



On Realization
and Revolution
vol. 1: Theories

Anna Mercury

On Realization and Revolution

Volume 1: Theories

Contents

- Anarcho Te Ching (p. 1)
- What is God, to an Anarchist? (p. 5)
- Realization: A Theory (p. 16)
- The Religion of Capitalism (p. 28)
- On Love and Anarchism (p. 35)
- What Political System is Closest to God? (p. 45)
- A Theory on the Origins of Domination (p. 55)
- Ego, Economy and State (p. 62)
- The Tao of Degrowth (p. 67)
- The Yoga of Dual Power (p. 73)
- Systems of Empowerment (p. 80)

Anarcho Te Ching

i. Reading this probably won't change your life. As Lao Tzu says, "The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." As Tenacious D says, "This is not the greatest song in the world. This is just a tribute." This is a description of an experience; this article is not the experience itself. Still, I am writing it. Everything I write comes from, and comes back to, understanding this and this understanding. I am practicing.

ii. The nature of existence is towards expansion and complexity. The nature of each living thing in existence is towards healthy equilibrium. Existence expands through the act of things growing towards equilibrium.

iii. What we experience tells us which direction we need to go in to reach our state of equilibrium. What we experience tells us what options we have to reach our state of equilibrium. What we experience tells us which states we are in.

iv. When we experience being out of equilibrium, having too much or too little of something, we need to move towards equilibrium.

v. What we need in order to reach equilibrium is to move towards the opposite state of the state we are currently in. A need is only ever a state of being. States of being can

by physical, emotional, mental, and none of these realms is separable from the others.

vi. Rather than denying what exists in our experience, we can work with it to find more options to meet our needs. Rather than fixating on a particular option or desired strategy to meet our needs, we can focus on the needs and broaden our number of possible options to meet them.

vii. All we have is the ability to respond to our experience, and through responding, alter it. Ability is expanded through awareness of more options, and power to take more options.

viii. Awareness is a product of internal conditioning and genetics. Power is a product of external conditioning and genetics. Everything is a product of conditioning and genetics.

ix. Everything comes from everything. The nature of existence is interdependence. Everything has a relationship to everything. Everything uses its relationships to get its needs met.

x. Sometimes, us getting our needs met leads to others not getting their needs met. The more possible options we have to meet our needs, the less we need to deny others their needs or harm others in order to have our needs met.

xi. Ability to meet needs is expanded through greater power and greater awareness. When we have too much awareness but not enough power, we need more

power. When we have too much power but not enough awareness, we need more awareness.

xii. This moves relationships towards a state of healthy equilibrium. This allows greater expansion of options to meet needs through allowing greater complexity in available options.

xiii. Politics is social relationships. Social relationships create systems, such as power structures.

xiv. A system is a pattern of behavior, of conditioning awareness and power, that can itself go on to condition behavior (awareness and power). Power hierarchies are systems that limit options for abilities to get needs met.

xv. Those at the top of a hierarchical power structure have more power to get their needs met, and often less awareness of a multiplicity of options or the needs of others. Those at the bottom of a hierarchical power structure have less power to get their needs met, and often more awareness of a multiplicity of options and the needs of others.

xvi. To reach a healthy equilibrium in which everything has the utmost possible options to get its needs met, hierarchical power structures must be allowed to dissolve through the power-lacking increasing power, and the awareness-lacking increasing awareness.

xvii. Having more available options for all beings to get their needs met moves existence in the direction of a healthy equilibrium. Having more options for all beings to

get their needs met without harming one another moves existence in the direction of expansion and complexity.

xviii. Nothing is separable. Everything is distinct from everything else, but still not separate.

xix. There is no map. There is only a compass, and that compass is your experience itself.

xx. Navigating by your compass takes practice. There is only ever practice, and movement towards.

What is God, to an Anarchist?

Someone once told me that I couldn't be an anarchist and believe in God because "No Gods, No Masters" is a popular anarchist slogan. I guess you can't be Jamaican and make a woman cry either, but I digress.

The idea that God is incompatible with anarchism makes sense if you don't know what God is. If you do, it's pretty obvious that God is the essence of anarchism (that sentence also runs in reverse, but we'll get to that later).

Anarchism is a political philosophy centered on opposition to the state and hierarchical institutions. Anarchists believe that the most fulfilling social fabric emerges organically out of authentic interactions between free, autonomous people acting in accordance with their own and collective good, without the use of force to regulate behavior. It's this totally secular idea that, in the absence of man-made power hierarchies, our own intrinsic virtue emerges as we let it flow, as we attune to our own nature and embody it in harmony with others and the natural world.

It's like — bro, have you even read the *Tao Te Ching*? Anarchism is all about God, though I understand why most anarchists wouldn't see that. Most people don't recognize God. It took me a long time to know God, too.

The rest of this essay is what I know, so far, about God. I write it not to tell you what to think, but to tell you what I

think. It explains why my faith in God is not only compatible with anarchism, but inextricable from it. If you don't recognize God, that might be counterintuitive, so let's make sure we're all on the same page about what God even is.

What God Is

God — I hate that word. When I hear it, all I can think of is an old white man floating on a sunlit cloud. Some mix of Gandalf and King Theoden, resplendent in His linen bathrobe, speaking forth divine decree unto us lowly peasants. To begin, let's set the record straight on this: that is not God. That's a king, and we anarchists aren't big on kings.

If you ever wondered why Islam doesn't allow depictions of God, this is your answer. Look at what we ended up with when European Christians tried to draw God. That God is an image made up by people whose concepts of power were European kings and priests. It was perpetuated to preserve the power of kings and priests by making it seem like God was one of them.

But that's not God.

See, I went to a Christian high school. We'd sing this song in Chapel called "God is Love," which I took as yet more evidence that Christianity had its head up its ass. I knew

what love was, and love was not some floating bearded septuagenarian who hated gay people. Love is taking someone as a part of yourself: taking someone else's will as a part of your will, someone else's needs as a part of your needs, someone else's happiness as a part of your happiness.

That's what love is. What did they mean, God is love?

Later in life, I realized I had the whole thing backwards. "God is love" is not meant to answer the question, *What is love?* You already know what love is. Rather, it answers the question, *What is God?* Perhaps a better way of saying it would be, "Love is God."

Saying, "King Theoden in a bathrobe is the definition of love" makes no sense whatsoever. That's objectively incorrect. But, "Taking others as a part of yourself is the definition of God" makes perfect sense. That's what God is.

God does not hate the gays or the infidels, the rich or the needy, the cruel or the meek. God does not hate — full stop. God does not fear. God does not condemn. God does not judge.

Why? Because God is love. Love, by definition, does not fear, hate, or judge. Love is the connection left over when we stop fearing, judging and condemning, how all that's left to do in the absence of judgment is to take one another as parts of ourselves. Love is the unifying force of us all, from which we are created, through which we feel connection to it all.

When I say I believe in God, I mean I believe in love. Love is not a big sky person who created the world. Love is the creative force of the world.

God is in everything, because God *is* everything. God is the intrinsic essence of life, akin to *consciousness* or *sentience*. God is our aliveness, the answer to the question, “Why is there something instead of nothing?” Why? Because God. Because aliveness. God is not some mythical being pulling the strings of our lives from outside the bounds of existence. God is the essence of existence, the electric current running through it all that brings matter to life.

God is my nature, not my lord. God is creativity, not a creator. God is a monad, not a monarch. God is more like a verb than a noun, like the way love is defined by what it does.

What God Does

A better question than, “What is God?” is, “What does God do?”

God loves.

In loving, God creates. In creating, God is everything. I can understand why some people can only comprehend God as a humanoid image, because they don’t know how it feels to

be loved by the land, or the sun, or the rain, or your own breath. But God is all of it.

God is not a person, nor some holographic humanoid cloud-spirit. God does not have a gender or a body. That we're "made in God's image" does not mean that God looks human. It means we are imbued with the Godlike ability to envision and construct reality. We love, actively. We're creative and imaginative. We're conscious and autonomous. Our lives are our temporary autonomous zones — if we allow them to be, by breaking free from false authorities and actualizing our autonomy to create.

All authorities but God are false. Dear me, I sound like an anarchist.

Now, what kind of anarchist would I be if I didn't talk about dialectics? See, our divine autonomy comes with a dialectic, too: you are autonomous, but you're not really *you*. You're everything.

Saying "All is One" isn't woo-woo; it's science. It just means that your body cannot exist without the combined evolution of everything in the universe that led to your parents mating. Your mind cannot exist without the combined learning of everything in the universe that led to your psychological conditioning. You are that which emerged, from everything, to fill the space that everything has made for you.

Think about it like this: the sky pulls up the water to create rain, and the land pushes itself up to create the mountain.

The water runs down from the mountain, its path shaped by the land's topography, carving out a riverbed as the land allows it to.

Right now, the river might seem to be a thing unto itself, and it is — from one perspective. But from another, it's the land and the sky and the rain and everything. The water in the river is doing river stuff right now, but that's never the whole story.

See — you, you're like the river. What you are now was made by everything. You have your free will, but your will was made by everything. It's as free as everything lets it be. You have the power to enact your will, and that power is given you by everything.

Because God is everything, and you and I are everything, then you and I are God. Or, we're parts of God, like a wave is a part of the ocean. We arise from everything, take our unique shape, run our course, and subside back into everything. A wave's course doesn't come from the wave; it comes from the ocean's tide. If you look at the ocean's tide, all you see are waves.

In much the same way, you did not create yourself. Everything that is or was made you what you are, right now. Like waves, we appear to be here, but we're better understood as the action of some larger thing, of which we're a part.

All God, No Masters

If this is hard to follow, maybe if we bring this back to politics it will make more sense.

Imagine your community is run by consensus-based direct democracy. What does your community do? It does whatever your whole community decides to do, together. If the community doesn't agree, then what the community does is conflict. Now, God is everything, so the will of God is the combined total will of everything. Your will is a part of that, like how you have your own autonomous voice within a consensus-based direct democracy.

You see? Like the wave and the tide, your will emerges from everything. Now that you're here, the will of everything emerges, in part, from you.

To have faith is simply to trust in the will of the whole. It's to decide that you have no need to dominate and control it, force behavior, establish rigid hierarchies, or live in fear right now, because you know you are everything, and so the will of everything is your will, too. You are in it, as it is in you.

God (the aggregate of everything) is the only authority that actually exists.

Sayings like "No God but God" or "No false idols" just mean, "Don't make your own hierarchies within the human community, dingus." No kings, no cops, no bosses, no

politicians. No worship of money, no forcing others to your will, no making laws that divide people based on identity or social position. “No God but God” means “No masters.” To commune with God is to practice non-hierarchy and collective freedom.

No wonder, then, that the Roman Empire crucified Yeshua of Nazareth. God is very threatening to empires.

The opposite of an empire is an anarchist society. Like the will of God, an anarchist society is not a codified thing. It’s a dynamic state of being, that which emerges out of everyone having the utmost ability to live their unique vision of a good life. It’s the combined emergence of us all actualizing our will, together. It’s Heaven on Earth.

Realization

How do we create Heaven on Earth? The answer isn’t revolution. It’s *realization*.

“Realization” is a term you’ll see in many spiritual traditions — for example, when Paramahansa Yogananda brought yoga teachings to the West, he called his school the *Self-Realization Fellowship*. Its meaning is twofold. First, to realize is “to recognize that something is so.” You can *realize* that you love someone, when you didn’t know it before. Second, to realize is “to make something manifest

in reality.” You can *realize* a vision in your mind by building it.

To recognize our true nature, and to actualize our true nature by making it manifest in reality — that is the spiritual path. What is our true nature? It’s God. It’s everything’s aliveness. It’s interbeing. Love. Wholeness. Inclusion.

To realize the Heaven on Earth is to democratize everything. It’s to bring everything into its greatest possible state of conscious self-awareness, dissolve all hierarchies, and allow us each to actualize our will, together. Heaven on Earth is whatever emerges from that process.

Yoga is the act of “yoking” our experience of day-to-day life with the ultimate reality — that all is love, and all is one. Our lives may be the direct product of everything, but on the whole, we don’t live like we’re one with it all. *Yoga* and other spiritual practices are about both recognizing that love and oneness are reality, and making that reality seem real in our lived experience.

The Steps of Realization

To love is the act of stepping from an experience of separation into an experience of union. God is that unity actualized. What we do, in loving, is *yoga* — taking the step from here to there. We *realize* the truth of our oneness.

Bit by bit, we take the steps of realization. Those steps include meditation and conscious training of the mind, from mindless reactivity to mindful connection. When we're reactive to pain and fear, we don't feel loving.

And those steps include emotional transformation and trauma healing, from anger and pain to forgiveness and peace. When we feel rage at one another, we don't feel like all is one.

They include healing from our addictions and our addictive habits. When we're enslaved to cravings for things that harm us, we aren't at one within ourselves.

They include changing our behavior towards each other, from perpetuating harmful patterns into building healing ones that help create lasting happiness. When we abuse others or ourselves, we don't feel like all is love.

They include living in deep relationship with plants and animals, living convivially with the world around us. When we dominate and destroy nature, we don't feel like all is one.

And of course, they include changing our economy and political systems, from exploitative hierarchies that meet no one's real needs, into inclusive direct democracies where decisions are made based on everyone's needs, aggregated together. When the world is as unjust and violent as this, it's hard for it to feel like one, loving whole.

To realize God is as personal as it is political, as spiritual as it is secular. As within, so without; as above, so below.

Community organizing is our yoga. Our awakening is revolutionary. With each step of love, we get closer to living in the experience of God.

That's what God is, to an anarchist. Well, that's what God is to me. I'm not here to tell you what to believe, just what I believe. What you do with that is up to you.

Realization: A Theory

The Benefit of the Doubt

I get frustrated by the quasi-gaslighting of invalidation. So often, I'll have a certain perspective or emotional response to a situation, and those around me will completely invalidate it. They'll treat me like I'm crazy or weird, and won't even consider that there might be very good reasons for why I have the perspectives or reactions I have.

This is, of course, pretty ubiquitous human behavior. There are well-known psychological reasons for why people refuse to see things from different perspectives, and those aren't really the subject of this essay.

The reason I bring up invalidation is that I get so frustrated by the impulse people have that, just because they don't understand why I'm doing what I'm doing, must mean that there is no good reason for it. The idea doesn't enter their minds that perhaps, there is a perfectly good reason for all of my behavior. Perhaps, if they understood, they'd be on board with what I'm doing. Perhaps, they're the ones who doesn't see clearly, not me. Why can't they just give me the benefit of the doubt?

But of course, I do this too. It's ubiquitous. We all do it, all the time. We judge rather than ask. We dismiss rather than

inquire. We get upset and enraged, rather than first seek to understand and empathize.

Life, as we know, is unfair and chaotic. It's crazy and crazy-making, arbitrary and confusing. It's weird. It doesn't make sense. All kinds of terrible things happen for no good reason, and it's infuriating. I'm upset and enraged on the regular by the bullshit of existing.

But if I believe that the way to receive is to give, then I ought to give what I want to receive. If I want other people to inquire, rather than dismiss, and understand rather than judge, why don't I do that? Why do I assume life is chaotic and meaningless? Just because I don't understand the reason doesn't mean there is none. What if there were perfectly good reasons why life is the way it is, following a logical pattern that I just personally don't understand yet?

Why do I just assume that life is chaotic and terrible and absurd, instead of giving life itself the benefit of the doubt?

The choice to "give life the benefit of the doubt" is, I think, where the belief in God comes from. I think that's what faith is — giving life the benefit of the doubt. The decision that there is some force with a plan, beyond our personal comprehension right now, that this all fits into. My understandings of God and faith are nuanced, and also not the subject of this article — at least, not entirely.

You see, I do believe in God, after a fashion. I don't believe that God is above us. I believe that God is within us. "God's plan" is being created by us, largely unwittingly. The plan

unfolds in the actions we take in spite of ourselves. “Spiritual awakening” or consciousness is the act of actively beginning to take part in the unfoldment of that plan. To be conscious is to be aware of your ability to choose. To act consciously is to do something, aware that you are choosing to do it.

The Yoga of Dolly Parton

Dolly Parton once said, “Find out who you are, and do it on purpose.”

I believe that God is nature. God is the whole. God is life itself. God is everything, unified, as one.

I also believe that the path to God is the path of love. To love is to take something as a part of yourself. To become like God, to do God like a verb, is to love.

If God (nature, everything) has a plan, then our part in that plan is embodied by being loving. I don’t think that love is of equal stature to fear. Fear is a product of thought and conditioning, rooted in the identification with the self as this limited personality residing within this limited body. Love is a return to truth. Everything is already part of you, and you are a part of everything. To take something as a part of yourself is the willful choice to align with reality. To love is to find out who you are (which is everything/God), and do it on purpose.

To live in “God’s plan,” then, is to choose consciously to do the things that align with your true nature, rather than what you think you ought to do because you’ve been conditioned to think so. This is why the first stages of spiritual learning are better understood as unlearning. Unlearning the lies you’ve been conditioned to believe in. Unlearning what you think you should be, and accepting what you are.

Strategic planning for businesses has a concept like this, about “strategy as pattern” rather than “strategy as plan.” Rather than sitting around and thinking up what a business should do, the best way to craft its strategy is to study what it’s already done, notice where it’s relative strengths and weaknesses are, and build the strategy out of the pattern that already exists.

Find out who you are, and do it on purpose.

The Two Realizations

Many spiritual schools, especially those rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism, talk about the concept of “realization.” It’s a sort of goal of the spiritual path, the act of “yoking” that the practice of *yoga* is for. *Realization* has two meanings, but in modern colloquial English, we tend to just use one.

The first meaning of realization is the one we’re more familiar with. To *realize* is to recognize that something is so.

To come to understand reality. To find out what is real. Self-realization, then, is the process of finding out who you are.

There's a second meaning to realization, though. In French, the director of a film is the *réalisateur* — the person who realizes the film. To *realize* is to bring something to life. To make something manifest in reality. To turn potential into actual, energetic into material. To make happen. Self-realization, then, is finding out who you are and doing it on purpose.

The spiritual practice of yoga has its root in the word “yoke,” like a cart to an ox. Yoga is the bridging of the gap between the one thing and the other. As a spiritual practice, it's mostly used to understand Ultimate Reality as God — unity, oneness, abundance, interbeing, love, peace, wholeness. It's all you, boo. All is God and so are you. Practices like meditation give the mind space from its conditioned thoughts and fears where it can come to know the reality beneath them. When thoughts are wiped away, unity remains. When fear is wiped away, love remains. When the turbulence of the mind is wiped away, peace remains.

You can hear that “All is One,” all is love, you are love, you are God, and so on — but they don't feel real, do they? That does not seem like reality, does it? Perhaps in moments in the modern world, like sitting in silence on the beach, dancing in the forest, tripping on acid — it's there. You understand that it is reality, and your mind recognizes

it *as reality*. But the acid wears off, the forest gets cold, a plane drones overhead, and then it's gone.

Yoga is the act of coming to live in that reality, all the time. (Side note — that's why I think psychedelics cannot be relied upon as a spiritual tool. A spiritual practice should guide you to the point where you don't need them. Psychedelics can temporarily pull the curtain back so you see what's behind it. Your goal is to remove the curtain entirely.)

As for yoga, there's that pesky second meaning of realization. To realize is not just to know reality, but to make reality. To shape change, like Octavia Butler's *Earthseed*. To realize is to make something manifest, to bring it to life in material reality. To draw it from the mind and actualize it in form.

To realize peace is to wage peace in public. To realize love is to make the world more loving. To realize unity is to create political systems that unify people around collective decisions. To realize consciousness is to increase the consciousness of humanity. Yoga is as socio-political as it is psycho-spiritual.

The goal of yoga is to yoke — to unify. To make two into one. To bridge the gap. To meld the mind's perception with the reality of union, which can be done through meditation that allows the mind to experience reality, and through changes to the material plane that make the material world

of form (*Maya*) into *Brahman* (the spiritual plane of united loving conscious peace and whatnot.)

As within, so without.

Meeting Our Needs

Psychologist Abraham Maslow famously put needs into a hierarchy, a kind of pyramid showing what needs we must meet first, and then the needs that come later. At the base of the pyramid were material needs, for food, water, shelter, sleep and so on. The next layer of the pyramid were safety and security needs, which I consider somewhat of a hybrid, a bridge between the material and the energetic. Beyond that were needs for self-esteem, then for love and connection, and finally for what Maslow dubbed “self-actualization.”

Self-actualization is a kind of complete personal fulfillment, a sense of actualizing one’s potential and living one’s true self, authentically and completely, in the world. To self-actualize is to find out who you are, and do it on purpose.

Another word for self-actualization is, of course, self-realization. The term “self-realization” is more commonly used by Westernized schools of Hindu thought (like the Self-Realization Fellowship), but Maslow was no stranger to Hinduism himself. His hierarchy of needs was inspired by the Hindu chakra system.

Whether or not needs can fully be understood as a hierarchy, or if sometimes our energetic needs supersede our material needs, is unclear to me. For now, though, let's take it as an order of operations. Material needs must be met first, or they will be our primary concern. Once our material needs are met, then we worry about security needs, and so on.

More Bars for the Donner Party

Sometimes I find myself wondering, why colonial capitalism? Like, why does it exist? Why did it happen? I mean, I hate it so much. It's so destructive. It's so awful. The existence of this system, especially as the dominant mode of social organization on the planet, must prove that there is no God, no plan or pattern, no rhyme or reason. Life is short, chaotic, unjust and brutish.

Given just how fucked up our systems are, the best explanation for a "cosmic plan" I can think of is that we're in some sort of eternal test. Life is experimenting on itself through us, giving us trials and tribulations because the myriad of ways we react to them and learn causes life itself to learn.

I think this is a fairly plausible theory of why the world is how it is, but I've been pondering another one.

I think the fundamental current of the world is yoga. God is trying to actualize itself. The energetic reality of peace, abundance, love, unity, knowledge and understanding is trying to actualize itself in the material plane, so that no practice of yoga is required to bridge the gap from perceptual reality to ultimate reality.

If I really want to take the world in good faith, then why else might colonial capitalism exist? Is there some good reason why we might have this awful system?

The knee-jerk answer I usually give is, “Because the Internet.” All of this atrocious colonization, nationalization, militarization, privatization, nonsense — because those were how we got to the Internet. I’ve often said that the liberatory political-spiritual movements of the 60s failed because the hippies didn’t have the Internet. The ability we have now to spread information like wildfire, document the truth rather than accept the official narrative, and share ideas in real-time. We need the Internet, to actualize whatever it is we’re here to actualize.

Why would we need the Internet to actualize God? Because the Internet is how we actualize abundance, knowledge and interconnection.

The knowledge and connection aspects are fairly known. I mean, look at the whopping amount of knowledge collectively poured into Wikipedia, relative to the average local library. Rather than needing to travel to a major urban center to read everything there is to read, digitization and

downloading means information can be accessed all the time, from anywhere in the world. No longer must we guess or assume; knowledge is at our fingertips. No longer must we travel for days or weeks to speak to those on the opposite side of the world from us, either.

In order to actualize God, we must actualize perfect abundance. Scarcity creates competition, and therefore, violence. Abundance creates the opportunity for peace. Without abundance, there can be no peace. As for how the Internet actualizes abundance, here's what I've come up with so far:

Most material scarcity in the world might be artificial at this point, contrived by capitalist ownership and distribution systems rather than resulting from any actual scarcity of resources. Just as that cosmic plan needed colonial capitalism to get to the Internet, so too does it need the end of capitalist ownership structures.

But if abundance is to be actualized, then scarcity cannot exist anywhere. Many of our scarcities are artificial, but for abundance to be *fully* actualized, scarcity cannot exist at all.

I had this thought driving over Donner Pass in California, and thinking of the Donner Party. The Donner Party was infamous for getting trapped in a blizzard going over the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and turning to cannibalism to survive. Scarcity created the conditions for violence.

Theirs was no artificially-induced scarcity. Theirs was actual scarcity, in that condition. The world at large may have

enough water for you to drink, but if you're lost in the desert, you're in a state of scarcity.

Now, what if the Donner Party had had sat phones to call in a helicopter? To fully actualize abundance, we must have global communication and information systems. To eradicate scarcity altogether, we must all have the ability to get ourselves out of a scarce situation, get material goods into a situation, and communicate our needs.

Global communication and transportation systems are ways of actualizing total abundance so that the world can always meet its needs.

Overcoming Addiction

And what are our needs, anyway?

My partner recently called emotional and mental needs "energetic needs," in the sense of "material needs" versus "energetic needs." A material need might be the need for food. An energetic need might be the need for attention, approval or purpose. Both are real needs, hierarchy or not, and we'd all do well to remember that our energetic needs are necessities too.

I've written many times about how actual *needs* are only ever states of being, either material or energetic.

We often confuse *what we need* with *strategies we can use to meet those needs*. On a cold night, we might think we need a warm fire, but what we actually need is warmth. We need to be in the state of experiencing greater warmth. We might think we need attention from one certain person, when what we actually need is the state of being in connection. Even the need for a certain vitamin is the need for a state of being — needing to be in the state of having adequate vitamin B in your body, for instance.

The belief that *a tool or strategy you could use to meet your need* is *what you actually need* is, in my view, the addiction cycle. It's what the Buddha means when he says the word "craving," or *tanha*. We desperately believe we need one specific thing in order to satisfy our needs, and then drive ourselves deeper into suffering and powerlessness. We might think we need a particular thing, but we actually need the state of being we think that thing will bring us to. If we refocus on the need itself, we can find far more options to meet our needs.

This shift in thinking, out of a mindset of scarcity and addiction, and into a mindset of understanding reality, is another form of actualizing abundance. It's just another form of realization.

The Religion of Capitalism

If you're wondering why this particular moment in American politics feels so deeply existential, or why the Cold War felt like a crusade, or why some people get so dogmatic about their political or economic viewpoints to the point of religious fervor, your question has a simple answer: economic and political systems are religions. Not as a metaphor. They are literal religions.

If that made you uncomfortable, that is completely understandable. That does not make it any less true. People who believe that their religious views are the objective truth generally don't like being told that their truth is just a religious view.

We like to think of our economic and political systems, these churches that hold such power in our civilization, as based on some kind of scientific rationality that transcends religious or spiritual thinking. We equate religions with being unscientific or faith-based, so the idea that our political or economic systems might be subject to the same faith-based assumption-making is deeply uncomfortable. To this I'll only say, if there is no God of any kind, then scientific rationality is God. If there is God, then God is in your politics and economics, too.

I think the point is that total scientific rationality is God, and that our current understanding of scientific rationality is still extremely limited, but that's for another essay. For now:

What's in a Religion?

Every political and economic system is a religion. Like all religions, they contain the following features:

1. They are socio-cultural systems of organization based around a belief in a fundamental condition of reality, a framework for how life functions.
2. They worship a fundamental cause of how life functions.
3. They seek to inspire and guide humanity towards some form of a heaven in which humanity can experience divinity, by conditioning humans to act as embodiments of the fundamental cause, and allowing the fundamental cause to guide human behavior.
4. From all of this, they produce a moral framework to guide decision-making.
5. They have priests and preachers, a collection of sacred texts that describe the religion, and a

series of social and cultural practices associated with the framework.

6. They have denominations and varying degrees of orthodoxy, which, at their extremes, can inspire dogmatic allegiance and brutally violent acts of crusade.
7. They think they have a monopoly on the objective truth of how life functions.

In this essay, I'm writing about the world's current largest religion, whose future in the balance in its staunchest theocracy:

The Religion of Capitalism

Capitalism is a socio-cultural system for human organization and decision-making, based on the framework that life functions according to individuals competing for survival by acting in their own self-interest. This fundamental condition has a fundamental cause, whose essence cannot be isolated on its own, but whose existence can be observed in nature's innate competition for survival.

Man emulates the fundamental cause by acting as the rational, self-interested "homo economicus." He need not trouble himself with the macroscopic patterns, for those

will be handled by surrendering to the power of the great behavioral guide, the Invisible Hand of the Market.

When combined, we get a sort of Holy Trinity that sketches out the God of Capitalism:

- The cause as we can observe it: Self-interested competition for survival
- The embodied ideal: Homo economicus
- The ineffable guiding force: The Invisible Hand of the Market

As with any religion, in capitalism, once the trinity is understood, its way can be followed towards the betterment of life on earth. The closer man gets to acting as homo economicus, the closer he gets to divinity. The closer humanity gets to acting only according to the guidance of the Invisible Hand, and not meddling with its holy way, the closer we get to the best of possible worlds.

Free market capitalism has its founding sacred texts, most notably the writings of Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill. It has its denominations, often led by impassioned high-priests, such as the orthodox denomination of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School, to the more moderate denominations like Keynesian economics, to the more pure philosophical denomination championed by Ayn Rand.

Capitalism likely faced a Great Reformation, when a discontent named Karl Marx began rallying followers around the belief that this whole religion was steering humanity into evil. As we have seen, Capitalist economic austerity has produced mass suffering and death in the name of purification to turn humanity into homo economicus, no different from a crusade.

What Capitalism Gets Wrong About How Life Functions

Each attempt at reformation, innovation or destruction and complete reinvention of human social organization is an attempt to get humanity closer to its ideal way of being. Heaven on Earth and Utopia are two terms for the same concept. Until we understand everything about the universe, which we don't, we will always be taking certain things on faith. We continuously expand our understanding and (slowly) revise our social structures according to that knowledge, bringing us closer to understanding all of reality and being able to create the best possible world.

Like all religions, Capitalism holds a limited (but not wholly inaccurate) understanding of God that allows it to both create profound advancements for humanity, and also to misdiagnose and misguide human behavior.

Capitalism takes on faith the existence of something that does not truly exist, but on whose existence its entire system rests. It cannot wholly ignore that this magical thing doesn't exist; it must declare that it does and hold its existence in place through force, then create extremely complex webs of willful lies and conditioning mechanisms to force belief in the existence of a thing that doesn't exist.

That thing that does not actually exist, upon which all Capitalist practice rests, is of course "private property rights." The private right to ownership of property is a complete and utter constructed fantasy. The natural order does not do private property rights. The natural order knows nothing of it. A stake in the ground or a piece of paper or a number on a screen has nothing to do with ownership, not in reality.

What the natural order does do is personal property — ownership through authentic convivial relationship. A child, or even a dog, will understand that a house is yours when you live in it and care for it. It takes a complex set of mental gymnastics to assert that a house you live in belongs to an LLC, which is not a person, because that LLC bought it after a foreclosure, because a bank actually owned it, and that LLC now lets you live in it in exchange for rent money which you pay, which goes on to pay other humans who get paid by that LLC and live in other houses. The enforcement of such a

magical and unscientific belief can only be held in place, as it is in Capitalism, through (the threat of) violence.

You may be thinking that this system of Capitalist property rights makes perfect sense, and I am being naïve or simplistic in pointing out that it is fundamentally not real. To that I say: that sounds a lot like how people indoctrinated in a religion talk about things they can't prove.

On Love and Anarchism

Anarchism is a political philosophy that cannot be separated from love: love for humanity, love for oneself, and love for the planet.

Love, you know, that thing money can't buy, according to the Beatles. Our resistance, according to Muse. A thing that cannot be forced, bought, or sold, that obeys no codified hierarchy, occurs spontaneously and universally, is caused by everything and nothing, alive with its own order that, to a structured hierarchy, appears to be chaotic.

Love is intrinsically anarchist, and anarchism is, to me, the natural base for building a society on Love.

To Begin, What is Love?

In short: seeing fully, and taking as a part of oneself. In shorter: interbeing.

To keep things simple: to love is to see someone fully as an agent unto themselves, and to take their needs as a part of your needs. This is not to bulldoze your own needs in service of another's, or to treat another as an extension of yourself. Love has a wholly different quality. It is understanding the full totality and distinctness of another, whole unto themselves, and viewing yourself as *not*

separate from that other. The happiness of another is a part of your happiness. The needs of another are a part of your needs. Your happiness and theirs simply become *happiness that is experienced*, and your needs and theirs become simply *needs that are needed*.

Love is given freely, and can only be given from a place of having freedom.

If you've ever loved anyone or anything, you already know how this feels. You will also know that love is so often confused with many things that are not love.

Just like anarchism.

What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political philosophy of *horizontalism, self-determination, cooperation* and *shared power*. Anarchism believes there is no need or desire for a coercive, authoritarian State. Entrenched power hierarchies of any kind are fundamentally incompatible with anarchism.** These include hierarchies of power between owners (shareholders) and workers, between governments and the governed, and between citizens and all "civil servants," with a particular focus often given to police.

In anarchist philosophy, each person is full unto themselves, and should be empowered to make decisions for themselves.

Fundamental tenets of anarchism include not using force to coerce action from others, allowing all people free association and disassociation from one another, and giving individuals the utmost opportunity to freely engage in mutual aid to meet their needs.

Each person has the opportunity to consent freely to any person in a place of power over them, and to disassociate or challenge that power when it no longer meets their needs. Each person has the ability to get their needs met in cooperation with others through mutual aid that meets the needs of all involved, and to disassociate when those needs cannot be met in cooperation with that other person.

As a basis for social order, anarchist philosophy teaches us to find commonalities between our needs and to find mutually beneficial paths to any shared needs. It requires us to have equitable power over resources and actions, so that no one is forced into doing things. It requires us to be aware of ourselves and of our needs, and the space for sovereignty over ourselves as individuals within our communities.

Anarchism is a philosophy of seeing ourselves and each other as full humans with legitimate needs, and taking each other's needs as a part of ourselves when we authentically can.

You know, like love.

Why Does Power Matter?

If you're wondering why equitable power is crucial to both anarchism and love, it is for the simple fact of consent. Consent is a free choice to allow something to happen. If your freedom is too constrained, the choice no longer feels like a choice.

When your society has entrenched power hierarchies about who is allowed to do what and who gets to decide, there can be no authentic consent. When you do not have the option to disassociate from someone's rule if you find it does not meet your needs, there can be no consent.

This is why, for example, any modern invocation of the "Social Contract" is self-aggrandizing lip service. If you're unfamiliar with the term, the "Social Contract" was an Age of Enlightenment theory describing the relationship entered into between the government and the governed in a democratic society. To put it very simply, the governed, We the People, give up certain rights unto the government in exchange for social order and the protection of our remaining rights. It's imagined to be a kind of consensual contract between purportedly equal parties.

The problem with the Social Contract is that power begets power, and concentration of power begets concentration of power. Nobody has every possible option available to meet their needs, but power structures can expand or constrain those options. When more people are

empowered to meet their needs themselves, and to find for themselves the utmost possible options to have their needs met by others, we have the utmost possible freedom.

To call contemporary American “democracy” a consensual social contract is akin to saying a twelve-year-old can consent to have sex with her teacher. This is not because We the People are children, but because We the People are in a position of far lesser power than those who make decisions for us. This includes the difference in power between people and government, and between workers and owners/executives/shareholders.

If there is no equality of power, there is no consent. If there is no consent, there is inherent violence.

Isn't Anarchism Violent?

People can be violent. Anarchism is, in my view, the least violent philosophy of governance. To quote our lord and savior Pamela Anderson discussing the Yellow Vests movement in France: *“I despise violence...but what is the violence of all these people and burned luxurious cars, compared to the structural violence of the French — and global — elites?”*

Violence can be great or small, physical or emotional, and is determined by one simple thing: lack of desire or consent.

Punching someone in the face can be violent, and it can be a consensual boxing match. Physically restraining someone can be violent, and it can be consensual BDSM play. We should *all* know the difference between sex and rape.

Slavery is violence. Servitude is violence. Obedience without authentically giving consent is violence.

Most of us are used to hearing the word “consent” only in conversations around sex, but consent is simply a choice freely made, and consent and non-consent come up in every aspect of our lives in every single day.

Leaving anyone in a state of housing precariousness when we have more than enough housing for every homeless person in America *is* violent. Letting anyone go hungry when we have more than enough food to feed every person in the world *is* violent. Denying someone power and self-determination is violent. Closing an arbitrary line in the sand to those in need of refuge is violent. Denying someone access to healthcare is violent. Denying someone access to an education is violent.

The state and the capitalist mode of production are violent. Power hierarchies are violent.

In the face of such enormous systems of violence, is a punk rocker throwing a brick at a BMW really such a huge act of violence? Even if it is, is creating a racist, violent, morally corrosive “justice” system *really* the best response?

In the immortal words of Pat the Bunny, “There’s no ballot we can cast to set us free ... but there’s no brick we can throw that will end poverty.”

More to the point, not all anarchists throw bricks. In fact, most of us don’t. I’ve never thrown a brick at anything. I’m not sure if I know any anarchists who have. I *want* to throw bricks sometimes, but only because in those select moments, I don’t feel I have other options within the set of narrow confines proscribed by an unjust system to make *my* voice heard directly and advocate for *my* needs *myself*, and those in power seem to love not listening to those over whom they have power.

Power concentration begets power concentration, and too much power is a disease.

Isn’t Human Nature the Problem?

What we call human nature is a pattern of responses to human *nurture*. We simply have no idea what our “nature” is without our conditioning, which is being perpetuated and reinforced through the societies and structures in which we were raised and currently live. Psychologists and anthropologists frequently find themselves at odds with one another over this question — the one looks for universal human natures, usually through experimenting on college students in laboratory settings; the other looks for distinction and difference based on cultural context.

What I can say about human nature is that people love and people fear, no matter who they are or how they're raised. The less reason we have to fear harm from one another, the more we can act from a place of love and communion. The more freedom everyone has to get their needs met without trying to control, dominate or harm one another to get there, the less we have to fear. The more freedom we each have to access necessities, the less violence there will be.

We live in a world with more than enough resources to meet everyone's needs, and in which people go hungry, go cold, go unhoused, are murdered and raped and brutalized and controlled. That is not shrewd policy; it's sadism.

People have the capacity for kindness and for violence. As the old adage goes, both wolves battle within us. The one that wins is the one we feed. Which wolf do we want our political and economic systems to feed? Which do we want our society to elevate, glorify, strive for and encourage?

What Does an Anarchist Society Actually Look Like?

I can't determine that for you. That's... the whole point. I can only tell you what I think:

I think an anarchist society looks like Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. It looks like exercising far less control over others, and far more control over ourselves. It looks

like self-determination, consent, and the sharing of resources in community. Complex social order at the grassroots, responsive to individuals' needs, with the equitable distribution of power amongst all people and an openness of access to the things we all need to survive and thrive. Free association and mutual aid. Less atomization and competition, more community and cooperation, and structures that encourage the latter while retaining the free choice of the former.

To me, an anarchist society looks less like corporate grocery stores and more like community gardens. It looks less like real estate developments and more like community land trusts. It looks less like the White House and more like block clubs, less like the Capitol and more like neighborhood assemblies. It looks less like militarized police and prisons, and more like restorative justice councils, community mental health institutions and conflict mediators. It looks like worker cooperatives and gift economies, not shareholders' meetings and stock markets. It works for the needs of people, not for the profits of few. It has no borders or nations, but it does have mutual agreements between communities. It has a diversity of power centers, distributed in communities across the world, with decision-making power held by the people.

It allows community and leaders to rise if and as needed, and subside when no longer needed. It looks like real democracy. It is flexible, responsive, individual and collective.

It does not need to be perfect, and nothing ever will be. The work really *isn't that hard* to make the world far less sadistic, and far more consensual. The work starts with your choices, your awareness, and claiming your inalienable right to choose.

An anarchist society looks like each of us getting what we need, in the least violent possible way: sharing resources, sharing power, free association and mutual aid. It looks like seeing, understanding and caring for ourselves, seeing, understanding and caring for others, and being seen, understood and cared for.

In short, it looks like love.

What Political System is Closest to God?

I am not a God-fearing woman, but I do believe in God. My beliefs come from what I've experienced, and I experience what I believe.

Knowing God

I believe God is. To be more specific, I believe God is *that which is*, the intrinsic essence, which is another way of saying "I am who am." Me, I am a Christian as much as I'm a Hindu, a Buddhist as much as I'm a Muslim, a Taoist as much as I'm #NewAge. When you know God, studying any spirituality becomes like going traveling to find yourself: wherever you go, there you are. Whatever name God gets called, whatever scriptures are wrapped around God, in every religion, there is an experience of God at its core.

What is God?

What the religions get right is that God is love.

As love, God is the source of all things. As love, God is the joy of all things. As love, God is a verb. God is a practice, an action we take, a choice we make in each moment. As love, we know we're doing God when we're doing it. Once we've

felt the experience of it, no other explanation becomes necessary.

To love is to include something wholly as a part of yourself. As God is the universal essence, God is the interbeing of us all. Doing God feels like taking others as a part of ourselves and meeting their needs as if they were our own, because they are. Doing God feels like authenticity and freedom, used in service of love for ourselves and others, which are no different. Doing God feels like the world stops being full of separate and conflicting wills, and becomes an all-encompassing dance of celebration — because that's what it is. God is like zooming out of a chaotic impressionist painting and seeing how every dot perfectly contributes to creating art.

What isn't God?

What I also know about God is that God cannot be conceptualized and be experienced at the same time. Like love, you know God when you feel it. Think of misguided parents unwittingly hurting their children out of fear. We know trying to love someone through a fear-based concept of what love is supposed to look like tends not to end up feeling like love. God, like love, is an experience that arises from actual empathy.

When you feel God, the doctrines fall away and it becomes wholly unnecessary to fixate on dogma or scripture, as if

the point of hiking were to stare at the trail marker. The words are never the point; they can only point the way. What they point to is the lived experience of God.

I am not a God-fearing woman, because God has no need of my fear. I fear no Hell, because I know that God isn't stupid. God is the power that resides in us all, so God has no need to punish us. We are alive with a God-given ability to surrender a pointless fight and choose God in each moment. We do as we will, and paradise remains right here, waiting silently for us to arrive when we're ready.

I choose paradise, and so I choose direct democracy, non-hierarchy, holding resources in the commons, free association, and the cooperative governance of everything. In other words: I choose anarcho-communism.

Governing Eden

There is but one God, who gets dressed up in many costumes. That God is love — the lived experience of union with something other than yourself (well, other than what you *think* you are) so that the “other” stops being experienced as an other. Call it interbeing, inclusion, merging, union, self-realization, Christ consciousness, Enlightenment — the words just point the way.

God is an experience, not a concept. God is a practice, not a rule. The same is true of democracy.

The experience of God is found through a kind of ecstatic surrender to what was only ever your true essence. As equally as humans crave the experience of power, we also crave the experience of authentic trust. Ultimate power is not found in controlling the world, but in truly not needing to control a thing — in being able to release all fear for safety, and rely absolutely on a world that meets your needs absolutely.

Trust and Cooperation

Now, walking the path of God is not without its hiccups. Learning to trust in the cosmic dance of reality, rather than needing to personally control all of it all the time, is a deep practice of continuously releasing fear. In its place, we choose faith instead. Faith is just the knowledge that things can work out without one personally knowing how they're going to do so right now. Faith is an act of trust in others, trusting that others know themselves and are correct about what they need. Faith is the release of competition: others can have what they need, and we can also have what we need. With God, all needs are met.

Truth holds no competition between wills, because true wills are not in conflict. The problem is never in us, or in them, but in the erroneous notion that a limited judgment from one conditioned perspective could contain the full knowledge of everything. In much the same fashion, every

religious teaching is a door to God. The point of a door is to walk through it. When you do, the door is behind you.

Real Democracy and Non-Hierarchy

When you experience God (which is everyone's birthright to do), the politics of God become clear as day. God is a monad, not a monarch, an essence, not a king. God is alive in the practice of surrender to that universal essence, which means that God lives in the practice of non-hierarchical democracy.

Real democracy is not a competition of wills between parties, but a holistic debate of choices between people with equitable power. So-called "representative democracy" is a popularity contest for control. Direct democracy is an action of faith, inclusion, empathy and trust. Its goal is not the triumph of one will over another, but the synthesis of all wills, so that all needs can be met—you know, like God.

"No God but God" means no kings and no masters, no presidents and no popes, no judges and no bosses. It means no hierarchies but the consensual surrender of the Ego to infinity.

Non-Condensation and Undoing Hell

The law of God is love. The price of breaking it is the experience of pain. No further pain need be inflicted on us for doing so. God is our judge, and God isn't stupid enough to create something as useless as Hell. God is the source of all, so God is the source of operant conditioning. God understands that eternal damnation (or punishment of any kind) can only have efficacy as a threat; as an actuality, it's pointless.

When our baseline experience is love and joy, straying from it becomes punishment enough. Punishment, like Hell, is useful only as a threat to condition behavior. Like Hell, it is wholly counterproductive. The goal of punishment is to traumatize someone enough that they don't do certain actions. Trauma is the cause of maladaptive behavior. We create violence by punishing it. In God's land, there are no prisons and no borders.

Actualizing Heaven on Earth

“The Kingdom of Heaven lies within” means we reach Heaven by living it — right here, right now.

The real way to eradicate violence and fully actualize the experience of God is to ensure that everyone has everything they need to flourish, and the complete freedom to act in service of their needs. When everyone

has their needs met, and full trust that they will continue to be able to get their needs, no one has any need to harm anyone else. Emotional needs are as important as physical needs, and always will be. If you need any clarification on this: Does Elon Musk really seem like a happy, healthy, well-adjusted person to you?

On this planet, we have no lack of resources required to meet everyone's material needs. What we have are bad distribution and allocation networks. The solution to material lack is plainly to change our distribution networks. If we want Heaven on Earth, we can't continue with winner-take-all property relationships based on arbitrary control rather than on actual need.

Real ownership is an authentic relationship of reciprocal care. You really own your house because you tend to its needs, and it meets your needs in turn. Right relationship is about authentic inclusion and reciprocity. "Personal property" is natural; "private property" is made-up to preserve fear. When you don't live in an authentic relationship of reciprocal care and understanding with something, you tend to misuse it, neglect it, exploit it or abuse it. You don't treat its needs as a part of your needs, and so the relationship becomes a locus of violence.

We know that, say, romantic relationships are best when they meet the authentic needs of all parties involved. The same is true of relationships with land, work, animals, water, food, housing, and other people. Like a romantic relationship, any relationship becomes violent when it

stops being consensual. Consent can only exist between parties with equitable power. Without consent, there is automatically violence, and violence is not of God.

We've long had the ability to meet everyone's material needs, but we've lacked the awareness required to meet everyone's emotional needs. Fortunately, we the #woke are waking up.

In my limited experience, growing up in a fearful society is the act of forgetting what's true and crafting all kinds of needlessly complex lies to justify the actions inflicted by your fear. "The spiritual path" is the act of realizing just what you've been doing, and finding your way back to truth.

The God-honest truth was there all along, and still lives on in cliché bumper stickers and hippie-dippy love songs. Coexist. Human-kind: be both. Bombing for peace is like fucking for virginity. Earth my body, water my blood. Money can't buy me love, and love is all you need. Ridiculing the truth does not make it less true.

When you live in a total experience of love, you live in a total experience of abundance, because nothing is separate from you. Your needs become one with everything's needs. You experience it by living it. Like democracy, living God requires a leap of faith, and the consistent choice to continue making that leap when the alternative is returning to fear and control.

God, like democracy, is built on empathy and understanding. God, like democracy, is the choice to trust the will of the collective and claim our own place within it, rather than try to control it all like a dictator. God, like holding resources in the commons, provides for everyone's needs. God, like cooperation, is an action of trust and good faith. God, like prison abolition, is knowing that punishment is counterproductive to peace. God knows no greed, no shame, no fear, no control, no hierarchy, and no defense. God, like love, is authentic, consensual and trusting.

Every religion or spirituality is a doorway to God. Whichever door you find yourself knocking on, it leads to the same place, and that place is God. Pro tip: if you find yourself continuously knocking on the door and it isn't opening you to the lived experience of union with God, then that door is probably closed for you right now. You might want to try another. If you do, it becomes obvious that every door leads to the same place, and we are all trying to go there.

We are not enemies competing towards conflicting goals. We are unwitting allies in the same goal. God is the action of realizing that. The closest political system to God, then, is the one that inspires us all to do that too. To quote another cliché, you have two wolves battling inside you. One is cooperative and compassionate, loving and kind. The other is competitive and warlike, vicious and cruel. Which wolf wins? The one you feed. The question, then, is, "What does the good wolf eat?"

If God is the source of everything, then God made operant conditioning. An economic system based on competition conditions competitive behavior. A political system based on conquering the other side conditions warlike behavior. An economic system based on cooperation and a political system based on collective decision-making condition Godlike behavior. Engaging in Godlike behavior is living the experience of God.

The hilarious conclusion of this all, though, is that you can't take my word for it. Once you've walked through the door, you'll know it for yourself. In the mean time, know that you are loved, and you can choose to be loving in turn.

A Theory on the Origins of Domination

Once upon a time, homo sapien sapien and perhaps some other creatures tragically became self-aware. When I say self-aware, I mean aware of themselves and aware of themselves *as selves*. This led to all kinds of problems like the capitalist mode of production and rulers dominating their subjects, I think.

Allow me to explain:

At our most fundamental level, we have a natural impulse towards survival. This causes us to experience fear of things we believe will kill us and cause us pain. We also have the ability to consciously act: that means, to act, aware that we are making choices to either act or not act in a particular way. So, by extension, we use our conscious action to protect ourselves from the things that we believe will cause us death and/or pain.

With me so far?

So.

When a thing becomes self-aware, a rift forms between it and itself. It becomes able to view itself as though from the outside, as though the self it views is another entity in existence that is somehow separate from itself. Perplexing? Highly. But you know what I mean. Think about talking to

yourself. Think about yourself, period. You're regarding something as though from the outside.

Moving on:

Once this self is viewed as separate, it becomes a potential player in the path away from death and pain. Because we have the ability to act consciously, we begin to act consciously towards ourselves. We view them as an object that can be influenced, acted upon, judged, regulated, and *controlled*.

Control is a word which here means "using one's force of energy in this world to limit the ability of others to use their force."

Fear is what leads us to seek control. If we had no fear of death and pain, we would have no reason to put forward force in the world in the direction of survival and away from the direction of death and pain. In exerting force over anything, we seek to use our conscious action to drive ourselves away from death and pain and towards the meeting of our needs and desires.

So, our naturally inclination away from death and pain led to us viewing ourselves as a thing to be controlled. We began to view ourselves as this thing to control. Our rational thought noticed our actions and sought to determine what they would be. We began to dominate ourselves as though there were two separate entities within us acting as ruler and subject.

Then, there was this whole problem of *other people*. Also, nature, same same, but I'm mainly talking about other people. So, in our origin story, Other People also had the ability to act, to carry force in the world and use it either towards or away from our experiencing pain and death. Thus, we sought to control others around us, and those who were the best at controlling others continued to control others and thus the systems grew embedded.

There's a chicken and egg issue here. Which came first: domination of the outside world or domination of the self? The answer is, of course, both. And, it's a feedback loop. And, the precise beginning doesn't really matter.

Wasn't this a story about origins? It was. It still is, about creating the next thing.

The story of domination became ingrained when we began to view things as separate from us. Whether this began with viewing the outside world as separate, or viewing ourselves as though that self were separate, the story still comes back to self-awareness.

With self-awareness comes other-awareness. If there is no self to place into contrast with other, there is no other that can be feared and thus controlled.

It's obvious to those who look at "Ego" and Capitalism and Statehood that there's an inherent overlap between the narratives we use. We believe that if we do not control and regulate our selves, we will not function. Our needs will not be met, and our survival will not continue. Likewise, we

believe that if we do not have systems of domination within our society, society will not function. It will not grow, progress, survive and continue. These frameworks influence each other in, as previously mentioned, a feedback loop.

But there's this other force in the world, the flip side of our impulse to control out of fear. It is not a separate force, but an intrinsic component of that fear for survival. That impulse is the impulse to *protect*.

We seek to protect ourselves from death and pain, and by extension, protect the things that feel like an intrinsic component of ourselves and of our path towards the meeting of our desires and needs. This includes things like ourselves, our children, our loved ones, and our property.

This impulse to protect is the antidote to our structures of domination.

I will illuminate that linkage now:

We're all one interdependent entity made up of interdependent entities. We, us, existence. Whether or not you buy into the woo-woo-ness of Oneness, you cannot escape the fact that you are literally made up of your biological parents, the oxygen you breathe, some water and whatever you ate for dinner last night. You are also made up of a system of natural processes from which you cannot escape, such as your natural inclination to fear death and pain and to pursue the meeting of your needs and desires. You are made of the same stuff as every other person and

entity in existence, and you could not be yourself without all of them.

I believe the next step in consciousness is awareness of other as self-awareness. When we step into the awareness that, though we are distinct, we are not *separate*, everything in existence falls under the category of an intrinsic component of ourselves whose survival we must protect, whose needs and desires we seek to meet. And it comes in having a view of ourselves as whole, in which we trust ourselves and allow our action to emerge organically out of our nature.

Trust is, in my opinion, the only answer to fear. It is to authentically believe that your best interests, your needs and desires, will be taken on by another. It is to authentically believe that you already take on your own best interests, rather than view yourself as a thing to be controlled in order to meet your needs. And the annoying thing is, trust cannot exist without vulnerability.

Vulnerability is an inherent component of dependence, but so is mutual aid. Independence is a myth, and striving for it is kind of silly IMHO.

So, anyways.

This is why this whole Ego dissolution/Oneness thing is quite literally communalism is quite literally the revolution and cannot be separate from it. The point of a new way of forming community without hierarchy is to honor the individual and build an organically emergent whole out of

individuals who are themselves organically emergent wholes.

The way we view ourselves is mirrored in the way we view each other, and forms the root of our societal structure, I think.

Blah blah blah blah.

Consciousness itself is evolving, as are each of its components and the structures between them.

In building a horizontal society, the thing to do is to take power back over ourselves by allowing power to emerge organically from ourselves, both in society and within our own psyche.

How can we do this?

1. Trust yourself. Allow your action to emerge organically out of your own nature. Regulate, judge and control yourself less. Trust that you have your best interests at heart.
2. Trust others. Allow themselves to emerge organically out of their own nature. Trust that others have your best interests at heart, or at least, that they have their best interests at heart, and that your best interests and their best interests will be in natural harmony more and more the less each of you has to exert control or domination to meet your needs.
3. Try to understand people. They're always coming from somewhere, and their path between there and here

always makes sense. Find yourself in that path, how you relate to it, how you fit into it.

4. Work towards building structures in society that honor and empower individuals within an organically-emergent community.
5. Work on the structures that exist in society from whatever your personal authentic space is. There is no one front that will champion the fixing of it all. Do what feels authentic to you.

TL;DR: Trust yourselves. Trust each other. Tear down the old by building up the new.

Ego, Economy and State

The state and the capitalist mode of production are the ego incarnate in social order.

As gratifying as the bloodlust to slaughter the bourgeoisie may feel, radicals should take note from spirituals that the ego cannot be dissolved through rejection, expulsion, or force. It can only be embraced as a part of the self and dissolved by removing divisions between “self” and “ego.” The other issue at play is that the ego will never entirely disappear, nor should it. There will always be division, within self and within society. The reason our ego culture is so corrupted is rooted in power imbalance and a lack of consciousness, or a lack of awareness of ability to choose.

That was a bit of a mouthful, so I’ll break it down a bit more. First:

What is the ego, and why do we have it?

I use the term ego loosely, neither in the particular Freudian sense nor in the colloquial sense of ego as arrogance or self-aggrandizement. Ego is quite simply the division of self. It is looking at the self as if from the outside. It is the awareness of the self as a self. It is, at its heart, consciousness.

We have an ego because we cannot look at ourselves without one. It isn't possible to both see yourself and be yourself in the same moment. To look at anything, we must step outside of it. Ego is the source of our self-awareness, of our ability to understand that we are acting, that we are us.

Ego is a necessary step in consciousness. Like all things in existence, it is no mistake and its existence is entirely logical within the confines of natural law. It is not evil, nor is it good. It simply is.

What is capitalism, and why do we have it?

Again, the term capitalism is used loosely, but a bit more tied to a particular Marxist conception of it. When I say capitalism, I mean the particular division of social structure along owners of the means of production (bourgeoisie) and the workers of those means (proletariat). It is the social order built on class, where each group of individuals in society plays a fundamentally different role in producing goods and services. I am not referring specifically to monetization or privatization, rather the simple division of society into two groups, one believing it has the ability to control the other's access to the things they need.

We have capitalism because it is simple. It is an easy heuristic to apply to producing things, where one's place is known and one's role is defined.

So how are they the same thing?

Due to the simple fact of division, and the illusion of control.

Self-awareness is dividing into two separate selves (Ego being whichever part of the split self feels it has the ability to dictate the actions of the other). Capitalism is dividing society into two different classes (the Bourgeoisie being whichever part of the split society feels it has the ability to control the other.) In a world where we feel so strongly the role of our ego in defining, controlling and dictating our selves, it makes perfect sense that we would likewise have a social order built on the same principle.

But the fact of the matter remains that the Ego, like the Bourgeoisie, does not have any intrinsic control. Both have only the illusion of it. That illusion is created by the belief of all involved that a power imbalance exists. Like self-definition and self-control, power in society is only as strong as it is obeyed.

What about the state?

Replace the word Bourgeoisie with Government. It's the same phenomenon. This is also why the state is inherently capitalist, and capitalism requires a state.

(Side note, for any “anarcho-capitalists” in the house, let me sum this up for you: 1) capitalism necessitates a hierarchy that is antithetical to anarchism; 2) you literally cannot protect private property without having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory. Google Max Weber’s definition of a state. What’s that, you say? You could collectively share responsibility for protection of property through force? Still a state. You could just collectively share private property amongst yourselves? Congratulations, that’s called Communism.)

So what do we do about this?

Okay, so here’s where I might lose the radicals: you cannot dissolve the Ego by trying to eradicate it. If you’re splitting yourself and trying to control what your ‘self’ is, you’re in the space of Ego. Oops.

You likewise cannot dissolve class division by seizing the means of production, or government through revolution and reestablishing control in new hands. If there is any division, the problem repeats itself.

The Ego can only be allowed to exist. As long as you possess any self-awareness, you cannot dissolve your Ego. Nor should you try to. It’s in you for a reason.

What can be controlled is the relationship to the Ego, which happens through awareness. Being aware of your own

division of self and how it functions within you is the only way to harness the power of the Ego in pursuit of your own true nature.

Likewise, being aware of your unique relationship to the market and the state is the only way to begin dissolving the perceived power imbalance between you and them. Seizing control just recycles the same phenomenon, which is, itself, control.

Capitalism, Ego, the State, they're all about division and control. And as long as there is self-awareness, there will be division and control. It's not about eradicating the space of difference, but using it as a tool in pursuit of Utopia.

So what do we actually do?

Break more rules. Test yourself. Learn your limits. Question authority. Question yourself. Love yourself. Love others. Work at it from every angle, embracing every path to truth of self and Utopia as legitimate. You're never not doing it. Just do it more.

It's simple. That doesn't mean it's easy.

The Tao of Degrowth

I came to the degrowth movement from a spiritual perspective to begin with. Before I get too woo-woo for any environmentalist academics, allow me to explain. I first heard the term “degrowth” from reading Charles Eisenstein, and it stuck in my brain as the first vision I’d heard articulated for how to do this whole “total societal transformation” thing. It has always been a total vision to me, one that encompasses change far beyond economic contraction and environmental sustainability: a complete reshuffling of societal order so that a natural dynamic equilibrium of people and nature meeting their needs can arise.

Degrowth, in my mind, has always entailed building a society around a revolutionary commitment to shared human interests operating within our ecological means. That means promoting social justice, because it’s inextricably linked to ecological justice. It means promoting a solidarity economy, because placing decision-making power with the workers is essential to the well-being of people becoming front and center in the economy. It means changing our self-concept to one of harmony with nature, in contrast to the capitalist drive to accumulate and hoard.

And to me, the so-called “spiritual” is no different from the natural. It is emotions, it is nature, it is finding harmony within and between those realms. That’s all I’m talking

about here, because my understanding of spirituality is about harmonizing with the way of nature. That way has been called the *Tao*, or *Dao*.

What is the Tao?

“The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao.” — “Lao Tzu,” *Tao Te Ching*

Tao is an ancient Chinese word usually translated into English as “the Way.” Its meaning is subtle and complex: it is not the way in the sense of a concrete path or road to a goal. It is the way in the sense of the way the planets move around the sun, the way a river flows, the way a flower blooms, the way we feel, the way we are. It speaks of a natural order, the process by which things come into being and move through existence in line with their natural states and inclinations.

As mentioned in the quote above, it is not a stagnant or rigid thing; it cannot be caught and pinned down. It is dynamic and unfixed, eternal and ever-changing, emerging out of itself.

What is Degrowth?

“Ecological economists define degrowth as an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that will

reduce societies' throughput of energy and raw materials. However, our emphasis here is on *different*, not only less. Degrowth signifies a society with a smaller metabolism, but more importantly, a society with a metabolism which has a different structure and serves new function." — *Giacomo d'Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis, Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*

Degrowth is a movement in research and activism to challenge the narrative that economic growth itself is in the public good. It argues that production and consumption need to be actively reduced, and the economic and power structures of society reconfigured so that all people have the freedom to meet their needs, within the ecological means of the planet. It has strong overlaps with movements for environmental justice, the solidarity economy, and decentralizing and relocalizing economic and political power.

Degrowth is not about sparking economic recession, but about transforming the total fabric of society into one with equitable distribution, where extraction-based consumption is drastically reduced and new forms of economic and political organizing arise so that society can function within the ecological constraints of the planet.

So... what does this have to do with Taoism?

Everything, obviously.

The parallel begins with the simple fact that degrowth looks at the way of nature, and asks society to align with it.

Natural law is in direct contrast to the drive for continuous economic growth; nature's way is one of interdependence and limit, with a dynamic equilibrium of power, production and consumption arising within and between ecosystems.

Degrowth speaks of the very same.

Taoism is a philosophy of simplicity, and of attuning one's own action to the way of nature. Economic growth is driven by a belief that infinite growth is possible within a total ecosystem (our planet) with finite resources. Degrowth is a movement to simplify living, reorient society around the public goods intrinsic to good living (such as clean water and air, healthy food, community connection, and individual empowerment), and, ultimately, end the system of expanding domination through concentrated economic growth and centralization of power.

Furthermore, degrowth and Taoism both speak to an acceptance of things being the way that they are, and attuning to them accordingly. Some degrowth advocates make degrowth a personal practice, limiting their own production and consumption in daily life. I'd argue that the spiritual implications of degrowth can go even further, into the very heart of self-concept.

Anti-consumerism, a fundamental tenet of the degrowth movement, can be seen as a Taoist practice. Beyond the basic concept of living simply, anti-consumerism on a

deeper level is a philosophy of accepting oneself where one is at, and not seeking to acquire more in order to boost one's self-concept. There's a viral quote that's stuck in my head here, the one that goes, "in a society that profits from your self-doubt, liking yourself is a rebellious act." The emotional practice of radically accepting yourself rather than seeking to change yourself, of defining your self-worth not in contrast to others and not by what you have that others do not, and of stepping into a sense of harmony with other beings is a deeply anti-consumerist thing to do.

A personal, emotional understanding of degrowth challenges the idea that we need to get more, have more, grow more, improve more, and be more than we are. On the flip side, both Taoism and degrowth offer the wisdom of accepting the world on its terms, and working within them to foster natural harmony.

At the end of the day, increasing production and consumption, increasing economic growth, is rooted in an idea of the world driven by a need to be separate, and be better because someone else is worse. Accumulation, over-consumption, and the fallacy of believing that we are not interdependent with our planet and each other are all symptoms of this fundamental disconnect.

A Taoist vision for the world, like a degrowth vision, imagines a society in which everyone has the freedom to meet their needs in harmony with their nature and with Nature. The Utopia we strive for is a dynamic equilibrium that blooms out of people meeting their needs, and nature

meeting its needs, in intrinsic harmony formed through autonomy, respect, mutual aid, and a radical acceptance of our interdependence.

It's all about aligning our actions with our nature, and with the *way* of nature.

The Yoga of Dual Power

When I was thirteen, I started doing yoga. I'm from Southern California, where you can't swing a cat without hitting a dozen yoga studios or read a single article on wellness without seeing *Twenty Different Poses to Unlock the Power of Your Pelvis*, so it took a few years for it to become more than a physical practice to me. It took a few more years for me to understand that the physical practice and the spiritual practice are not separate things.

Yoga means yoke, it means union: between the material and spiritual, between the self we can define and the self that is infinite, between the actions we take and the authentic inspiration that moves through us.

I've been searching for God since I was ten. Perhaps the only driving urge of my being that pre-dates that search was a resolute commitment to justice. When I was seven, I watched George W. Bush become my country's president after losing the popular vote to Al Gore. It bothered me, not just because my parents were upset, but because the numbers didn't make sense. I was good at math as a kid, I liked numbers, and there was something fundamentally wrong to me about a man losing the popular vote but becoming president anyway. It wasn't just. It literally didn't add up.

As time went on, my political understanding broadened. I made the slow transition from a liberal democrat to a socialist to an anarchist. My spiritual practice deepened. I read and I meditated and I moved and I thought and I felt and slowly, the world began to look different to me. I always had two spheres, politics and spirituality, for interfacing with the world: one external, one internal. Over the years, they grew closer, like circles on a Venn diagram, like different colored lenses, the area where they overlapped still obscure.

One night, they clicked into place over each other, and I saw the clearest picture I have ever seen. The way the universe grows, emerging from itself, the way we feel and act, emerging from that feeling. The flow of energy, the stream of consciousness. It all made sense, which is to say, I could relate myself to it. I felt the experience I'd long read about in spiritual books. It was exactly like they'd described, but as different to the description as reading about an embrace is to being held.

Resistance, Allowance, and Ego

It took another few years to dig to the root of what that feeling was, and it was this: that we are manifestations of a universal consciousness, call it source, God, the universe.

I understood that we are not separate, just as different colored rays are not separate from light, and are not

separate from each other. Energy moves like water moves, that action can be used to allow that flow or to resist it and nothing more. The way to expanding consciousness is to allow energy to move through you, like water moves, to become a vessel for its flow and expansion — not by denying yourself, but by allowing yourself to be exactly as you are in each moment, to respond to the shifts in current as smoothly as an unanchored boat, as smoothly as water itself does. All you can do is choose: resistance or allowance. Choosing one always chooses the other in some way.

Neither is necessarily right, neither is necessarily wrong, and, of course, they are not separate.

What we call the Ego mind, that self-awareness that sees oneself as a rigid, defined entity with clear boundaries, separate from the rest of existence, that mind is not separate either. It cannot be eliminated by trying to eliminate it. Think of the Ego as a dam within the river of consciousness. The Ego's only tool is cement. It seeks to cement boundaries, to cement patterns, to cement ideas of oneself and of existence, and it fears more than anything that something will tear it down.

You cannot tear down a dam by adding more cement to it.

Unbuilding the Dam

Resistance too must be allowed, for to resist it is to lay more cement. The Ego can only be allowed to fade away, to be softened by the flow of water through it, first in little points of conscious awareness, and slowly, bit by bit, hole by hole of flowing water, it collapses.

When you have only two options to work with, to resist or to allow, there is no way to blow up the dam. You can either build it firmer or allow the river to seep through it.

This takes practice. This takes time, and it does not come through force. The shift can only come naturally, organically, out of being consciously authentic to one's true nature and allowing the flow of consciousness to move through that wall of Ego to the other side.

Ego is the space of self that divides itself, that draws lines around itself, that seeks to control itself and define for itself what it is.

In another post, I explained how Ego division has manifested as both capitalism and the state. As the division between owner/shareholder and worker, and as the division between ruler and ruled. The control of the one over the other. The fear of what would happen if the latter were to gain power and eradicate the need for the former.

That Ego mind is terrified that it will become obsolete. It clings to its fear to build itself stronger.

The external world is not separate from the internal world, for it was nothing but billions of internal worlds that built

the external world over eons (nothing but billions of internal worlds that make up the external.)

Would that we could blow up the dam, but we can only ever choose to allow or to resist. To let it crumble, bit by bit, through the flowing of water, or to build it higher.

I laugh when I think of resistance, in the political sense. If the Ego's resistance to allowing what is manifests as entrenched power hierarchy, as capitalism and the State, then we are resisting resistance itself.

Rather, we need a resistance by allowance. We don't allow the dam to stand strong, but we allow the river of expanded consciousness to flow through it and crumble it. We allow authentic freedom, true equity, genuine expression, heartfelt community, to flow and to grow. Bit by bit, pocket by pocket, allowance flows through resistance until the holes in that Ego dam, that wall of entrenched hierarchy and control, become so numerous that it crumbles into the water.

A Political Yoga

So you can imagine how happy I was when I came across the concept of dual power.

Dual power is a revolutionary movement without a revolution. Or, with a different kind of revolution. A revolution through "resistance by allowance."

Rather than take to the streets en masse, fists raised, guns drawn, and storm the battlements and tear down the thrones of the rulers, dual power is about allowing their power to wither away. It's about building a different kind of power in different institutions, through local, horizontally-structured communities learning to work together to build what they need for themselves and each other.

Dual power is about shifting the balance of power towards alternatives, bit by bit, pocket by pocket, until the balance shifts and the old world crumbles into the new.

It is not that we resist by resisting what is; we resist by allowing something new, something that grows organically from our needs, from our feelings, in communion with each other.

No longer is energy spent beating against a cement wall; it's spent cultivating new structures, new ways for people to meet their needs themselves, in community with each other, together, freely. In each new pocket, the methods by which we meet our needs turn from the institutions that dominate us to the communities that affirm us. We learn from each other. We grow together. We experiment, and improve, just like life does.

Dual power is spontaneous and authentic, arising from the needs of people and planet and the failures of the status quo systems to meet those needs.

We poke holes in the dam by allowing new options, and more water flows through it. Slowly, slowly, and then, all at once — it crumbles away.

These institutions we revolutionaries fight are nothing but Ego manifested in the socio-political realm. You cannot fight the Ego with resistance. You can only allow it to dissolve, by allowing something else instead.

Systems of Empowerment

I spend a lot of time thinking about systems: how they influence us, how to undo their power, and the importance of building new ones. What I haven't delved into much is how to build new ones, systems that serve the paradoxical function of empowering individuals.

First, I define the term "system" loosely. In my mind, it's a catch-all term for "the tendency of certain things to do certain things, when that tendency grows strong enough to shape the behavior of the things that interact with it." Gravity is a system. American Racism is a system.

My blanket view on systems is this: 1) systems in general will always exist; 2) some systems in particular cannot be eradicated (I call these systems "natural laws"); 3) a system that is not a natural law can always be resisted; 4) new systems can be formed, and formed deliberately.

Building a system for individual empowerment is, at first glance, a contradiction. For a system to be a system, the simple pattern of behavior of the individuals within it has to hold enough force to condition the behavior of individuals. By its very nature, it exerts control over individuals without the individuals explicitly consenting to it, or often being conscious of that control. So, what then could a system of individual empowerment possibly be?

I imagine systems like momentum, or currents. We each float down the proverbial river of life, society, existence, desire, and interaction, carried along by the currents that have conditioned our selves and the world around us since before our birth. I would go so far as to say that the existence of systems is itself a natural law: patterns of behavior with the power to shape behavior will inevitably emerge out of anything, regardless of whether there exists some codified power hierarchy to enforce them.

We cannot escape the fact that we exist within a current. Our very swimming within this current pushes the current in different directions, and we and every other life form and structure of natural law will continue to push the current as well, simply by our existing and acting.

But any system that is not a natural law can be changed, resisted, subverted or dissolved. Systems cultivate behavior, so, why couldn't it be possible for systems to cultivate a behavior of personal empowerment?

Resisting Systems — Stepping into Freedom

At the end of the day, if you *can* do it, then you can do it. If taking an action does not contradict natural law, it is within the realms of possibility that you can take it. This does not mean you can take it with impunity; impunity doesn't exist. There will always be consequences of some form for every action you take. This is, quite literally, a natural law.

To step into the place of understanding that we are always able to take a physically possible action is perhaps the most powerful way to undo the vice grip of the system. Why don't you get naked at Starbucks? Why don't you slap a cop in the face? Why don't you tell everyone your absolute honest and vulnerable truth? Honestly, why not?

Likely, because you fear the consequences of taking those actions. At the core level, you fear harm, so you control your behavior accordingly. What can bring you harm depending on what action you take, and what fears in particular you are instilled with that determine in what ways you control yourself, these are products of the conditioning (systems) of your surrounding environment.

Saul Newman has an interesting term that I want to draw on here, and that term is *ontological freedom*. Academic obfuscation aside, my view on ontological freedom is simply that it is the process of stepping into the knowledge that we are already free.

We are never in absolute freedom; at the very least, we are always constrained by natural law. However, beyond that, we always possess freedom to act or not act in particular ways. This does not mean that any or all options available to us will be desirable, however, there is always an element of choice involved in every action we take. At the fundamental level, we can always choose to die. We can always choose to be harmed.

Resistance to death and harm are, paradoxically, a natural inclination. I would not go so far as to say they are natural *laws*, as there are countless examples of individuals choosing death or allowing harm to be inflicted upon themselves. What is innate is that we will seek out our self-interest in each moment, and wind like a river to the sea towards our version of the good life. If we choose to die to save someone we love, we have made a self-interested choice that their life mattered more to us than ours in that moment.

By stepping into our ontological freedom, or our awareness of the fact that we are already free to make choices beyond the conditioning of the systems in which we find ourselves, we have resisted the power of systems and stepped into personal empowerment.

Resistance as a Practice — The Importance of Being Incurable

Breaking the conditioning of systems is a deeply difficult and terrifying thing to do for many, many people. Why? Because systems exist, their conditioning power exists, and our fear of reprisal for breaking their conditioning is a very real and legitimate issue.

However, the “muscle” of stepping outside the conditioning of a system can be strengthened like any other. To step off the beaten path, quite literally to step out of the current of

a system, can be made into a practice. I believe strongly in cultivating a practice of daily rule-breaking, and like all practices, it begins small.

What are you afraid to say? Say it. Where are you not supposed to walk? Walk there. What are you supposed to wear? Don't wear it. What are you afraid to be seen as? Radiate it.

Do the opposite of what you're supposed to do, and do it deliberately. Start small. Treat it as practice.

The maximum freedom we can have is an openness to all available options. When we are as unafraid to break rules as we are to obey them, the rules cease to have any power over us at all. However, we cannot become as comfortable breaking rules as we are obeying them if we don't make a practice of breaking them.

Internal Systems — Your Freedom Ends Where Someone Else's Begins

We often conceive of systems as these over-arching, societal structures that exist above and outside of the individual. This could not be further from the truth. Systems may not be consciously chosen, formed and obeyed by individuals, but their force can only ever be felt at work inside the individual body and psyche. Gravity will continue to exist in the universe whether or not there is mass,

however, without a mass to act on, gravity holds no power. It might as well not exist without a space for its existence to carry weight.

When we speak of societal systems, while they may be unconscious tendencies within a given culture, the systems only come to hold power within individuals.

The individual self is, of course, a paradox. It is a combination of everything outside of it (through genetics, biology, experience, and conditioning) that has formed into an entity that goes on to influence everything outside of it (through passing on genetics, forming experiences, interacting with the outside world.)

There's a feedback loop. The external goes in, the internal comes out, always and continuously and irrevocably. It's a natural law. There is no way to get out of the feedback loop of external influence becoming internalized and internal action becoming externalized.

The goal, then, is not to stop the loop, but to step into it from a place of consciousness. Consciousness is nothing more or less than the awareness of ability to make choices. You cannot decide for anyone other than yourself what their ability is to make choices, or what choices they will make. You can only change yourself in the hopes that the changes you make within yourself, when externalized through action, will become internalized in others in ways that push the current in the direction you want to go. Even with a gun to someone's head, you cannot be certain what

their choices will be. Even in bondage, you cannot decide the content's of someone else's mind. We cannot truly control anything but ourselves, and our selves are just an amalgamation of everything around us that continuously shapes us.

The same goes for everyone.

We are distinct, but not separate. We literally would not exist without one another. We all have skin in the game.

Reimagining Collective Power — From Control to Trust

It is easy to feel powerful in a current where everyone around you is swimming so as to carry you the direction you want to go. It is easy to become attached to such a feeling and seek to control others' actions, or control their ability to make choices that benefit you.

In understanding that our identities are quite literally inseparable from the world around us, we step into a particular understanding of the phrase "to have skin in the game." We would not be ourselves without each other. We cannot be ourselves without each other.

When we seek to control others, what we're focused on is their *ability* to make certain choices. However, we often ignore the issue of their *incentive* to make certain choices. When we seek to control others, we do so because we fear

harm will be done to us. That harm can manifest as either a lack-of-a-good-thing, or a perceived bad thing.

Control always, irrevocably, comes from fear. We fear that if we do not control the situation, the things we want to see happen will not happen.

The opposite of fear is trust. Because they are opposites, they cannot exist without one another. To trust is to open our proverbial throat to a knife and believe we will not be cut. It is to believe that others will take our best interest on as an irrevocable component of their best interest.

It is to believe that in swimming whatever direction it is they swim down the river, their current and our current will be in harmony.

Building Systems of Empowerment — From Homogeneity to Harmony

Harmony is a fundamentally distinct term from homogeneity. Homogeneity is, biologically speaking, often tremendously harmful to the flourishing of life. It is also the thing we seek out when we build systems on control (and by extension, on fear).

Our identities are not separate from the world around us, but they are still distinct. To be in harmony does not mean that all identities behave in the same way, but that the diversity of identities exist in a harmonious balance that

uplifts the ability of each distinct identity to serve its self interest.

The freer we all are to meet our needs, the safer we each are from harm. Why? Because we do harm to one another when we feel that individual stands in the way between us and our needs. We quite literally view the individual as the path to our needs, when our needs are only ever a feeling.

Think of the last time you shoved someone out of the way of where you were walking. Think of robbing someone, or being robbed. Think of the desire for revenge. Think of a time you yelled at someone who did something that hurt you. In each case, the person who inflicted harm did so because their need was not being met, and doing harm to another seemed like the only immediate option to meet that need.

I'll repeat: the freer we all are to meet our needs, the safer we each are from harm. The more we step into our ontological freedom, that is to say, become aware that we are already free in far more capacities than we have been conditioned to believe by the systems in which we exist, the less need we have for systems of control. The more possibility we have for systems of trust.

Now, the How-To:

Like the formation of identity, the changing of systems exists in a feedback loop: the internal manifests externally, and the external is internalized. The loop will spin faster in a new direction if it comes from both sides.

From the internal to the external, building a system of empowerment comes from stepping into our internal power. It comes from practicing freedom. It comes from growing comfortable resisting systems. It comes from strengthening our ability to do so. It comes from relinquishing control over anything but ourselves, and stepping fully into control of ourselves. It comes from allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, thus allowing ourselves to trust.

From the external to the internal, building a system of empowerment comes from allowing all individuals involved to have skin in the game. It comes from creating structures that allow for relative freedom to meet needs, and eliminating power hierarchies. It comes from allowing naturally-emerging tendencies to occur, and building system-wide norms that resist rigidity. It comes from cultivating the space for spontaneity. It comes from free association, free disassociation, and value structures built on intrinsic worth of action rather than an anticipation of reciprocity.

The issue is not the existence of systems, this cannot be resisted. The issue at hand is becoming aware that they exist, that many of them can be formed and resisted at will, and choosing to build them deliberately.

At the end of the day, we can only ever change ourselves. We can only change our actions internally. But those internal actions invariably influence others, and we can use

our force, our weight in this world, as a force to further allowance.

How do we further our ability to allow? We build trust.

How do we build trust? We allow ourselves to fear harm, and do it anyway.