Mortification of the Flesh, or, Gymnosophy

Fragments towards a mystical anarchy

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Bibliography & Suggested Readings

- Alejandro de Acosta, *Its core is the negation*

- Alejandro de Acota, *Cosmic Pessimism*

- Alyson Escalante, *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto*

- Anonymous, *Heart Sutra*

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- Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

- Damascius, Commentary on *Parmenides*

- Echo, *Rejectionary Anarchist Critiques*

- Epictetus, *Enchiridion of Epictetus*

- Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*

- Giorgio Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism*

- Jeffrey S. Kuperman, *Living Theurgy: A Course in Iamblichus' Philosophy, Theology, and Theurgy*

- Kerry Thornley, *Zenarchy*

- Leonard Williams, *Language, Ideology, and Anarchism*

- Lev Chernyi, *Introduction to Critical Theory*

- Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*

- Plato, *Parmenides*

- Plotinus, *The Enneads*

Preface

This work is unfinished. It is a composite of several essays that began, in some places, as condensations of longer and more academically-tinged works. In other places, they have their origin in my notes while trying to construct an imperative logic (hence, the stark change in tone between my discussions of mystical practice, and my discussions of logical truth.)

If this unfinished piece is unclear (even Porphyry apologizes, more than a thousand years before me, for a lack of clarity when attempting to speak that which cannot be put into words), I hope to write something of a distillate or abstract of this work. In simple terms:

1. Anarchy as an internal experience, not as an external one. I aim towards a sort of inversion of anarchy from an aggregate of social relationships, to anarchy as the attainment of self-liberation.

2. Renewing anarchy's relationship to transcendence. I offer an alternative translation of anarchy: rather than the negation of authority, one can also interpret the term as a negation of a beginning principle or cause, i.e., a state of being without beginning or cause. Compare ⊠ (wú wéi) in Chinese religion, acting-without-acting.

3. Anarchism, as separate from anarchy, as a set of techniques for attaining anarchy. I argue that veganism, radical sobriety, and other forms of self-discipline are closer to the classically anarchist practices of social warfare than a good portion of anarchist theorists would credit. That is, they are material and embodied, and work linearly towards an end outside themselves.

4. Anarchist theory free from truth. I describe the possibility of an anarchist logic that is entirely outside truth-aptitude, i.e.,

theory which does not make claims as to what is true, and thus, what isn't. This takes the form of imperatives, interrogatives, and speech acts. In other words – commands, questions, and non-linguistic acts that take the form of speech.

I use the Greek work ἐγχειρίδιον (enkheiridion) in some places. This refers both to a handbook (a manual,) and to a sharp knife, in its capacity as a tool. It refers in most contexts to the Ἐγχειρίδιον Ἐπικτήτου (Enkheirídion Epiktḗtou), the Handbook of Epictetus. This Handbook is a set of techniques and methods for practicing Stoics. Deleuze is credited with the quip:

> A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a court-
> house of reason. Or it can be thrown through the
> window.

Thus, the ἐγχειρίδιον (enkheiridion) is in this sense, a brick. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the most famous and well-known work that can be called anarchist in any sense, is not Tolstoy nor Kropotkin. It is a manual for bomb-making (amongst other things,) and titled the Anarchist Cookbook. A cookbook, of course, makes no claims as to whether or not its recipes are *true.* Perhaps they are successful, perhaps they are not, but there are many degrees of validity and being that a recipe, or a method for making explosives, can be satisfied or not-satisfied.

Along with this preface, I have appended a bibliography of works that were central to the development of this one.

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the technitēs as a βάναυσος (banausos), a term that indicates a person who is unimportant, not entirely respectable.

Thus, anarchism (as I define it here) is aimed at producing an "anarchy" at the site of the individual. Anarchism does not "produce" anarchy in a generative sense, but rather is a *clearing out* , a cleaving open within which that state of undifferentiation can come indwell. Undifferentiation is, of course, αναρχία (anarkhíā) – that without a beginning principle or substratum, the arkhḗ. This clearing out is practical and attainable: it places anarchy within reach, though not entirely graspable by normal means.

The One is void-like in a vacuous sense. In its unity, it contains nothing, no other thing. It is not the same as the empty set, i.e. the prime, least, first member of all sets because it is not a container in the same sense that other sets are: it is uninhabited. Hegel, too, calls the One synonymous with the Void.

For centuries, the dominant ideology of the West has considered the Signifier (the word, logos) as a sort of "natural fact" arising from a productive relationship with the referent. Thus, in his mystical writings on the One, Porphyry argues that the One has no name, even "One" is inadequate to describe it, as he writes that within the word, the constituent letters which compose it reveal some hidden (cryptic) knowledge of the referent within it. This was a common belief in Greece until relatively recently, and perhaps date back to at least Pythagoras, who was supposedly a gifted numerologist. On the Pythagoreans, Porphyry writes that their term for the One, appropriated from the pagan divinity Apollo, is not an affirmation but rather an unsaying of names: he derives it from ἀ- (a-) and πολῢς (polús), literally "without parts." Thus, they are speaking of a (non)being that is a simplex, who they do not attribute an affirmative name.

critique of being. This vein of discourse arrives from everywhere, it seems: from utilitarian antinatalism, to deep green social activism, to the field of (informal) pragmatics.

Antinatalism is chief amongst these because it gives moral & ethical value to nonexistence. This is not to say that I necessarily agree with their conclusions (I am critical of the nature of universal moral imperatives. I find that they strip the practical nature of imperative statements and place them into an abstract realm, in their sense as a mandate from a creator.) Rather, I enjoy how antinatalists transform what amounts to merely a mental exercise, a thought experiment, into something with actuality. As something with real, concrete consequences, it begs the question: what is to be done?

By purging anarchism of essentialism in all its form, I hope to fold it in on itself. From the external obsession, which implies the existence of an atomized social individual, comes an internal obsession, a looking-inwards. Thus, anarchism is rendered as a concrete set of methods for obtaining self-liberation.

Mystical anarchy

Anarchism (as opposed to anarchy) is not τέχνη (tékhnē), i.e., knowing-in-doing, contrasted with ἐπιστήμη (epistḗmē), knowing in the theoretical dimension. Rather it is a concrete set of exercises or praxis in which the end goal is the transformation of the subject. As Agamben notes, for the ancient Greek, one who has the aim of work outside one's self, is inferior to one who's subject is himself:

> While contemplation, the act of knowing, is in the one contemplating, the artist is a being who has his end, his telos, outside himself, in the work. That is to say, he is a constitutively incomplete being who never possesses his telos, who lacks εντελέχεια (entelécheia). For this reason the Greeks considered

Part 1: Etymology

Arkhḗ

Despite a wide acknowledgment among generations of anarchists, the Greek etymon (precursor) of anarchy, does not necessarily mean domination, or oppression, or hierarchy. While it would come to mean all these things, its primary or original meaning was beginning. It is from this understanding that the word attains its meaning as superior, and further thus as power and hierarchy.

I affirm that this understanding has served the development of anarchy well. There has been a turn in the past couple of decades away from traditional anarchist schools of thought, towards new and novel forms of liberation, and distilling the term anarchy into a simple negation of domination frees the term from the historical baggage of dead European ideologies. Further, and perhaps more importantly, I enjoy the ambiguity and potential for play that lies at its center.

There is a certain understanding of ἀρχή (arkhḗ) that is lost when understood simply as "domination." In Ancient Greek, ἀρχή (arkhḗ) is singular, as opposed to a plural form. Thus, anarchy preserves a singular conception of power, what Hobbes, and later, Perlman referred to as Leviathan. There is an alternative translation here: in its capacity as being understood as meaning beginning, anarchy can thus mean "that without a beginning," in the sense of not having an ἀρχή (arkhḗ), or source. It also refers to the mystical beginning of all, what Anaximander deems ἄπειρος (ápeiros), analogous in some ways to 道 (Dào) in China around the same time, about 600 BCE. The term contains its own negation: a pure sort of negativity. In its sense of being the source of all being, all things derive their being from the ἀρχή (arkhḗ), but in its sense of not having a beginning itself, the ἀρχή (arkhḗ) is anarchic.

Thales, the founder of the Milesian school which Anaximander was a part of, is attributed to the following fragment:

What is divine? What has no origin, nor end.

Anarchy, when interpreted this way, moves from an external (i.e., political) concept, to an internal one. It is the state of being Unique and without any relationships, being above all other things. One is "above" things not in a moral sense, but in the sense that the Creative Nothing is Stirner's criterion of truth, and thus all other things derive their truth or substance from the Creative Nothing.

All statements in language are based on presuppositions which cannot be validated or verified within that language. In this sense, nous proceeds from the One. Sextus Empiricus, Greek skeptic, writes:

Those who claim for themselves to judge the truth are bound to possess a criterion of truth. This criterion, then, either is without a judge's approval or has been approved. But if it is without approval, whence comes it that it is truthworthy? For no matter of dispute is to be trusted without judging. And, if it has been approved, that which approves it, in turn, either has been approved or has not been approved, and so on ad infinitum.

Stirner shares this same sort of critique, but unlike the Skeptics, who took on a sort of radical agnosticism, he locates the criterion of truth on the Nothing. He distinguishes between servile criticism, who serves a phantasmal criterion of truth, and one's own criticism, the criticism which takes the Subject as the beginning for all knowledge:

Every one criticizes, but the criterion is different. People run after the "right" criterion. The right

refers (a) to the rejection of truth-aptitude; further, (b) it implies in a certain sense, that truth-aptitude constricts or subjects us.

The former clarification, despite appearances, enjoys a wide acceptance, even amongst the staunched logical positivists. Many statements in natural language are not necessarily truth-apt, such as statements which linguists refer to as imperative (commands), exclamative (exclamations), and interrogative (questions). There are also expressives and many other truth-nonapt categories.

Anarchist theory, thus, can take a form far removed from the "science" of dialectical Marxism-Leninism, that of prescriptivism. It can take, rather, the form of artistic & poetic creation undertaken for its own sake and which has its own end within itself.

Prayers free from truth

The topic of logic is surprisingly ubiquitous amongst anarchist theory – there is the near-constant talk of the logic of capitalism, or settler-colonial logics. A major work of contemporary Individualist-Anarchist theory is entitled Against the Logic of Submission, though the question of what logic in this sense entails is not discussed.

Even Aristotle, the father of logic and perhaps even of the valuation of truth, states thusly:

[A] prayer [has meaning], but it is neither true nor false.

An anarchist theory free from truth would be as a prayer is. That is, imperative and interrogative, as opposed to declarative – an Aristotlean prayer, or perhaps, exorcism, rendered free from truth. It would be an unknowing as opposed to a knowing; which renders a passive object which is to be known, and an active subject which knows.

The general intention of my inquiry into the nature of disconnection from truth is one of a wide and varied program, that of the

This is evidence that Escalante's nihilism is incomplete. The fate queerness now "faces" is not one of nonexistence. it is a fate of definitely continued, stable, cannibalized existence. Existence in this state is confinement to the social context which produces it.

I believe that the non-essence of queerness is already a sort of anti-linguistic gesture. It is fundamentally a denial of the rational technologies that Western-European civilization has used to construct coherent social identities.

I find that in the context of political negation, too much emphasis is put within the spoken, crystalline negation of an affirmative. Negation is never complete in this sense, within the negative-affirmative pair the contradiction and the tension is preserved.

Negation is the ascension away from being. I should note here that it is not morally or ethically superior to affirmation in the normal sense, but it is ascension in the sense that it inverts the "coming into being," the creatio ex nihilo that constitutes existence. The return to emptiness (ex nihilo nihil fit) is anti-linguistic. It is not merely "above" language in the sense that it is superior to it, rather, it works (in the actual sense of the word) to annihilate the intelligible. This annihilation is in a sense, a self-censure, a vow of silence that does not merely negate (or contradict) the intelligible meaning of a statement (and is thus intelligible itself.) One must be careful not to reify the censure (in which the act of censorship becomes knowable.) A successful censure is complete annihilation that results in silence.

Part 3: Pre-Enchiridion

Why should one prefer an anarchist theory free from objective truth?

Truth here refers to the quality of being truth-apt, that is, having a truth-value, generally true or false (termed bivalence) though some alternatives have been developed. Thus, to be free of truth

criterion is the first presupposition. The critic starts from a proposition, a truth, a belief. This is not a creation of the critic, but of the dogmatist; nay, commonly it is actually taken up out of the culture of the time without further ceremony, like e.g. "liberty," "humanity," etc. The critic has not "discovered man," but this truth has been established as "man" by the dogmatist, and the critic (who, besides, may be the same person with him) believes in this truth, this article of faith. In this faith, and possessed by this faith, he criticizes.

He continues:

I am the criterion of truth, but I am not an idea, but more than idea, e.g., unutterable. My criticism is not a "free" criticism, not free from me, and not "servile," not in the service of an idea, but an own criticism.

Anarchism, then, can be said to be separate from anarchy. Anarchism is a material set of methods for arriving at anarchy. In simpler terms: anarchism is a body of methods for self-liberation.

Áskēsis

The most prominent critique of vegan, straight edge, and anti-civilization currents of anarchy is, regardless of validity, that it represents a sort of meaningless asceticism towards a goal other than the Individual, and thus is discarded as a moral technology of control. This view is based on two assumptions.

First, the view that those aforementioned schools of anarchism are "ascetic" in the sense that they deprive the subject of something

they desire. Thus, this argument is not entirely applicable even accepting the premises arguendo. A trivial individualist-anarchist veganism can take the form of simply not wanting to eat animal products. While valid in this constricted sense, it is passive, toothless even. Disputing the premise that veganism is a deprivation, however, produces a stronger, more dangerous veganism.

Secondly, that view that veganism or radical sobriety is intended outwards towards an external, outside goal. The difference between this argument and the previous is subtle, though important. The counter-argument here, though, disputes the implication that outward goals necessarily need to oppose inward goals. Surely, some practices satisfy both goals as an effect, regardless of intent. Moreover, there can be said to be those practices that are stronger on both fronts as due to their symbiosis.

Take, for example, mutualist relationships in the Wild, that spontaneously form between unrelated species, or, on a more sentimental note, that of friendship. Only under the bivalent logic of civilization does friendship oppose self-transformation and exaltation. Only under the binary logic of domination does sexual promiscuity necessarily oppose the notion of healthy romance.

Then, veganism can be rendered as a technique for friendship, and both radical sobriety and veganism as techniques for self-transformation. Veganism, as I practice it, is a method for building relationships with the more-than-human world. I make the concession that these practices are, in fact, ascetic. Asceticism, despite its religious and moral connotations, merely refers to practice, or technique. Veganism and radical sobriety are separate from the pursuits of the "traditional anarchist" because they share more in common with the militant & active pursuits of violent rebellion than the more-often-than-not nonviolent movements and impotent theory. Contrary to mainstream stereotypes, the individualist-anarchist is a sentimentalist in the sense that she never loses the hope that anarchy can be brought about here and now. The result of these techniques are tangible, easily embodied.

Passive, Active, and Complete Nihilism

The construction of the citizen in discourse is thus a reification of the true subject who lies outside the signified. The latter is indeterminate and cannot be manipulated as the former is. This same process happens within Alyson Escalante's writings on radical negativity. Alyson Escalante was once a stream-enterer of nihilism, before abandoning her prior leanings in favor of Marxism. For early Escalante though, the radical loss of self is something to be feared.

> This powerfully captures the predicament that we are in at this moment. While the risk of embracing negativity is high, we know the alternative will destroy us. If we lose ourselves in the process, we have merely suffered the same fate we would have otherwise. Thus it is with reckless abandon that we refuse to postulate about what a future might hold, and what we might be within that future. A rejection of meaning, a rejection of known possibility, a rejection of being itself. Nihilism. That is our stance and method.

She writes that in the demand for a stable identity, the program of gender nihilism says "no." Escalante's nihilism (or ex-nihilism) simply does not go far enough. The radical loss of being is desirable (and for Lacan, too, desire is intimately linked with lack.) One should fear not radical loss because by clearing the Self of its Being, one transcends it. Direct, unmediated experience of the nothing at the center of all existence is traumatic: it ruptures the symbolic order.

Escalante states,

> While the risk of embracing negativity is high, we know the alternative will destroy us. If we lose ourselves in the process, we have merely suffered the same fate we would have otherwise.

nihilism because a "true" nihilism is literally no-thing. Any conception of nihilism will thus be incomplete. In classical Aristotlean logic and the logics which follow from it, the negation of the negation is affirmative and speaks positively of the object of the former negation. From Damascius's negation, however, follows a divine silence, in which nothing positive or negative is even uttered. This divine silence allows the Godhead (monad) to come and dwell within one's self.

Silesius Angelus, 17th century German religious poet, writes:

> In Gott wird nichts erkand, er ist ein Einig Ein. Geh
> auss, so geht Gott ein: Stirb dir – so lebtsu Gott.

Some readers will recognize words and pairs such as *einig ein* from Stirner. In English, this is rendered:

> In god is nothing known – he is a unique One. Go out,
> so God comes in: die, so you live as God.

In simple terms, the Creative Nothing, who's authenticity is marked by the failure of language to reach it, is without differentiation. For Lacan, and for those who follow his school, the in-fant (the prelinguistic stage of human existence) is in complete union with the Real, and one in this stage does not perceive anything as "outside itself." In contemporary psychology, this is referred to as lack of differentiation. Many recall a period in their childhood where they struggled to understand that other "people" possessed a mind and subjectivity. This is a remnant of this period in development. The breastfeeding pair of mother and child is, as the child perceives it, without separation. Once the child acquires language, the child exits the Real and enters the registers of the Imaginary, and then the Symbolic. One is now forever divorced from the Real, which is the unattainable, ineffable transcendent that can never be reached by language. The Real remains, however, where the subject "lies." The subject, properly, is a "lack of being" or in Lacanian jargon, "want-to-be."

For the new generation of anarchist militants, theory is transmuted into tactics and strategy. One begins to think of anarchism as attack in this sense.

Theōría

From the ancient Greek θεωρία (theōría), "contemplation," evolved the English theory, and it derives much of its meaning from this etymon. θεωρία (theōría) also is the root of theater. It derives from theōréō, "I look." Contemplation, thus, can be said to be the observation of mental objects or the observation of mental objects. Note here that θεωρία (theōría) does not denote a body of knowledge as such. Contemplation, in the Christian tradition (particularly Eastern Christianity,) refers to a mystical practice. Dionysius the Areopagite,[^1] writing in 5th or 6th century AD, describes contemplation as being an exercise in which the intelligible is left behind to achieve union with that which lies beyond being and knowing:

> Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge.

Theory in the active sense of contemplation becomes anterior to a sort of silence in the works of Damascius, a late Neoplatonist author. For Damascius, the Absolute or One, which lies at the base of all existence, so wholly transcends everything that it cannot even be properly called "transcendent." That which can be said to be transcendent must necessarily transcend something, and thus the

Absolute cannot be "transcendent" because it holds no relation to things that are ontologically inferior to it. The only proper response to something as Wholly Other as the One would be to remain in indeterminate silence:

> Therefore it should be called neither principle, nor first, nor before all, nor beyond all, much less proclaimed all; it must not be proclaimed, nor conceived, nor conjectured at all.

The Absolute lies beyond all duality and thus, beyond truth and falsehood. Rather, it acts as the principle which makes it possible for things to be true or false, it can be said to be the ἀρχή (arkhḗ) or first principle. Of course, this statement seems paradoxical. And in the understanding that this statement perhaps is paradoxical, one cleaves it of its truth-value and completes what theologians call the negatio negationis, the negation of the negation (Cl. Hegel).

Damascius likely was influenced by the tradition of Skepticism, and employs language native to Skepticism. Within Skepticism, there exists a certain concept of ἐποχή (epokhē), or the "suspension of judgement." Sextus Empiricus, a Pyrrhonic skeptic writing sometime in the several centuries before Damascius, define ἐποχή (epokhē) as a "standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither deny nor affirm anything." One must not confuse this with the via negativa in which all propositions are negated rather it is analogous to a sort of silence of belief, in which ἀταραξία (ataraxia) or "unperturbedness" can be obtained. The Pyrrhonic sage makes no assertion or denials, their (un)knowing rendered free from truth.

Skeptical discourse takes the form of stock arguments meant to bring about a state of ἀπορία (aporía), literally a "puzzle" or "paradox." Discourse was intended not as an end in of itself as the object of philosophy, but rather a practical exercise to induce ἀταραξία (ataraxia) through ἐποχή (epokhē). This practical property is present across the board of ancient Greek philosophy, what Pierre Hadot refers to as "philosophy as a way of life."

Part 2: Negativa

Silence & Mysticism

The so-called "last neoplatonist," Damascius of Syria, developed perhaps the purest distillate of negation: apophasis, silence, that which remains after negatio negationis, negating the negation. Later mystical (and heretical) writers built upon the apophatic logic of the neoplatonists and developed a negative theology in which self-denial allows the Spirit of God to indwell within a human subject, thus liberating them – as Galatians 5:18 states, "Those who are driven or led by the Spirit of God are no longer under the law."

Negation in anarchism, however, tends to take an incomplete form: in the "active" sense embodied by insurrection against power, and in the "passive" sense embodied in anarchy-as-lack-of-authority. The mystic, however, categorically rejects all binaries, and thus the Thing-beyond-language which the mystic seeks appears neither passive nor active.

For the mystical-anarchist, anarchy manifests not as an action or a practice, nor as a theoretical organization of society. It acts as a cleaving off of the ἀρχή (arkhḗ), which leaves an empty void at the heart of the subject, no longer dressed in the stable mask of the Ego which lends itself to symbolic control and domination. For the mystical-anarchist, "complete" anarchy lies beyond the bounds of language, thus it terminates and negates itself and dwells in silence. The hermit, the monk, the tree-sitter who carries the heritage of the ancient ascetic stylites, becomes the site of anarchy, i.e. a negation of the ἀρχή (arkhḗ), and of the negation-of-the-negation of the ἀρχή (arkhḗ).

Nihilism

Nihilism, a mythic sign that calls upon its own destruction, necessarily contains its own self-annihilation. There cannot be "true"