

An Anarcho-Taoist Manifesto

Emotional Responsibility, Needs, and Amorphous Activism

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This is my take on anarchism, Taoism, and emotional responsibility.

It is applicable to yourself, to your relationships with others, to society, to nature. It is intended to be more a treatise on philosophy than a how-to guide to build an anarchist utopia, but there is a guide within it.

That guide goes like this:

I feel cold.

We'll come back to this later.

Anarcho-Taoism: A Manifesto

1. Everything is, ultimately, a choice. Having a choice does not mean all options are desirable.
2. Desire is a tension between how things are and how things could be.
3. Everything already is as it could be. That is to say, it is as it is. If it could have been anything different in that moment, it would not have been what it was.
4. The only way out of a feeling is through it.

Think of loving someone you don't want to love. The harder you try not to be, the more in love you seem to find yourself. Trying not to feel something is like using a shovel to climb out of a hole. You only dig yourself deeper.

It's when you look at the shovel in your hands and choose to dig that you see where the hole goes. And often, it leads to the very surface you were trying to get to in the first place. But you will never find that surface if you do anything other than dig. By which I mean, by feeling as hard as you can that which you are afraid to feel.

5. The essence of anarchism is self-determination. This means that everyone else has that same self-determination, and you do not determine for them.

Thus, the practice of anarchism is in trusting yourself and trusting others. In trusting other people, not to do what you want, but to do what they want, and that what you and they want will be in cooperation, even if it doesn't look like it to you right away.

That in simply being, in doing whatever it is that you do, in controlling nothing other than yourself, the world will become an anarchist utopia, because that's what an anarchist utopia is.

6. What an economic or political policy does to you is none of my business. What it does to me is absolutely my business. What it does to you is absolutely your business.

If its harm to you makes me outraged, then what it does to me is bring me outrage. That outrage is my business. What I do with that outrage is my business. The harm it does to you is your business, and yours to respond to if and as you see fit.

7. Emotional responsibility and anarchism are not different things. Like mind and body and spirit, like self and society, it's all the same shit.

8. The very problem we're trying to fix in one or the other is *the drawing of the line between the two* in the first place. It is not that you should never draw the line. It is not that you *should* do anything. It is realizing that the line is drawn, and choosing where to draw it.

Everything is a choice.

9. There are ways to frame the space in which the choosing happens to allow more desirable options for all involved (e.g. maximizing freedom). Keep in mind, that "space" is nothing but yourself. You cannot force the maximization of someone else's freedom.

I'll repeat that: You cannot force the maximization of someone else's freedom.

10. You cannot force freedom. You can only allow it. In yourself. In others. If in your mind, it has to look any particular way, it is not true freedom. It is an expectation that limits the potential of the freedom to exist.

11. Freedom is a lack of force, an openness of all options, and free action emerges when it is not forced.

You cannot force freedom. It just happens. It can only ever be allowed.

12. So what does it mean to allow? Think of the verb "consent." I like it, because it feels active. I not only allow a thing to happen, I consent to it. I choose.

"I consent" means I have chosen to allow.

I am aware of my choice. I am aware of my freedom. I am allowing my freedom to manifest in allowing this to happen.

13. The choice to allow is the most paradoxical of actions. It is acting in nonacting. It is giving up the reins wholly unto yourself. It is trusting yourself so much with yourself that you do not need to trust anyone else with yourself. It is trusting them with themselves.

14. What happens when they cannot be trusted?

Let's break that down:

Can they ever not be?

When you've already established that you are not trusting them with yourself, you are trusting them with themselves, there is no inequality of power.

15. We choose power inequalities. When confronted with a choice, we also choose to make one option more desirable than the others.

Do I go left or right?

Do I die or live?

Desire for one over the other is the ultimate limit on freedom.

Desire itself is the power inequality.

16. If desire is a limit on choice, how do you maximize freedom?

You allow it to emerge.

You choose to dig the hole.

You choose to feel however it is that you feel in that moment.

It is choosing to want what you have.

17. This is so often misinterpreted as “to want the circumstances in which you find yourself.” This is not the meaning I give it at all. It is choosing to want yourself, as yourself, in those circumstances. Choosing to be however you are in those circumstances.

It is not about wanting poverty, or oppression.

It is about wanting *how you feel* in those circumstances. If that feeling is outrage, anger, sadness, it is choosing outrage. It is choosing anger. It is choosing sadness.

It is not taking on anything other than your own feeling.

For a light example, when the epic night out does not go as planned, it is not about forcing yourself to be happy with the tired subway ride home. It is about feeling shit about it. It is about wanting to feel shit. Allowing yourself to feel shit. Expecting nothing more or less from yourself than exactly what it is you feel.

Because what you’ve got is never the subway ride or the night out. What you’ve got is yourself in those situations. The circumstances are not you. You do not control the circumstances. You only control yourself.

The only question you can truly answer is: Do I feel satisfied?

18. What a miraculous gift of the universe that eating when you’re hungry never stops being satisfying. That pooping when you really need to poop never stops serving the need you have in that moment. That falling in love never stops being falling in love.

19. What a fabulous joke of the universe that things you feel change. Trying to poop when you do not need to poop won’t satisfy the same need. Eating when you’re full won’t satisfy hunger.

Holding on to the things you did while you were falling in love as if those things were themselves the act of falling in love... We know, it does not work the same way.

20. The reason eating when you’re hungry is satisfying is because you are hungry.

If you do not have the need, the act of meeting the need will not satisfy.

Needs, feelings, they cannot exist without one another.

I feel hungry. I am in a space of hunger. I have a need for food.

21. There are some needs where the thing needed to satisfy the need are obvious:

Hunger, food.

Thirst, water.

Cold, warmth.

And there are some where it is not so obvious:

Depression? Self-criticism? Judgment? Unacceptance? Insecurity?

22. What makes hunger easy is that hunger and food exist as points on a spectrum. They give each other their meaning, and cannot exist without one another.

Food is food because hunger exists.

Without hunger, an orange is just an orange. With hunger, it is food.

Needs change our understanding of the character of a thing.

Our understanding of our needs changes everything.

23. Understanding our needs and desires is essential to understanding our feelings. Needs are authentic and intrinsic, desires are constructed. Desires and needs can be the same, though they are not always so. We can desire what we need. Our understanding of our desires is our best attempt to make sense of what we believe we need.

When I feel a desire for Bob to love me back, what do I mean when I say this?

Do I need to have sex with Bob? Do I need to have sex? Do I need to have an orgasm?

Are these needs Bob-dependent?

Do I need to feel wanted? Do I need Bob to take me out to a fancy Italian restaurant in order to feel wanted? Do I need to go to an Italian restaurant? Do I need to eat dinner?

Am I hungry?

Do I need roses? Professions of love? Poetry?

Do I need to be held by someone?

Do I need to be held by Bob?

What is it about Bob?

Do I simply want to feel that greatest and most indescribable of natural feelings: love?

Does Bob not feeling love for me negate my ability to feel love?

Is love not something I can give freely?

If I detach love from everything that I have been told love looks like (sex, relationships, fancy Italian restaurants and roses), can I not give it freely to whomever I choose?

And why have I chosen Bob?

These are not Socratic-method style leading questions. They are not intended to guide you away from wanting Bob's affections. (Okay, the one about detaching love from things we think love looks like, that's a leading question. I admit that.) The rest are simply there to maybe help expand your understanding of needs and desires.

This all links back to anarchism and economic philosophy. I'm going to illuminate that linkage now, if it wasn't clear already:

24. So, what is consent? It is the choice to allow. The space of active freedom.

Free choice. Not only choice, but choice freely made.

This has built within it the idea that coercion is not a part of consent, though it can be a part of choice.

25. Your feeling of being coerced is your problem. Someone else's desire to coerce you is not your problem.

Freedom is essential to consent, this includes the freedom to remove consent at any time for any reason.

You consent to the moment, for the moment, and you choose freely when that moment ends.

26. The other person knowing when you've removed consent is not your problem. Communicating that you've removed consent is your problem. Expecting them to understand when you have not communicated is your problem. Their understanding is their problem.

In its most simple form: Other people's actions are not your problem.

Your actions are entirely your problem.

Other people's actions touching you is your problem only in the sense of how you feel they touch you. If you feel oppressed, if you feel abused, if you feel mistreated.

Of course, this is not to say that you should not feel oppressed. There is no should about it.

You feel how you feel. The only way out is through.

27. And just as working your way out of the hole of falling in unrequited love is to actively dig, so too with oppression. It does not mean, make yourself more in love. It does not mean, make yourself more oppressed. It does not mean, seek out your oppression. It means, allow yourself to feel in love. Allow yourself to feel oppressed.

It does not mean, allow oppression.

It means: allow yourself to feel oppressed.

28. If I agree to X, and you agree to X, we have consented to X.

Consent is not a contract, and a contract is not consent.

The ability of a contract to sustain the consent around X can be hung up by two things: inflexibility, and inequality of power.

Thing one, Inflexibility: In a space of contract, once X is agreed to, that agreement cannot be broken. However, at any moment can you remove your consent to X. Consent is a feeling, a free choice. Contracts are intended to be consensual, but if they do not disappear when the feeling of consent is removed, then they cannot stand in for consent.

Contract and consent are not the same thing.

Thing two, inequality of power: Imagine I hold a gun to your head and say, Do you agree to have sex with me, and if you don't, I'll shoot you?

You still have a choice. You can still give consent. But the texture of consent is essentially moot.

Your freedom is so severely limited by these options. That is, if you have desire for one option over the other. You can consent to have sex with me over the option of death, because you have such a strong desire to not die.

You have still chosen, but we would not call this consent, because the choice was not free. The freedom in the choice was severely limited by the inequality of power.

29. Desire is the essence of power inequality. Desire for one option over another. If you limit my choice by allowing me only one option that is tolerably desirable, or any number of options that are horrifically undesirable, you have sought to limit my freedom.

30. Desire is what makes us choose. Without desire, we have no need to choose. We just allow.

Remember what we said about oppression? It is not in allowing oppression, it is in allowing yourself to feel oppressed.

It is not in actively wanting both Death and Sex with Scary Gun Man, it is in allowing yourself to feel your reactions to both.

Scary Gun Man is not your problem. Scary Gun Man's emotions, motivations, needs, desires, are not your problem.

31. The space between Scary Gun Man's feelings and your feelings is the space we call action. What are your feelings? Why do you feel them?

Then, what are you going to do about them?

32. If you feel that this situation creates an inequality of power, if you feel a disempowered, then you are. In the same way that if you feel sadness, then you are sad.

33. Can a 6 year old consent to have sex with her teacher?

If I put a gun to your head and tell you to give me your lunch money and you say yes, did you still consent?

At some point, though there is still *always* a choice, the inequality of power becomes great enough that we draw a line where we no longer call it consent.

34. Instead of a gun, I'm holding the threat of eviction, of homelessness, of imprisonment, of starvation.

Is it still consent?

35. Money is power is the ability to meet your needs. If it weren't, we'd never seek it.

With more money, we have greater power to meet our needs for shelter, for food, for pleasure.

We are not seeking money, we are seeking the power to meet our needs.

Like with love, so much of the pain from money comes from equating the thing (satisfaction of needs) with how we think the thing ought to look.

Money can buy me food. Food can satisfy my hunger. Money is not the satisfaction, it is the greater ease of obtaining the satisfaction.

36. If money increases or decreases power to meet a need or desire, then an inequality of money is an inequality of power.

37. Inequality of money can also *not be* an inequality of power.

Not everything in existence has the same perceived needs, and money cannot satisfy every need.

Hand a million dollars to a tree. Hand a million dollars to a dog. Hand a million dollars to a remote tribesman who has never once associated paper currency with the meeting of needs for food, shelter, water.

38. The state, in the sense of government, is just people. It is also more than that.

39. People are just doing the things that people do. They are feeling their feelings and needing their needs and trying to satisfy those needs the best way they think they can. Donald Trump is doing his best. He is. He is doing what he thinks is best to the best of his perception of his own ability. That's a hard one for me to stomach too.

40. The state being comprised of individuals does not mean there is not a state. That is like saying, there is not poverty. There is not happiness.

41. In a sense, this is true.

There is not happiness, only the feeling of it.

There is not poverty, there are only the feelings produced by having less access to the stuff that meets your needs.

42. What we speak of here are "systems," or patterns at work that are expressed through individual behavior.

An example of a system could be the equilibria of populations in an ecosystem. Each bird in the tropical whatever does not wake up in the morning and consciously choose to eat the rodent or whatever. The birds do not sit down together and consciously choose to reproduce more in response to an increase in the rodent population. But the system of life still exists.

It does not exist in the same way the bird's hunger exists.

It exists in the sense that gravity exists. It is a force, a pattern that shapes behavior, a space between things.

It cannot be caught and pinned down and touched and stepped on like a planet can, but it can be felt and can shape behavior the way gravity can.

Equating individual and system, or politician and state, is like equating the Earth with its path around the sun.

43. A system is a pattern of behavior. It is a pattern so strong that it goes on to shape behavior.

Laws, rules, religious doctrines, are codifications of "acceptable behavior" drawn from individuals' interpretations of this pattern.

They're quite possibly the most ridiculous thing in the universe.

44. Let's say, I believe in God. I believe God says X. I interpret what I heard as X. I tell you, X. I tell you, you have to X. You say, Why should I X? I say, because God says X.

You say, *What God?* How do you know God says this? How do you know that just because you perceive God as saying this, this is the way it should be?

Replace the word God with "Government."

Now replace God with "the Market."

When it becomes doctrine, when it becomes systematized, it becomes ludicrous.

45. A System then is a pattern of behavior that goes on to shape behavior.

If behavior is a product of conditioning, by past, nature, biology, society, then the key is not to punish or coerce or alter behavior on its own, but to change the conditioning mechanisms. To change the systems.

A system is a thing of wholly a different character, a different kind of existence, than an individual. Like matter and forces, people and systems.

46. Society. Community. Government. State.

They all serve the same purpose and act in similar ways. They are the way in which people come together and their behavior shapes each other's behavior.

The difference between government and community, or state and society, is in the codification of the methods of shaping behavior.

With law, with doctrine, with rules, we not only say This Force exists, we say, You must follow it, and you must follow it in this way.

It makes the relationship between individual and system rigid. It is saying, "This is what your behavior must look like, and you are not allowed to choose otherwise."

That is all government is. Ludicrous indeed.

47. Now replace the word "government" with "the market."

Such as, this is what the market looks like. This is what the market is. This is how it is supposed to look: in the exchange of money. In massive inequalities of money. In money being linked directly to satisfaction of needs. In contract that cannot be broken when consent is removed. In people existing in a space where they feel they have no power and being told to negotiate as an equal.

Even the idea of the Market makes rigid a relationship.

The capitalist Market is a codification. It is saying a relationship, which exists, can only exist in a particular form.

48. Market, in the vaguest sense, exists. The exchange of goods and services exists. Or, even more basically, exchange of assistance in satisfying individual needs exists.

But The Market. Money. Capitalism. Even the -ism of it. This is a system. A codification. *This is how it looks. This is how you must behave in it.*

How is this any less ludicrous? How can this possibly be in harmony with freedom?

And without freedom, *what the fuck is the point of anarchism?*

49. For a free market to ever be truly free, its definitions of value have to be open to change. Simply put, value of a good or service in a market cannot be 'defined.' What has value to me may have no value to you.

The 'libertarian' response would be: then don't buy the thing.

50. Let's work with that: Don't buy the thing.

Where did I get money through which I could buy the thing?

Through labor. Mine or someone else's.

What is labor? Time, energy, effort.

So in saying, "don't buy the thing," you are saying "do not give time, energy, and effort towards the thing."

Example: One hour on a wage makes you \$10, and the pizza costs \$10. So, 'don't buy the thing' means 'do not put that hour of labor towards the pizza.'

What if the thing I do not wish to buy is a job?

What if I do not wish to put my time, effort and energy into a company?

What if I would rather spend my time, effort and energy in painting?

Well, then, you can paint, but you cannot buy food.

We accept this as a natural law of capitalist society: if you don't work, you don't eat. If you don't labor, you don't live.

Remember we were talking about value.

When we say, "Do not buy what you do not value," we say, "do not work for what you do not value."

But what a rigid market does is define the paths between you and the things you value.

To eat the food you need, you must have money to buy it. To have the money to buy it, you must sell your time, energy and effort to someone. To sell your time, energy, and effort, someone must be willing to buy them.

And they are not buying your time, energy and effort just to have them – they are buying them for a specific purpose. They are putting your time, energy and effort towards what they value. And you cannot have what you value if they do not have what they value.

51. Through one lens, they can have what they value even if you do not have what you value. X depends on Y, but Y does not depend on X.

Then, there is a power inequality.

Then, there is not consent.

Then, there is not freedom.

52. Through another lens, this is not the case. I would say, this is the lens of "Rise up, proletarians, you have nothing to lose but your chains!"

The idea is, Bourgeois Bob feels hunger. Bourgeois Bob needs food. Bourgeois Bob needs money to buy food. Bourgeois Bob makes money by selling cars. Bourgeois Bob cannot sell cars without Proletarian Paul in the factory building the car parts. Proletarian Paul cannot be in the factory building car parts if he is dead. Proletarian Paul needs food in order to not die of starvation.

Thus, the power inequality does not exist. Bob needs Paul just as Paul needs Bob.

However, when we choose that work is exchangeable, and individuals interchangeable, Paul is not working as Paul. Paul is working as a piece of a codified system, a cog that can be thrown out and exchanged for another. And the system is structured in such a way that keeps Bourgeois Bob as the holder of the ability to discard Paul for another cog.

53. That is the great problem of Capitalism: it creates the feeling of a power inequality where there is none. It destroys freedom because it destroys the feeling of it.

Remember our example with consenting to sex with a gun to your head?

Like hunger, like sadness, if you do not feel free, then you are not free.

54. If you have a desire for one outcome over another, there is a power inequality.

When the Market is felt to be dictating your desires more than it is responding to them, there is even a power inequality between you and the Market.

To truly be free, the market has to be so responsive that it does not have a greater conditioning ability than it does ability to be conditioned. As in, it cannot dictate more than it responds.

Therefore, it cannot exist as a codified force. That is, as a definition of a relationship that dictates the terms of that relationship.

The relationship still exists, between you and what you need, but when the Market stands in the way as dictating the only path or set of paths between you and what you need, it ceases to be a thing of freedom.

Because you cease to feel free in it.

And freedom is only ever a feeling.

55. So. How do we make the market free?

Freedom is a state of equilibrium between options, fully free choice to go left or right.

The problem with Equilibrium is that it doesn't just happen: a pendulum held off to one side swings the other way before it reaches center. (You also can't force it to the other side. You allow it to swing until it settles at the center.)

In terms of society and market, what I mean is this: You can't wake up tomorrow and say "The market, in its totality, is now fully responsive to my shifting desires" and mean, "I and others' desires are now fully responsive to my shifting desires."

You can say "I control my relationship to the market and my desires."

You cannot say, "I control Bob's relationship to the market and his desires," or "I control Bob's relationship to my desires," or even "Bob controls his relationship to the market and his desires."

Only Bob can say that.

55. You also cannot say, "I now satisfy my needs in *absolute* freedom."

You can say, "I can now satisfy my needs *in the feeling* of absolute freedom," but that is saying, "I feel equally content with starvation and death as I do with riches and comfort."

That is freeing yourself from the Market. That is freeing yourself from desire, in a full Buddhist sense.

56. But what is freedom for all, then?

It is for Bob and Joe and Mary and everyone to all be able to say "I control my relationship to this thing." Be it the market, society, their emotions, each other. It is not saying, I control this thing. It is saying, only, I control *my relationship* to this thing.

57. In a sense, that control comes only from the feeling of control. That freedom comes only from the feeling of freedom.

It can be unrelated to anything that acts upon it. It also can be entirely related to things that act upon it.

What I meant about the pendulum was, when the codification of the relationship feels stronger than the ability to say "I control the relationship," it must first swing the other way.

When you feel the Market controls your desires and actions more than you consciously choose its ability to control you, then to free your desires and actions from the will of the Market, you must consciously do the opposite of what the Market desires you to.

58. This is where the smashy smashy comes in: the process of actively destroying institutionalized power structures and breaking down hierarchies.

This does NOT mean simply shifting who is in power and who isn't. It means uprooting the existent power relationships, not exchanging those involved in the relationship.

It is actively destroying the relationship, the force between the two, not the individuals involved in the force.

It does not mean, Proletarian Paul becomes President and CEO and Bourgeois Bob is killed. It means, the President and CEO does not *control* Proletarian Paul. It means, the power inequality does not exist.

It means, the system has no more power over me than I do over it.

59. The act of destroying power dynamics is not about the proletariat having control over the bourgeoisie. It is about the *active destruction of power inequality*. It is about actively leveling the playing field and eliminating hierarchies.

Taxation? Active check on monopoly? Education? Revolution?

This is where the guide comes in.

60. Remember how I said at the very beginning of this essay, that we'd get to the how to?

Remember how I said the how to goes, "I feel cold"?

Remember how I said, the only way out is through?

Pretend you believe me until you do.

61. I feel cold.

I am not going to deny that I feel cold in order to feel warm.

I am going to first, fully accept and understand that what I am feeling is cold.

That it is *okay* to feel cold.

I am sitting on a roof in the wind.

I am not wearing a jacket.

It makes sense that I feel cold in this situation.

Am I satisfied in my coldness, or do I have a need that is not being met?

I discover, I am dissatisfied. I have a need that is not being met.

What do I need?

I need warmth.

Then I am going to do something to warm myself.

What can I do to warm myself?

Replace "cold" with "sad."

Replace "cold" with "lonely."

Replace "cold" with "oppressed."

But how is this possibly a how-to guide for anarchist policy?

Like this:

62. Anarchism is that which emerges naturally without exterior direction or control.

I cannot tell you what it looks like.

That is the entire point.

As wholly unsatisfying as that may be, it is the only anarchist way of imagining anarchism.

63. If what is needed is freedom, my action becomes freedom.

If what is needed is love, my action becomes love.

If what is needed is revolution, my action becomes revolution.

How do I know what is needed?

I know what I feel.

If what I feel is cold, and what I need is to find warmth, my action becomes finding warmth.

64. Anarchist action is acting to serve nothing but the needs created by feelings, and not holding to any idea of what each means. Fuck your Rational Self Interest. As if Interest were rational. So often it is physical, biological, intuitive, emotional, psychological, spiritual.

And all of those are just labels to tear the fuck off, because what use do they do anyone?

I feel.

I feel.

I feel.

That is it. I can be certain of nothing beyond my immediate sensation.

When you feel powerless, you are.

When you feel sad, you are.

When you feel happy, you are.

When you feel free, you are.

When you allow yourself to feel whatever it is you feel, you give yourself the ultimate freedom.

When you choose to act as you would in each moment, you rule the only power that can ever rule you.

I don't know what that looks like for you, for society, for anyone.

I only know how I feel.

65. For me, anarchist activism IS the lack of plan.

The un-rigid law, the way that exists in a hundred thousand forms because its essence is flux.

You are never not doing it.

Your rigidity, your definitions, your shoulds and shouldn'ts, these are the only things standing in your own way.

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Anna prouty
An Anarcho-Taoist Manifesto
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