

“Economic Justice and the Kantian State”

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Abstract

According to a widely accepted interpretation, the Kantian state is a version of classic liberalism's *night watchman*. Since strict right for Kant consists in the protection of individual freedom and property and not in the attempt to make people happy, the Kantian state must be indifferent if not opposed to the promotion of social welfare. A concern with social justice can have at most a merely instrumental character for the state, in which it contributes to the stability of the system. Is it possible to account for any *duties* of the state to foster social and economic justice or any welfare rights within a Kantian theoretical framework?

In this paper, I will reject a libertarian interpretation of the Kantian state. I will argue that Kant's liberal theory of right does not exclude the possibility of deriving an obligation of governments to promote social welfare. Although Kant's theory of social justice is in need of further development, there is enough textual evidence for the claim that Kant had a broader conception of the state than usually assumed.