

Spiritual Anarchism

Topics for research

Peter Lamborn Wilson

2002

“Cowper came to me and said: ‘O that I were insane always. I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane? I will never rest till I am so. O that in the bosom of God I was hid. You retain health and yet are as mad as any of us all—over us all—mad as a refuge from unbelief—from Bacon, Newton and Locke.’”

—William Blake (1819)

1.

Stone Age Conservative (tribal, roughly egalitarian, proto-shamanic, hunter/gatherer/gardener, gift economy, etc.)

Sumerian city states (4th Millennium): the breakdown of original unstriated human polity; the emergence of separation (see P. Clastres).

Enkidu in Gilgamesh: domestication of the “Wild Man.”

The Good Old Cause & Everlasting Gospel—what Blake called Druidism—in fact has always been the guise of our Stone Age shamanism and “goddess” paganism

Vs.

the 6,000-year Illuminati con-job: state religion.

The emergence of money as the Sexuality of the Dead.

2.

Bronze Age: war god paganism, leading to Iron Age imperial paganism of Rome, the Great Beast of Revelation; against this the early Church appears as a dialectic of resistance, especially in its Essene or Nazirite/Ebionite form, Zealotry, gnosticism, social reform (moneylenders out of Temple, Gospel of the Poor, etc.) and neo-platonic mysticism

vs.

the “Donation of Constantine,” appropriation of Christianity by Rome itself (just as Sumerian priest kings appropriated Neolithic spirituality as the “suppressed content” of the Temple cults).

Christianity, originally a radical-gnostic cult (“Kingdom of heaven within you”) now functions badly as state religion:—severe contradictions, schizo-culture, etc.

3.

But all religion is rooted in basic contradiction: the old Stone Age spiritual content (the Clastrian mythos, so to speak) plastered over with Metal Age ideology of hegemonic separation. (See especially the Enuma Elish or “Babylonian Genesis” where war god Marduk slays Tiamat the Neolithic goddess.) Religion constantly attempts to overcome or rectify this contradiction. But the moneylenders always return to the Temple and rectification is once again shunted off into heresy, apostasy, magical shadows, ritual crime.

Heretical millennial sects talk of restoring the Golden Age; this dream derives from actual memories (stored in myth) of Stone Age rough-egalitarian hunting/gathering/gardening gift-economy and shamano-pagan society.

4.

Spirituality does not equal religion. Spirituality is the imaginal creative (esprit) of the social; religion its inverse of negation, its “spectre” as Blake says: the alienation of that creativity into powers of oppression. However, due to complex paradoxes of dialectics, the kernel of spirituality is often found encased in shells of religion—especially the mystics (e.g. Eckhardt and the Spiritual Franciscans)—and the poison of religion often taints the heresies, especially if they gain real power.

5.

In religious times all talk and practice of non-authoritarianism will be expressed in religious terms—usually as heresy, schism, apostasy, magic, etc.—but sometimes as “reform within the Church” or marginal but permitted forms of excess (monastic communism for example).

Historians of anarchism who trace it from a few Greek Cynics direct to the Enlightenment, with nothing in between, fail to appreciate the realness of mentality every age must experience something of freedom (if only its dream) on pain of losing its humanity. The history of anarchism as consciousness (rather than ideology) lies buried in an archaeology of spiritual resistance. We need to re-read the heretics. (See for example. R. Vaneighem’s work on the heresy of the Free Spirit.)

6.

The Problem of Gnostic Dualism. Extreme forms of spirituality often identify the social world with the natural world—and condemn them both. They reject the “god of creation” as evil and even revile the “soul” as principle of life. Only “spirit” satisfies such extremists. Their body-hatred becomes more exaggerated and severe even than that of the Church (which at least condemns suicide and promises the resurrection of the body).

The problem of dualism haunts anarchism, I think. Proudhon’s hatred of God may have derived from his early reading of Gnostic Dualist literature (while he was typesetting it)—a kind of secular Catharism. Atheist materialism, à la Bakunin, can seem weirdly immaterial sometimes, ridden by its own hobgoblins, categorical imperatives, blind science-worship, machine over human, strange asexuality.

Christian/dualist body-hatred occupies the secret heart of our “environmental crisis”—even as post-Christians we cannot escape the Conquest of Nature motif, which colors nearly all 19th-20th century progressive thinking.

Possible help in overcoming such crypto-Dualism might come from a “pantheistic monist” approach to shamanic and pagan models—what T. McKenna called the Archaic Revival—not a return to the Stone Age but a return of the Stone Age.

7.

Because we're all post-Enlightenment whether we like it or not, "Science" poses for us the problem of teleology (or teleonomics as Henri Bergson called it). We really believe in the Death of God. The spectral aspect of the Enlightenment—what Adorno (?) called "the cruel instrumentality of Reason—flattens permissible consciousness into one big 2-D map. Any manifestation of meaning would threaten the monopoly of "brute accident", "random collision of particles," mechanistic/behaviorist models of consciousness—"Newton's Night".

Hence the contemporary plague of meaninglessness: we all feel its germs lurking behind some thin scrim of hygienic daylight. Collapse of ethics. No thought for seven generations. Stop forest fires by cutting down the forests. "There's no such thing as Society"—Lady Margaret Baroness Thatcher.

8.

The Movement of the Social on the unconscious level constituted in itself a kind of (anti)religion. After all what proof exists for atheist materialism?—just as spooky as God, really—the absence of meaning.

The Communist Party as yet another Holy Roman Empire.

And the philosophical weakness of anarchism surely lies somewhere near the fault line between meaninglessness and ethics. How can there exist a right way to live in an "absurd" universe? Existential commitment? Leap in the dark? But why not simply carve out one's own share, or rather more? What bushspirit say Nay? (See Stirner/Nietzsche.)

Nietzsche of course went mad and signed his last letter "Dionysus and the Crucified One"—a god reborn, but only into speechless abyss. Possibly we need to consider the exigency of a "rough morality"—and perhaps even some sort of meaning—however inexpressible—or even "spiritual".

9.

Now with the collapse of the Social and the triumph of Global Capital we shattered remnants could put on happy faces and say that globalism is just the new internationalism, the final Final Stage of Capital, and that soon the means of production will finally fall ripely into the hands of an enlightened global proletariat. Or—we could gloomily admit that the Totality has engulfed us, that History is dead, that alienation is universal, that the last Enclosures have been carried out, that the logic of technology and money combined ends with the elimination of the human, Virilio's time-space-pollution, the Big Accident. Or—we could go on refusing to accept the dichotomy—go on demanding the impossible. But what is the impossible, if not a kind of spirituality?

If religion and ideology both have betrayed us perhaps we need a new paradigm. But every "new" worldview has ancestors. Post-modernism needn't mean simply sifting through the rubbish of history to construct more "revolutionary" commodities and attitudes. Let's say we want to try to imagine a non-authoritarian Green movement based on Proudhonian anarcho-federalism and kropotkinite mutual aid—basic "plumb line anarchist" stuff—but rooted in some form of spirituality. Where could we look for inspiration? Do we have a "tradition?"

10.

A genealogy of resistance? a "golden chain of transmission" passing on the Stone Age autonomist spirit from age to age?

Since we've mentioned medieval Europe let's start there; unfortunately we'll have to ignore the Classical era, the Orient, etc.—Taoism for example, or Sufism and Shiite Extremism, radical Kabala (Sabbatai Sevi and Jacob Frank), Hinduism (esp. Tantra, or radical syncretists like Kabir, or the Bengali Terrorist Party)—also tribal shamanism and its history from Stone Age to present. Instead we'll stick with Christianity, if only because most of us are brought up to consider it the Enemy par excellence.

Subject for research:

Joachim di Fiori and the Spiritual Franciscans;
 Beghards & Beguines—Brethren of the Free Spirit;
 The Adamites (literal return of Golden Age—went naked “for a sign”);
 Radical wing of Renaissance Hermeticism, esp. Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake for heresy 1600, and the alchemist Paracelsus, who supported the Peasants Revolt 1525 against Luther and the princes;
 The Radical Reformation—neither Catholic nor Protestant. Anabaptists and “Bible Communism”;
 The Spiritualists (Sebastian Franck, Schwenckfeld, Paracelsus) who preached an exoteric Invisible Church with no dogma, sacraments, ministers or authorities;
 The Libertines;
 The Family of Love;
 The Rosicrucians, the idea of “radical tolerance,” influence of Sufi alchemy and Jewish Kabala;
 German mystics—Eckhardt, Tauter, Suso—later Jacob Boehme and the Hermetic Pietists (Jane Leade & the London Philadelphians);
 English Revolution (see Christopher Hill and J.P. Thompson)—Diggers, Ranters, Levellers, Seekers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Muggletonians (Blake’s mother was a Muggletonian), early Quakers, Antinomians; later the Blasphemers’ Chapels;
 Left-wing Freemasonry: John Toland, the Druids and Freethinkers. Paine & Blake as “druids.” Masonic societies behind the French Revolution;
 William Blake—sine qua non;
 The left wing of German and English Romanticism;
 Charles Fourier as Hermetic Socialist;
 American Romantics—Thoreau, Emerson, S. Pearl Andrews, Spiritualism and Radical Reform, the “Religion of Nature” (Native American influence);
 Gustav Landauer, Gh. Scholem, W. Benjamin;
 Surrealism (especially the fascination with Hermeticism) also R. Callois and G. Bataille;
 The return of shamanism (since at least the 18th century);
 Neo-paganism;
 Universalist heresies;
 Psychedelic cults, “entheogenic ceremonialism”; etc.

11.

The Critique of Civilization needs a strong science of its own. Post-Enlightenment science with its “dead matter” crypto-metaphysics needs a Kuhnian revolution. Restitution of meaning. Re-enchantment of the landscape. Not just a Sorelian myth but a real myth. Surrealist Surrealist Surrealist subversion requires potent Earth-centered spirituality, a Gaia Hypothesis that’s more than hypothetical—a spiritual experience. Ecstasy as enstasy. (See Bakhtin)—festival consciousness as magic.

In this context Hermeticism recommends itself because of its rectified neoplatonic view of matter as spirit—the doctrine of Earth as a living being. (Nicholas of Cusa, Pico, Ficino, Cambridge Neoplatonists, etc.) Hermeticism is not a religion but a science of spirit and imagination—empirical, experiential, and experimental. Historically it’s closer to us than shamanism or the oriental ways, culturally familiar (tho also strange, always strange). It’s compatible with Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu mysticism, maybe also with Taoism and Buddhism, certainly with Rosicrucianism and Masonry, and with most of the great heresies.

12.

I don't want to argue for "anarchist spirituality" or "spiritual anarchism" on principle. By their fruits shall ye know them. "Research" here means participation, a willingness to hallucinate and be swept away beyond the Censor of Enlightened Reason, perhaps even into the daemonic. Psychonauts in psychic bathyspheres.

—October 2002

Sidebar

Excerpt from the book *Modern Pagans: An Investigation of Contemporary Pagan Practices*. Eds. V. Vale & John Sulak. Available from RE: Search Publications: (415) 362-1465 www.researchpubs.com

In Western culture, anyone who is too deviant gets locked up, yet many more spiritual cultures honor the mad ones, sometimes as shamans. They're said to have vision and to be able to see other worlds. If they become absolutely damaging and are not participating in the collective reality at all, then sometimes they're sent off to be hermits—but not out of disrespect or invalidation. But in this culture there's no place for mystics or shamans.

The dictionary definition of psychosis is "a sharply altered and different reality." But that's what we go for when we're doing ritual or taking psychedelics: we're altering our reality...When I first entered the Pagan community, I was having some intense mystical experiences that I couldn't tell anybody about, mostly because I had no language or lexicon to describe the things in my head, but I managed to find other outsiders who understood. It took me some time to learn the languages of Paganism, so that I could communicate my experiences to other people. Now, even if the rest of the world thinks I'm crazy, I'm okay with that—because the rest of the world really is insane. I look at global capitalism and transnational corporations and how much of the planet is being destroyed and workers exploited, and I think being crazy or depressed is a healthy reaction to that!

—Joi Wolfwomyn

fifth Estate

Peter Lamborn Wilson
Spiritual Anarchism
Topics for research
2002

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/359-winter-2002-2003/spiritual-anarchism>
Fifth Estate #359, Winter, 2002-2003

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)