Here is my reconstruction of Robert Nozick's Wilt Chamberlain argument:2

1. A distribution of holdings is just if and only if it arose voluntarily3 from a just distribution.
2. \(D_2\) arose voluntarily from \(D_1\).
3. \(D_1\) was just.
   Therefore,
4. \(D_2\) is just (from 1, 2, and 3).

Is the argument valid, in the sense that its conclusion follows logically from its premises? I shall prove that it is. Let the universe of discourse be distributions of holdings. Let “\(J\)” be the one-place (monadic) predicate “is just.” Let “\(A\)” be the two-place (dyadic) predicate “arose voluntarily from.” Let “\(i\)” be the initial distribution. Let “\(r\)” be the resultant distribution. Here is a proof that proposition 4 follows logically from propositions 1, 2, and 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Technical Reading</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ((x)(\exists y)(y \cdot x \cdot y))</td>
<td>Premise</td>
<td>For all distributions (x), (x) is just if and only if there is a distribution (y) such that (y) is just and (x) arose voluntarily from (y).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. (rAi)</td>
<td>Premise</td>
<td>Distribution (r) arose voluntarily from distribution (i).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (ji)</td>
<td>Premise</td>
<td>Distribution (i) is just.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (jc = (\exists y)(y \cdot r \cdot y))</td>
<td>1, UI</td>
<td>Distribution (r) is just if and only if there is a distribution (y) such that (y) is just and (r) arose voluntarily from (y).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Let \(D_1\) be the initial distribution (before people gave Wilt Chamberlain money) and let \(D_2\) be the resultant distribution (after people gave Wilt Chamberlain money).
3 Let “arose voluntarily” mean “arose as a result solely of voluntary transactions.”
Any argument that has a valid form is a valid argument. Since Nozick’s argument has a valid form (which I just proved), it is a valid argument. This means that it is logically impossible for Nozick’s premises to be true while his conclusion is false. It follows that if Nozick’s conclusion is false, then at least one of his three premises is false. Another way to put this is that if someone rejects Nozick’s conclusion, he or she must (on pain of inconsistency) reject at least one of Nozick’s premises.

G. A. Cohen\(^4\) rejects Nozick’s conclusion (4 in the reconstruction, 10 in the proof), so he must reject at least one of Nozick’s premises (1, 2, or 3). Cohen accepts premises 1 and 3 for the sake of argument,

but rejects premise 2, which says that $D_2$ arose voluntarily from $D_1$. (Technically, he says that premise 2 may well be false; see below.) Cohen thinks that a transaction is voluntary only if all parties to the transaction would have agreed to it “had [they] known what the results of so transacting were to be” (Cohen, 9). In the Chamberlain case, one result of the transaction is that Chamberlain, by virtue of his wealth, comes to have “an unacceptable amount of power over others” (Cohen, 10; italics in original). As Cohen puts it,

> The fans’ access to resources in future may be prejudiced by the disproportionate access Chamberlain’s wealth gives him, and the consequent power over others he now has (Cohen, 11).

He adds:

> [A] person might welcome a world in which he and a million others watch Wilt play, at a cost of twenty-five cents to each, and consistently disfavour one in which, in addition, Wilt receives a cool quarter million (Cohen, 11).

Since it is possible that not all fans would have paid to see Chamberlain play had they known that he would acquire power over others, it is possible that not all fans acted voluntarily in paying to see him, in which case it is possible that $D_2$ did not arise voluntarily from $D_1$. Thus, premise 2, which asserts that $D_2$ did arise voluntarily from $D_1$, may well be false.

It might be objected that no single person has the power either to make Chamberlain wealthy or to prevent him from becoming wealthy. Cohen agrees, but says that “a convention might evolve not to make such payments, or, more simply, there could be a democratically authorized taxation system which maintains wealth differentials within acceptable limits” (Cohen, 12).

Will Chamberlain continue to play basketball if his wealth is reduced through taxation? Cohen says it’s not obvious that he would not. In other words, he might well continue to play even though his wealth is no greater than anyone else’s.