

Total Liberation Review

Julian Langer

January 10, 2020

Contents

Weaknesses	3
Strengths	4
Ending	5

Total Liberation is a book that follows the same ideological framework as that argued in Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal Rights and the Radical Earth Movement and The Politics of Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century. The attempt within all 3 of these books is to articulate a radical theory that is entirely holistic, privileging no enemy or struggle over any other.

The book Total Liberation draws from examples of groups, projects and movements, which all fit what could be called a Total Liberationist ideology, to present a theory and framework for radical action.

It is a book that has gained considerable attention within anarchist and radical environmentalist discourse. Published by Signal Fire and printed by Active Distribution, the book's Anonymous author is unknown to us. The entire thing can be read for free on The Anarchist Library website.

While the philosophy brought in this book includes earth and animal liberation, detailing the activities of ALF, ELF and other similar radical projects; the bulk of the text is on human-centred ideas, like Workerism, and projects that are centred around human liberation, such as the Zapatistas, the ZAD (zone à défendre) and the Exarcheian anarchist activities in Greece. Through analysing the activities of these attempts to resist this culture, the writer makes a solid attempt to interconnect struggles, encouraging unity in thought and radical practice. The conclusion that the writer reaches is that radicals ought to build zones of resistance, similar to that of Rojava, which has emerged out of ecological crisis, militarisation and international terrorism.

I will start by addressing the weaker aspects of the book, before moving to its strengths. My intention for doing so is to emphasise that I am sincerely appreciative of what the book attempts to bring the reader.

Weaknesses

I am somewhat of a luddite – I type this from my laptop, but still retain a disgust for the equipment I use – and was entirely disappointed by the lack of technology-critique within the entirety of the book. Radicals have continually found the repression of will and desire that technology requires to be processes to resist, but this is entirely missed from this work on “total liberation”. Thinkers such as Ellul, Heidegger, Zerzan, Freud and (dare I say) myself have provided descriptions of the totalitarianism of technology, but this book completely ignores this aspect of the authoritarianism this culture has built.

Similarly, for a work on “total liberation”, it was entirely disappointing to find nothing on the liberation of the individual from society. Of course, individualism can be an uncomfortable notion for many, given how liberalism has branded its collectivism as a form of individualism. But individualist praxis has continually been an aspect of anarchist and radical practices. As far as drawing inspiration from history goes, I have found the 19th century individualism of naturist-anarchists beautiful examples of people liberating themselves from this culture.

The main weakness of the book is within the perspective it follows – viewing earth liberation as a revolutionary completion of History, with future planning being where the work lands at the end. This culture, as History, is the continuation of the agricultural revolution, which has included the industrial and technological more recent accelerations, which is the attempted repression of the living, wild earth – something I described in my book Feral Iconoclasm. Anarchy, as non-

domesticated space/wild-life/freedom, is not, as this book claims, a historical force, but is life outside of the attempted interiorised cage of History/civilisation.

This historicism – a form of ideology that is inherently totalitarian – follows with the Marxian-Hegelian ideology the writer flirts with continually throughout the text, of social ecology. Not wanting to go too far into this within this book review, Murray Bookchin's social ecology's concept of dialectical naturalism green-washes an approach that is ultimately authoritarian – while I am not a fan of his liberalism, Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* provides a brilliant description of this.

I would also point out that the writer misunderstands Hakim Bey's T.A.Z., as it is not an ideal he has advocated, but an event that emerges between radicals attempting to resist this culture. They also dislike the idea of temporality – which is basically existence – as they would rather Bey discussed permanently autonomous zones. Of course, no space lasts forever, however much we might wish they did. Thinking ecologically (rather than techno-historically towards a totalised future) means thinking in terms of temporality – I would have hoped the writer would have appreciated this.

Strengths

The first strength of this book that I noticed was it actually provides a solid critique of Marxism, identifying our situation as non-reductive and our enemy as a many-headed hydra. Often radical conversations and ideas, including anarchist ones (who continually critique Marxism), get reduced down to simplistic class-based logic, which ultimately arrive at “we first gotta get the right socialist politician in place” (which in Britain today means getting Corbyn in office). With this, the book presents a solid critique of Workerism – Marxism's core foundation – and appeals for greater plurality.

The main strength of the work is, despite how it flirts with social ecology, the book presents a critique of civilisation that reads really well. With this, earth liberation and animal liberation – as immediatist type activities – aren't excluded/ignored, as they so often are. The human supremacism that rests as an automatic assumption within this culture is usually included within even radical thought. While the writer enframes liberation as a revolutionary process – an idea I disagree with – that they're not privileging humanity and including anti-civilisational ideas within the work is fantastic! They cite towards the end the book *Desertas* a (surprising) inspiration, which is popular amongst nihilist anti-civilisational thought, but avoid being trapped by either hope or hopelessness – taking the courage to be somewhere in-between.

I also thoroughly enjoyed the writer appealing to attempting to explore a liveable anarchy (within the contexts of the machine today). This aspect of the book, which isn't engaged in historicisms and is much closer to the strengths of Bey's thought, is a joy to encounter. Being liveable is something that I would want at the core of any critique and attempt to fight against the suicidal tendencies of this culture.

Ending

To end this review I want to reaffirm my appreciation of what the writer has attempted. There are weaknesses and disappointing aspects of the book. However, it has its more fantastic aspects and is beautiful in many ways!.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Julian Langer
Total Liberation Review
January 10, 2020

<https://ecorevoltblog.wordpress.com/2020/01/10/total-liberation-review/>

theanarchistlibrary.org