

Consider this libertarian claim:

(T) Taxation is theft.

Some libertarians use this claim to argue that government shouldn't do very much (only things like police and military), while others argue that it shouldn't exist at all.

Libertarians typically think this claim is obvious—perhaps even true by definition—but it's not.

Here's the argument that seems to underly it:

- (T1) Taxation is taking money by force.
- (T2) All taking money by force is theft.
- (T3) So, taxation is theft.

We can grant T1, since, there's clearly threats of force involved.

But T2 is open to counterexamples.

If you steal my wallet, and I take it back from you by force, that's not theft

If you refuse to pay me for an agreed upon job, and I use force to make you, that's not theft.

If you harm me, and I use force to make you pay restitution, that's not theft.

So, T2 is false. What this shows is that not *all* taking money by force is theft. It's only theft if you take something that you have no right to take.

Now, obviously libertarians will argue that the government has no right to collect taxes. But the point is, their claim, “taxation is theft” is not obvious or true by definition.

It can only be supported by defending a particular theory of property rights, one that's highly controversial and, in my opinion, not very plausible.

Update: I clarified what I meant here in video 13.