

(This video references Video 9.)

In this video (Video 9), I made the small point that the libertarian claim “taxation is theft” is neither obvious nor true by definition. It requires moral assumptions, in particular assumptions about property rights.

I wasn’t as clear as possible in that video, so let me make the point again here.

Consider this argument:

(T1) Taxation is the government taking money from citizens by force.

(T2) A taking X from B by force is theft

(C) So, taxation is theft.

This argument makes no moral assumptions. But it fails, since T2 is false (as my previous counterexamples showed). Not all taking by force is theft—it’s only theft if you take something you have no right to take.

So we need to add this clause to premise 2: “...assuming B has a right to X and A doesn’t.”

And then, to get to the conclusion, we need this premise:

(T3) Citizens have a right to the money taken from them through taxation, and the government doesn’t.

So, here’s the full argument:

(T1) Taxation is the government taking money from citizens by force.

(T2) A taking X from B by force is theft, assuming B has a right to X and A doesn’t.

(T3) Citizens have a right to the money taken from them through taxation, and the government doesn’t.

(T4) So, taxation is theft.

This is the sort of argument you need to justify the conclusion. And notice T3 is a moral assumption—an assumption about property rights—and a controversial one.

To defend it, you’d need to argue that people’s property claims are legitimate outside the social contract (that includes taxation). Also, you’d need to argue that there are no restrictions or limitations on property acquisition that would allow for redistributive taxation.

I’ve skeptical of these latter two claims, which is why I’m skeptical of the conclusion.