

The Transition from Slavery to Freedom

I sometimes hear people, including freedom advocates, pondering how society might “transition” from an authoritarian system to a stateless society. The implication is that there could be some sort of gradual, peaceful phasing in of freedom, and a phasing out of governmental controls.

But that is not how things works, and not how things will ever work.

Ultimately, there are only two choices: either you own yourself, or you are the property of someone else (the majority, the collective, some political “authority,” etc.). The choice is binary. You can’t “sort of” belong to yourself and “sort of” be the subject of a ruling class. It’s one or the other. If there is a *disagreement* between you and some other “part owner” of you, one opinion has to “outrank” the other. And whichever opinion that is, *that* is the actual owner.

This principle applies to “owning” anything: whoever has the final, *exclusive* right to decide what is done with something is, by definition, the “owner” of that thing. (This is also why “collective ownership” almost always ends in disaster: if different members of the collective have different ideas about what should be done with what they “collectively own,” then what?) A slave can’t be partially owned by himself and partially owned by his master. Whoever has the final say *is the actual owner*. A slave who is “allowed” to do certain things by his master is still 100% a slave. Here is how an actual slave expressed the point:

“I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master. ... He was satisfied with nothing less than the last cent. He would, however, when I made him six dollars, sometimes give me six cents, to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I regarded it as a sort of admission of my right to the whole. ... I always felt worse for having received any thing; for I feared that the giving me a few cents would ease his conscience, and make him feel himself to be a pretty honorable sort of robber.” – Frederick Douglass

Likewise, either “government” has the right to rule, or it doesn’t. You can’t gradually transition from authoritarianism to freedom, as if there some grayscale possible between the two.

The only way in which there will be a “transition” from statism to a stateless society is in the number of people who have given up the superstition of “authority.” But for each individual, he either believes in freedom, or he believes in “government” (i.e., someone else having the right to rule him). The two are mutually exclusive. And believing in a

kinder, gentler master/owner, as “minarchists” do, is still to believe in the Divine Right of Politicians, and is still fundamentally incompatible with actual freedom.

For a lot of people, talking about a “transition” from “government” to a stateless society is really just an expression of their own reluctance to give up their own attachment to the political mythology they were taught. They find it uncomfortable to all the way let go of the philosophical security blanket of a protector “government,” so they hope for a more moderate happy medium—more pleasant, comfortable chains, that are a slight improvement but without having to upset their deeply ingrained statist paradigm.

But the choice remains binary. For example, either the state has the right to rob people, or it doesn't. (It doesn't.) To “transition” from one to the other would be akin to claiming that 50% forced extortion is intolerable tyranny, but that 49% is righteous and moral. The only principled choices are 0% or 100%. Either you are the property of someone else, and they get to decide how much of your stuff they will take from you (the basis of both the belief in slavery and the belief in “taxation”), or you own yourself, and the state (or anyone else) taking even one penny from you without your permission is immoral theft.

So, for example, to gradually transition from the current levels of authoritarian “taxation” to only voluntarily-funded services implies that, in the interim, legalized extortion is valid and righteous. Is armed robbery okay as long as the thief is slowly phasing out his crimes? Of course not. To talk about any gradual “legislative” solution necessarily implies that it is *up to legislatures* to decide how much control they should have.

Again, that is analogous to a slavemaster slowly allowing his slaves more and more “freedom.” Until they are released completely, have complete freedom and 100% control over their own lives, they are still *slaves*, and that is still wrong. As long as the slavemaster has *any say* in what happens, there is not true freedom. For the exact same reason, engaging in politics at all amounts to condoning authoritarian domination, because petitioning, campaigning, voting, running for office, all of it implies that elections and legislation are actually legitimate, and that the outcome of political rituals determines who has the right to rule.

A slave who still thinks that he needs his master's permission in order to be free is not even free inside his own head, just as a person still seeking the legislative permission of “government” in order to be free is not even free inside his own head.

If the *choice* is still up to the ruling class, as all elections, campaigns and political petitions imply, then the people remain slaves, no matter how relatively nice or nasty the rulers decide to be. This is why “political action” is not something anarchists or voluntaryists should engage in, since it obviously implies that voting and legislation are the path to

freedom. They are the exact opposite. Always. To play the game at all is to *concede* that we need the permission of “law-makers” to be free. And that, of course, means we’re **not** free, no matter what the “law-makers” do or don’t *allow* us to do.

There will be no gradual “legalization” of freedom. Ever. To try for that is worse than futile: it is entirely counter-productive. Politics is a game of the parasites, by the parasites, and for the parasites. It is never the road to freedom. If anything is gradual, it will be a gradual increase in the number of people “illegally” ignoring, disobeying and/or resisting the state, until its decrees become unenforceable and its extortion fees (“taxes”) become uncollectible, before it finally crashes under its own weight. But no, there will be no gentle, official, “legal” transition from freedom to slavery. There never has been, and there never will be.

To expect *those in power*—those who *sought out* positions of power—to be the ones who will diminish and eliminate their own power, is ridiculous. As Thomas Jefferson said (and as basic human nature and all of human history should make obvious), “*The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield, and government to gain ground.*”

Just as chattel slavery ended by way of disobedience, “law-breaking,” and occasional violence, so too will statism. There will be no smooth transition, no gradual conversion, between an authoritarian system and a free society. The belief in the Divine Right of Politicians is incompatible in every way with the belief in freedom, and those who muddle the two together (“minarchists,” Constitutionalists, political “Libertarians,” etc.)—or try to find some “compromise” between the two, even if they say it’s just a temporary measure on the way to the goal—are doing little more than strengthening and keeping alive the most dangerous and destructive superstition ever: the belief in “authority.” They are, in fact, prolonging injustice, in the name of being “practical” and “realistic,” when the reality of the situation is that all political action—bickering over who is on the throne and begging the masters for mercy—has never and will never lead to true freedom.