

interpretation

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Exploring the Limits of Analytic Philosophy

A Critique of Nozick's *Philosophical Explanations*

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Robert Nozick has performed a valuable service in writing *Philosophical Explanations*. By going further than anyone else in articulating the assumptions upon which analytic philosophy as an enterprise rests, he has inadvertently helped us to see just how untenable that enterprise is. Nozick asks and answers the kinds of questions that the ideology of analysis usually prevents people from even asking. Unfortunately, the answers suggested by Nozick are pretentious restatements of the modernist liberal teleology that underlies analysis. As such the answers are neither novel nor adequate. They are inadequate because the terms in which they are cast are still analytic. In short, Nozick asks non-analytic questions but he asks and answers them in an analytic way.

My paper is divided into three parts. In Part I, I shall summarize Nozick's book chapter by chapter and largely in his own words. In Part II, I shall interpret what Nozick is doing against a broader historical background. In Part III, I shall argue just why it is inadequate.

I: SUMMARY OF PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLANATIONS

Introduction: According to Nozick, all philosophical questions "stem from one: how are we valuable and precious?" (p. 1). In trying to answer this question, what Nozick wants to avoid is "coercive philosophy" in which we seek to prove things by providing a knockdown argument. In its place, we are offered what Nozick calls a *philosophical explanation* which is designed to render things "coherent and better understood" (p. 8).

A philosophical explanation, then, is a hypothesis. (a) It relies on imaginative theoretical constructs; (b) it asks questions like "what might be possible?"; (c) it discovers and realizes the possibilities inherent in the theory; and (d) its formulation is not intended to prove that it is true but what is possible if we act as if the theory is true.

To engage in philosophical activity is to formulate and to explore a hypothesis. A philosophical explanation is not a transcendental argument, which, we are told, is designed as a proof intended to reveal necessary conditions (p. 15). Whose conception of transcendental argument is being rejected is not something we are told. Nozick's goal is not to persuade but "to remove the conflict, to put my own beliefs in alignment" (p. 16). In short, what he is proposing is that "explanation replace proof as the goal of philosophy" (p. 14).

The foregoing conception of a philosophical explanation is intertwined with and contrasted with a second and more radical goal. Exploring hypotheses may lead to “radically new and surprising truths and insights” (p. 12), partly because we may be led to consider “explanatory hypotheses which are not already believed” (p. 14). It is not yet clear which of these two models of explanation is to predominate, either exploration or replacing what we believe by something more adequate.

A distinguishing characteristic of Nozick’s presentation is his willingness to tolerate alternative hypotheses, what he calls philosophical pluralism. But pluralism is not, we are told, to be confused with relativism. Nozick’s aim is still to arrive at the truth. Although philosophy itself may not be a science, “the philosopher’s existential hypothesis may suggest detailed investigations to the scientist” (p. 13). For a further elaboration of the meaning of Nozickean pluralism we are referred to the end of the book where we are told that philosophy is an art form, understood as presenting a shaped view or vision (p. 647). [As far as I can make it out, what this amounts to is the familiar claim that philosophy is hypothesis formation, that hypothesis formation is a creative act which cannot be further explained, and that theory construction and methodological innovation are indistinguishable.]

Following the introduction, the book is divided into three parts: Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Value. No immediate explanation is given for this order. The order seems at first to be odd because we have been told that the fundamental questions are questions of value. However, in retrospect what we shall see is that Nozick’s methodological innovation is the notion of a self-subsuming explanation, and this can only be made clear initially by reference to the metaphysical problems of self-identity.

Metaphysics: This part of the book is divided into two main chapters: The Identity of the Self; and Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

The Identity of the Self: This chapter is divided into two parts; the first concerns the problem of identity through time, and the second concerns the notion of reflexivity. These two parts are intimately related and reveal reflexivity as one of the dominant themes of the book. Nozick subscribes to the closest continuer theory of personal identity through time, a theory that invokes the notion of self-creation. Self-creation is an example of reflexivity.

Let me elaborate. The general philosophical issue of identity through time is treated by Nozick in terms of the *closest continuer theory*. As a necessary but not sufficient condition, “something at time t_2 is not the same entity as x at t_1 if it is not x ’s closest continuer. And ‘closest’ means closer than all others. . . . However, something may be the closest continuer of x without being close enough to it to be x . How close something must be to x to be x , it appears, depends on the kind of entity x is, as do the dimensions along which closeness is measured” (p. 34).

Well, what kind of entity is a *self*? The “capacity for reflexive self-reference

is essential to being a self” (p. 79). Reference is here made by Nozick to Fichte’s notion of self-positing (p. 76). The self is created by a primordial act of self-reference which is also a decision about what to be. This primordial act is self-reflexive (seen from the inside) and refers to itself at the same time. “The self which is reflexively referred to is synthesized in that very act of reflexive self-reference” (p. 91), and it is also described as a “reflexive act of craftsmanship” (p. 110). Parenthetically, this conception of the self satisfies the original impulse to engage in philosophy, namely, to explain how we are valuable (p. 109).

The foregoing explanation of how reflexive self-knowledge is possible now becomes a prototype of all explanation. It is a self-subsuming explanation in that it both refers to itself and justifies itself.

Self-subsumption is a way a principle turns back on itself, yields itself, applies to itself, and refers to itself. If the principle necessarily has the features it speaks of, then it necessarily will apply to itself. This mode of self-reference, whereby something refers to itself in all possible worlds where it refers, is like the Gödelian kind of the previous chapter. There we also discussed an even more restrictive mode of self-referring, reflexive self-referring. Can the fundamental explanatory principle(s) be not merely self-subsuming and necessarily self-applying, but also reflexively self-referring? (p. 136).

Why Is There Something Rather than Nothing?: Nozick treats this question as meaningful, as literally meaningful, and as an issue about the nature of explanation. Philosophy is in part an attempt to explain everything. But as we all know the attempt to push explanation to its outer limits seems to present us with the following dilemma:

Explanatory self-subsumption, I admit, appears quite weird—a feat of legerdemain. When we reach the ultimate and most fundamental explanatory laws, however, there are few possibilities. Either there is an infinite chain of different laws and theories, each explaining the next, or there is a finite chain. If a finite chain, the endmost laws are unexplainable facts or necessary truths or the only laws there can be if there are laws of a certain sort at all (the fact that there are laws of that sort is classified under one of the other possibilities)—or the endmost laws are self-subsuming (p. 120).

Given the traditional and seemingly intractable problem of justifying first principles within a deductive explanation, we are brought to self-subsumption as the only way out. What we need, according to Nozick, is a fundamental explanation of the totality of reality which loops back onto itself without circularity and without an unexplained residue of brute fact.

What might such an explanation be like? Without endorsing any of them, Nozick discusses several. I select two of them because I think that these two indicate the direction of Nozick’s thinking. First, Nozick speculates on going beyond existence and nonexistence to a nothingness force that “nothod” itself

and let in reality. This hypothesis would seem to give nonbeing a power of its own. Second, Nozick considers the possibility of a self-subsuming principle of organic unity, “one that best fits in with the other facts” and which “would be explained by its mesh with other facts” (p. 149). This hypothesis would seem to reinstate particulars within the universal concept.

At this point it seems as if there are enough resources in Nozick’s book to argue that all of the alternative explanations or hypotheses are themselves moments within one great organic unity, all being reinterpreted in the way that the self recasts itself in Nozick’s theory. But Nozick refuses to complete the picture in this way (p. 20). Later, we shall have to speculate on why he refuses to do so. For the moment, we shall note Nozick’s reservations.

Still, won’t there be many different equally coherent and unified worlds? If each is equally in accord with a principle of organic unity, why then does one hold rather than another? (This question parallels the familiar one put to coherence theories of truth.) . . . I see no reason to think there is only one self-subsuming organic unity principle capable of generating other facts within a structure of high organic unity undistinguishable in fundamentalness; so the question would remain of why one particular one holds, barring a reflexive account (p. 149).

In summation, there appear to be three key and interrelated Nozickean concepts: self-reference, reflexive self-reference, and self-subsumption.

1. *self-reference* may be exemplified as follows:

This sentence has five words.

2. *reflexive self-reference*: “I am Nicholas Capaldi” (when uttered by the author of this article).

3. *self-subsumption*:

P: any lawlike statement having characteristic C is true.

P is a lawlike statement with characteristic C.

Therefore P is true (p. 119).¹

All reflexively self-referential statements are self-subsuming, and all self-subsuming statements are self-referential, but not all self-subsuming statements are reflexively self-referential. Nozick does not claim that all self-subsuming statements are true or acceptable proofs. Being self-subsuming is a purely formal characterization.

1. Not all self-subsuming explanations are true. Many false statements are susceptible to being derived in this way. The following example is Nozick’s own:

S: Every sentence of exactly eight words is true.

S has exactly eight words.

Therefore, S is true (p. 119).

Notice how this example too already contains the word ‘true’ within it, and how ‘truth’ remains unanalyzed.

Epistemology: This section of the book has three subdivisions: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Evidence. It answers the question, How is knowledge possible? Beginning with the skeptic who “argues that we do not know what we think we do” (p. 167), Nozick proceeds to show two things. First, skepticism is, allegedly, a logically coherent position which cannot be refuted. Second, the coherence of skepticism does not entail the denial of the possibility of knowledge. So knowledge is possible.

Nozick’s explanation does not claim to provide “procedures to determine whether or not any particular case *is* a case of knowledge” (p. 287). In fact, in his discussion of evidence, inductive logic, and probability, Nozick takes the position that epistemology is not and cannot be an autonomous discipline, that epistemological principles at best can only achieve self-subsumption (p. 278).

Knowledge is defined, positively, as having “a belief that tracks the truth” (p. 178). *Tracking* is the case where “to know that p is to be someone who would [subjunctive conditional] believe it if it were true, and who wouldn’t believe it if it were false” (p. 178). Tracking is a “real factual connection to the world.” Finally, Nozick offers a speculative hypothesis about knowledge as tracking which is compatible with evolution. That is, the evolutionary process can give organisms the capacity to vary beliefs with the truth of what is believed (pp. 283–87).

Value comprises the third, final, and largest section of the book. It is subdivided into three chapters: free will, foundations of ethics, and the meaning of life.

Free Will: Nozick does not attempt to argue that man’s will is free. Instead he tries to formulate a theory of free action that is “compatible with determinism and sufficient for our value purposes” (p. 292). Jargon notwithstanding, this is a familiar position. The only question is how this relates to Nozick’s other themes.

A free choice is a choice which weighs both the reasons for and against an action, and it weighs the principle in terms of which it assigns weights. By assigning weight to itself, the choice is self-subsuming (p. 300). This allows for the explanation of choice as something other than a random event. Although the explanation is not itself causal it is compatible with reductionism. It is even possible to imagine that such free action exhibits tracking by tracking value or bestness (p. 317). This theory, we are told, is compatible with the mind-body identity theory (p. 339) and with a notion of contributory value but not originary value (ruled out by determinism).

In drawing the parallel between epistemology and value, Nozick is clarifying his concept of ‘tracking’. There is a great deal of formalistic paraphernalia thrown about, and tracking is construed as a subjunctive relation, but in point of fact tracking is a teleological concept. It is a disposition of human behavior both cognitive and evaluative, a disposition connected with certain obvious facts but not deductively inferable from those facts.

The reader should recall at this point that teleological concepts lost their standing in nature with the advent of modern physical science construed deterministically, and Anglo-American analytic philosophers have generally and officially eschewed their use even in discussing man or man's intellectual endeavors. There was in the 1960s a whole literature devoted to trying to show that teleological explanations were replaceable by causal explanations. Early on, Quine himself thought that dispositional terms could be defined extensionally, but all this was abandoned. Quine now thinks that dispositional terms will eventually be dropped from science when the enterprise of science is "completed." In technical discourse this has made it difficult (some of us would say impossible) to achieve any epistemological consensus on the status of laws, etcetera.

Nozick is reintroducing teleological concepts ("tracking" in epistemology, "organic unity" in value theory) but trying to do so in a way that is compatible with but not deducible from determinism. He does this by adopting what I can only describe as a two-tier approach. There is a level of conscious understanding where tracking is possible and a deterministic level where teleological concepts do not appear. If these two tiers were functionally identical (like mind-body identity theory) then we could have our intellectual cake and eat it too. There are a number of antecedents for this approach in modern philosophy, but I shall discuss them later.

Foundations of Ethics: Nozick's ethical theory is an attempt to show how we can mould the world into an embodiment of human purpose. He defines the task of ethical theory in terms of the dialectical relation between right and morality, or in his words "the moral pull and the moral push" (p. 401).

Value is understood teleologically as "organic unity." Nozick calls his position "realization", that is, "we choose that there be values, that they exist, but their character is independent of us" (p. 555). As is to be expected, this choice to find value subsumes itself as something valuable, justifies itself, and puts itself into effect (p. 560). Moreover, "the choice that there be value brings (some) facts into an organic relationship with value, unifying these but not identifying them" (p. 568). This unification is perhaps obscured "because our facts have not been organically unified enough yet." This tight organic unity is what brings together epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics (p. 524).

Nozick attempts to do justice to Kantian deontology as well as to Aristotelian teleology, but he takes the predictable view that deontology needs to be supplemented by some end for organization. So we come once more face to face with the issue of an ultimate synthesis, this time of push and pull (p. 421). Nozick still answers, no! (p. 449). Doubtless frightened by the collectivist implications of such a resolution he urges that "there not be the highest organic unity in the realm of values" so as to leave "room for new and even radically different organic unities" (p. 449).

Is it really possible to resolve autonomy and an unconditioned end without

resort to a self-developing absolute spirit? Can we avoid, finally, finding freedom by having the individual fully integrated into the community? Nozick hesitates and then declines to explore these issues. Specifically, he claims that he is not linking this view of morality with his earlier book *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (p. 499).²

Philosophy and the Meaning of Life: The choice that there be value is also what gives life its meaning. It is meaningful in the sense that it is “a choice to connect and accord with something external, a choice to transcend one’s own limits” (p. 618).

Nozick finally concludes that philosophy is a part of the humanities precisely because it aims not only at explanation but at the explanation of value and meaning. Moreover, he proclaims that his self-subsuming explanations are nonreductionist and preserve value and meaning, although he does not think that it is possible to prove that reductionism is impossible, and he once again backs away from an ultimate synthesis (pp. 635–42).

So what does this make of academic philosophy? Philosophy is an art form.

The philosopher aimed at truth states a theory that presents a possible truth and so a way of understanding the actual world (including its value) in its matrix of possible neighbors. In his artistic reshaping, he also may lift the mind from being totally filled with the actual world in which it happens to find itself. There is a tension between the philosopher’s desire that his philosophy track the world—as a tight unity, tracking is of value—and his desire that it depict a world worth tracking, if not transcend the world altogether. Still, the philosopher must be true enough to the world, presenting a possible (though shaped) view, to be transcending it (p. 647).

II: THE HEGELIAN BACKGROUND (FROM CORRESPONDENCE TO COHERENCE)

Contemporary analytic philosophy began with Russell’s rejection of Hegelianism. What was inaugurated was a realist, foundationalist, antipsychologistic enterprise. This enterprise has failed to achieve its goals, and we are now in a period of reassessment. Ironically, the reassessment leads us back to Hegel. The inadequacy of the correspondence theory inherent in foundationalism, the

2. I believe that Nozick is aware of a lack of perfect congruence between *Philosophical Explanations* and *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

In *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, I presented a political philosophy but did not present any moral foundations for that view. One might attempt to provide such a foundation either by working back from the view, step by step, or by starting at the very foundations of moral philosophy and working forward. There is also the risk, however, that this forward motion from the foundations will lead to a completely different view. We do not pursue the construction here extensively enough in the direction of political philosophy to be able to see if there are two lines or one (pp. 498–99n.).

desertion of Wittgenstein, the failure of positivism's program of verification, Quine's wholism, and the disequilibrium of Kuhn and Feyerabend have cumulatively undermined Russell's original program. First Rorty and now Nozick have put their fingers into an ever-widening hole in the dike.

Nozick's book is heralded as a bold new step into the future, but in reality it is a reactionary return to Hegelianism accompanied by all of the fumbings and thrashings about of someone who has not fully understood the past that is being revived.³ The return to idealism, here understood as the belief that to be real is to be a member of a rational system, where members are only understood when the system as a whole is understood, is signaled by Nozick's conception of a self-subsuming explanation. Whereas Russell rejected internal relations, Nozick restores them via self-subsumption. What is being proclaimed as a new direction in disaffected analytic circles is in part a return to an older position in the light of the failure of mainline twentieth century analytic philosophy.

The Hegelian background to contemporary analytic philosophy's current crisis can be expressed in terms of three intertwined problems. (1) There is a gap between how we understand ourselves (self-consciousness) and how we understand the world, a gap accentuated and aggravated by scientific, reductive attempts to subsume the former under the latter. (2) It does not seem possible to reconcile science as the study of a nonteleological fixed external structure and the human striving for value. (3) The attempt to construe the logic of explanation in purely formal (mathematical) terms independent of the subject who does the explaining renders meaning unintelligible.

Nozick's task is expressed in terms of (3), but it is motivated by (1) and (2). This is the whole point behind the desire to replace argument by explanation. Some expressions of the motivation are the following.

It is ironic that one of the most glorious achievements of the modern mind, science, seems to leave no room for its own glory; that the reduced image of man toward which it seems inexorably to lead—a mean and pitiable plaything of forces beyond his control—seems to leave no room even for the creators, and the creation, of science itself (p. 627).

those who deny value sometimes see as itself valuable their tough-mindedness in refusing to succumb to (what they view as) the illusion of value, this comfort is not legitimately available to them (p. 559).

Just as Hegel developed a dialectical logic to overcome the dualism of and to unite thinking and being, so Nozick develops an organic as opposed to a mechanical paradigm of logic in the form of self-referentiality and self-subsumption. But whereas Hegel solved the first problem, the gap, by reconceiving the phenomenal world as the self-presentation of the noumenal world, Nozick is

3. There is no logical provision in Nozick for paying attention to the views of others. There is no argument for taking anyone else's perspective or hypothesis seriously other than Nozick's personal assurance that he does so. He offers, however, no indication of how he would rank other views from within his own.

content with a mere formal analogy between self-consciousness and the world in terms of self-subsuming explanations. By arguing for the analogy between reality and self-articulating reason, Nozick's enterprise is Hegelian but with a refusal to follow it through to the Absolute Spirit. Just why is something we shall discuss in Part III.

In order for Nozick to express and to explain what his theory is about, he is forced at several key junctures to play God or to talk from a point of view suspiciously like Hegel's Absolute Spirit. In his discussion of epistemology, Nozick imagines a God who creates organisms that would have true beliefs in a changing world, beings "able to detect changes in facts, who will change their beliefs accordingly." According to Nozick such beliefs are "merely" true. But the evolutionary process which Nozick champions gives beings the "capability for true beliefs." This capability is supposed to be superior.

. . . it makes their beliefs (sometimes) vary somehow with the truth of what is believed; it makes their beliefs somehow sensitive to the facts. . . . Thus, the belief capability instilled by the evolutionary process will yield beliefs of status intermediate between a belief that (merely) is true in the actual world, and a belief that varies with the truth in all possible worlds (pp. 283–86).

In other words, the evolutionary epistemology is superior to the God hypothesis. But is it superior to Hegel's Absolute? Actually it is like the Absolute but without the Absolute. How's that? Well it is "sometimes" and "somehow".⁴

The perspective of the Hegelian Absolute is also invoked in order to explain value.

The existence of value is up to him, but the character of value is independent, not subject to his control or choice . . . In God's relationship to value (under this view) his autonomy is preserved, for it is his choice that there *be* value, yet also there is an independent standard of value according to which his existence and choices are valuable, a standard not fixed simply by his own preference or approval. Although he founds the country club, its membership conditions are not up to him (pp. 554–55).⁵

4. Nozick is somewhat aware of the similarity of his views to things said by Hegel. But Nozick's version of Hegel is, apparently, gleaned from a reading of Aurobindo and McTaggart! That Nozick fails to understand Hegel can be seen from the following two remarks:

. . . such theories (do not) find it easy to explain why the perfect and all-inclusive underlying substance is undergoing the process of coming to complete self-knowledge (p. 606).

See note 5.

5. Nozick is guilty of the usual analytic caricature of the history of philosophy, and he even argues for the value of such caricatures (p. 546).

"Hegel's theory leaves us being Geist's little helper and arena; but how awe-inspiring is a Geist that needs us as the arena in which it achieves self-consciousness, how ennobled can we be by being connected with such a Geist? Would you join a country club that *needs* you as a member? (pp. 606–607n.)

Notice the same metaphor of a country club.

Let us at this point spell out the Hegelian argument and locate Nozick precisely within it. This will also permit us to see his difference with previous analytic philosophy.

The Hegelian argument can be presented as a progression through nine theses.

- (1) There is a multiplicity of objective truths.
- (2) This multiplicity of truths forms a coherent system (S).
- (3) *a.* any statement about S is, if true, a part of S.
b. our understanding of S is, if true, a part of S.

(4) Statements of the kind (3*a*) and (3*b*) cannot be established by correspondence because we the establishers would have to be outside of the system S in order to use correspondence.

(5) Therefore, the fundamental explanatory principles (3*a*) must be established in some other way, by coherence understood organically.

(6) Coherence alone is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. It is a mere formal requirement. Any suggested (3*a*) is a hypothesis to which there are alternatives.

(7) How can we tell which version of coherence is the true (correct) one? Certainly not by correspondence (see 4) or any extra-systematic means.

(8) There must be a final and all-encompassing system which includes the correct understanding of itself. It must also account for the how and why of alternative expressions of (3*a*). How can a system know itself? This is only possible if there is a *unity of thought and being*.

(9) If such a unity exists but we cannot yet articulate it, where are we now, those of us who clearly understand this? We are at one stage of a process undergoing development toward self-articulation. This explains why and how we relate to the Absolute (3*b*). The Absolute, in short, needs us.

Quine, and most analytic philosophers of the hard core stop at step (2). They refuse to talk about talk about the world. When analysts are criticized for not considering the big questions it is the refusal to go beyond (2) that their critics have in mind. Nozick goes beyond (2), and that is why he appears to some to be progressive. But Nozick stops at (6). He refuses to discuss how we choose.

As an analytic philosopher not satisfied with just deductive argument but who wants a self-subsuming explanation, Nozick is engaged in a total conceptualization of the world. In order to do this, knowledge must not only explain but be like the world. Ultimate reality and self-articulating reason must be identical. In some way we must explain that logic is derivative from self-consciousness (self-reflexivity in Nozick's terminology). Nozick's discussion of self-synthesis and the closest continuer theory of identity, for example, uses analytic jargon, but what it boils down to is a dialectic which annuls, preserves, and elevates. Thinking is thus a developmental activity, not a static one, so an explanation of thought must be itself developmental. Once the explanation of think-

ing is based on the movement of thinking (for example, progressive self-redefinition, trackings, or reachings for organic unity) then the explanation must itself be subject to movement. This would explain pluralism and maintain the possibility of absolute truth.

The important difference is that Hegel can envisage saying everything (a final synthesis) whereas Nozick will not go that far and so is left with a possible plurality of self-subsuming explanations. Nozick thus fails to reconcile this plurality with a belief in objective truth. He certainly parades his support of such truth as well as priding himself on his open-mindedness, but the logical problem nevertheless remains. Absolute truth is replaced by the model of self-subsumption, and curiously *truth* is one of the few concepts not analyzed in Nozick's book. Self-subsumption is another word for a coherence theory of truth organically understood. But such a theory is only successful, I would argue, if there is a single organic whole of mind and reality and if it is undergoing a self-development that requires ultimate consummation. Short of that, Nozick is going to be left with an implausible historicism.

Nozick's theory is indistinguishable from historicism.⁶ Suppose two philosophers, N and H. N believes or says that he believes in an absolute and objective truth, but he is also totally open to new ideas, new hypotheses, radical paradigm shifts, and so on. At the same time, N refuses to commit himself to any specific criteria by which we can tell that later is better or that we are ever closer to the absolute truth. H, on the other hand, either denies the existence of an absolute and objective truth or refuses to be drawn into a debate about it. Instead, H argues that later thought evolves out of earlier thought but is not in any objective sense closer to "a" or "the" truth. H even seizes upon N's point that all thinking involves speculative assumptions or starting points that cannot themselves be objects of proof: what Nozick means when he denies that deductive arguments can justify themselves. How could we distinguish in practice or empirically between N and H? What difference is there between Nozick's quasi-Hegelianism and an out and out historicist? The answer is that there is no difference without an act of faith.⁷ Alternative self-subsuming theories (à la Nozick) become just so many incommensurable discourses (à la Rorty). It is never explained how *we* are to choose or compare or to coordinate those alternatives.

6. For an elaboration of this very important point see Hilail Gildin (ed.), introduction to *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), p. xiii.

On one occasion, [Leo] Strauss used Ernest Nagel's *The Structure of Science* to illustrate what he meant by affirming that if positivism understood itself it would necessarily transform into historicism.

7. Nozick aptly expresses the limitations of this kind of theorizing: "However, just as empirical data underdetermine a scientific theory, so actions do not uniquely fix the life plan from which they flow. Different life plans are compatible with and might yield the same actions" (p. 577). If so, are they really different life plans, or is one of the plans (at least) an inadequate expression of the actions?

What Nozick shows us is that fully self-conscious analytic philosophy must embrace Hegelianism. That it does not do so is, in part, the result of being not fully self-conscious of what it is doing. It is a peculiar kind of failure, not to follow an argument backwards to its implicit assumptions. No matter how brilliant individual analysts are at developing the implications of a hypothesis, they lack the capacity or the will to understand the roots of a hypothesis. They fail to be philosophical insofar as they fail to be self-conscious. Nozick's speculations are, in the end, just like Rorty's incommensurable discourses, Quine's theoretical multiplicity, Rescher's pluralism of metaphilosophies, and Goodman's world visions. To the extent that they fail to be consistently Hegelian (ultimate synthesis), they either retreat into silent nihilism or at best embrace historicism.

III: THE LIMITS OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

In the previous section I argued that Nozick in particular and analytic philosophy in general can be best understood as failed Hegelianism. I now want to raise the questions of why it fails and what that failure implies. But before addressing these questions there is one potential misunderstanding that I want to avoid. My examination is not a brief for Hegel. I am not arguing that all philosophers ought to embrace Hegelianism. My purpose is to expose the inadequacies of analytic philosophy. At the conclusion of this paper I shall argue that the more consistently Hegelian the analyst becomes, given his other limitations, the more dangerous analysis becomes.

Why is analysis failed Hegelianism? It would be easy to argue sheer historical ignorance, the failure of many contemporary professionals to study their own tradition or to teach it to subsequent generations. But this is not the whole story. In fact, early analysts like Russell knew very well what they were rejecting in idealism.

There are two reasons why analysts, especially like Nozick, would not embrace Hegel even if they understood him. The first has to do with scientism, and the second with the politics of liberalism.

Analytic philosophers subscribe to scientism, to the belief that science gives us the ultimate truth about the whole of reality. Scientism is opposed to idealism in the sense that the latter takes reality to be mind dependent. On the contrary, not only do analysts believe that reality is independent of mind but that mind is itself explainable in the same way that we explain the rest of reality. Thought is nothing but the reflection of an external structure. Scientism as such entails materialism and reductionism.

It might appear to some that Nozick does not subscribe to scientism because he criticizes reductionism. On the contrary, Nozick always writes under the shadow of reductionism. The great fear is that whatever independent realm we

carve out for man is in imminent danger of being replaced, and the ultimate embarrassment in analytical philosophical circles is to be cast into the position of people who refused to look through Galileo's telescope or who opposed evolution. Nozick goes to great pains to point out that any attempt to prove that reductionism must fail is futile (pp. 570, 642). Nozick does not rule out the possibility of reductionism, and we should recall that in his treatment of freedom he does not argue that man is free but strives instead to formulate a compatibilist position. More important, Nozick denies that there is an intersubjectively valid commonsense world from which science itself is abstracted (p. 627).

The fundamental commitment to scientism has two important consequences: it leads to a peculiar conception of the practice of philosophy, and it leads to normlessness.

Let us look first at the practice of philosophy. In Nozick, the practice of philosophy is derivative from the practice of science. Instead of attempting to understand science, what we get is a scientific approach to philosophy. As in science, hypothesis formation is everything. But how do we know that we have correctly understood science? This question is postponed indefinitely.

In order to clarify further what hypothesis formation means in Nozick, I shall introduce a distinction among: (a) philosophy as exploration, (b) philosophy as replacement, and (c) philosophy as explication of meaning. In (a), *philosophy as the exploration of meaning*, we follow out the implications of some *hypothetical model* of thought and practice in order to realize its inherent possibilities. In *philosophy as the replacement of meaning*, there is an explicit substitution of new ideas for our everyday ideas. Reductionism is a form of replacement. Both exploration and replacement rely upon imaginative theoretical constructions and ask the question "What is possible if . . ."

In *philosophy as explication* what we seek to do is to extract from our previous practice a theory of that practice, a theory that may be reflectively applied in deciding what to do next. In philosophy as explication, norms are fundamental. Explication is the serious attempt to clarify an intuition—the sense we have of ourselves as we act.

Nozick predominantly and self-consciously engages in theory exploration. We are constantly besieged by what the book dust jacket calls "new concepts, daring hypotheses, rigorous reasoning, playful exploration." Nozick exemplifies the preoccupation of contemporary analytic philosophy with methodological innovation. There is much concern over who arrived at what hypothesis first (p. 654, n. 12). But what is the point of these hypotheses? Sometimes these seem to be mere exercises in cleverness. At other times, the point of the hypothesis seems to be theory replacement, that is, to get us to see things in a new way and to give up our old ways of thinking. For example, in his handling of "the view that the self exists independently of all acts of self-referring", Nozick suggests that we must "explain it away" (p. 94). On the other hand, all

forms of reductionism are examples of theory replacement. How are we to tell when it is appropriate to replace a view and when not?

Sometimes Nozick is brought to the brink of explication as when he wants to square science with our view of ourselves as meaningful beings. But he specifically refuses to embrace this as the aim of philosophy. "Showing that certain values are immanent in certain activities does not constitute an explanation of why those values are correct, or of how correct values are possible at all" (p. 435).

Philosophy as exploration is committed to the traditional Cartesian starting point of "I think." So right from the beginning Nozick's emphasis is on thought as opposed to action and on the "I" as opposed to the "we." On the surface this appears to take the subject "I" seriously, but as it develops we come to see the subject as an object interacting in an environment of other objects. To his credit, Nozick does not use mechanical models but organic ones. But by stopping at the organic level, we get a picture of man as a rational animal but not as a person.

Nozick's analysis of skepticism is typical. Dealing with the skeptic involves an egocentric perspective, not a social one.

My task here is to remove the conflict, to put my own beliefs in alignment, to show how those of the things the skeptic says which I accept can be fit in with other things I accept. In this way, I take very seriously what the skeptic says, for I acknowledge that what he says creates a problem for *me* and my beliefs. In thus trying to explain to myself how knowledge is possible, what is relevant is what I accept (p. 16).

Nozick responds to the skeptic's demand for total justification by the now familiar move of rejecting foundationalism, that is by rejecting the notion of the existence of privileged contexts. If there are no privileged contexts, and if we are to avoid nihilism, then there must be a context of the whole, a pervasive all-inclusive background. Such a background for Nozick is science. So, ironically, we are back to foundationalism. What analytic philosophers have finally come to reject is phenomenalism, but they have confused this with the rejection of idealism. They have not really rejected idealism. Moreover, if the widest background is science, and if science is normless, then there will be no way to decide short of possessing total knowledge (Hegelianism again) which alternative explanation is correct. There is, in fact, no way to decide which among competing hypotheses is correct, no way to compare them, and no way to coordinate them. Nozick's pluralism is ultimately normless. Such normless plurality is a pointless multiplicity. It's all just talk until science brings home the final verdict.

Practically speaking analytic philosophy remains a form of historicism, not a very good one at that, and this is why it continually degenerates into an orgy of methodological innovation. Is it any wonder that many analytic philosophers feel alienated (p. 578), not knowing what world they inhabit (the pretheoretical or the Absolute)?

All norms in Nozick's view function organically (teleologically) at the upper level, whereas science itself is normless. There is no possibility of making science itself a norm-governed activity. Nozick is opposed to transforming science "against its grain, into a humanity" (p. 627). Nor is there on Nozick's part a desire to correlate a final organic unity with a final scientific whole—that would be Marxist. So we are left with an unexamined, and unexaminable, pluralism that is comfortably and marketably liberal.

Nozick's objective, as is the objective of all analytic philosophy, is total conceptualization. To conceptualize the interaction of the subject and the object is to make the subject or self a self-conscious concept. All of Nozick's explanations refer to the formal properties of the thing explained, and the formal properties ultimately appealed to (self-subsumption and self-reference) make the subject and the object indistinguishable. What I am arguing is that once we abandon philosophy as the explication of meaning we inevitably lose the self. What is peculiar about the subject, namely that he is part of a cultural matrix with implicit norms, is completely lost. Man is not just a rational animal interacting with nature, but a being in a culture in nature.

Surely in the case of self-identity we exist in a social setting (for example, the family) long before we develop a *personal* identity. It will not do to say, formalistically, that "I" cannot be derived "only from non-reflexively self-referring statements" (p. 74). The fact is that before anything can become a function of the individual's mental life it must first have existed externally as a result of an exchange between two or more people. We are ourselves because of and through others. What Nozick has confused is an account of the idea of the self with an account of the self. Contrary to Nozick, the self is not an idea nor is it deducible from ideas, any ideas.

To take the subject seriously would be to refer to the normative social milieu, but this would involve a totally different conception of what an explanation is. Nozick does recognize the social dimension, at least implicitly, by his making of philosophy a part of the humanities. Specifically he cites the need to share our experience. But of course this treatment is inadequate. One cannot just say it, one must do it and embody it in one's philosophy. Autobiographical asides and admissions of doubt are not enough, they are just in bad taste.

Let us suppose, contrary to Nozick, that thought is a reflection on action, specifically social practice, and let us suppose further that practice contains implicit norms. If so, then there are existential limits on thought; you are not entitled to hold any old view; you cannot challenge indefinitely and contextlessly. Moreover, if thought were a reflection on *what you and I do together*, as opposed to *what I think alone*, then those limits would be underscored. Failure to provide for a social frame of reference is not only problematic in epistemology, however nice and polite pluralism may be. It is catastrophic in the social sphere where there must be some way of handling conflicts among competing versions of political and social life.

Nozick, then, is not primarily interested in explaining what *we* mean or the

sense we have of ourselves. At the same time Nozick needs philosophy as explication of meaning because it is only within the context of what we already mean—our previous valuing of ourselves—that we are going to be asked to repudiate ourselves and emerge reconstructed by the exploration of certain hypotheses. By Nozick's own account there is a pretheoretical context in terms of which arguments function. Arguments are not self-certifying. It is this pretheoretical context of meaning and value that he is trying to explain. That, after all, was what he told us in the introduction. But what he is doing is trying to explain it by totally conceptualizing the pretheoretical context. The clearest example of this is the treatment of the self, where we end up with the self being eliminated in favor of the idea-of-the-self. In short, the pretheoretical context eventually disappears in Nozick's theory. The underlying commitment to scientism underscores the major and most ironic failure of Nozick's book. Ostensibly committed to preserving the dignity of man, the whole logical thrust of Nozick's argument is to collapse the distinction between the subject and the object. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Nozick's philosophy represents a loss of the self.

We come now to the second reason for the failure of analytic philosophy to move consistently to total Hegelianism. This reason is purely political. Analytic philosophy, which has its origins in Hobbes and Locke, is *culturally biased toward liberalism*. This explains its entrenchment in Anglo-American universities and its other home in Anglophiliac Vienna. Liberalism, for our purposes, can be defined as follows: (a) the assumed congruence of teleology and determinism within the individual (such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Smith, Bentham); (b) the assumption that each individual has a built-in end or set of consistent ends (teleological-organic component); (c) the Enlightenment belief in progress; and (d) the belief that freedom is the absence of arbitrary external constraints (defined relative to b). From this point of view, any social collective is judged in terms of its serving the ends of individuals. Consequently, the Hegelian synthesis of right and morality in the ethical life of the community, and the notion that the ends of the individual are both satisfied and transcended in the social organism would be rejected as dangerous collectivism.

What Nozick has offered us is a two-tier system of explanation. There is a reductive level (we shall call it the *micro* level),⁸ and an organic-teleological

8. Liberal political theory is directly analogous to liberal economic theory. It is thus no accident that both Rawls and Nozick use the vocabulary of contemporary economics. The most extreme version of CL is found among Austrian economists who still subscribe to homo economicus, to the view that each individual has a built-in end. Mainline ML postulates a double teleology. Its first articulation was in Adam Smith's hidden hand thesis, and its last has been enshrined in textbooks by Samuelson's neoclassical synthesis integrating the microeconomics of Arrow and Hahn with the macroeconomics of Keynes as expressed by Hicks. The most radical version of liberalism actually invokes social transcendence, and it can be seen in the sole hypostatization of aggregate demand by Keynes' Cambridge disciples such as Ms. Joan Robinson.

level (we shall call it the *macro* level), wherein each level has an integrity of its own. Of course, and here comes the scientism, the micro is responsible for the macro, but the macro has emergent properties (teleological) whose explanation properly utilizes organic concepts not found on the micro level.

Such a view would have to present people's valuable traits (such as being a self, seeking value, and freely choosing) as having an integrity of their own. Although these traits emerge from component processes and are shaped by outside factors, their functioning would not be explicable merely as the product of the simple interaction rather it would involve the intricate integrity of the whole. must not be merely a view that can be taken by us . it must be the ontologically correct view (p. 635).

What we have is a deterministic system that *coincidentally* operates on the self-conscious level as a teleological system. This explains why Nozick redefined freedom so as to make it compatible with determinism.

We must stress that this approach is anything but novel. It originated with Hobbes who, on the one hand, claims to be a determinist and physicalist and who, on the other hand, describes the human and social world as coincidentally operating with principles such as self-preservation, which are not themselves specific drives but parts of an elaborate homeostasis to keep the entire system functional. It is also no accident that Hobbes was the first liberal.

The question we can ask is whether this coincidence of micro and macro levels is true? Is it true, and is it true in precisely the way that Nozick says it is? There is not one single piece of evidence offered nor is there even an argument for why anyone should believe it. It is in Hobbes, in Adam Smith, in Nozick and in everybody else in between, a rationalization which allows them to wrap themselves in the flag of scientism and in the belief in human value as they would like to construe it. It is whistling in the dark. It is in no sense a serious argument, and calling it an hypothesis does not disguise the fact that it is a carpeting together of personal intellectual commitments. Adopting a form of compatibilism to solve some problems may appear to be a neat solution, but it is purchased at the price of invoking a new dualism that is no more and no less plausible than any other form of dualism.

Nozick's dualism is an expression of a particular variety of liberalism. Within liberalism there are at least two possibilities. Classical liberalism (CL) finds the ultimate teleology in the individual per se. Classical liberalism is therefore forced to assume that on the social level there is no ultimate conflict between the organic unity of any one individual and any other individual. Modern Liberalism (ML) finds a double teleology: both in the individual and a more inclusive organic unity in the social world as a whole, so that no individual can achieve his full organic unity without every other individual achieving his as well (but there is no notion of social transcendence).

Whereas Rawls is a modern liberal, Nozick is a clear case of a classical liberal.

... there is no guarantee of a path to maximize both your own harmonious hierarchical development and also that of others. However, ethical responsiveness does not demand you most (*sic*) enhance the development of others, only that you respond to their value as value, that you treat them as having the value they do have. Between such responsiveness and your own value, your own harmonious hierarchical development, there is no conflict at all (p. 515).

Both of these positions are *ad hoc*. Both depend upon the whim of where we would like to see the organic unity rest. Both assume or postulate such organic unities but never offer any proof of them or evidence for them. In fact, both Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* and Rawls's *Theory of Justice* are explorations (not explications), and hence they are contextless.

Nozick would no doubt reply that a teleological theory cannot be given solid empirical backing. As he says (pp. 441, 541, 577), such theories provide necessary but not sufficient conditions (this is true of all self-subsumptive explanations and even tracking). In short no knock-down argument can be offered against *any* teleological argument or hypothesis, so while it is immune to refutation so is every other possibility. This still leaves us with a plurality of possibilities and no way to decide among them. This should put Nozick's pluralism in a proper light.

If, as I have argued, the distinction or borderline between CL and ML, and beyond, is purely arbitrary, then we should expect to see strains in Nozick's analysis, strains which indicate that his much touted libertarianism is easily moulded into something like the New Left. There are three such instances.

(a) Nozick recognizes a context in which "there is a possibility that rights can be transcended" (p. 504).

(b) He talks, in passing, of the possibility of barriers to self-development (p. 514). Here we are reminded of how difficult, if not impossible, it would be to define equal opportunity or to specify criteria for when all barriers have been removed. Remember that for Nozick we cannot specify sufficient conditions for when all barriers are removed. I suggest that teleological explanation will come back to haunt Nozick.

(c) Nozick's treatment of *capital punishment* is the most glaring example of how all this talk about organic unity can drift toward modern progressive liberalism. According to Nozick, punishment is a form of retribution, but the purpose of the punishment is to reconnect the wrongdoer with correct rules (p. 374). But even a murderer has, as an agent, some intrinsic value, so to execute him is both to destroy intrinsic value and to jeopardize our own connection with value. So while Nozick's own moral intuitions are in favor of capital punishment, his liberal theory of organic unity allows for a drift to the left. "I myself have alternated on the issue of an institution of capital punishment, unable to reach a clear stable conclusion" (p. 378). Nozick's reputation as the arch defender of individualism will not survive a careful reading of this book.

I think that now we can begin to appreciate why Nozick's book has received

such plaudits. By pursuing the preconceptions behind technical analytic philosophy, Nozick lays bare the progressive liberal motivation that sustains and fuels it. Solving and dissolving all of the technical issues eventually is supposed to liberate man for higher things. Just what higher things we are never told, and in some cases I suspect it will mean just doing more methodological innovation. Even those on the left who find Nozick a bit retarded politically will welcome his book, for it provides the opening wedge.

What, in conclusion, are the alternatives available to those who take analytic philosophy seriously? Either analytic philosophy embraces reductionism and hence becomes nihilistic, or it seeks to avoid nihilism. There are two ways to avoid nihilism: either embrace some form of teleological consummation or put oneself on radical historicist hold. If we take teleological consummation seriously, we either embrace vague progressive liberalisms or we can argue for ultimate consummation. Ultimate consummation can only mean Hegel or Marx. Hegel is out because of his rejection of scientism and materialism. That leaves only Marxism. In short, Marxism and progressive liberalism are the only political positions compatible with analytic philosophy.