

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Natural Endowments & Entitlement

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.

(Excerpts are from "Natural Assets and Arbitrariness", "The Positive Argument", "The Negative Argument", and "Collective Assets".)

Questions

1. In "Natural Assets and Arbitrariness", Robert Nozick reviews John Rawls' position that the distribution of holdings (primary goods) should not depend upon natural endowments because natural endowments are undeserved and arbitrary from a moral point of view. In "The Positive Argument", Nozick then presents argument D that might be used to justify Rawls' belief that the influence of natural differences ought to be corrected.

What is this argument, and why does Nozick believe that it fails to fully defend Rawls' position?
2. In "The Negative Argument", Nozick presents argument G, which he believes refutes Rawls' position.

What is this argument? (Hint: to understand the plausibility premise 1 of argument G, you'll need to understand premises 1 and 2 of argument F.)
3. Why does Nozick believe it is problematic to try and exclude all "morally arbitrary" features of individuals from the original position?
4. Why does Nozick believe is it morally troubling and perhaps inconsistent for Rawls to maintain that the totality of a community's natural assets should be viewed as a collective asset for the ends of society?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.