

# **Spiritualizing Anarchism, Making Spiritual Practices Anarchistic**

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## **Abstract**

This article not only mentions spiritual anarchism nominally, as do so many previous articles, but tries to define it as precisely as possible. The definition assumes that the self itself can be a source of unjustifiable authority and a limitation to freedom, and that spiritual anarchism is nothing more than being open to that which transegoically transcends our narrow perspective. The article critically revisits previous overviews of spiritual anarchism, and itself proposes to take into account traditions that have been neglected. Finally, the article reverses the approach; that is, it considers how some of our spiritual practices can be made more anarchistic, including meditation, the psychedelic experience and the mystical experience.

Keywords:

anarchism; spiritual anarchism; spirituality; authority; religion; meditation; psychedelic experience; mystical experience

## **1. Introduction**

The paper starts with an overlooked Eastern European anarchist tradition in order to emphasize a point that will be important throughout the paper: that for spiritual anarchism, the individual is not an absolute secure basis from which all else is questionable, but is itself inherently authoritarian, and its narrowness and limitation per se are not worthy of anarchism's claims to freedom. The starting point of spiritual anarchism must therefore be self-liberation, the transformation and self-transcendence of what Darren Allen calls the "mental-emotional ego". This article aims to maintain this focus throughout. It will be suggested that this can be done by relying on transcendence, but also in a secular way. Examples will be given of how not only anarchists can have spiritual thoughts and tendencies, but spiritual authors often also express themselves in a quasi-anarchistic way—there is therefore the possibility of a fruitful dialogue. At the same time, it will be also emphasized that an alternative reading of the past can be liberating, i.e., discovering that certain authors and activists have said things that may be illuminating for spiritual anarchism today. It will be considered, using the examples of Malatesta and Landauer, how flexible the concept of spiritual anarchism might be, especially when contrasted with that of religious anarchism. In the later part of this paper, three authors who have dealt with spiritual anarchism in the most depth and with the greatest claim to completeness will be critically reviewed (Hakim Bey (also known as Peter Lamborn Wilson), Anthony Fiscella, Simon Critchley), and while paying close attention to what they consider affirmable from the past, in a digression, authors will be listed who have been neglected in previous articles on spiritual anarchism. In the concluding part of this article, the focus will not be on the spiritual interpretation of anarchism, but on the contrary, on the inherent anarchist potential in existing spiritual practices (such as meditation, psychedelic experience, mystical experience). This analysis will be consistent with the main argument of the paper, that spirituality is a paradoxical self-transcendence of the self.

## **2. Transcending the Self, Transforming the World**

"Inside there is a world of pain, / outside is only explanation. / the world's your scab,  
the outer stain, / your soul's the fever-inflammation. / Jailed by your heart's own

insurrection, / you're only free when you refrain, / nor build so fine a habitation,  
/ the landlord takes it back again."

(Attila József: *Consciousness*; transl. Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner)

This motto serves to focus the attention of anarchist theory not on some external institution, but on self itself. It is from the Hungarian proletarian poet Attila József, who was a pronounced anarchist at an important time in his life and a member of the Union Anarchiste-Communiste while in Paris, and he also moved in anarchist circles in Vienna (see [1]). As well as being anti-state and anti-capitalist, his anarchism had a strong spiritual dimension, inspired primarily by the Christian Gnostic anarchist teachings of Eugen Heinrich Schmitt (Schmitt Jenő Henrik), centered on the Rebel Christ and the anarchistic spirituality of love.

The quote is very instructive because it has a message that does not pit the supposedly by itself sovereign and autonomous individual against external domination or authority (as in "everybody is the ruler of their own temple"), but rather asserts that the Master (the "landlord") becomes internal, gradually interiorized. It is also suggested that although the primary source of suffering is external, rebellion must begin with self-liberation; that is, the self is the starting point of the struggle for change. (The line may also remind one of the classic lines of Freud, whose psychoanalysis was well known to Attila József, who himself had been psychoanalyzed: "The ego is not master in its own house").

This means a subtle change in focus. As is well known, anarchism has frequently been very much anti-religious throughout its history, especially in the ideologically aufklärer and scientifically positivist era, obsessed with atheism or anti-theism. In other words, anarchism has often rejected any subordination to what might undermine supposed human sovereignty and self-determination, as, for example, Brian Morris has written: "to worship or revere any being, natural or supernatural, will always be a form of self-subjugation and servitude that will give rise to social domination. As [Bookchin] writes: 'The moment that human beings fall on their knees before anything that is 'higher' than themselves, hierarchy will have made its first triumph over freedom.'" [2].

Spiritual anarchism, by comparison, could have a deeper message that may be even stronger than Attila József's. According to it, the self as an individual is by their very nature prone to subject themselves to unquestioned authorities in the course of their personality development (since they are forced to rely on others in the course of their socialization), to become a prisoner of dogmas (since the habitual representation of certain views can sometimes make it easier to find their way in the world). Furthermore, the self is prone to be conformist to social customs and norms in the name of adaptation, to take on roles and even masks that are alien to them while adjusting to the environment, to develop a super-ego within themselves which stifles their need for freedom, to develop an arbitrary ideal self to which they can become subject, etc. That is, it might be that precisely the self as a quasi-monolithic, compulsively stabilized self-projection (the one held to account by the state administration and capitalist businesses), which, according to many, is to be seen as sovereign at all costs, or, at the other extreme, on the contrary, they see it as a mere victim of determinism, that can become both the stimulator and the limiting wheel-lock of freedom. It is now more than the internalized exterior, such as the State Within, or the Stirnerian individualistic "working forth of me out of the established": these are indicative of authoritarian and dominant tendencies of a type whose dangers are inherent in the development of the self

itself as a mental construct and in the process of the differentiation between the internal and the external.

How could we eliminate self-denial, self-coercion, etc.? How should we govern ourselves by distancing from ourselves? As Jiddu Krishnamurti (who is regarded by some anarchists as a non-authoritarian thinker [3]) puts it: “there is the immensely greater difficulty of rejecting our own inward authority, the authority of our own particular little experiences and accumulated opinions, knowledge, ideas and ideals. You had an experience yesterday which taught you something and what it taught you becomes a new authority—and that authority of yesterday is as destructive as the authority of a thousand years.” [4] (p. 13). Obviously, only a self can achieve this who has transcended their self-limitation, their narrowness—an extended self who surrenders themselves to that which is greater than themselves, namely, an inexhaustible infinity. This means that you are your own enemy (as Rudá Iandê formulates it in his article on spiritual anarchism, “[t]he challenge is much more subtle since the enemy is installed inside of our heads” [5]), but also your own most promising savior, beyond but still somehow within yourself. That is, we cannot ignore the paradoxical nature of the self-transcendence of the self: it is performed by the self, yet it points beyond the self.

It is worth briefly mentioning that it is not only spiritual anarchists who are paying attention to these problems and challenges, but also spiritual authors themselves, even those who otherwise have no connection with anarchist movements or other elements of anarchist thought. For example, Eckhart Tolle, considered the most popular spiritual author in the United States, talks about the need to free oneself from the mind, and claims in his cult book *The Power of Now* to show the reader “how to free yourself from enslavement to the mind” [6] (p. 8). Let me note at this point that the references to slavery are part of the long tradition of anarchism (and libertarian communism); they refer to the ancient ideal of liberty as non-domination, and they have an explicitly important role in the republican tradition of anarchism [7,8]. This kind of discourse is in fact an inversion of what we are used to in the “classical”, dominantly aufklärer-materialist-atheist discourse, as Emma Goldman’s words illustrate: “organized churchism ... has turned religion into a nightmare that oppresses the human soul and holds the mind in bondage” [9] (p. 7). Another motif appears in the school of Gurdjieff, the first truly independent spiritual teacher of the modern West: the prison. See, for example: “You are in prison. ... It is necessary to tunnel under a wall. One man can do nothing. ... Furthermore, no one can escape from prison without help of those who have escaped before. ... An organization is necessary. Nothing can be achieved without an organization” [10] (p. 30). Or the same for the many false selves who lack real freedom in the midst of everyday automatism: “Free will is the function of the real I, of him whom we call the Master. He who has a Master has will. He who has not has no will” [11] (p. 146). According to the teachings of this school, the everyday personal self is clearly the prison, and the true spiritual higher self is the embodiment of freedom. The metaphor of prison also appears in contemporary spiritual teachings, such as the hugely popular film *Samadhi*:

“The mind can be likened to a trap for consciousness, a labyrinth or a prison. It is not that you are in prison, you are the prison. ... Your self-structure is made up of many little conditioned sub-programs or bosses. ... The ego is violence; it requires a barrier, a boundary from the other in order to be ... Your divine self has become enslaved, identified with the limited self-structure”

Another example could also illustrate the directions in which the need for spiritual liberation can take certain authors. Henri Corbin, perhaps the most important mediator of Muslim (above all, Shia) mysticism to the West in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, faced these challenges himself. Thomas Cheetham, Corbin's monographer, not coincidentally refers to Corbin's "suspicion of human masters" [13] (99) and his dilemma of "inner Guide versus human Master" [13] (p. 107). "Gurus" may be rendered superfluous by the fact that everyone's path is perfectly unique and individual (as Sufism says, "there are as many paths leading to God as there are sons of Adam" [14] (p. XVII), but also by the fact that an external human "guru" would obscure God's role as guide. But if the individual needs the "guru" like the patient needs the doctor (who Bakunin would have regarded as the authority of the specialist)? One possible way of resolving this challenge is what Corbin writes: "It goes without saying that the form in which each of us receives the master's thought conforms to his 'inner heaven'; that is the very principle of the theophanism of Ibn 'Arabi, who for that reason can only guide each man individually to what he alone is capable of seeing, and not bring him to any collective pre-established dogma" [15] (pp. 75–76). Corbin also sketches the figure of Khidr, who is none other than the teacher who mediates as an invisible guide, and contrasts this with authority. According to him, everyone has to make an existential decision in this regard, which "announces either that each human being is oriented toward a quest for his personal invisible guide, or that he entrusts himself to the collective, magisterial authority as the intermediary between himself and Revelation" [15] (p.33). In the same work, Corbin speaks of how "the spiritually inaugurated by Khidr is free from the servitude of the literal religion" [15] (pp. 105/55).

Perhaps needless to say, since many traditions claim the soteriological goal of self-liberation, it logically follows that the as-yet unfree state is described as an extreme limitation, a deficiency. However, as far as the possible answers and solutions offered are concerned, these considerations would raise critical questions in any anarchist who is truly sensitive to the problem of unquestioned authority, domination, and commandment about the exact status of God as a guide, the invisible angelic mediator or the external teacher who is suited to the "inner heaven". What is certain from these brief examples is that the issues of domination and authority are not necessarily unknown to non-anarchist spiritual authors themselves. In fact, a certain quasi-anarchistic discourse is a common *façon de parler* in spiritual circles and teachings, and for deep reasons. And this could be the starting point for a common dialogue.

At this point, once the dialogue between spirituality and anarchism has been brought closer, let us return to the definition of what spiritual anarchism is. In his essay *Anarchism and the World*, Darren Allen, after listing the six "dominants" (the (autocratic) monarchy, the (socialist–democratic) state, the (totalitarian–capitalist) corporation, the (mass) majority, the (professional–religious) institution and the (technocratic) system) that must be gotten rid of in order to create an anarchist society, adds a seventh: the (mental–emotional) ego [16]. As I wrote earlier, the ego, by its characteristics and development, can function as a source of dominance and unquestioned authority, above all for the ego itself. Spiritual writers sometimes speak of the enslavement by the mind, as we saw with Tolle, or the closure of the "skin-encapsulated ego" (Alan Watts). Here, it might be that our consciousness is often a prisoner of the mind's automatisms, prejudices and dogmas. Furthermore, it might be that they cannot develop their deeper and more authentic autonomy because of accidental attachments and cravings (or unquestioned aversions), that they are clinging to elements of the objectual–phenomenal world, that they are at the mercy of passions, that their binding to the world is full of testimonies of their vulnerabilities, etc. Or, from

another point of view, that they can repress desires for allegedly higher “self-interest”, or become a suppressor of the emotional–creative side of consciousness for the sake of instrumental–calculative rationality. From a spiritual anarchist perspective, we might already be shackled by the fact that, confined within our psycho-physical coordinates, we cannot open ourselves to the conscious infinite, whether immanently conceived or in a transcendent way. In the former case, the infinite is not a mere private extension of our familiar interior, and in the latter case, it is not an alien exterior necessarily separated from us. Spiritual traditions all have different ways of framing the question of transcending the ego and different answers. Sometimes they speak of becoming nobody and self-abandonment in a nemo-centric way, hoping for the total extinction of the ego, sometimes of the sanctification or divinization of (wo)man; that is, raising them to Godhood. Sometimes spiritual traditions aim at the non-dualistic dissolution of the distinction between self and not-self, subject and object. In certain case-transpersonal spheres is the goal in which the ego’s self-transcendence is realized, but at the same time, the earlier phases of the ego’s development are integrated; in other words, there is a kind of dialogical partnership between the self and the so-called Higher Self... To sum up, from this point of view, the ego is a limitation to the freedom of the infinity of consciousness, a narrow perspective, a control mechanism limited by “self-interest”, an imposition of mental schemas, finitude. It may not be necessary to destroy it, but it must be transcended anyway so that we no longer imprison ourselves.

This part of my article serves precisely to free us from an automatism, a naïve dichotomy: to believe that spiritual anarchism consists of merely confronting dominant and authoritarian institutions with something simply and purely sovereign and autonomous, above all with ourselves. The meaning of “spiritual anarchism” is not at all self-evident, and this article should contribute to further exploration of its potential. One of the greatest potentials of spiritual anarchism is to go even deeper than this, not only to challenge the dominant and authoritarian traits within us, but to challenge ourselves, our very being. Defining spirituality is notoriously challenging (e.g., [17]). In this context, it can be defined as an experience that undoubtedly has a subjective dimension and can enable personal growth and transformation, yet its distinctive feature is precisely that it transcends our psycho-physical limitations in a transpersonal–transegoic way. The change serves to no longer view the world through a narrow keyhole, not bound by the constraints of “somebody-training” (Ram Dass) and the limitations of somebodiness. That is, it is intended to shift our attention to a conceptual third-person perspective beyond the merely pre-conceptual first- and second-person perspective, to a fourth-person perspective vision logic, and to the additional fifth-, sixth- and ... nth-person perspectives [18] (pp. 46–51). In other words, in “becoming the world”, the register extends by far beyond the particularity of the narrow self, creating a potentially planetary community of self-transcenders. There is something about the nominally private perspective that is actually deeply aperspectival. As Miri Albahari writes, it is as if someone has been raised in a windowless room from childhood, and once they finally leave the room, they will never again identify reality with the rectangular confined space, that is, as intrinsically square-shaped [19] (p. 31). Perhaps, finally, through the universal perspective, they see themselves as an integral part of the whole universe, not wishing to conquer, subjugate, exploit, or dominate any other part of it. Meanwhile, infinity is incomparably greater than the mere sum of its partial perspectives. All necessary changes having been made, historically, this is not far removed from Proudhon, who wrote different things about the God hypothesis in System of Economic Contradictions, but also, among other things, that “God is nothing more than collective instinct or universal reason” [20] (p. 5).

In the “culture of narcissism” (Christopher Lasch) and ego-fixation, this transformation is in itself subversive since it is iconoclastic, self-deconditioning and self-deconstruction, and also as the creative reconditioning of basic patterns. For some spiritual people, it is very important that the entity opening up through the new perspectives is a transcendent Other and sacral in nature, while others, for example, perhaps within a secular spiritual perspective, would describe it as an internally, immanently opening dimension. These two perspectives are not as far apart as they seem. What the two positions have in common is that spirituality is directed towards something greater than our personal ego, that is, self-transcendence. On the other hand, what makes certain types of spirituality anarchistic is their conscious attention to freedom, illegitimate authority, injustice and inequality, dominance, unjustified hierarchy and commodification. And surrendering egoistic self-direction is obviously an integral part of solidarity and mutuality, and it can also easily pave the way for property-lessness. As Critchley writes, in the context of mystical anarchism, in a Lacanian manner: “to love is to give what one does not have and to receive that over which one has no power” [21] (p. 304); [22] (p. 153). Finally, let us add that spirituality conceived in this way, by its very nature, has a special relationship with authority. As Steven Lukes says, authoritarian relations can only be thematized perspectivistically, either from the perspective of actor A, who has authority, or from the perspective of actor B, who is subject to actor B’s authority [23] (pp. 203–204). Spiritual anarchism does not simply focus attention on the specific situation of actor B, but seeks third- and n-th-person perspectives that are beyond the limitations of both actors. The alternative to the illegitimate authority of actor A is not the authority of actor B, but openness, the complementarity and cohesion of perspectives, possibly their merger. As Mary Wollstonecraft [24] observed, asymmetrical power relations corrupt both parties, so something new is needed. Yes, the self can certainly internalize the state, but the state can also be seen, conversely, as an externalization of the limited self. Openness means not only flexibility towards the perspectives of others, but also the creation of new, broader perspectives. These aspects, according to which an explicitly non-individualist interpretation of spiritual anarchism is possible, may be crucial because, especially since Murray Bookchin’s *Mystical and Irrationalist Anarchism*, there has been a one-sided tendency to see “mystical anarchy” as necessarily opposed to social anarchism [25] [p. 29].

The aim is to surpass rigid boundaries, narrow perspectives, artificial divisions, limiting contexts—towards “the most complete community” [26] (p. 101), in which me and you, mine and yours, my community and your community, man and nature, humanity and cosmos, the inner and the outer are not so separated as to be unaware of what they have in common. From this point of view, “inward colonization” might show that “our most individual is our ever most common” [26] (p. 105). As Franziska Hoppen writes in relation to the spiritual anarchist Gustav Landauer, whom I quoted in the previous sentences: “An anarchist is someone who ... becomes a nobody in the terms of society, moving beyond all names, race, colour, country or nation and who yet becomes a somebody in the highest, spiritual sense of the term by reconnecting to true community. The specific quality of the anarchist’s ‘world-I’ is that it has no quality” [27] (p. 214). When all labels are dropped, the self is not robotically interested in its own motives or attached to a particular viewpoint anymore. It could mean stepping outside of ourselves, that is, experiencing ecstasy both in its etymological and spiritual sense. Or, from another perspective, it could serve as delving into the depth of our own inner endlessness, that is, ultimately, knowing better and more creatively what it is to belong authentically together, beyond hegemonic separation and division, i.e., not closed in on ourselves, to contemplate,



to act, to rejoice and to love in the “alliance of plenty” (Landauer). (Self-)transformation and (self-)transcendence can help to be truly present with others, to truly share the experience with them, rather than to be absent in the relationship. Landauer himself speaks of the rejection of the self, of the anarchist mystics’ need to kill themselves. While there are various moments of ego-dissolution (for example, in deep meditation, ecstatic love or psychedelic experience) when the ego as a personal self-system disappears for a time, I am closer to Ken Wilber’s integral theory, which holds that spiritual development requires that we patiently process our shadows and that one can be transpersonal if one is already fulfilled in some way as a person. So, I would prefer to talk about transcending the self. The emphasis is thus shifted from (self-)destruction to integration and creation.

### 3. Exploring the Past in Order to Change the Future

“By anarchist spirit I mean that deeply human sentiment, which aims at the good of all, freedom and justice for all, solidarity and love among the people; which is not an exclusive characteristic only of self-declared anarchists, but inspires all people who have a generous heart and an open mind.”

(Errico Malatesta: *New Humanity*)

“Where there is no spirit and no inner compulsion, there is external force, regimentation, the state. Where spirit is, there is society. Where unspirit is, there is the state. The state is the surrogate for spirit”.

(Gustav Landauer: *Call to Socialism*)

Spiritual anarchism can undoubtedly be liberating if it explores its own undiscovered past, its own “secret history”, resisting the mechanisms of *damnatio memoriae*. By demonstrating that the past is different from the dominant interpretations imposed on it, the paths of the future can be also stretched. The two mottos at the beginning of this sub-section also testify to the challenge this can be. After all, while both Malatesta and Landauer speak of spirit, there is a difference in the semantics and connotations of the word. For whereas in Landauer’s mystical anarchism, which was greatly influenced by the medieval German mystic and philosopher Meister Eckhart, spirit explicitly means an appeal to God as ground (*Grund*), Malatesta was in fact nuancedly anti-religious and an atheist. Both of them must have been influenced also by Bakunin’s Hegelianism, and in Hegel, the spirit (*Geist*) refers to the dialectic of the finite and the infinite, which is fulfilled in the absolute, and—especially in Hegel’s philosophy of religion, but also elsewhere—is endowed with explicit Christian theological meanings. So, after all, do Malatesta and Landauer mean the same thing when they talk about spirit? Malatesta is talking about what is “good for all” according to the universal all-inclusive perspective, and he is also talking about “open mind”, i.e., transcending our narrow perspectives, and “deep human sentiment”, i.e., which is an inner dimension compared to the surface, yet in principle a given for all. For all these reasons, Malatesta might be considered a secular spiritual anarchist so to say, especially when we add how deep his teaching on love is, as demonstrated by Zoe Baker [28].

This example illustrates how sensitive and nuanced one must be if one wishes to outline the past of spiritual anarchism. The challenge is not small, since spiritual anarchism is conceptually

very difficult to separate from religious anarchism. Spiritual anarchists may also draw heavily on religious traditions, just as the oeuvre of authors and activists who can be considered religious anarchists (such as Leo Tolstoy, Martin Buber, Dorothy Day, Jacques Ellul, the anti-authoritarian Ivan Illich or Reiner Schürmann) may overlap substantially with what I have said about spiritual anarchism. In fact, it is often a matter of nuance: spiritual anarchists are more skeptical about the institutions of organized religion (as in “spiritual but not religious”) and some of them are able to think about spirituality in a completely secular way and without any reference to transcendence, but this is at most a tendency. Fortunately, there are nowadays many overviews of religious anarchism available, so I need not elaborate here (for a summary of religious anarchism in general, see [29]; for the most comprehensive Christian anarchism, see [30]). I would just add that I agree with Ruth Kinna and Matthew Wilson that religious anarchism is also still “under-researched” [31] (p. 348), but it is also worth pointing out that research on individual traditions, Muslim anarchism, Daoist anarchism, Vedic anarchism, Jewish anarchism, antinomian movements, etc., is getting richer every year. Spiritual anarchism should be in dialogue with these traditions, while at the same time preserving its own unique message. In sum, proponents of the name “spiritual anarchism” have to fight for legitimacy for their particular perspective. The best conceptual strategy to do this seems to be to place the emphasis on the self-transcendence of the self, either completely independently of religious traditions or in dialogue with them, depending on the orientation.

Undoubtedly the greatest systematic, but still sketchy contribution to the concept of spiritual anarchism can be considered to be Hakim Bey, also known as Peter Lamborn Wilson, who in *Spiritual Anarchism: Topics for Research* [32] has attempted to review what are the legacies of the past that contemporary spiritual anarchism should look back on, refer to and reconsider. The text refers to many past movements or actors which could also easily be included in a summary of the history of religious anarchism, but there are possible exceptions and shifts of emphasis: heretics, mystics and gnostics are highlighted, as well as frequent references to pagan, shamanistic, Freemasonic and magical–occultist–hermeticist traditions. This includes his reference to the Earth as a living being. However, Wilson himself makes a sharp distinction between religion and spirituality, seeing religion as a denial and alienation of the imaginal creativity of spirituality, although he acknowledges that spirituality is often discovered within religion, and that in religious times, anarchistic tendencies are expressed almost covertly, in religious terms. It is not always entirely clear how Wilson thinks about God, as it sometimes seems ironic (see, for example, “[a]fter all what proof exists for atheist materialism?—just as spooky as God, really—the absence of meaning” [33]). Sometimes he seems committed to what he calls an “all is one” monism, according to which all-encompassing reality can be seen as both immanent and transcendent [33] (p. 58). Wilson’s attachment to Islamic heterodoxy is also worth mentioning (see [34]). Murray Bookchin, in his book *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*, has classified Wilson’s work as lifestyle anarchism and condemned it for its ties to mysticism, the occult, anarcho-primitivism and irrationalism [29]. However, on the basis of his above-mentioned general paper on spiritual anarchism, it is difficult to agree that Wilson simply represents the opposite of social anarchism, since he claims—in an explicitly anti-religious spirit—that “[t]he Movement of the Social on the unconscious level constituted in itself a kind of (anti-)religion”, and rails against, for example, the “triumph of global capital” [32]. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Wilson does indeed pay little attention to how the message of spiritual anarchism should be put into practice.

In the history of anarchism, the affirmative use of “spirituality” has been rare, but still recurrent, and especially in the past ten years, there has been a significant increase in the number of articles and internet posts on spiritual anarchism. The rest of this article will discuss two more treatments of spiritual anarchism, which are similar to Wilson’s in terms of their systematic claim and in that they have also a message of their own.

Invaluable is Anthony Fiscella’s long article *From Benign Anarchy to Divine Anarchy: A Critical Review of “Spiritual Anarchism”*, which gives a thorough, bird’s-eye view of all the manifestations of spiritual anarchism that he knows, while stating that “no one has thus far studied it”<sup>1</sup> (p. 264), and that in a strict sense, “we currently have no field of or broad conversations about ‘spiritual anarchism’”<sup>2</sup> (p. 265). It is particularly noteworthy that Fiscella, aware that words like “spirituality” have no non-ideological usage, also stresses that as “white people’s word”, it is loaded with Orientalist and colonialist attitudes. Anyway, the virtue of Fiscella’s review is that it denounces the emerging trend of spiritual anarchism as having few non-Western, and even fewer Indigenous, representatives (and equally few women contributors), and he also suggests that Wilson’s spirituality is full of problematic colonialist and orientalist aspects. Accordingly, he seeks to draw attention to the overlooked movements that might be considered spiritual anarchist at least in a certain way (Earth First!, Womanism, MOVE, Auroville, Twelve-Step programs/Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.), indigenous peoples (especially Native Americans) and non-Western contributions (such as Krishnamurti’s or Sri Aurobindo’s). Fiscella also draws attention to Western actors who are directly relevant to spiritual anarchism, yet have not been the focus of attention in this sense (W. E. B. Du Bois, Noam Chomsky, William James). Fiscella’s typology takes into account a number of aspects, such as the fact that about half of the self-proclaimed spiritual anarchists are committed only to activism or organizing work (and, moreover, many do not concern themselves with the practical dimension of their message at all), and that there are also fragmented tendencies, i.e., there are both individualistic and also more communal–collectivist variants. Fiscella’s observations on the evolution of spiritual anarchism are noteworthy. After showing that “spiritual anarchism” appeared in newspaper articles from the 1890s with widely differing meanings, he shows that it was used in a truly affirmative way from the 1910s, and then from the 1930s, thanks to the Catholic Worker movement and Sri Aurobindo, it was ten times more in use than it is today. Fiscella, by the way, suggests from the articles he has studied that two cultures in particular are thought to have been hotbeds of spiritual anarchism: stateless shamanic communities and Black liberation struggles. Fiscella also mentions the possible accusations against spiritual anarchism, apart from the colonialist and orientalist aspects: the accusation that it is too individualistic and impractical, and that it merely reflects current fashions, that is, “the idiocies of consumer society” (I would add that for many anarchists spirituality is simply “farcical, supernatural rubbish, not to mention highly pretentious”, a “very loaded term” [3]). Although at the beginning of his article, Fiscella promises to contribute to the reflection on alternatives within spiritual anarchism, his article in fact has a rather disappointing end. For, he reports that

[i]nitially, “spiritual anarchism” caught my attention because it seemed to often point in directions that interested me (i.e., social and eco-justice work, radically revising dominant language and life-organizing stories, challenging patterns of violence

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<sup>1</sup> (p. 305)

<sup>2</sup> (p. 305)

inwardly and outwardly, building community, etc.). I don't know that we need a single term for all of that.

While I agree that these various phenomena should not be labeled with a single term, I am puzzled to note that Fiscella does not reflect on rich contemporary debates about the meaning of spirituality, and in fact does not even attempt to consider whether it is possible to ascribe a positive meaning to it without being burdened with colonial and orientalist perspectives, while at the same time not being meaningless. The phenomena he mentions have in fact nothing to do specifically with spiritual anarchism and even less with spirituality. In my opinion, the main problem is the lack of a truly spiritual insight into the need for transpersonal self-transcendence.

Before presenting another article on spiritual anarchism, which is systematic and at the same time somewhat original, I would like to contribute to the knowledge of the history of spiritual anarchism. I do so at this point in the text because it is a direct contribution to the almost encyclopedic endeavors of Wilson and Fiscella.

Eugen Heinrich Schmitt (Jenő Henrik Schmitt), the Hungarian anarchist, mentioned at the beginning of my article, is, I think, of particular interest, not only for historical-philological reasons, but also because his ideas could have a fruitful impact on today's debates. The Gnostic Christianity and anti-violence of Schmitt's teachings were both anti-state and anti-capitalist (he edited two journals in Hungarian, titled *Without State* (Állam nélkül) and *Nonviolence* (Erőszaknélküliség)), while at the same time, as an agrarian socialist, he attached great importance to technical progress and large-scale production. His "idealist anarchism" was modeled on the fraternal community of early Christianity, and he wanted to form an international confederation of the "religion of the spirit". Thus, he wrote, among other things, "As man sees his individuality as merely finite, the connection that binds everything together is the secret of his own essence, for he is the consciousness of the universe, for his life is necessarily not a finite life, but the infinite life of the universe, which he does not see, however, because he is still a child and the rough consciousness of his own dignity has not yet awakened, he is not free" [36] (p. 131). This is very much in line with what I wrote about transcending the narrow perspective of the ego in the earlier parts of this article. After describing the spirit as a shared consciousness, a moral consciousness and a life of divine love, he says that the spirit is "a cosmic function, not some separate spiritual entity, but the manifestation of the community of beings" [37] (p. 47). As we can see, Schmitt has all the aspects that can be the defining features of the identity of a clear, self-conscious spiritual anarchism: thinking in terms of the infinity of spirit rather than the enclosure of the ego, the cosmic community that transcends individual perspectives rather than isolation, the close connection between self-liberation and communal liberation. It seems that a clear understanding of this may be precisely what is missing in contemporary discourses. Eastern Europe and Central Europe could be treasure troves in the search for sources of spiritual anarchism.

One could also mention, for example, the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Gross, who, as an early representative in anti-psychiatry and a believer in sexual liberation, was anarchist in his commitment, drawing on Bachofen's proto-feminist and neo-pagan theories and envisioning a return to a pre-civilization, non-hierarchical golden age. Besides, it is a mistake to look at Europe as a whole as if it could only express a hegemonic Western discourse.

It is also worth mentioning the Italian individualist and illegalist anarchist Renzo Novatore, who spoke of the "redemption of material slavery" and that high spiritual wealth should be invulnerable, stressing that, in confronting the existing spiritual impoverishment and the "spiritual

mob of democratic civilization”, a revolution will “communalize material wealth” as it will “individualize spiritual wealth”. According to him, “[b]ourgeois and proletarian, though clashing over questions of class, of power and of the belly, still always remained united in common hatred against the great vagabonds of the spirit, against the solitaries of the idea”, adding that both survivalist fascism and socialism say no to spirituality [38].

In another digression, I would like to add only briefly, because it is relevant to the dialogues of anarchism, that libertarian Marxists/communists can also be inclined to spirituality; see, for example, what Jacques Camatte writes in *This World We Must Leave*:

the revolutionary movement is the revolution of nature, accession to thought, and mastery of being with the possibility of using the prefrontal centers of the brain, which are thought to relate to the imagination. Revolution has a biological and therefore cosmic dimension, considering our universe limited (to the solar system); cosmic also in the meaning of the ancient philosophers and mystics.

It is no coincidence, of course, that many people also associate Camatte with anarcho-primitivism. To be fair, he also tended to see the “fashionable preoccupation with mysticism” as a mere adjunct to Western hyper-rationalism. By the way, in the earlier history of libertarian Marxism/communism, there are also those with whom spiritual anarchism could have a meaningful dialogue, such as Ernst Bloch or Walter Benjamin, who had both Marxist and anarchist ties.

After brief digressions, the next example of a systematic and somewhat original treatment of that which is akin to spiritual anarchism is Simon Critchley’s *Mystical Anarchism* [21,22]. Starting from Carl Schmitt’s thesis that all our contemporary political concepts are secularized theological concepts, he outlines some important stages of mystical anarchism (Critchley himself does not use the term “spiritual anarchism”, but mentions spirituality several times): the millenarisms, the Movement of the Free Spirit, the mysticism of Marguerite Porete, Gustav Landauer and the Situationism of Raoul Vaneigem. While the list of actors and movements covered is not as comprehensive as in the case of Wilson or the articles reviewed by Fiscella, Critchley certainly offers an in-depth reading of some of them. A few points and arguments can be made here. Critchley mentions the examples of “redemptive, cleansing violence”, the Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and the Red Brigades. Aside from the fact that the examples are not from the history of anarchism (and that they are tendentious), Critchley’s article was published in 2009, when he had at his disposal Peter Gelderloos’s seminal 2007 anarchist book *How Nonviolence Protects the State* [40], which argues that nonviolence is ineffective, racist, statist, patriarchal, tactically and strategically inferior and deluded. In fact, Critchley’s dogmatic pacifism offers no relevant arguments against Gelderloos’s ideas. Also problematic is the way Critchley refers to self-deification, in this way: “[d]efending the idea of becoming God might be seen as going a little far” [21] (p. 304), and then, relying on Badiou, who is hostile to the mystical experience in general and also to anarchism, presents self-deification as an obscurantist “discourse of glorification”. This is unworthy of the historically complex, nuanced and careful theological reflections of theosis, sometimes also called *perfectio*, and misses the significance of finding the divine spark (*scintilla animae*) within us, which insight humbly observes that “God is our essence, but we are not God’s essence” (it is no coincidence that at the heart of the tragically deceased Kirsten Brydum’s spiritual anarchism was also the idea of the divine as immanence, which recognizes God

as the self, and that she also claimed that “the Church, the State, and the Workplace function to alienate us from our divinity and from one another’s” [41]). This rigid hostility to self-deification is also curious because Critchley, moreover, speaks a few lines later of “the immortal dimension of the subject” [21] (p. 304), although he claims that the “only testimony” to this is love. Throughout the article, love is given a prominent role, and is even the focus of the “Conclusion—the politics of love” section. It seems that love is treated here in a too individualistic or inter-individualistic way, that Critchley does not take enough account of the communal–social dimensions of love (an excellent contemporary example of a critical discussion of this is Alva Gotby’s *They Call It Love. The Politics of Emotional Life* [42]). Unfortunately, Critchley also falls somewhat prey to ego-death jargon when he writes that love is “the daring that attempts to extend beyond oneself by annihilating oneself” [21] (p. 304). On the contrary, I think that love is truly valuable when it is dialectically both self-transcendence and self-preservation, when we can surrender ourselves to others and to the community, but when we can also remain ourselves. Nevertheless, Critchley’s writings are an important contribution to the tradition of spiritual anarchism.

#### **4. Making Spiritual Practices More Anarchistic**

“Spiritual zombies no longer hear their inner guide.”

(Alice Walker)

“In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque cooperative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not (as at present and still more so in the *Brave New World*) as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them. Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man’s Final End, the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman. And the prevailing philosophy of life would be a kind of Higher Utilitarianism, in which the Greatest Happiness principle would be secondary to the Final End principle—the first question to be asked and answered in every contingency of life being: ‘How will this thought or action contribute to, or interfere with, the achievement, by me and the greatest possible number of other individuals, of man’s Final End?’”

(Aldous Huxley: Foreword to the *Brave New World*, second edition)

The spiritual path is full of difficulties. When people decide to take up the struggle against their spiritual poverty, they are exposed to a number of external and internal dangers (see, for example, [43]). One of the main difficulties of spiritual self-transformation is also one of its most attractive: that one who embarks on this path no longer relies on mere faith but on experience, that is, one may become pragmatically and non-authoritarianly skeptical of pre-established answers. If indeed one is not guided by unconditional respect for authority, one may reject privileged access to anything infinitely greater than the personal ego (whether one speaks of the clerical class or of others). The infinity of consciousness, whether conceived immanently, transcendently or a combination of both, cannot be privatized or monopolized. It is more than mere introspection or exclusive access to an external entity—it is an opening of consciousness, a transcending of perspectives in an otherwise pathologically closed society. One could agree with integral theory

that spiritual experience by its very nature should not remain a keyhole-like isolated experience or a privileged, incommunicable perspective of a single individual: there must be injunction, by virtue of which others can learn how to gain spiritual experience; there must be apprehension, that is, the self-perception of what the injunction has brought us to; communal confirmation, by virtue of which we can check our experience with others who have used the same or similar injunction [44] (p. 273). This triple criterion works against privilege. Accordingly, “the Way” or “the Ways” are in principle accessible to all, direct experience and communal feedback can serve to ensure that spirituality, and, in line with this, spiritual anarchism, is neither one-sidedly individualistic nor stiflingly collectivist.

Of course, there is the classical “metaphysics of the left” (dialectical materialism, reason, logic, science, progress, etc.), which tends to be inherently hostile to any notion of spiritual anarchism. This attitude should not be confronted with diametrically opposed views, but with a holistic approach that accepts the relative validity of non-spiritual aspects and can even enter into dialogue with them, integrating them. For example, there is no doubt that anarchism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should not simply revert to pre-rational aspects of archaic–magical–mythical ages (Jean Gebser’s words and theory are used here, but I do not claim in a progressivist–modernist and Western-centric way that any era or state was necessarily entirely prerational), but can develop a more comprehensive, freer, mature, transrational stance, without ignoring the inspiring aspects of previous eras, and also criticizing the limitations of a unilaterally “mental”–rational stance. In other words, in contrast to a one-sided instrumental rationality which subordinates everything to its own interests (from nature to labor force), which tends to simplify, to think in terms of black and white contraries, to think in terms of exclusive “nothing but...” statements (as in extreme materialism), and to lack intrinsic values, a more dialogical position can be developed. This position might and should reject the various manifestations of domination, both obvious and subtle. This can help to overcome what Wilson described in his article on spiritual anarchism as a “contemporary plague of meaninglessness” [32].

What is more, I think that contemporary spiritual anarchism should be in close dialogue with neuroscience, and should know as much as possible about the bodily-neural correlations of the functioning of consciousness. In this respect, I find Scott Emerson’s article on the anarchistic nature of consciousness itself and how, although the brain may at first appear to be a dictatorship, it is in fact organized in a decentralized way [45], and very promising. Here I note that the contemporary French philosopher who is one of the most enthusiastic promoters of thinking about neuroplasticity, Catherine Malabou, is also one of the most important contemporary continental anarchist thinkers [46,47,48]. Beyond this, of course, spiritual anarchism can point to experiences that have escaped the view of science because of naturalistic hegemony. This does not make it anti-scientific; it merely points out the limitations of certain scientific views and practices. After all, science itself can also become an unquestioned belief, dogma or authority, and therefore, some “epistemological anarchism” (Paul Feyerabend) is needed as a remedy.

Since it is suggested throughout this article that spirituality is primarily a self-transcendence of the ego, that is, an openness to the conscious infinite beyond one’s own perspective, it is only natural that in this context, a special place should be given to those practices and states of mind that can help to achieve this. In this respect, I strongly disagree with Fiscella, who argues that “the most individualistic variants of ‘spiritual anarchism’ tend to emphasize autonomy, personal

issues (drug use, sexuality, asceticism, etc.), magick, and or mind expansion”<sup>3</sup> (p. 262). While I do not agree that the personal/individual and the communal can ever be separated in this non-dialectical way, and have myself stressed that spiritual anarchism must have a deeper doctrine than a naïve message of mere autonomy, I also believe that these practices, whatever the circumstances in which they have taken place, have rarely been exclusively individualistic in nature. It is one thing that sexuality—especially sexuality with a spiritual dimension—is not by its very nature purely individualistic, but Fiscella also ignores the fact that, for instance, psychedelic experience is also very often communal [49]. To give just one example, in Brazil, members of tribes also often consume ayahuasca communally, but the same can be said of communities that consider themselves Christian, such as Santo Daime, Barquinha or the União do Vegetal (paradoxically, Richard Nixon was more aware of the communal power of psychedelics when he began to stigmatize, demonize and persecute them in the shadow of protests against the Vietnam War). Just as many spiritual people throughout history who have engaged in ascetic practices have lived in community, for example, in monasticism, and have been explicitly empowered by their environment. What is more, it is contradictory to call mind expansion individualistic and personal, since it refers precisely to that which is transindividual and transpersonal. To put it briefly, Fiscella’s comment is too one-sided and simplistic.

In a sense, our whole modern life needs an anarchistic re-spiritualization. This already applies to birth itself. In many countries, it now seems natural for women to be taken out of their homes and to give birth to their children under alienated state control, distorting the natural process of childbirth, at the risk of abuse. The event thus lacks the joy of a new life, the deep spiritual meaning of attachment, the peak experience of the consciousness-altering process of childbirth (on this, see, for example, in the context of orgasmic birth: [50]). Something similar applies to the end of life, death. Death is mostly tabooed in our modern societies, and the dying are very often cut off from their homes and loved ones. Although the proliferation of returns from death, of near-death experiences, is largely due to the medicalization of death, in alienated-state contexts, there is little opportunity for a full experience of a farewell to life and death as a self-transcending spiritual experience (for a comprehensive overview, see [51]). Of course, it is also true of birth and death that if it takes place in a for-profit business rather than in a state context, there is little room, besides the focus on the “success” of the process, for the intrinsic spiritual value of the experience. The same can be said for love and sexuality. For example, despite the liberation of love in the West, which began in its entirety in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and its increasingly clear self-worth, it took on more and more distorted forms, either because of over-regulation by the state, or because of the lack of knowledge of love and the flight from it in late capitalism, which is atomized, suffering from social isolation and lack of real attachments, which even led Eva Illouz to speak of “the end of love” [52]. All of this is exacerbated by what is often called the “crisis of the family”, but is a wider catastrophe, rooted in the disappearance of pre-modern communal ties [53]. Unfortunately, the link between pseudo-spirituality and sexuality has many superficial, consumerist manifestations, but if we consider the spirituality of sexuality simply as the surrender of oneself in a self-transcending way to the event of transpersonal union with another, the term might recover its authentic meaning (for a comprehensive discussion of sexuality as an alteration of consciousness and union, see [54]). We could talk about many aspects of our lives in this way that may contribute to the reenchanting of life. There is no doubt that there are many

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<sup>3</sup> (p. 305)



movements and aspirations to counter existing negative tendencies, and we may have a right to be somewhat optimistic.

The illegitimate and alienating state authority, the authority of experts when it cannot be questioned or supervised by the community, the abstract and alienating domination of value (and its self-valorization) in profit-producing economic mechanisms, the contradictions between the spheres of life and work of late capitalism are all obstacles to living a spiritually fulfilled life. Rather than going into all of them, three practices will be analyzed here that are commonly regarded as excellent ways of having a self-transcending spiritual experience: meditation, psychedelic experience and mystical experience. There is an inherent anarchistic potential in all of these experiences, just the practice of people engaged in them can gradually become more and more anarchistic.

#### **4.1. Meditation**

Let us start with meditation in the broader sense, in the sense that it encompasses its environment, its associated practices and teachings. The world's meditation traditions are rich and varied (see, for example, [55]), with cognitive, somatic, therapeutic and conceptual aspects, and it is by no means easy to bring them all together. Nowadays, it generally refers "to practices attempting to bring about a heightened state of attention, clarity, mental quiescence, or a host of related mental states along a complex spectrum culminating in transcendence" [56] (p. 3). The meaning of transcendence should not be misunderstood here, since there are also fully secular versions of meditation (such as the Norwegian Acem or the meditation proposed by the non-authoritarian Krishnamurti). Transcendence here refers above all to self-transcendence, which is at the heart of this article. Although the rapid global spread of meditation (and with it the explosion of interest in mindfulness) raises a number of questions about (post)colonialism and Orientalism, for the moment it seems more important to criticize the ideology of Buddhist modernism and exceptionalism [57], and it is regrettable that the West is in fact shutting itself off from its own meditative and contemplative traditions, and too often looking to sources outside itself that seem exotic (this is somewhat similar to the criticisms of yoga: [58]). One could be in favor of the preservation of the purity of each tradition (of course, looking critically at what is unacceptable according to our current ideals), but with the cross-pollination between meditation legacies and practices and neuroscience. Meditation thus involves the altering of consciousness, but never in its original form as an end in itself, but in the midst of ethical self-cultivation, with the aim of a higher soteriological state, and with an ontological insight into the nature of reality.

To what extent can meditation be anarchistic in any sense? It is no accident that the term self-liberation is often used in the context of meditation. While it may have many communal dimensions, it is ultimately a first-person perspective practice, at least in regard to the starting point, that "frees the mind from external demands and also from internal themes of unfinished business that pressure for planning and problem-solving" [59] (p. IX). Meditation reworks internal and external stimulus information by de-linking sensations and the tendency to respond, thereby increasing the space for freedom of maneuver and creating the possibility of volitional self-regulation. To this extent, there is reason to speak of a transcendence of the usual separate-self sense and a deconstruction of the self, since the observing self or absorbed pure consciousness, developed during meditation, disidentifies from many self-representations, which gradually increases the degree of self-detachment. The state of consciousness thus created gets rid of au-

tomatisms (for example, bare attention or open monitoring can let mental contents be free by letting them come and go), restrains the censorship of the mind, creates relative independence from the contents of awareness, etc. Also important for spiritual anarchism is that meditation can help to dispel the illusion of compactness, i.e., seeing things in their processuality and broader context, in their fragility and transience, deconstructs the stability of existing entities, and this might also be relevant for seemingly compact institutions and mechanisms of domination and authority. In sum, there are strong reasons to agree with Jack Engler's and Daniel Brown's findings [60] that in some ways, meditation strengthens the ego (as it becomes more organized, pays attention easier, more easily exerts voluntary control over impulses and behavior, etc.), but at the same time, through self-transcendence, it evokes a state of consciousness that views the ego from a more integrated, broader and deeper perspective. Finally, it should be added that, through deconditioning and reconditioning, meditation replaces the usual automatic and unquestioned interpretations with a more thorough reality testing—and this too can be an extension of, or a precondition for, anarchistic practices and critical thinking, but also cultivating compassion.

The spread of meditation and mindfulness has recently come in for a lot of criticism, which can be summarized as McM mindfulness. According to this criticism, mindfulness-based stress reduction in particular is too much integrated into the system of individualistic and de-politicized self-technologies offered by late capitalism, and has essentially become a consumerist, commodified choice. Further accusations are that meditation does not help to change the world, but conformistically leaves it as it is, and furthermore, it is linked to practices that are ethically highly problematic, in addition to the fact that Western practitioners divorce meditation from its ethical framework, contrary to important traditions. However, it depends on the context and the intentions of the practitioner as to what the inherent self-liberating potentials of meditation are used for, and these objections do not affect the very essence of meditation. Fortunately, there are now writings available that answer these objections in detail [61], deconstruct the myth of McM mindfulness [62] and outline critical, socially aware and engaged forms of mindfulness [63]. It is worth quoting here Michael W. Taft's *The Anarchist's Guide to Mindfulness*:

“In a world that is constantly vying for your attention, becoming selective with that attention is an act of rebellion. ... To sit, to really sit, is an act of rebellion. It requires you tune out the stimuli demanding your attention. It requires you upend the traditional values of modern western culture and stop. It requires you submit your desires to an intention. It is the opposite of what they want and it flies in the face of all of the ways they've conditioned you. ... It provides both individuation and communion. It's also one of the most radical things you can do”.

[64]

Rather than reviewing these debates, let us focus on a topic of particular relevance to spiritual anarchism and inherent to the practice of meditation.

It is about the relationship between the teacher who teaches meditation, who transmits its traditions, and the disciple. It is well known how much abuse there is of teachers teaching meditation, sexual abuse, financial abuse, abuse of power, etc. Fortunately, we have a publication, Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad's *Guru Papers. Masks of Authoritarian Power*, which systematically reviews the problems [65]. For spiritual anarchism, the question here is whether this relationship

is inherently unacceptable, or whether it is possible to have a practice that refutes the possible objections of anarchists.

Anarchists have always been cautious and careful about different forms of authority. For example, in the Anarchist FAQ written by Iain McKay and others, in their article *Why are anarchists against authority and hierarchy?* [2], they argue, drawing on Bakunin, Erich Fromm and others, that authority has two meanings, one rational and the other irrational. The former is based on the abilities of competence, i.e., socially acknowledged expertise and performance; helps the person who relies on it and they are supposed to accept the authority of their own free will; authority is subject to constant scrutiny and criticism; it is in principle temporary. The latter, on the other hand, often institutionalized, is based on power, on a hierarchy of rather asymmetrical inequality; it is usually fixed; and it exercises dominance over or outright exploits the subject subjected to it. Perhaps needless to say, from this point of view, many “gurus” or teachers should be unacceptable to a spiritual anarchist, since many of them have merely a fixed position in an institutional hierarchy, sometimes not freely chosen by the individuals, the aura or mere spectacle around the teacher is often the deciding factor, rather than actual competence. Furthermore, the teacher’s teaching is often not questioned in any way and their status is generally not revocable, and it is common to exploit rather than help students. But is it possible to imagine a teacher–disciple relationship that would be acceptable from the viewpoint of spiritual anarchism?

On this point, one can draw on John Welwood’s *On Spiritual Authority* [66] to argue that spiritual anarchism can conceive of an alternative model. Welwood himself, almost anarchistically but certainly questioning illegitimate authority, distinguishes between a bondage-creating spiritual teacher and one who promotes liberation. He argues that the connection with the liberating teacher is interrelational, characterized by mutual influence, a kind of partnership. Such a teacher is responsive, but does not impose herself or himself on anyone. The disciple expects to recognize something in the teacher that they could learn from them, at a stage when the learners are not yet able to find their inner master—and in this sense is drawn to someone who has done the work and can thus be of help. Instead of a preprogrammed agenda, the right teacher flexibly follows the progress and wellbeing of the learner, a kind of mutual adjustment takes place, reinforced by a system of mutual and continuous feedback—the learner is not subject to the one-sided instructions of the teacher. In fact, it is a dialectical process whereby the teacher’s authority serves to enable the disciple, through self-transcendence, to naturally recognize the authentic authority inherent within them. As Welwood puts it, in the name of the master:

“Granting me this authority can be a step toward recognizing their own authority—that they are indeed the authors of their own experience, rather than passive victims of circumstance. In a parallel, though far more profound way, a genuine spiritual master’s presence may serve as a mirror that reflects back to students qualities of their awakened being: openness, generosity, discernment, humor, gentleness, acceptance, compassion, straightforwardness, strength, and courage”.

[66]

Welwood further reinforces the aforementioned binarity by distinguishing between mindful surrender and mindless submission, stressing that the former, unlike the latter, is an opening to a deeper dimension of truth, that true surrender is not enslavement, not giving oneself up for the sake of an idealized or blindly revered other for the sake of some gain, not a regressive

retreat from maturity. The liberating teachers are happy to reveal their resources and their own experiences, even to talk honestly about their own weaknesses and failures. They do not ascribe privileged status to others or to initiated disciples, insofar as they consider the teaching in principle accessible to all, and do not promote herd behavior within the group. Such a teacher–disciple relationship does not hermetically seal their relationship, but rather transcends the two of them and is defined by an openness to the common being in both of them, transcending keyhole perspectives and egocentricity. As Welwood writes:

Surrender does not have a finite object; one does not give oneself to something limited and bounded. If one does, then it is most likely submission—to the teacher’s personality, or the ‘Cause.’ ... The authentic teacher-student relationship leads beyond narcissism by showing students how to devote themselves to a greater power that lies within, yet beyond themselves. ... Genuine teachers encourage self-respect as the basis for self-transcendence.

[66]

At this point, it is worth mentioning an example of parodic–ironic treatment of spiritual teachers that is clearly non-authoritarian in nature, but which in fact also manifests an authentic spiritual teaching. The example is Vikram Gandhi’s 2011 documentary *Kumaré*, in which Gandhi plays the role of a fictional guru, “Sri Kumaré”, and uses arbitrarily invented practices and teachings to gain a number of disciples in Arizona. The movie illustrates how easily uncritical people can fall prey to spiritual impostors and the authoritarian atmosphere that surrounds them. The movie also ridicules the way in which people, with their Orientalist leanings, accept baseless “exotic” lessons, postures or other aspects without further ado. At the same time, it can be suggested that the film also contains an authentic spiritual teaching. In fact, Kumaré actually teaches to the disciples at certain moments what Gandhi’s real message is; for example, he writes on the blackboard “Self = ideal self”, repeating that “you have to find Kumaré within yourself” and “everyone is a great guru, everyone has an inner teacher” (complemented by the teaching that “external guru is an illusion”). Sri Kumaré’s or Vikram Gandhi’s teaching is fulfilled by the end of the movie—after he reveals himself to the disciples, i.e., he now shaves his head and admits without posturing that Kumaré was a fictitious, false guru, a large number of the disciples remain faithful to him, accepting the teaching that everyone must rely first and foremost on themselves, the inner teacher. The part where, still as Kumaré, he asks the disciples to change roles, pretending to be the guru while giving advice to Kumaré as themselves, is symptomatic. In the process of self-transformation, Kumaré is in fact facilitating the development of the observing self, a higher and more open third perspective through self-transcendence. In the process, Kumaré ends up playing the role of a mere mirror. The whole movie thus embodies a paradox: Kumaré tries to prove to people that they do not need a guru as an external authority, but he does so largely through the use of classical spiritual techniques, i.e., the discovery of inner depth; truth and freedom are in this case also realized dialectically, that is, with external help. The film is a spectacular critique of illegitimate spiritual authority and, at the same time, in fact, a praise of the teacher–disciple relationship based on help and partnership. Something similar goes on in Shiv Sengupta’s *Advaitaholics Anonymous: Sobering Insights for Spiritual Addicts* [67], which is first of all addressed to those who are disappointed in spirituality, those who have escaped from themselves or their environment through spiritual bypassing, spiritual addiction. While it

is debatable when Sengupta seeks to keep spirituality purely personal, individual (he himself has already sought to promote his insights through blog posts), it is remarkable that, in opposing illegitimate authority and hierarchy, he also ends up offering a teaching that is very close to Krishnamurti's, albeit with more self-irony.

## 4.2. Psychedelics

Ever since humanity has had psychedelic experiences, what it experiences has generally been ascribed a deep spiritual significance. The persecution of psychedelics by Western societies has taken place on several scales, first with repression of the Eleusian mysteries—some speculate that witch-hunts had a similar dimension—and finally, with the colonization of the Americas, as the globally most rich psychedelic cultures were bloodily persecuted. Before the stigmatization, demonization and criminalization of psychedelic use began in the Nixonian era, i.e., the 1970s, there was an aspect of the Western rediscovery of drugs that could be considered spiritual (and/or religious). For example, Aldous Huxley in *Doors of Perception* likened the experience of mescaline to a mystical experience of Being [68], and many works such as Huston Smith's *Can Drugs Have Religious Import?* have addressed the issue [69]. Timothy Leary, one of the strongest Western advocates of psychedelics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has even written a long essay entitled *Start Your Own Religion* [70]. The psychedelic renaissance that is now taking place is closely intertwined with other spiritual trends. It is no coincidence that Lamborn Wilson has dealt with ayahuasca on several occasions [71,72].

From the point of view of spiritual anarchism, the absurdity of state restriction and illegitimate authority is fatal, since it is an experience that, with a responsible attitude, and with due regard for the set and setting, psychedelics can be an innocent part of recreational activity, or can even become the source of psychological development and spiritual self-liberation. It might be argued that spiritual anarchism must be critical of the three options suggested as “emancipatory”: mere decriminalization certainly does not solve the problem of psychedelic experience being marginalized as a “suspect activity”, *laissez-faire* liberalization raises serious questions of responsibility and legalization is problematic because of the state's arbitrariness and narrow vision. This is why I think that spiritual anarchism should consider a fourth option, the regulation of psychedelics within self-organizing communities where there is a wealth of accumulated experience, where authority is plural and questionable in principle, and where the sharing of knowledge does not lead to the domination or the proliferation of privileges for anyone. Such is the case of the “Daath Hungarian Psychedelic Community”, which it is no exaggeration to say operates in an anarchistic manner, since it is independent of the state and capitalist mechanisms, has no leader, only a coordinator, and above all—to use the Marxian expression favored by libertarian–autonomist Italian communists—it is governed by the wisdom of the general intellect [73].

As communities have put pressure on the state, and the stigma and repression against psychedelics have been reduced using the Trojan horse of psychedelic therapy and the growing body of scientific research, a new serious problem has emerged: the instrumentalization of the psychedelic experience by major pharmaceutical companies. In addition to the subordination to the mechanisms of capital and profitability, it is particularly important that the spiritual dimension of experience is eclipsed and can be dissolved into self-help practices, even the conformity to the system, of the self-managing neoliberal subject. Fortunately, the place of

the psychedelic experience within late capitalism is increasingly subject to critical discourse, and further important questions are being raised about inclusion, diversity, equity, cultural appropriation, gender and natural sustainability (see, for example, the book entitled *Psychedelic Justice* [74]).

Why could the psychedelic experience be so important for spiritual anarchism? Precisely because it can help self-transcendence. Psychedelics facilitate the mechanisms of neuroplasticity at the molecular level, allowing neurobiological modulation of Default Mode and Salience networks. This means that they contribute to the loosening of rigidly entrenched neural pathways and the reconditioning of self-modeling, which may also lead to a rethinking of social norms and rules. This is why it is so often suggested that unbinding the self-model may also have system-critical consequences. Transient network disintegration and resetting beliefs, the re-wiring of elementary subjective mechanisms, can also occur in a way that leads to total ego-dissolution, and also in a way that the ordinary sense of self is significantly altered and becomes embedded in something larger, such as the surrounding nature or an infinite consciousness, in the sense of self-transcendence.

Meanwhile, the worldview on psychedelics can take different directions. On the one hand, those who have such experiences may radically question the scientifically dominant naturalism, for example, in terms of a kind of transcendental idealism or monism [75], or, for example, psychedelic experiences in indigenous contexts may be influenced by worldviews that have been the focus of increasing scientific attention since the ontological turn in anthropology. In this respect, an intriguing question arises concerning spiritual anarchism. On the one hand, epistemic authority can be attributed to the psychedelic experience in general (on this, see [76]), and, on the other hand, authority can also be attributed to the beings that often appear in psychedelic experience (from Mother Ayahuasca to Mother Earth to the personified Mushroom). What is certain is that experiencers experience the agency of psychedelic plants, which is usually not propositional but rather exemplary; for example, it works by paradigmatic scenes or by the demonstration of knowledge by acquaintance and teaching know-how. Regardless of how one understands this phenomenon (as a projection of the experiencer's unconscious or whether one indeed accepts the autonomous agency of beings), for spiritual anarchism, this authority can hardly be unquestioned and rather desirable in a kind of relation marked by a kind of partnership. In addition, the psychedelic experience may also be understood from the perspective of a naturalized, secular spirituality (a good example is the model offered by Chris Letheby [77] (pp. 196–205)). It is important to note that although the psychedelic experience has inherent anarchistic potential, it does not necessarily follow that psychedelic communities are necessarily anarchistic or anarchist. Alan Piper's research has clearly shown that the psychedelic experience can be instrumentalized by fascist and far-right communities [78]. In short, it is true here too, as in the case of meditation, that the psychedelic experience is not independent of the surrounding socio-ethical community, the set and setting, the psycho-spiritual dimensions of the relationship to it. An excellent positive example of how a psychedelic experiencer can become open to anarchism is Terence McKenna, who is widely regarded as the "psychedelic guru of the 90s" and who has expounded that psychedelic use could pave the way for the withering away of the state and anarchy [79], also mentioned green anarchy [80], talked about "anarchy being the ideal" and envisioned creative democratic communities without leaders [81]. Overall, we can say that psychedelia can contribute to rethinking and expanding the modal space of experience. And, moreover, it can contribute to what H. L. T. Quan has criticized as "despite its claim of heresy, anarchism in the

West remains faithful and obedient to the ontologies and life-worlds that gave birth to it” [82] (p. 125). In other words, the psychedelic experience lived through the prism of spiritual anarchism can also contribute to the questioning of dominant ontologies. This would mean leaving our comfort zone within the consensus reality, a more participative and egalitarian ontology, more plural approaches to reality.

### 4.3. Mystical Experience

We should be very careful about the term “mystical experience”, since it is a modern category that can only have a retrospective meaning. The people of premodern times did not strive to have a mystical experience for its own sake, but engaged in a complex ethical-soteriological activity of seeking to know reality, for which we, as ex-post interpreters, use the term “mystical experience”. It refers to an experience which is not accessible to our sensory perception, which is guided by our mental concepts, and which thus reveals the true or deeper side of reality. According to William James’ classic definition, mystical experience has noetic qualities, ineffability, paradoxicality, transiency and passivity. However, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, our thinking about mystical experience has become more nuanced (see, for example, [83]).

The mystical experience has also been repeatedly accused of being individualistic, i.e., devoid of community, like meditation and psychedelic experience. This accusation is inherently problematic because the mystical experience tends to eliminate or relativize the distinction between the inner and the outer, and indeed, Dorothee Soelle in her book *The Silent Cry. Mysticism and Resistance* seeks even “to erase the distinction between a mystical internal and a political external” [84] (13). According to Soelle, “mysticism can be regarded as the anti-authoritarian religion per se” [84] (p. 36), since preestablished dogma, unquestioned institutions and privileged classes cannot be accepted by it. As a professor of theology and an activist in the peace and ecological movements, Soelle frames mystical experience as a resistance to contemporary destructive forces, from consumerism to economic inequalities. She illustrates with a series of examples, from Müntzer to the Quakers, that “contemplative activism” is very possible, and can be transformative on a global scale through the power of imagination and direct experience. The guiding moral–practical principles she proposes, which follow from mystical experience, are egolessness, property-lessness and nonviolence. In other words, mysticism can be the foundation of a new kind of relationality and fusion, since there is no structure that can stand between it and direct experience. Although Soelle does not explicitly declare herself an anarchist, she always uses the term “anarchist” in a positive context (for instance, she claims that mystics speak an “anarchistic language” [84] (p. 63)) and refers to several anarchists in her work—her unadulterated anti-authoritarian spirit places her in the tradition of spiritual anarchism. Soelle is thus part of a tendency which stresses the “inherent politics in all mysticism” [85] (p. 541).

It is worth drawing attention to Philip Wexler’s *Mystical Society: An Emerging Social Vision* [86], in which he argues that a new spiritual social model is emerging, one that pits integration against alienation, and in which holistic relationality, conceived as “re-cosmicization”, takes precedence over functional specialization, the search for the transcendental over spiritual emptiness. Taking Weberian theory further, he argues that it is a kind of innerworldly mysticism that does not turn away from the world in an escapist manner, but is characterized by a tendency to re-sacralize it, yet there is a constant “reselfing”, a systematic and comprehensive re-inhabitation of the self that also defies the separation between social life and the individual. From Wexler’s point

of view, this can be seen as a mystical phenomenon because it is characterized by de-mediation, i.e., the desire for the immediacy and revitalization of being rather instead of the existing socio-cultural infrastructures. Wexler also takes into account that already at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, what we might call the democratization of mystical experience took place. Forty-three percent of all American and forty-eight percent of all British people have had one or more mystical experiences [87] (p. 3). The number has since increased (a 2009 survey found that 49 percent of Americans claim to have had a mystical experience, a figure that is particularly striking when compared with 22 percent in 1962) [88]. Something is undoubtedly happening and changing; however, the question arises as to what exactly.

From the point of view of spiritual anarchism, this tendency is absolutely welcome, insofar as the increase in sensitivity to spiritual experience is accompanied by the need to significantly reform society. Mystical experience may be attractive to anarchism because, although the experience is not entirely self-authenticating, as it can be truly empowered by communal confirmation, its starting point and primary medium is the direct experience of self-transcendence, for which institutions of unquestioned authority, domination, etc., are unnecessary and even disturbing. The mystical experience is in fact the most difficult of all for the spiritual anarchist to grasp, since it can in some way permeate most spiritual experiences, including the meditation already mentioned and the psychedelic experience. Meanwhile, spiritual anarchism cannot lose sight that mystical experience is also in danger of being inflated, that instead of genuine self-transcending, transformative, transpersonal experiences, merely pre-rational ideas flood the public discourse, as a false remedy for the mechanisms that seek to rationalize everything according to the triadic structure of of state–capital–labor.

## 5. Conclusions

The starting point for this article was the premise that instead of a simplistic juxtaposition of the autonomous self and coercive institutions, spiritual anarchism needs to make a critical revision of the self itself, insofar as the inherent development of the personality might entail the acceptance of unquestioned authority, the becoming prisoner of dogmas, the repression of the self, etc. It has been demonstrated that, not coincidentally, spiritual writers completely unconnected with the anarchist movement often speak “anarchistic” language—the demand for self-liberation is a general feature of authentic spirituality. Taking up Anthony Fiscella’s observation that previous texts on spiritual anarchism have not attempted to define spirituality, a definition was proposed: spirituality is the self-transcending, transpersonal transformation of the ego’s narrow key-hole, the ego’s limitedness. This modifies the existing literature insofar as it sees spiritual anarchism as more than an institutionless counterpart to religious anarchism, but as having an inner essence to which it can adhere. And insofar as spiritual anarchism transcends narrow perspectives, it also has an inherently social significance—that is, contrary to the accusations, in spirituality, individual and community are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It was left open whether this infinity refers to the inner depth, either in a secular way, or to some transcendent, external being. Alongside Fiscella, Wilson’s and Critchley’s views on spiritual or mystical anarchism were briefly reviewed. In addition to drawing attention to the caution required in dealing with the past of spiritual anarchism, I have also mentioned three authors who may be relevant to this history (Schmitt, Gross, Novatore). A different interpretation of the past could certainly open



up avenues for the future. Finally, in countering the accusation that some spiritual practices can only be individualistic, it was demonstrated that they in fact have a number of communal dimensions, all of which raise specific questions for spiritual anarchism. In this spirit were meditation, psychedelic experience and mystical experience thematized.

Given that certain spiritual practices are clearly on the rise (the psychedelic renaissance, the explosion of meditation/mindfulness, the proliferation of mystical experiences, the transformation of the relationship to the life cycles, etc.), it is certain that the social embeddedness, the high intensity and transformative potential of these practices will trigger the need for a non-authoritarian interpretation of some of their dimensions (such as the guru–disciple relationship). The spiritual activity of self-transcendence, self-liberation and the multiplication of perspectives as a whole is an extraordinary opportunity for anarchism, not only because of the anarchist ethos (solidarity, mutuality, property-lessness, etc.) but primarily because of the “mental-emotional ego” (Darren Allen) as a source of unquestioned authority and domination. It is not difficult to predict that if the spiritual dimension of anarchism is strengthened even more (as the proliferation of the term “spiritual anarchism” demonstrates), or if a movement that defines itself as, among other things, spiritual anarchism, will be given a special place, the ecological dimension, the concern for the Earth and the wider cosmic horizon will have a particular role. In addition, spiritual anarchism would not be bound by the dogmatic and institutional constraints that would hinder dialogue between the spiritual traditions of the globe. Furthermore, when internal personal change is intertwined with external social change, spiritual anarchism can come up with a nuanced critique of civilization, with its own particular aspects, hardly naively nostalgic for the past as anarcho-primitivism is, but rather with a special attention to the subtle layers of the past that can still be integrated into the present. What is certain, however, is that if spiritual anarchism is ever to become a significant factor, its primary opponent will be consumerist pseudo-spirituality, against which it must reclaim authentic, genuinely self-transcending spirituality that defies ego fixation. As Kirsten Brydum put it, “much work is still to be done” [51].

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