

Philosophical Anarchy

1. The Tale of the Slave: Robert Nozick tells a story in several stages, the first being obvious slavery, and the last being something very much like the state that we in the U.S. find ourselves in today. He asks the question, at which one of these stages did the situation change from slavery to non-slavery?

The implication is that it did NOT change in this way, such that WE in the U.S. are slaves of a sort; and presumably this is unjust, such that government rule is unjust. In argument form, Nozick's point might look like this:

Argument for Philosophical Anarchism

1. Stage 1 of The Tale of the Slave is clearly slavery.
2. There is no clear cut-off point between Stage 1 and Stage 9 where the story goes from being about slavery to NOT being about slavery.
3. If there is no clear cut-off point from stages 1-9 between slavery and non-slavery, then Stage 9 is still slavery.
4. Furthermore, stage 9 represents OUR current situation.
5. Therefore, our current situation (under government rule) is one of slavery.

Of course, the implication is that our government's rule is unjust, so we might add:

6. Slavery is unjust.
7. Therefore, the government's rule is unjust (i.e., its authority is illegitimate).

2. Objections: Premise 1 is clearly true. Here are some objections to the others:

(a) Against Premise 2: We might reject premise 2. Perhaps there IS a clear cut-off point? Is it obvious to you that, between each of Nozick's 9 stages, the situation does NOT change from slavery to non-slavery? Or, from unjust to just?

(b) Against Premise 4: Nozick believes that Stage 9 is the stage that WE are currently in. We might think that Nozick has mis-represented our current status, however, since WE have the ability to opt out, while the slaves in his story do not. That is, perhaps we HAVE in some sense CONSENTED to our present status by remaining here; and if we didn't like it, we would be free to leave (whereas it is not stated that the "slave" in stage 9 of Nozick's story is free to opt out of the system).

[But, recall our discussion of implicit consent during the social contract unit. Nozick might reply here that we are NOT really free to opt out, since it is very difficult to emigrate.]

Furthermore, even if we DID manage to go elsewhere, we would just be trading in one master for another (since every place has a government which makes demands of its citizens). Furthermore, similar objections apply to the idea that we have consented to being governed by accepting goods and services from our government. So, perhaps we have NOT consented to our present situation, and therefore Stage 9 DOES accurately represent our current status. Do you agree?]

(c) Against Premise 3 (The Sorites Paradox): Nozick suggests that, if a change (from slavery to non-slavery) HAS occurred, then we must be able to identify WHERE it has occurred. But, that isn't true. For, **the fact that one cannot identify the dividing line between where something changes from one extreme to the other does not entail that there is no difference between the extremes themselves.** For, the increments between the two extremes may be so small that they are imperceptible. But, **many small, imperceivable changes add up to big, perceivable ones.** Consider:

Stage 1: I have 100,000 hairs on my head.

Stage 2: I pluck one hair so that I have 99,999 hairs on my head.

Stage 3: I pluck another hair so that I have 99,998 hairs on my head.

Stage 4: I pluck another hair so that I have 99,997 hairs on my head.

...

Stage 100,000: I pluck another hair so that I have zero hairs on my head.

Question: At what stage did I go from being **not bald** to **bald**? It may seem impossible to locate some specific point at which this occurred—but this does not therefore entail that I am still NOT BALD at Stage 100,000. (Note that we can conduct similar experiments with many other transitions; e.g., short/tall, rich/poor, young/old, etc.)

This puzzle that arises out of the vagueness of some of the terms in our language is known as a **Sorites Paradox**. We must conclude that, just because we cannot identify where the sharp cut-off line is between slavery and non-slavery in Nozick's story, this does NOT entail that Stage 9 is still slavery.

3. Is Stage 9 Unjust? If Nozick's argument fails (e.g., due to concerns that he is relying on a type of Sorites Paradox), then we must ask whether stage 9 is unjust or not, based on its own merits. So: IS Stage 9 unjust?

In Stage 9, you get to vote along with 10,000 other people, and these votes determine how much of your income goes to the entire group (of 10,001 people), and what it will be used for, etc. Perhaps this is not slavery. On the other hand, since there has never been a tie at any vote, your vote is effectively powerless/meaningless. In that case, we might think that you are really just beholden to the decisions of the other 10,000

people. Regardless of how you vote, it will be THEIR decisions that dictate what rules you will follow, what money you will hand over to them, and what services you will get in return (if any). Is that still a form of slavery? Nozick thinks so. *[Do you agree?]*

4. Okay, Anarchy. What Now?: Imagine that we agree with Nozick that the government's authority is illegitimate. What then? Should we have NO government? What would a society with no centralized government even look like?

Note that by 'anarchy' is meant only *philosophical* anarchy. This is merely the view that no government presently has the legitimate authority to rule over us (or perhaps even that, in principle, NO government COULD have legitimate authority over its people).

But, how would a world without government work? Michael Huemer proposes a version of anarchism called '**market anarchism**' or '**anarcho-capitalism**'. In such a society, everything is run by private corporations, competing within a capitalistic system. For instance, there would no government-run post office, but multiple competing delivery companies (e.g., Fed-Ex, UPS). Likewise, no centralized public schools, but multiple competing private schools. Even SECURITY and JUSTICE systems would be privatized. Police, military, court systems, jails, etc., would all be run by individual companies.

Worries: One question is, could this sort of system work AT ALL? What do you think? Consider a related worry: What if the justice system of the community that I pay to be a member of has a different set of rules than YOUR community? Those of us who travel a lot might have to remember thousands of micro-rules (to a VERY small extent, we have this now. In some states, it is illegal to turn right on a red light, for instance).

Another question is, even if it DID work, wouldn't this sort of system either just in effect be a bunch of micro-nations, or else evolve into one giant nation (i.e., the present state)?