Alnoor Ladha
Mystical Anarchism
2015

https://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/
mystical-anarchism-a-journey-to-the-borderlands-of-freedom/

**usa.anarchistlibraries.net**

# Mystical Anarchism

Alnoor Ladha

2015

# Contents

greed, and self-annihilation is a planetary initiatory process that will catalyze the human species to evolve. This will require a new type of politics and a new type of spirituality. We need activists motivated by social justice and empathy but with the sense of wonder and self-confidence of a mystic—the balance that comes from a deep spiritual practice and grounding. Those who can break through the prison walls of Cartesian dualism and find the magic and mystery in our collective struggle. Those people who can create what the Russian novelist Chyngyz Aitamtov calls the 'divine spark,' a resonance that has both love and power to operate at all three levels—the self, the community, and the super structure—simultaneously.

When I started to intellectually bridge the realms of mysticism and anarchism, I did not think I would end up in this place, that the resulting exploration would have the potential to be so liberating yet so daunting. I immediately went back to my mother's faith in the magic of the unknown, her confidence that every atom was the embodiment of God, and her totalizing ability to trust in a wisdom greater than our own. I can leave you with no better words than those of Guillaume Apollinaire that she read to me all those years ago: "Come to the edge, he said. They said: We are afraid. Come to the edge, he said. They came. He pushed them and they flew."

Note. A earlier version of this article appeared in the anthology Wisdom Hackers.

system in any way possible. We can refuse to participate in ways small and large, mobilizing on the streets, organizing debt resistance, creating alternative currencies, buying locally, living off the grid, etc. Whatever the avenue for radical change, all that matters is that we do it consciously and with clear intention; we understand the structure of the power we are facing; we are aware how it is affecting us spiritually; we incorporate these lessons into both our collective and self-evolution; and we build with the communities around us.

Many of us will choose to create alternative communities to live in. These are growing all around the world including the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico; El Alto in Bolivia; the Transition Town movement that started in the United Kingdom; and even Burning Man, the temporary utopian community in Black Rock City, Nevada. All of these can create containers or even just sparks for the new consciousness.

As we explore and experiment with these new autonomous, self-sustaining, self-organized communities, we will chose the alternatives that make the most sense for us, our communities, our geographies, and our historical contexts. Creating new stories and the infrastructure to carry the utopian seeds for the New Earth will allow us not only to materially protect our species from a dramatically changing climate, but will allow us to live in spiritual accordance with our values. Dieter Duhm confidently reminds us that this "concrete utopia is a latent reality within the universe, just as the butterfly is a reality latent within the caterpillar. It lies in the structure of our physical and biological world, in our genes, and in our deeper ethical orientation."[11]

Perhaps this process will be a part of our spiritual ascension. It could be that the collapse of neoliberal capitalism and the healing of our planet and species from the grips of destructive growth,

[11] Duhm, D. (2015).Terra nova: Global revolution and the healing of love. Bad Belzig, Germany: Verlag Meiga: 27.



## On Beginnings

They say it takes a certain type of personality to be a radical. Questioning of the status quo, anti-authoritarian, angry perhaps, undoubtedly rebellious, critical rather than accepting of what is. Complex analyses and algorithms are deployed to compare shared psychological traits, relationships to authority figures, level of socioeconomic privilege, and even birth order. If any of this attributive, long-form speculation is correct, I may be more of an anomaly than my grade school report cards alluded.

I started my career under the same veils and presumptions as most youth growing up in a Western, capitalist state—seduced by rationalism, consumption, growth, and competition. I wanted to be a lawyer or some such technocratic, middling career that would satisfy my immigrant parents' desire for white acceptance and simultaneously uphold the logic of the system that put the whole house of cards together. I grew up in a poor part of the relatively affluent city of Vancouver, Canada. I maintained mediocrity with the occasional hints of rebelliousness that would be produced in any sentient being living in the Canadian suburbs.

It was not my love for Trotsky or Proudhon or Sankara that radicalized me. Even if I had read fragments, I couldn't fully understand them in my state of pre-consciousness. It was, in fact, the influence of my mother's spiritual values that seeded my initial morality. The influence of her brand of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, self-cultivated within me, even though I explicitly rejected Islam from a young age. I started to adopt some of its principles as the basis for my own spiritual journey, both rejecting and accepting its tenets at my discretion, while incorporating other modalities including Buddhism, Taosim, Ayurveda, and Shamanism.

As I progressed on my journey, those initial seeds blossomed within me as a reaction to the total disgust I felt for a world that lacked empathy, compassion, and signs of progression to a higher plane. After all, every religion especially the esoteric traditions

are, at their core, a moral philosophy. The illusion of reason and the animalistic drive for self-interest that are the main features of late-stage capitalism challenged my spiritual values.

How could I continue to legitimize the structures of this world while holding true to my spiritual ideals? How could I subtly regurgitate the premises of Cartesian dualism when I knew they had no model to explain the torment and anguish and heartache that existed all around me? This tension awakened my political sensibilities. I started to understand that one's politics are simply their morality put into action. I could no longer not act.

Regardless of my awakenings, I never attributed my identity to the coming together of these two modes of being. I did not self-select into the dual camp of the mystical anarchist, both in the hopes of maintaining my political friends who would be embarrassed by such a 'new age' sentiment and my spiritual community that would see me as divisive, judgmental, and living in 'non-acceptance.'

As I kept these identities separate, I found that my central quest — to help create an emancipatory political and economic system, to create the better world we know is possible—was also suffering from the central schism in my life. Despite what my Leftist sensibilities tell me, I know that simply changing the rules of the economic and political system will not be enough. And despite my spiritual disposition and what many 'spiritual gurus' propose, I do not believe that shifts in our individual consciousness, even at mass scale, will change the outcomes of our material reality in the absence of a superstructural overhaul that more closely resembles revolution than reform. So what then shall we do? What must be done? And most importantly, what should we believe in?



concept of how the story would unfold. A lot of the common sense 'conventional wisdom' that has built up has proven to be incorrect. We're only as selfish or as generous as we allow ourselves to be. In *The Original Affluent Society*, anthropologist Marshal Salins showed how hunter-gatherers worked less than us, were highly cooperative and egalitarian, and even consumed more calories per day than modern humans. Thomas Hobbes had it wrong—we don't have to fight and struggle to survive.

We must tell new stories and forge new relationships that make the old story of neoliberal capitalism obsolete. We must choose to be the autoimmune response of the planet, the white blood cells of humanity that cluster together at points of infection and begin the healing. The first decision must be made within. We must all decide what role we want to enact. Then we must set our own intentions and look to activate those around us.

This does not have to be by political means only. Accessing nonordinary states through meditation or yoga or psychedelics can be beneficial avenues to break from the spell of the dominant Matrix ideology.[9] Until we can become free thinkers once more, how will we gain the independence to break the cycle of complicity? As Hakim Bey poetically states, "The only true conflict is that between the authority of the tyrant and the authority of the realized self—all else is illusion, psychological projection, wasted verbiage… only the uprising against the false consciousness in both ourselves and others will sweep away the technology of oppression and the poverty of the Spectacle."[10]

After embodying this realized self, the second stage is to organize among family, friends, and the community around us with the aim of liberation and delegitimizing the logic of the operating

[9] Eve Ensler from One Billion Rising reminds us that Patrix is a more apt description of the current establishment order as it is a direct result of our violent, masculine, patriarchal culture.

[10] Bey, H. (2003). Temporary autonomous zone. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia: 46.

gilded threads of self-evolution negate purpose before the meditation starts.

Many people on the spiritual path believe that they need to achieve a certain level of material wealth or spiritual enlightenment before they start to contribute to the broader world. But we often forget that the very acts of altruism, empathy, community, and solidarity create our happiness and, therefore, our enlightenment. They are not ontological states to be punted to a future self. The actions define who we are and even how we see ourselves. We now know from behavioral psychology that we always act first and then retroactively create our identities from the fabric of those actions. We are tomorrow what we do today.

## On Revolution

All of the collapses we are seeing—the destruction of the planet, mass resource depletion ('peak everything' as it has been called), the war on women and girls, the increasing financial boom and bust cycles, violence with no end, skyrocketing inequality, and even the spiritual ennui and existential angst that characterize modernity are not separate, discrete issues. They are interdependent and interwoven. Ours is a temporary society built on the quicksand of fossil fuels, human misery, and the destruction of our biosphere.

For true emancipatory social change to happen, a new type of society must be created. New relationships must be forged. A new consciousness must be born. This change will require revolution at all three levels simultaneously.

At one level, it's as simple as choosing a better story. We have taken one book off one shelf in the library of ideas. The first sentences in the story of capitalism were uttered barely 250 years ago, at a time when we knew so much less about how human nature really works. And like any profound beginning, we had no earthly



## On Anarchism

At its core, anarchism states that creativity and self-organization will always lead to better societal arrangements than the arbitrary commands of disconnected technocrats. Concentrating power at the top of the pyramid will unequivocally lead to the capture of the democratic process and a tyranny of plutocratic rule.

We cannot deny that there is a metaphysical and moral code deeply embedded within all political philosophy, but one that can never be expressed without the admonition of rationalist judgment. The highest values in anarchism are the simultaneous upholding of freedom and equality. The traditional Right values freedom over all else (e.g., they champion property rights and fight against redistributive taxes), or at least they value the rhetoric of freedom.[1] And the traditional Left values equality over freedom (e.g., they are willing to bear the costs of societal levelers and safety nets such as healthcare, welfare, etc. at the expense of some personal freedom). But for anarchists, both of these conditions must apply. True freedom is equality of choice and equality of opportunity for everyone to thrive in his or her own way. It has nothing to do with private property or ownership per se. If we can decide on our own arrangements for how to live, the majority of us will not be subjected to the greed and wealth extraction of a tiny elite and, therefore, will not need to reduce our freedom or equality to compensate for this. This fundamental belief in the dignity of the human soul, the desire for collective liberation, the intuitive understanding of a shared con-

[1] I would argue that the Right values the rhetoric, not the substance of freedom. They have captured the language and made it mean property rights; however, the two are not synonymous except in their dictionary meaning. Property rights are a freedom only in the sense that slavery was a freedom; i.e., for the slaveowners to own slaves. If you want to use the rhetorical definition that "because it lets me do what I want" as the definition, then murder could be called freedom, and even genocide could be defended with this line of illogic. In fact, one could say that the Right's love of the rhetoric is matched only by their hatred of the actual ideal.

sciousness, and the faith in a human creativity greater than any one individual are in many ways all recognitions of a greater 'source' in each of us.

The other two tenets of anarchism that have spiritual corollaries are disintermediation and consciousness. Anarchists don't require the mediation of the state, feudal lords, popes, imams, ayatollahs, sun gods, or any other arbitrary source of ordained power. 'No gods, no masters' as the famous dictum goes. Anarchists also believe in the conscious individual as the unit of free societies. This requires sovereign women and men who understand the structure of power, consent to rules they themselves have legitimized, and consciously choose to live within their own communities according to their shared principles and values.

Living as a conscious individual, of course, requires significant investment of time. It requires active and mindful consent. It requires the infrastructure for direct democracy. None of us ever consented to the way things are in the current system. We couldn't—not only because it was built and calcified before we were born, but also because it requires learning and interest and patience and humility to study the vast power structures we have today. Anarchism offers a relationship to power that is grounded and consensual, which means power can only be so big and so distant. Power too easily and rapidly grows out of conceptual and practical reach left to its own devices. Anarchism believes in keeping group power under a shared, transparent, and democratic 'system' rather than putting society under the boot of a small group of elites and experts.

Both the material and mystical aspects of anarchism lead to the ontological need to create a world that reflects these political and spiritual values. If this is the case, why do we never authentically explicate the spiritual underpinnings of our political beliefs?[2] Why

[2] Of course, the Right, especially in America, has ridden the wave of false spirituality to a huge degree. You can't be President—Republican or Democrat—



institutional religions that believe we should focus on the community level. They ask, how do we create the support structures for those around us? The last level has often been suggested by spiritual teachers and mystics who have simply said, 'go within.' All you have control over is yourself, and since the entire universe is within you, that is the primary unit of change.

The truth is that we need to create change at all three levels simultaneously, and given the state of climate change and the destruction of the biosphere, we must operate at a rate that creates interdependent, positive feedback loops. If we simply try to change the superstructure, we will spend our precious resources in an inefficient battle with well-funded tyrants (they do print money in private mints after all). This war of attrition will frustrate, criminalize, and dishearten us, will lead to burnout, and worse, we will miss the infinite moments of opportunity that surround us. We will not have shared values that bind us together, as the atheistic Left has painfully found out. Nor will we have the type of conscious individual that is truly required for anarchist, autonomous, sustainable societies to truly exist.

If we only focus at the community level, we risk contributing to the banality of good and ensuring that the status quo stays in place. We will only create temporary bubbles of moral superiority while our species and fellow planetary co-inhabitants are forced into extinction all around us.

And if we only focus on ourselves, we forget the most important lesson of human nature. *We are who we are through others.* Beyond the quantum truth of this, highlighted by Einstein when he said that the idea of the separate self is just "a kind of optical delusion of consciousness," there is also the sociological truth of our entanglement.[8] We are inherently social creatures. As the old motto of the American abolitionists goes, "none of us are free until all of us are free." Spiritual narcissism will not save us. In fact, the

[8] Einstein, A. (1972, March 29). Letter of 1950. New York Times.

Operating successfully or even moderately well in this system makes us transactional beings who reduce each other's vital humanity to tools by which we value-maximize short-term profit. We are quick to point out the misery accumulated by communism or fascism. But capitalism, especially neoliberal capitalism, is a form of *distributed fascism.* What a few despotic elites once did to a massive population, most do to each other now, in the hopes of accumulating more wealth, status and hedonistic pleasure.

This is our background condition, the ubiquitous backdrop for all of our lives. If we want to reconnect with spiritual truths, the first essential challenge is to disconnect just enough from the economic machinery and its incessant propaganda to recognize neoliberalism for what it is and what it does to us. How else can our political organizing have the power and to know the importance of our spiritual wisdom?

## On Solutions

We tend to assume that progress is guaranteed, that human ingenuity will beget the necessary solutions at just the right time.

We will find a technological innovation to mitigate climate change. We will create enough economic growth to 'lift all boats' from the stagnant harbor of poverty. But if we look at the arc of history from its beginning, the dominant mode is extinction and collapse of species and civilizations. As evolutionary anthropologists remind us, 99% of every species that has ever existed is now extinct.

So what must be done? Depending on one's ideology, we are given three types of answers or, more accurately, three levels of answers. The traditional answer of the Left, especially Marxists, has been to change the superstructure—the generative rules that create our material conditions. The second has been suggested by anarchists, communitarians, libertarians, and ironically, by many



do our political decisions exempt meaningful spiritual source material? After all, aren't freedom and equality, the disintermediation of power, and conscious, free individuals also the hopes and aims of most mystical and esoteric spiritual traditions?

## On First Principles

Politicos have a tendency to begin or end every debate with two questions: *what is your theory of change*? by which they mean, *what is your strategy for achieving some outcome*? and what is the viable alternative you seek? by which they mean, *what's the answer*? I have either tiptoed around these questions or I have gone straight into the bluff. I have laid out the play-by-play policy plan that gave them confidence that there is, indeed, a better way. But these answers are illusory salves. I was answering the question with the wrong level of consciousness, as E.F. Schumacher would say. We are asking questions on the material realm that, in fact, require spiritual answers.

When someone asks, *what should be done in such and such a situation*? the primary question is, in fact, how should we live? The answer requires both a material and spiritual answer. We must honor the dimensions of both mind and soul. But the intellectual life of modern man has been hijacked by an extreme form of Enlightenment logic, a deep rational materialism that focuses only on the observable and measurable at the cost of everything else. It is a scientism that believes that if something cannot be measured, it cannot exist.

---

if you don't conjure up illusory images of a white, bearded, savior God. So it's not that we don't hear the language of gods and morality and other spiritual concepts, it's that we've packaged up the ideas into simplistic esoteric dogma that is meaningless—the antithesis of spirituality. True spirituality starts with humility and heads off into the wilds of wonder and ignorance. It doesn't set judgmental rules and regulations by which to judge others first and yourself never.

## First Principles

- WHY ARE WE HERE?
  existentialism
- WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE END PURPOSE?
  ontology
- WHAT CAN WE TRULY KNOW?
  epistemology
- WHAT IS BEAUTY?
  aesthetics
- HOW SHOULD POWER BE DISTRIBUTED?
  political philosophy
- WHAT IS REALITY?
  metaphysics

It tends to ignore most of what we're learning from quantum physics (and direct experience), including the deep entanglement of the cosmos, a probabilistic universe of superpositions rather than inert matter waiting for human exploitation, and the fact that 'the 'knower' does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world being investigated—there is no such exterior observational point… we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity."[3]

Add to these omissions of consciousness the fact that what we even consider observable has gone through seismic shifts since the Enlightenment and it leaves one bewildered how we have not challenged the reductionist barriers to our imagination. There has been a daylight hijacking, a coup d'état, of the political agenda of defined reality. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us, ideology is always a

[3] Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



fines our relationship to each other through a competitive lens (am I better, richer, etc.?), which inevitably leads to ordering society through rigid hierarchies. It equates material wealth with life success, which is equated to virtue (e.g., rich people are good, poor people are bad—i.e., re-interpreting poverty as a moral failing). And it holds the individual is the primary unit of power, an idea best captured by Margaret Thatcher's famous quip that there is no such thing as society, just individuals and families.

From an economic point of view, neoliberalism advocates the bankrupt policy of trickle-down economics, the concentration of wealth in private hands through explicit subsidization of corporations. This directly leads to the extraction of wealth from the poor to the rich. Since our jobs and our identities are offshoots of this system, we are incapable of breaking free of the logic. We have all had to create our own stories in order to cope within the system. People at the World Bank or USAID or the Gates Foundation think they're helping the poor (and at a micro-level maybe they are) and people in ad agencies think they're being creative (and at a micro level maybe they are), but they are, in fact, ensuring that the murky waters of the status quo stay toxic. What Hannah Arendt once called the banality of evil has transmuted into the banality of good.

We are told that people of merit rise to the top of the system. But as John Ralston Saul argues, the system finds the people that are best constructed to further its own existence and draws them to the places they can best further the system.[7] Since the very lifeblood of modern capitalism is the energy derived from material consumption, it is inevitable that those who single-mindedly and 'successfully' desire, adore, and glorify consumption to the point of gluttony will fit neatly and effortlessly into the seats of power.

[7] Ralston Saul, J. (1993). Voltaire's bastards: The dictatorship of reason in the west. Visalia, CA: Vintage Press.

huge inherited advantage in power and wealth over the rest of the world."

We must also be aware that the butchery of capitalism is not a historical relic. Capitalism constantly requires a state of war and conquest (e.g., from Iraq and Afghanistan to the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and IMF) in order to ensure access to resources. The system is dependent on the destructive extraction of fossil fuels that is irreversibly devastating the only planet we have. Its hunger for more—for everything— is insatiable, which forces us to constantly work more hours for additional 'growth' and 'wealth' that the majority of us will never see. These are not 'bugs' in the system, to use coder language, but rather the core feature, the very logic of the system itself.

For every dollar of income created in the US since 2008, 93 cents goes to the top 1%.[6] Therefore, growth creates inequality from its inception. Climate change is not manmade in the traditional sense that we think about it—climate change is *capital made*. Every dollar of wealth created heats up our planet because we have an extractivesand fossil fuel-based economy. Capitalism turns natural resources into commodities in order to attract and generate ever more capital. It locks us into path dependency where we can never take a risk of slowing growth. We even subsidize our own destruction by giving the ultimate agents and benefactors of this production and consumption—corporations—more subsidies and more power.

## On Neoliberalism

Although neoliberalism and capitalism are not the same thing, we can accurately describe our current brand of global capitalism as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is based on three tenets. First, it de-

[6] www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-10-02/top-1-got-93-of-incomegrowth-as-rich-poor-gap-widened.



background condition—we are accessing and referencing ideological principles in every act and utterance whether we recognize it not. Most of the superstructures we are subjected to, from our education platforms to our political systems, from the institution of marriage to who is considered a societal keeper of knowledge, are relics of a colonialist, capitalist, rationalist mindset.

If we are to uphold a worldview that reflects our values, we must answer for ourselves the key questions, the first principles of philosophy, that we are never incentivized to ask: Why are we here? (existentialism); What is the ultimate end purpose? (ontology); What can we truly know? (epistemology); What is beauty? (aesthetics); How should power be distributed? (political philosophy); and What is reality? (metaphysics).

None of the false gods, including religious institutions, academia, the political machine, mainstream media, and other organs of the status quo ever address these first principles—although they offer us illusory answers that we are asked to obey. They serve as both our siren and our lullaby. They present us with critical concerns and then pacify us with their agenda-ridden propaganda. We become willing carriers of their pre-programmed memes.

## On Mysticism

What is mysticism and why does it elicit such derisive reactions? For scientific materialists, the very word signifies an unacceptable negative: 'unknowledge.' At its simplest level, mysticism is the belief that our material reality goes beyond the 'observable' phenomena around us. It recognizes that the world of three dimensions and five senses is limited to exactly those confines. We can therefore never truly understand all of the complexities of the universe with our rational minds.

This does not mean that mysticism denies science. In fact, the opposite is true. As a mystic, I view all of the world's scientific knowl-

edge as the minimal level of our understanding—it is the floor of our collective knowledge as opposed to the ceiling. Every day, brilliant scientists from around the world add new observations to our constantly growing nest of accumulated wisdom. But as recent findings in string theory, quantum mechanics, and chaos theory have proven to us, the more we discover, the more we realize how little we truly understand.

Mysticism incorporates this willing suspension of disbelief and a concomitant reverence for mystery and wonder that hardcore rationalists find unsettling. This need not be the case. Everything we learn from the scientific realm further enhances and deepens the magical aspects of the universe. Even the atoms we are made of were forged from hydrogen that exploded long before our solar system was born. We all have the equivalent of a teaspoon of stardust inside of us from the Big Bang. The universe expanded at the perfect rate from its inception. If it grew 0.01% faster, matter would never have been able to take form. If it grew 0.01% slower, the universe would have collapsed on itself.[4] These are just facets of an incomprehensible, diffractive, and queer reality filled with majestic mysteries, the bounds of which are beautifully unknowable to us right now, and perhaps always will be.

So what does this mean for how we should live our lives? These thoughts and facts further our awe for our cosmos, our biosphere, and our fellow species. They impel the mystics and the anarchists among us to create a better world that is commensurate to this unfathomable, inexplicable, divine experience of the life we each have.

[4] Greene, B. (2010). The elegant universe: Superstrings hidden dimensions and the quest for the ultimate theory. New York, NY: WW Norton.



## On Capitalism

How can we even begin to organize the better world if we do not fully understand the current system? Having a mystical worldview does not abdicate us from rigor or from politics. Many of the most spiritually enlightened people I know will say things like, "I'm not political" or "Politics creates dualities between good and evil." Politics is just about power. Who has it? Who doesn't? Who gets to decide? And why? As we discussed earlier, ideology, and therefore politics, is always present, whether we recognize it or not. Ignoring it doesn't remove our responsibility; it contributes to the status quo, working against the interests of the poorest and most vulnerable amongst us. As Howard Zinn says, "you can't be neutral on a moving train."

We must be conscious and critical of our current economic and political structures—the operating system, if you will. We must recognize that this system is dependent on the misery and exploitation of other human beings. As Dieter Duhm reminds us, "Behind the material consumption of our society stands the indescribable anguish of billions of our fellow beings. It stands behind the menus of our restaurants, the doctors' prescriptions, and the numbers on the stock market. The wellbeing of one side is achieved through systematic murder on the other. Countless human beings and animals pay with their lives for our daily intake."[5]

Capitalism is simply an extension of colonialism, slavery, patriarchy, imperialism, and deep racism. For those of us who have benefited from this system, we must be cognizant of the moral implications. In a lecture at Carnegie Council in 2012 the political philosopher Thomas Pogge said, "The affluent are quick to point out that they cannot inherit their ancestor's sins. Indeed. But we violently defend our entitlement to the fruits of these sins: to their

[5] Duhm,D. (2015). Terra nova: Global revolution and the healing of love. Bad Belzig, Germany: Verlag Mdiga:13.