



The Power to Tax: Analytic Foundations of a Fiscal Constitution

Geoffrey Brennan, James M. Buchanan

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Should government's power to tax be limited? The events of the late 1970s in the wake of California's Proposition 13 brought this question very sharply into popular focus. Whether the power to tax should be restricted, and if so how, are issues of immediate policy significance. Providing a serious analysis of these issues, the authors of this 1980 book offer an approach to the understanding and evaluation of the fiscal system, one that yields profound implications. The central question becomes: how much 'power to tax' would the citizen voluntarily grant to government as a party to some initial social contract devising a fiscal constitution? Those in office are assumed to exploit the power assigned to them to the maximum possible extent: government is modelled as 'revenue-maximizing Leviathan'. Armed with such a model, the authors proceed to trace out the restrictions on the power to tax that might be expected to emerge from the citizen's constitutional deliberations.

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