Book review: Anarcho-existentialist wisdom

Review of Julian Langer (2025), Noah's Choice: On the Revolt of the Flesh, self-published

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I would not be surprised to find this text being studied in philosophy and literature departments fifty years from now. This massive book – over 400 pages, mostly substantive writing – is an exercise in simultaneous philosophy and self-narration. Around 100 pages are poetry, the appendices consist of academic-style pieces and a short story, and there are also photographs and drawings on some pages. Langer's preferred means of expression is to provide a numbered series of reflections and aphorisms loosely related to the title topic. Rather than providing an argument, the different passages circle around the topic in a way that weaves together a definite perspective. They typically intersperse brief discussions of a bewildering array of philosophers, anarchists, novelists, political celebrities (etc.), with the author's own experience and emotional reactions, and his reflections on life, nature, poetry, et al.

Langer identifies as an eco-anarchist and nihilist. He refers continuously to existentialist and absurdist writers, such as Nietzsche, Camus, Shestov, Kafka, and Buber. At one point he defines his position as bioexistentialist: an identification with one's body as self-creating, free, and responsible. The titular revolt of the flesh is a visceral, embodied resistance to dying, fuelled by a kind of meaningless life-affirmation.

Certain themes run through the fragmentary book, and all the different modes of expression it contains. Langer views revolt, struggle, and life as absurd and futile, yet necessary, acts. The Biblical character Noah figures prominently as an archetype of such futile yet beautiful preservation. Langer is consistently hostile to any kind of reformist, system-based solution to ecological and other problems. He also constantly criticises modern civilisation and rationalism.

In the introduction, he explains his preference for autobiographical and aphoristic writing over systematic philosophy, and his attempt to avoid offering solutions, because no ultimate solutions exist. The first quarter of the book consists of a series of poems, the themes including embodied healing through nature, critiques of ownership, visions of nature as life, place-based reciprocity, memory and haunting, human temporariness, ecological awareness, shared intimacy, and acceptance of grief.

The remainder of the book consists mainly of the aphoristic prose pieces. The essay 'On Love' summarises and criticises different philosophical conceptions of love before arriving at a personal position which affirms love as free, chosen, risky, and irreducible to ideology. Love is associated

with life-affirmation, and contrasted with absolutism, duty, and capture. 'The Philosophy of Ecological Despair' is a wide-ranging meditation on ecological collapse and the possibility of living meaningfully amidst devastation. 'Death's Absurdity' insists on a view of death as ordinary, and yet absurd and unspeakable.

'Tanz' is a philosophical and personal affirmation of dance as a mode of life-affirmation, rebellion, immediacy, and healing. 'Nihilism and Weird Positivity' handles themes of nihilism, absurdism, negation, and life-affirmation, as well as a critique of what Langer terms micro-authoritarianism as well as all claims to a singular true path. Langer defines authentic nihilism as a means to clear the field for rewilding and creation. 'Stories of Plague and Revolt' is a series of reflections on chronic illness, healing, ecology, and philosophy, grounded in Langer's lived bodily experience. Illness reshapes life; health is a desire and practice of care, not a duty. 'The Wandering Diasporic' reflects on population movements, anti-immigrant bigotry, colonialism, and nationalism, interweaved with the author's experience. Diaspora and exile are treated both as types of loss and as spaces of possibility.

In 'Reflections on Preservationist Ethics/Aesthetics' Langer rejects ideologies that seek to conserve civilisation, deny death, or systematise life, while affirming preservation as care for living presence and possibility rather than form, image, or permanence. 'Individualist-Holism' frames life as an experience without inherent problems or solutions, where joy, suffering, care, and harm coexist. The piece engages with what Langer sees as the paradox of being an individual while also being part of a whole.

'What Rot' is an attack on conservatism, which for Langer encompasses various leftists such as Chomsky and Žižek along with typical rightists. Conservatism is depicted as obsessed with preserving images, ideologies, or control, which ultimately stifles growth, tenderness, and authenticity. 'The Tribal Surviving the Last Man-kind' suggests that true life and resilience emerge from tribal care, wildness, and embodied relationships with the Earth and others, rather than political, religious, or techno-industrial structures. Tribal living might therefore survive the collapse of 'Leviathan,' or modern industrial society.

Echoing Buber's famous book, 'I-Thou' sets out an existential position opposed both to organised religion and secular scientism. Christianity, Satanism, humanism, and scientism are portrayed as frequently indistinguishable in their reliance on hierarchical metaphysics and moral coercion. Langer here makes a case for animism and neo-paganism based on a view of matter as living, and on I-Thou relationality. 'L'Chaim' argues for a sustained affirmation of life for its own sake, in opposition to *ressentiment* and a series of anti-life ideologies such as technocracy. The last two aphoristic pieces, 'Catastrophe and Genesis' and 'Noah's Choice,' deal with the themes of disaster and preservation. Langer ceases to ground responses in embodied life rather than reason, and focuses on the question of how to live, be, and survive amid ongoing disaster. Courage, presence, and love are seen as lived rebellion, and philosophy is framed as a primal choice between affirmations of life or of death.

After a short list of resolutions, there follow the 'Appendices,' which are more formal prose works such as conference presentations. 'Deterritorialising Ability' argues that disability is not deficit but a manifestation of diverse forms of power, presence, and agency. Care and listening are juxtaposed to deficit models, control, and cure. 'Revolting Folk Religions and Dialogic Praxis' juxtaposes monological truth-claims with dialogical approaches grounded in mutual presence, openness, lived encounter, and life-affirmation. While these pieces read like academic texts, the third appendix, 'Cancer, Technology and the Ineffable Visceral Space,' is a deeply personal ac-

count of surviving brain cancer. Langer here recounts radical changes in his bodily experience due to invasive therapies and new prostheses, as well as a depression-like 'limit-experience' following therapy. Langer recounts his disenchantment with religion and recourse to existentialism to recover a basis for living. The appendices also contain a short story, 'The Autobiography of John Lynch,' which addresses issues of hallucination, the hippie movement, love, and violence.

This is an intriguing and inspiring book, addressing the deepest questions of existence in a distinctly ecological and anarchist way. Most of the time, Langer doesn't really make a case for his point of view, preferring to express strings of judgements and claims which are persuasive, if at all, in a poetic way. The scope of the commentary is immense, but the dismissals and classifications of others' positions are subjective and too often unexplained. A reader with an attachment to any of the many chosen targets will likely feel they are dismissed unfairly. If someone can get past this, however, the book offers a unique point of view with implications for our own lives. I sometimes wonder if the book's wisdom is actually a kind of disavowal; it seems impossible to affirm and experience joy in something one has stripped of meaning, such that I wonder if it can be done without maintaining some unconscious belief in the meaning one denies. Still, Langer's message will prove vital for many, and stimulating for those who are not fully convinced.

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