

OBSERVATION REPORT FALL 2012

Observer: William James Earle

Observee: Daniel Restrepo

Course: Phi 1700 DMWA "Ethical Theories"

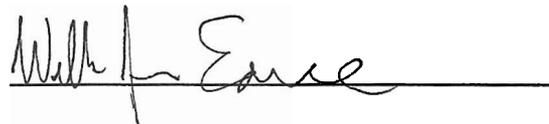
Date: November 28, 2012

This was a discussion of Robert Nozick, clearly coming after a discussion of John Rawls. Nozick was a champion of the minimalist state and, unlike Rawls, hostile to redistributive efforts. I think it is not necessary to go into detail here, but several things should be noted. First, discussing these thinkers in a serious way, as happened, raises very fundamental issues about how we should think about the social world and our place within it. Restrepo gave Nozick a good run for his money. He explained very clearly the Nozick view that even starting from an exactly equal apportionment of wealth, there is no way to keep it that way without stringent curtailment of liberty. If you allow people to go, as they fancy, to the movies, disproportionate wealth will end up in the pockets of Denzel Washington or Natalie Portman. Many people will voluntarily transfer some of their money to Madonna, Snoop Dog, or Andrea Bocelli.

Still the holdings that people presently have, and that liberty-considerations alone, suggest they can retain or spend as they please, may not have been arrived at fairly. Think of the ownership of land in the United States. How did the Dutch families, who still own ground in Manhattan, acquire the land on which native Americans once happily roamed? You cannot avoid Rawls's concern with 'justice-as-fairness'.

Restrepo presented all of the above clearly and forcefully. Moreover, and this is what made it a superior class, he did it with humor and grace. It was clear that he liked the students sitting in front of him and that they liked him. This matters because it meant that students participated. They asked and answered questions. (Restrepo, incidentally, was able always to call on students by name, something that many instructors, including the writer of this report, don't manage to do.)

I know one is supposed to suggest places where the observee might make improvements, but I am at a loss to think of any.

 _____ November 29, 2012

 _____ 12/5/2012