Christianizing Nozick

Gregory Robson

Suppose, falsely, as perhaps many do, that Christianity is a naive and narrow worldview and its proponents are, at best, good-hearted people trapped by ideology. For, one might think, "God doesn't exist!" After all, the problem of evil is real, and the Holocaust happened. One might also believe "Christianity is against science!" and worse, "The Catholic Church and other churches have done terrible things!" If to Christianize a thinker is to harmonize their thought with this ideology, then Robert Nozick would not want to be "Christianized." Neither would you, or I. But there is more to be said.

First, there is nothing unexpected here. Substantive responses to the charges abound. Read Frankl ([1946] 2006) on God during the Holocaust and Barr (2003) on contemporary physics and the faith. Modern science began with, and still presupposes, the Christian idea of an intelligible universe. And members of human institutions persistently fail in despicable and saddening ways. Perhaps the failures of the Catholic and other churches (or, at least, their members now or before) are not so much evidence of the naivety or falsity of the religions themselves as their limits in a postlapsarian world.[1]

Second, on "Christianizing" Nozick, there is much to be gained by exploring how parts of a major thinker's contributions can be supplemented and, perhaps, supplanted by a millennia-old tradition of scholarly thought and spiritual insight

Gregory Robson is an associate research professor in the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame and coeditor of *The Independent Review*.

1. Do Barr, Frankl, and others mount a decisive theistic response to the problems of evil, the potential incompatibility of faith and science, and so on? Not close. But they and dozens more authors altogether make a powerful case for Christianity. Also, it is widely accepted that the probability of our being here, thinking now together about Nozick and Christianity, say, is not even close to one-in-a-trillion, if we start with the odds at the time of the Big Bang. And yet, here we are. Why?

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and practice. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, wrote eight million words, the equivalent of a thousand journal articles, in forty-nine years of life, which is all the more astonishing given the brilliance of those words. Asking, "What might St. Thomas (or Aristotle, Hume, Anscombe, et al.) say over a drink with Nozick?" is a powerful invitation to intellectual challenge and improvement.

This essay focuses on Nozick's rather influential contribution in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* to debates over distributive justice. I unpack his argument, indicate its importance, and provide some questions (and answers) for Nozick from a broadly Christian point of view. These are not just Catholic or, more broadly, Christian questions. They are small-*c* catholic or universal questions that every scholar of justice should take seriously, whether Christian, otherwise monotheistic, theistic, agnostic, or atheistic.[2]

Nozick on Distributive Justice

Anarchy, State, and Utopia appeared in 1974, shortly after John Rawls's 1971 *A Theory of Justice* (henceforth, *Theory*). The world of political philosophy was abuzz with questions around distributive justice. When it comes to wealth, who deserves what? Is material inequality inherently unjust? Under what conditions might differential distributions of liberties and opportunities be justified?

In general, distributive justice concerns the distribution of social and economic burdens and benefits across persons in a society. Construed narrowly, it concerns who has a right to which resources and why. The argument that Rawls developed in *Theory* implied that citizens should use the state to impose large redistributive taxes to help the least well-off (e.g., the poor). It may particularly surprise classical liberals outside of philosophy to hear that Rawls gives lexical priority to securing citizens' basic liberties over providing for the worst off by redistribution. Still, Rawls does *not* prioritize the capacity freely to contract—to engage in market exchanges and associations without third-party interference. In Rawls's scheme, this capacity is not lexically prior to (morally required to secure if in conflict with) the realization of Rawls's famous *difference principle*: socioeconomic inequalities are to be permitted only if they redound to the benefit of the least well-off. If the capacity to contract were a fundamental freedom, then that fact would presumptively block many alterations in the real-time endowments of different market actors. But, Rawls thinks, not to alter market outcomes would be to permit troubling socioeconomic inequalities and power asymmetries. The state, then, should fix the problem.

Nozick demurs. The issue is not so much outcomes as rights. Suppose we grant, *arguendo*, that robust redistribution by state transfers from the middle class and wealthy to the poor would make society better off. Even so, says Nozick, it would be *unjust* for the state to redistribute other people's holdings. The state, if we accept

2. For helpful feedback and discussion, I thank Jason Byas, Daniel Cummings, Adam Gjesdal, and Robert Whaples.

Max Weber's prominent gloss, is "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" ([1919] 1958, 78, italics in the original). Nozick's point is that this "community" does not have the right to deploy physical force, or violence, for the good in the absence of exceptional circumstances (e.g., defending against external aggression). The desire for society to realize Rawls's difference principle, says Nozick, is not one of these circumstances; and even if society itself (or its members, if society is not a "self") would benefit, that would not make forced redistribution right. In normal circumstances, one adult may not force another to choose wisely and well. Likewise, thinks Nozick, for whole groups of adults.

Nozick summarizes the implications of his account for the proper scale and scope of the state:

> Our main conclusions about the state are that the minimal state limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is justified; that any more extensive state will violate persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things, and is unjustified; and that the minimal state is inspiring as well as right. (1974, ix)

Nozick argues, then, that the state may not deploy violence to make people act for their own good or that of others. For example, extracting wealth by the threat of imprisonment or fine backed by the muzzle of the gun is not permissible. This is so even if extraction-based redistribution would help financially struggling people who really could use the help.

No doubt Nozick's anti-redistributive view is radical by today's standards. How, logically, did he come to hold it? "The term 'distributive justice' is not a neutral one," he observes. Moreover,

> there is no *central* distribution, no person or group entitled to control all the resources, jointly deciding how they are to be doled out. . . . *In a free society*, diverse persons control different resources, and new holdings [property] arise out of the voluntary exchanges and actions of persons. (149–50; emphasis mine)

Nozick schematizes his "entitlement theory" of justice in holdings:

1. Any person who acquires a holding justly is entitled to it.
2. Any person who receives a holding by a just transfer (e.g., trade or gift) is entitled to it.
3. No one is entitled to any holdings "except by (repeated) applications of 1 and 2" (151).

Nozick's core claims may seem simple or even obviously true. But therein lies their profundity. Human societies are arguably as or more complex than any known

entity in the universe (Christian 2004, 506). In a few simple principles, Nozick claims to have *discovered* much of the normative DNA of a free society—a blueprint of how a complex society of mutually respectful, free, and equal adults would approach distributive justice. (Taking this view is, of course, rationally compatible with seeing high moral value in noncoercively aiding the needy.)

Nozick follows John Locke's (1632–1704) account in the *Second Treatise of Government* of a process of just acquisition and transfer:

1. *Principle of just acquisition*. People originally (in nature) acquire property justly by mixing their labor with it and not making others worse off as a result (thus not violating the "Lockean proviso" on just original acquisition).
2. *Principle of just transfer*. People transfer property justly when they (a) give it away as a gift or (b) trade it voluntarily with willing others.

Of course, though, our world is not fully just. Nozick writes:

> Not all actual situations are generated in accordance with the two principles of justice in holdings: the principle of justice in acquisition and the principle of justice in transfer. Some people steal from others, or defraud them, or enslave them, seizing their product and preventing them from living as they choose. (1974, 152)

Hence, says Nozick, we need a third principle:

3. A *principle of rectification* of past injustices.

Nozick says it is not clear how best to rectify past injustices, but rectification is needed. But, *if* past injustices are rectified, including needed redistribution to this end, no more redistribution is permitted. For Nozick, a society is distributively just if and only if, and because, the principles of just acquisition, transfer, and rectification are satisfied. These three principles are jointly necessary and sufficient for distributive justice.

Crucially, Nozick argues for *historical* principles of justice. Justice depends on how, with whom, and in what context property was acquired: whether from nature (e.g., picking apples), by trade (exchange in the marketplace), or by gift. This line of thought actually dovetails with the views of socialist critics of Nozick. Agreeing that historical processes matter in assessments of justice, socialists often argue that (1) employers in capitalistic markets illicitly extract "surplus value" from workers and (2) market processes deceive consumers. Nozickeans and socialists agree that we need a moral accounting of the *process* of market exchange.

Unhistorical principles, in contrast, can be (1) current time-slice principles or (2) end-result principles. A prominent current time-slice principle is the principle of justice, held by many in "welfare economics," that resources should be transferred from group A to group B to increase overall social welfare, with no consideration of ownership history. Nozick denies that to see what is just, one need only look to

who has what and not to how people came to have what they have. With Rawls he rejects the morality of utilitarian distributions, which aim exclusively to maximize the total positive consequences for a large group like a society. Unlike Rawls, however, Nozick holds that freedom of contract and association, to *exchange or do business with* whomever a given adult would like, is a basic human liberty.

Now, in contrast to current time-slice principles, end-result principles involve distribution according to criteria such as need, contribution, effort, and moral merit. Many anti-Nozickeans argue that such distribution is *not* only, or even mainly, to be carried out indirectly by individuals involved in the light of their own life narratives, preferences, and choices, as Nozick would have it. Rather, political-economic planners should be tasked with picking allocations for us.[3]

How then can we—or an unspecified "we" (which usually means "the state" or its influential decision-makers, not "citizens" as such)—maintain a pattern of distribution? For Nozick, the state would need to interfere continually in people's lives. Property is transferred in countless, innumerable ways. To monitor all such transfers would require, says Nozick, constant or frequent interference. Consider what James R. Otteson (2014, 79–88 *et passim*) calls the "day two problem." Suppose a government has somehow provided a fully satisfactory initial distribution. What then? It would need, on "day two," to *update* the distribution, and do this continually in ways that interfere in people's lives. Any distribution at time T1 can readily change into a different distribution at T2, yet another at T3, and so on. People will persistently trade, invest, gift, share, combine, destroy, separate, and otherwise alter distributions within the unimaginably complex set of crisscrossing networks that we call modern society. Any just distribution cannot be long maintained without intrusively impeding free human action. Hence Nozick's dictum: "Liberty upsets patterns" (160–64 *et passim*).

An objector might claim that annual income taxes for Rawlsian redistributive purposes would not necessitate constant interference. Perhaps we need only have an annual income tax to push outcomes in certain directions. The strength of this countermove will depend on how individuals, firms, and other groups anticipate and respond to taxes imposed for later redistribution. Adept social actors would, and do, avoid or minimize their tax burdens. They comply with tax codes throughout the year in ways that unsettle redistributive agendas, often by complying with the letter of the codes but not the spirit.

Importantly, though, Nozick's argument need not assume the constant-interference claim. Nozick (1974, 170) thinks that much as robbery is morally illicit,

3. There is debate about whether Rawlsians actually support patterned principles of justice (see, e.g., Kaufman 2004). For many Rawlsians, procedures of justice are themselves selected to satisfy Rawls's principles, including the difference principle, and if a technological or environmental event pushes distributions out of compliance with the principle, the resulting "pattern" is not necessarily unjust. Yet it would be unjust, the Rawlsian line goes, not to bring any resultant inequalities back into alignment with the principle when it comes time to recalibrate socioeconomic inequalities.

so interference via nonconsensual, violence-backed taxation is morally illicit even when merely occasional. Coercively enacted redistribution is wrong even if it could be executed consistently and with precision. For example, suppose that Jane prefers to make money and buy movie tickets. Bill prefers to do neither and instead watch the sunset. Now suppose that some of Jane's money is taxed away to aid the needy, but Bill chooses not to make an income and receives it. Why would it be fair for Jane to need to work more to pay for not just her movie tickets but Bill's income as well?[4] Notice, we are talking about a simple case involving three parties: Bill, Jane, and a state distributor. Yet the United States, for instance, is a society with over a hundred million times as many people as those three, who as a small group already have diverse interests, needs, preferences, life stories, beliefs, desires, and associations. This complexity is not lost on Nozick. Central distributors face dire epistemic limits when they aim to redistribute for others' good (more on this later from a Christian perspective).

But suppose that a future AI distribution machine could readily match resources to those interests, needs, and so on. Even here, Nozick would stress that it would not be just to force people to give up their property:

> Whether it is done through taxation on wages or on wages over a certain amount, or through seizure of profits, or through there being a big social pot [of government-controlled money] so that it's not clear what's coming from where and what's going where, patterned principles of justice involve appropriating the actions of other persons. Seizing the results [e.g., income] of someone's labor is equivalent to seizing hours from him. (1974, 172)

Suppose the state taxes your income from your job against your will. According to Nozick, it thereby takes your work hours from you, in a sense, making you work for the state and/or others. Some people might be willing to give the state the money collected in taxes as a donation. But many would not. For the latter, the state appears to extract their money. Nozick summarizes the upshot of his view when he famously avers, "Taxation of earnings from labor is on a par with forced labor" (169).

Christianizing Nozick?

For all of its obvious ingenuity—and perhaps each of us has been so gripped by *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* that we simply could not put it down—Nozick's discussion of property rights, the state, and redistribution will leave some readers feeling like unsettled moviegoers, having enjoyed the popcorn feast but forgotten to look

4. A counterargument to this case is worth addressing, namely: Coerced redistribution that is generally on target is morally justified, and to expect it to go perfectly is to set too high a standard.

up at the show. What, after all, *is* the purpose of property in a well-lived life? What is the value of distribution and redistribution for persons qua persons? In focusing on procedural justice, have we put ourselves in danger of losing sight of how property relations contribute to, or detract from, people getting their due?

Nozick clearly believes that property is essential to the life well lived. It has a purpose, or purposes, and should be afforded substantial protection from external interference. But again: How, exactly, does property improve people's lives?

In view of these questions, this section turns to the aforementioned task of *Christianizing* Nozick. I do so realizing that many might be taken aback by the mere thought of this idea, based perhaps on what they assume Christianity is or who they assume Christ is. My aim will be to identify where the faith can valuably supplement or supplant parts of Nozick's insightful work, and indicate some starting points for carrying out that task. The over two billion Christians alive today, including brilliant scholars, and the numerous moral and intellectual Christian leaders throughout history, have long had ready answers to the above questions. Their answers regarding the purpose and value of private property in human lives are steeped in a rich anthropology of the human person. I will provide an interpretive lens or guide for how Christianly inclined readers might approach Nozick on distributive justice. In discussing these ideas, I will certainly not presume that Christian answers should seem obviously true to every rational person. The potential combinations of reasons on any matter of substantive dispute are numerous, the potential paths of reasoning highly varied. One should no more present a condescending religiosity than a condescending secularism.

Pope Leo XIII (1891; see also Robson forthcoming) and many others have provided worked-out accounts of how property enables human beings to achieve our purposes in life. We human beings are unlike other animals. We have singular reasoning powers among the animals, including a remarkable capacity for abstract thought. We alone travel to the moon. We alone create and use the internet, AI, and more. We alone are made in the *imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God. And by our intellect, we alone, among the animals, are *made for deep union* with God (Thomas Aquinas 1271). Our physical bodies evolve, but our souls, including our immaterial intellect, are infused by God. Whereas the very idea of other smart animals—chimpanzees, dolphins, pigs, etc.—growing in union with God seems bizarre, it is widely accepted that we humans are built differently, constituted with a special, supercharged intellect and a correspondingly sophisticated will. On the Christian view, private property is an indispensable tool that enables humans to foster a life of increasing cognitive, volitional, and affective union with God.

Nozick, of course, has much to say on the separateness of persons and how persons have ends that ownership can help facilitate. He gives a less detailed account than one might hope, however, of the purpose of private property in relation to the nature and purpose of human beings as such (1974; but see Nozick 1981, 1989).

As usual, Nozick asks just the right questions:

> In virtue of precisely what characteristics of persons are there moral constraints on how they may treat each other or be treated? We also want to understand *why* these characteristics connect with these constraints. (1974, 48)

Nozick considers candidate characteristics such as free will, moral agency, and rationality (49). He adds that the moral constraints discussed in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* evidently derive from personhood and, specifically, from the fact that a person is a being "able to formulate long-term plans for its life" and "regulate and guide its life in accordance with some overall conception it chooses to accept" (49). Nozick adds that our understanding of the basis of moral side constraints (rights) for which he argues is importantly tied to the idea of the *meaning of life*. And he notes, "I hope to grapple with these and related issues on another occasion" (51).

As Nozick well knew, not every important relevant consideration can be taken up in a philosophical work. He does, however, do important work in addressing the nature of these moral constraints. For one thing, he stresses the diversity of human goods, the role of property in securing them, and the value of protecting them (1974, esp. in part 3). For another, he argues against the long-held view that the attainment of pleasure in lower and higher forms, from eating chocolate to reading Shakespeare, is the ultimate purpose of life (see his famous "experience machine" hypothetical at 42–45). Nozick rejects hedonism and thinks that the basis of moral rights is something more like the meaning of human life. In this, he presents interesting if sketchy ideas that dovetail with longstanding Christian views on the main or only foundation of moral rights and duties. Nozick, in fact, implies that just *one* candidate—"having a soul" (48)—in his list of characteristics may be sufficient to serve as a basis for the moral constraints of interpersonal treatment.

It would have been interesting to hear more from Nozick on the soul, then, in connection with *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. A fuller account of just what human persons are, and what we are doing here on earth, would help to fill out the account. For instance, are we human persons "individual substances of a rational nature," as St. Thomas, following Boethius, says? Are we on a distinctively human voyage from birth to an eternal life in union with God, the source of all goodness in whose Goodness we participate (Thomas Aquinas 1271; Lewis 1952)? Or are we more like clumps of atoms arranged human-body-wise, resulting from a blind process of biological and social evolution, and somehow fully governed by the four fundamental forces of physics despite rarely feeling like we are, that is, feeling free to move and live autonomously? (See Barr 2003 for a counterargument.) What, in any case, is the answer to Nozick's question of what grounds our moral rights? If being ensouled fits into the answer, how does it?

These are, to be sure, not obvious questions to answer even in a wide-ranging book on state legitimacy, communal living, market exchange, and justice. But might

the fact of this unobviousness be a remnant of our times? Perhaps it is a symptom of what I call *the modern disease*: a propensity to disdain, ignore, or avoid the pursuit of an adequate specification of human personhood in a philosophical account of the role of states, markets, or civil society. Arguably every attempt to understand the nature and purpose of human activity must pivot on an understanding of just what human persons are, who jointly constitute society.

One might of course wish to avoid giving a description of human persons as such in an account of human activity or human society. "No need to introduce 'unnecessary controversy' into one's argumentation," the thought might go. But take a stand here we must. The only way to deny the need to give an account of personhood would be if one's account of, say, a just society holds for human beings under *any* plausible description. But even if it did, to know that it did we would still need both to know it did and to compare the full option set of descriptions to confirm it did. Hence, we would still need to ask and answer: *Who are we?*

This, then, is the Unavoidable Question. As political philosophers, many of us close our eyes to it because we are plagued by the modern disease. Perhaps the fact that so many of us do not provide an account of human persons is a testament to our unease with who we are, who we have become, and our relationship, metaphysically and psychologically, to the God in whom alone we can most fully *be*. Regardless of one's metaphysical and psychological commitments, who we are (our being qua persons, not our constitution or what we do) is a question at the heart of every great work on human society. This elephant in the room demands dialectical acknowledgment and investigation.

To Christianize Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, then, would be to bring its powerful results into harmony with the Christian view of our calling, as human persons, to live for God. To pursue this project would be to recalibrate Nozick's account to our nature as beings whose lives, if Christianity is right, are incomplete or potentially barren without the pursuit of that calling.[5] It would be to describe a sociopolitical arrangement for people who can recognize and know the natural moral law in any culture or era, with or without the large help of scriptural teachings and institutional church practice. This recalibration project would put at the center of a political community's life a shared concern for participation in truth, goodness, and beauty, transcendental qualities of the God to whom we all are drawn, whether or not we recognize how and how far the allure of those qualities, for us, just is God's allure.

5. "Potentially" is an important qualifier here. To many Thomists (who follow St. Thomas Aquinas), numerous people who do not report a Christian affiliation, or report even a decidedly non- or anti-Christian worldview, do in fact *participate* in God's love. We all seek the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty. And, as economists say, talk is cheap, or usually costs less than (other) action. Arguably numerous non-Christians live highly Christian lives in the sense of living for the values (if not necessarily the *person*) that Christians are called to live for, even if the sacraments and other elements of Christian tradition are key helps. Conversely, many self-professed Christians are not living for Christian values or Christ much at all. The way for us fallible people, wherever we stand, to improve our lives is perhaps not so much to assent to Christian propositions as to *try* a Christian lifestyle, or launch more deeply into one, as the philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal, among countless others, famously enjoined after his life-changing religious experience.

Suppose, for instance, that Nozick is right that any state beyond the minimal state would violate our rights. Christianizing Nozick, one might say here that such a state would violate the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, according to which state activity should occur at the lowest feasible level, with federal or supranational governments not doing work that state, provincial, or municipal governments could do at least as well. Alternatively, a Christianizer of Nozick could argue, an account of the needs of human beings in accordance with our nature might suffice to ground arguments for redistribution to meet basic human needs.[6] All of this, of course, should depend partly on one's interpretation of Christ's teaching, including the instruction to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." Was this teaching more notable for not specifying what is due to Caesar? Or for not gainsaying that Caesar is owed something (Feser 2005)? There is much to consider here.

Or take another example. Suppose, compatibly with Nozick, that a nonminimal state would fail adequately to respect our dignity as free beings made in the *imago Dei*. On this assumption, one could elaborate on Nozick's argumentation by showing why an overstepping state is a threat to human flourishing understood in the profound and beautiful way distinctive of the Christian faith. In the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII (1891) argued that freedom to own private property and enter into relevant contracts matters because freedom to make *life plans* that perfect (complete) one's rational nature matters. On a version of Nozickean Christianity, perfecting one's human nature ultimately matters only because growing in union with God matters. Private property is but a tool, if an important one, for living a good life for God.[7] A defense of private property then becomes but one part of a broader social account of how human beings can live as God calls us to live.

Earlier I said that, for Nozick, the state is not permitted to deploy its apparatus of physical force or violence to make people act for their own good or the good of others. A harmonization of Nozick with Christian social thought must recognize that some if not all Christian thinkers would demur here. If, as on much Christian social thought, the state should aim to secure the *common good*, then the question becomes whether the state should do this by (a) securing rights and letting people and groups themselves pursue the good uncoerced; (b) actively marshaling its force, per Weber's description of the state, by requiring actors to pursue the good (assuming that a coerced pursuit of the good is even possible in principle); or (c) acting nonviolently by encouraging others to pursue the good, as in cases of awareness raising, where encouragement is a state activity that nonetheless does not arise from the state's monopoly on violence. A Christianized version of Nozickean philosophy would, in any case, investigate paths to the common good and the

6. For illuminating discussion, see Feser (2005).

7. For related work on Aristotelian perfectionism, see Rasmussen and Den Uyl (2005).

potential role(s) for the state. One possibility, in keeping with Adam Smith's work ([1776] 1976), is that a just state would pursue the good for society only where private actors cannot themselves adequately provide for the common good, and only if the state does not favor some persons or groups at others' expense but uses its power fairly for all.

One might think that tax-financed state activity, and redistribution in particular, could not in principle be done well given the great size, diversity, and complexity of modern societies. After all, as Nozick observes, distributions of resources constantly change in response to the particular features, propensities, and circumstances of agents whose lives are, continually, moving targets or works in progress. Nevertheless, suppose, as Christians believe, that there is a single human nature, even if humanity as we know it emerged from the Pleistocene perhaps three hundred thousand years ago and has since existed in quite diverse communities. One might wonder on this assumption whether redistribution to meet basic discernible human needs can be done without needing local knowledge of people's lives. Perhaps redistribution could predictably be used to improve the lives of human beings who share a single nature and thus presumably have predictable needs (food, shelter, etc.). This call for redistribution might be motivated specifically by a Christian "preferential option for the poor" or by a concern for the poor of alternative provenance. Either way, it might be met with a Nozickean reply that such redistribution would not be *right* but only *good*. Collecting taxes on the threat of fines or imprisonment to fund redistributive transfers would seem flatly incompatible with Nozick's entitlement theory of justice in holdings.

Mightn't it matter how severely the poor are suffering, though? St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, thought that a poor person would not be stealing if, absent a better alternative, he took another person's bread in order to stay alive. One wishes that Nozick were around to continue telling the story he so brilliantly developed in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. In particular, it would be good to hear more about the nature of charity or the duties of assistance in a free society whose members typically or even fully comply with the entitlement theory. It would also be good to hear more on whether and how the use of property for charitable giving can improve the lives of giver and recipient alike.

I turn to a final example of how one might undertake to Christianize Nozick. Nozick provides an elegant map of the principles of just acquisition, transfer, and rectification; but the world is, of course, not so elegant. There has long been chattel slavery. There were a hundred million deaths under socialism in the twentieth century (Courtois et al. 1999). Recent military campaigns such as those in Iraq, Ukraine, and elsewhere have led to hundreds of thousands or more deaths. More generally, the historical terrain of human society is spotted by blood and laced with horrors, even if to home in on its negatives would be to peer at an unrepresentative sample. Importantly, then, Nozick's principle of rectification implies that victims of

severe abuse deserve just compensation. Quite so. But *how*? Which forms of compensation and other rectification (e.g., apology) are warranted?[8]

Suppose with Hume ([1776] 2015), along Nozickean lines, that many or all governments are born of violence and deception, force and fraud. If so, many of our societies are the ill-begotten stepchildren of conquest and confiscation. And if Nozick's entitlement theory of justice in holdings is true, we would want it to be a political philosophy for us-as-we-are, for our political history as it has actually unfolded. We would thus want a detailed account of whether, how, and for whom rectification is required by justice. Here the Christian Nozickean would quite possibly insist that rectification for past injustices should include a reallocation of existing distributions. This is not to deny, of course, Public Choice concerns such as the danger of rent-seeking under the guise of rectification.

A Christianized Nozickean might also emphasize that even or especially after grave injustice, the grace of God is what ultimately leads to true peace by rectification and reconciliation. In *Miracles Today*, Craig Keener (2021) details numerous miracle reports. Many of these enjoy strong evidential support and have, for instance, led to the conversion of countless skeptical atheists who had no other viable explanatory option. (Notably, if just one miracle account is true in Keener's recent 300-page book, an addition to his previous 1,248-page book on God's work in the world, then God exists.) If God works, then, in our lives, then a full account of rectification for injustices would consider the promise and beauty of divine action in bringing together victim and perpetrator, human person and human person. God's grace can restore perpetrator-victim relationships to person-person relationships. In "Amazing Grace," the adult convert John Newton tells precisely this story as a former slave trafficker:

> Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
>
> That saved a wretch like me!
>
> I once was lost, but now am found;
>
> Was blind, but now I see.

To Christianize Nozick would thus be, among other things, to indicate how a deep love for God can transform both individual lives and communities within a polity (Vallier, forthcoming). We all fail in virtue. We all will persistently fall short in this lifetime. And yet, God's grace coupled with our own commitment can help a polity not only better secure justice but also build a world more reflective of God's call. Such a world, which a Christianized Nozickean would appreciate, is one in which we are lovingly oriented not only *outward* toward others and *inward* toward ourselves, but *upward* toward God.

8. On historic injustices and rectification, see Rothbard (1998, chap. 9–11) and Byas (2022).

Conclusion

Nozick, an ingenious philosopher and literary stylist, has done more than virtually every other living and deceased recent political philosopher to enhance and challenge our understanding of the just society, including the role of both markets and businesses therein. But, of course, there is work yet to be done.

For one thing, there are places in his argument where we could put pressure internally, such as working out just what proper rectification for past injustice would consist of, for what (and whom), and how rectification might unsettle existing resource distributions resulting from possession, trade, and gifts. For another, there is external work to be done in supplementing and supplanting diverse parts of Nozick's project. Many people argue, for instance, that Christianity is the most evidentially justified and rational worldview. A few of the arguments include recent accounts by Marilyn McCord Adams, Bishop Robert Barron, John Cottingham, Edward Feser, Reinhard Huetter, William Lane Craig, John Lennox, Bishop Charles Morerod, Alvin Plantinga, John Polkinghorne, Eleonore Stump, and Richard Swinburne, and numerous others (e.g., from Thomas Aquinas 1271; Lewis 1952; Barr 2003; and, of course, Jesus Christ himself and his disciples). If at least one of these arguments is broadly correct, then we are people made in the image and likeness of God: broadly rational persons who are singularly equipped among earthly creatures to grow in loving union with God. Such an understanding could and, for the Christian, must inform any account of how we should develop our character, which institutions we should have, and how best we can all live together—and for Whom. And whether or not Christianity is true, we do need a worked-out anthropology of the human person, lest our account of the just society be insufficiently clear and grounded. We also need a full account of why and how rights matter, including property rights, and why and how justice should prevail.

These philosophical questions immediately raise others, such as: Which worldview is the most rationally justified and why? And how might the rational selection of a worldview inform one's views of market exchange, justice, firms, and the state? Nozick provides innovative and influential answers in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* and beyond. But even from this gifted thinker, we can ask for more. Nozick himself, a philosopher par excellence, would demand nothing less.

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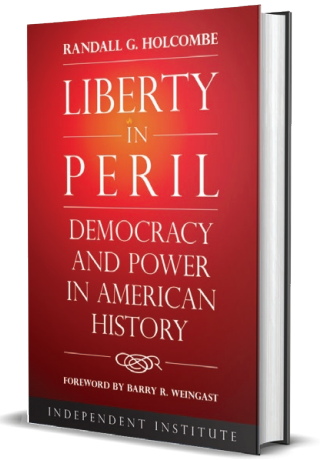
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