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Book review: Joachim Wündisch, Towards a Right-Libertarian Welfare State

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***Towards a Right-Libertarian Welfare State* by Joachim Wündisch. Munster: Mentis Verlag GmbH, 2014. 181pp., £18.99 (p/b), ISBN 978-3897858442**

Wündisch's book is split into four parts. Part I introduces libertarianism – most specifically, Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Part II seeks to derive (something resembling) a welfare state from Nozick's normative principles. Part III offers solutions to the non-identity problems associated with compensating x for wrongs committed before x's conception. Part IV looks towards the implications of the book's argument.

It is in Part II that the book's most important contribution is to be found. There are two broad arguments: first, welfare may serve as a crime fighting tool. Wündisch argues A) in the minimal state, welfare may be more effective at fighting crime than retribution; and B) an inefficient state is, for Nozick, unjust. Therefore, the welfare state is required. Second, welfare may be demanded as an efficient form of compensation. Most interestingly, compensation for violations of Nozick's "Lockean proviso", which requires that A's holdings not leave B in a worse position than B would be in a world without any appropriation, may justify payments to those in dire need. It would be inefficient (so unjust) for the state to calculate which putative victims are actual victims, so it should ensure payment to them all. This would be funded by a small tax on property-holders.

Wündisch undoubtedly offers a highly valuable contribution to Nozick studies and libertarian theory. In some ways, the vision is radical: The Nozickian welfare state is cross-border (pp. 161-2), meaning it goes further than actually-existing welfare states. Perhaps, too, nonhuman animals could be included, but this is not mentioned.

Despite this, Wündisch does not offer an idyllic vision, and does not commit to it. The Nozickian state would be obliged to deny payments to the heavily disabled, as such persons would not have fared well in a world without appropriation. This is an "ugly reminder" of the role of this welfare state (p. 86). It is an open question whether Nozick's normative commitments could ever ground a desirable welfare state. Indeed, Nozick's own words on the subject, taken from his later work, are apt: "The point [of public expenditure] is not simply to accomplish the particular purpose ... but also to speak solemnly in everyone's name, in the name of society, about what it holds dear" (*The Examined Life*, p. 289). Surely, we do and should hold dear the survival of our co-citizens, regardless of how they would have fared in some counterfactual world.

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