



Radicals: Outsiders Changing the World

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In the last few years the world has changed in unexpected ways. The power of radical ideas and groups is growing. What was once considered extreme is now the mainstream. But what is life like on the political fringes? What is the real power of radicals?

Radicals is an exploration of the individuals, groups and movements who are rejecting the way we live now, and attempting to find alternatives. In it, Jamie Bartlett, one of the world's leading thinkers on radical politics and technology, takes us inside the strange and exciting worlds of the innovators, disruptors, idealists and extremists who think society is broken, and believe they know how to fix it. From dawn raids into open mines to the darkest recesses of the internet, *Radicals* introduces us to some of the most secretive and influential movements today: techno-futurists questing for immortality, far-right groups seeking to close borders, militant environmentalists striving to save the planet's natural reserves by any means possible, libertarian movements founding new countries, autonomous cooperatives in self-sustaining micro-societies, and psychedelic pioneers attempting to heal society with the help of powerful hallucinogens.

As well as providing a fascinating glimpse at the people and ideas driving these groups, *Radicals* also presents a startling argument: radicals are not only the symptoms of a deep unrest within the world today, but might also offer the most plausible models for our future.

Radicals: Outsiders Changing the World Details

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Amy says

A really interesting read. Bartlett makes sure to give his "radicals" a voice and lets them speak their views without being overly judgemental. In a world that has been taken over by Twitter quick takes, it was nice to read about groups you would normally dismiss as nutty (and tbh some of them still came off as nutty). I will say I got a bit bored towards the end, and would suggest maybe reading something else between each chapter to avoid burn out.

Roman Clodia says

An excellent piece of investigative/political journalism which is funny and thoughtful and provocative all at once. Bartlett investigates a range of 'radical' groups, from the transhumanists seeking immortality, to the wacky but rather charming free-love community of psychadelics who create a 'ring of power' in order to stop the war in Syria by the power of their thoughts...

More chilling are the alt-right activists, yep the ones who claim they're not racist/fascist/neo-Nazis then call for 'gas chambers to be set up for Muslims'.

But where Bartlett challenges and provokes thought is where he addresses head on a kind of double-speak (and I would admit that I'm guilty of this): 'Yes, I agree we need radicals... but not *those* radicals'. His point is that a healthy, free, evolving and involving democracy has to allow space for those voices which are 'mistaken, absurd and offensive'. And his final point is, I think, one of the reasons he remains optimistic, even buoyant, in the face of the worst excesses of the emergent alt-right:

Tommy Robinson [ex-English Defence League] and Pegida-UK [an extreme nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Islam group] are necessary for the existence of its opposite. Their presence forces us to examine our ideas, work out what we believe, why we believe it, and mobilise. If Pegida did not exist, the arguments against it - in this case in favour of multiculturalism, or an authentic British Islam - would lose their vitality and strength.

An oblique but relevant and intelligent look at contemporary ideas politics.

Thanks to Random House/Cornerstone for an ARC via NetGalley.

Athena_reads says

While reading Jamie Bartlett's *Radicals*, I couldn't get off my mind the image of grinders, this self-focused group of people who believe that ageing is a disease and are not afraid of taking human evolution into their own hands by harnessing nanotechnology, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence. Grinders are biohackers that operate in their own bodies. They seek to turn themselves into living DIY cyborgs by placing microchip implants inside their bodies. They are not exactly part of the transhumanist movement which think about how technology can extend and enhance human life; grinders take the idea of transhumanism to the extreme through physical modification.

Grinders and transhumanists are not the only radicals in Bartlett's book. He follows a series of individuals and groups that have expressed radical ideas or try to find and establish a new way of existing. A transhumanist presidential candidate in the US, gatherers of magic mushroom-eaters and the establishment (on paper, so far) of a libertarian micro-nation in an uninhabited and disputed parcel of land between Croatia and Serbia. Jamie Bartlett explores how a comedian's non-party movement became one of the biggest political forces in Italy, a commune which try to promote a new planetary culture and pursues self-sufficiency in Portugal and the eco-protestors movement, a new wave of environmentalists who have concluded (correctly) that saving the planet is urgent, and that formal politics can't do it. He also investigates the rise of anti-Islam, anti-immigrant, multinational political groups like Pegida and the effects of the UK 'Prevent' strategy to counter Islamist extremism.

The visions for society the radicals present in this book could not be more different and often diametrically opposed. But there are also some striking similarities. They are all frustrated by the status quo and often voice similar concerns: a belief that politics had become too remote, that society is not facing up to the challenges of the day, and impatience with the traditional route of change. Jamie Bartlett explores what he sees as the "mega-challenges which are about to crash into our comfortable and complacent political arrangements". The first is technological, the second is climate change and the final challenge is a haemorrhaging attitudinal confidence in democracy and its associated institutions. Jamie Bartlett finished his book in 2016 and the events that followed, add some credibility to his research.

Radicals is a fine example of investigative journalism. It is also a book of tales and Jamie Bartlett is a sensitive and thoughtful storyteller.

Matt says

Super interesting read if you're interested in groups (not just political) that practice ways of living we rarely hear about. Bartlett gives a man on the street type account of each movement he covers.

Daniel Casey says

These mildly thematically connected essays are the type of articles you'd find in glossy pop culture mags (Vanity Fair, GQ, Esquire, Rolling Stone, etc.) lacking the import to make them literary or critical but most certainly well-crafted journalism. But journalism is more about novelty than it is anything else, so Bartlett gives us a tour of fringe groups as he attempts to show them as actually impactful actors on culture and politics. I can't say I buy it. Less engaging than I had hoped but still intriguing.

Tariq Mahmood says

Never really knew many of the radicals I met in this book apart from the Muslim ones. But than the Muslim radicals were not described in much detail as compared to the other radical types. By the end of the book I had developed a sense of respect for most radical movements, apart from the Islamic one which o don't think really fits into the radical framework. I also agree with the authors deduction that the world changes constantly, therefore radicalism is an important indicator which can trigger controlled change saving us from nasty surprises. Therefore radicalism must be accepted and debated in any society and culture.

Nicola says

DNF. Jamie Bartlett's previous book *The Dark Net* was workmanlike in its style, but it zeroed in on some fascinating issues bubbling beneath the surface of the internet. This new book is similarly workmanlike, but (based on the first two chapters) his subjects are much, much less compelling. The lack of style also makes it quite a dull read on audio. I may revisit it as a physical book another time, but I'm setting it aside for now.

Shannon says

I didn't finish this book (kinda skimmed through it after the intro and first 2 chapters)

It is well-written and interesting, but I think that the author did not interrogate his topics enough considering the context of the world we're living in right now. He tries to be way too neutral. Sorry but even Howard Zinn said, "you can't be neutral on a moving train."

I think he's far too sympathetic towards right-wing anti-islam movements. Because I get that we have to study them and understand them and hear them and know that they're out there - but also in these times we have to draw hard lines of what's not okay because these movements fuel hatred and violence (even if the violence is not committed by those directly in the movements - people feel emboldened and righteous because of these movements).

For example, he describes activists shouting "Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here" as "high-grade abuse hurled at them from close range." Like I get that people yelling in your face is annoying - but describing defending immigrants as "high grade abuse" really made me question where the authors sympathies lie.

Sorry but you can't be neutral in times when xenophobia is so powerful.

I just can't really trust the author because I don't think that he really explains in the intro what he means by utopia. I get that for a lot of people closed borders will be a utopia - but I really think that the author tries to be too neutral here.

I think it's lazy to say that it's lazy to "call Pegida supporters racist, ill-informed bigots.... because it provides Pegida supporters with the ammunition that the liberal elite are trying to silence them."

If you're going to get into that you really have the responsibility as an author to dig deep. Is it fueling anti-Islam movements to call them racist? Or is the fact that being called racist is seen as offensive and "silencing" is a larger cultural trend right now that needs to be unpacked? Is it a worse attack on your rights to be called a racist or to be killed by a racist? That is the reality we are living in right now - that people think it is the most offensive thing in the world to be called a racist.

I really just think that the author did not dig deep enough, which he really does have the responsibility to do given the topics he chooses to study and the context we are living in right now.

Also, I think it was a little bit of a cop out to not look at Black Lives Matter because he "wouldn't be able to do it justice." You're missing out on a whole key section of radicals chasing utopia by not studying or mentioning (besides to say that you won't mention) any Black Liberation movements. In fact, much activism today is rooted in black liberation. The authors whiteness does not make him a neutral observer of movements - it very much affects how he understands these things and I think the book lacks an acknowledgement of that.

It IS possible to hear people and give their side of the story while also being like "but the implications of these things are really bad and dangerous"

Charlotte Jones says

In a world where the word 'radicalism' has become synonymous with terrorism, I wanted to learn more about other radical movements across the globe that are fighting for freedom, the environment and free love, as well as the more political or religious movements.

In this book, Jamie Bartlett discusses eight very distinct groups of people, from far right extremists to inhabitants of a free-love commune, and presents his findings in a brilliantly non-biased way. I found that he didn't take a side with any of these group's ideals, more focusing on experiencing their point of view and reporting it in an honest way. This made Radicals an enjoyable reading experience. It is the first book I've read that isn't angry with all of those that the author doesn't agree with. It brought different views from around the world into one place and presented everything in a clear way.

I would definitely recommend this book, particularly on audiobook, and I'm glad I picked it up as I feel I learnt a lot from it.

Shirley Revill says

Radicals

Really enjoyed this book and it really got me thinking about the concepts mentioned in this book. Will follow with a longer review on my second reading as it's one of those books that you really want to read again and again. Highly recommended.

Trevor Barton says

A fascinating, well-researched book about some of our present-day radicals and the function (perhaps even import) of radical thinking in society. If you feel disconnected from some recent trends, or simply wish to gain a wider understanding of the current world, you should gain something from this work.

When you're younger (at University, for example) you feel relatively connected to whatever is the current vibe. You may not agree with the social experiments of all of your peers, but you get the lingo. And then it happens. One day you wake up and discover that you've aged. The world has moved on without you. It has new ways of speaking, dressing, and thinking. You'd stick out like a sore thumb were it not for the fact that, once you hit your 40's, you start to become miraculously and wonderfully invisible.

I'd never heard of Pegida-UK; and until I read this book I thought Five Star were just an American 80's pop group with astonishingly high-pitched female vocals. Bartlett introduces phenomena like Pegida, Five Star, the "alt right" and so on in a way that inspires fresh critical evaluation from the reader.

I think he encourages this "think again" response partly because of his humble approach. He has sat alongside his subjects; rubbed shoulders, shared meals, broken bread. His starting point has been one of respect, and he seems to have earned his respect in return. Hence the reader is invited to explore it all with him; to leave behind whatever comfort zones we make for ourselves and "go there" - to the places and people we have, perhaps, avoided because they don't fit our own sense of reality - our own echo chamber.

That means nothing gets objectified. Characters and subjects become more real. My own need to objectify in order to summarize, categorize, understand or dismiss is left without much function. I love this book for that, and I loved discovering how some brave souls choose to live, think, and act in ways I'm never likely to myself.

Blair says

Radicals is 'an exploration of the individuals, groups and movements who are rejecting the way we live now, and attempting to find alternatives'. The introduction sets the scene: an age of unprecedented progress and achievement, yet one in which globalisation, income inequality, climate change and the impact of the internet (among many other issues and developments) have caused the social, economic and political consensus to shift in ever-changing, often unpredictable ways. As in Bartlett's previous book *The Dark Net*, each chapter of *Radicals* makes a study of a particular individual or smallish group, using them to represent and explore wider themes.

- Chapter 1 follows transhumanist Zoltan Istvan on his (futile) attempt to run for president of the USA, travelling from the west coast to Washington DC in his campaign vehicle, the 'Immortality Bus' (it's designed to look like a giant coffin on wheels).
- Chapter 2 revisits someone you might remember from *The Dark Net*: former EDL leader Tommy Robinson, who has attempted to reinvent himself as more of a respectable activist. This particular story finds him trying to start a UK arm of the 'peaceful' European anti-Islam group Pegida, along with ex-Labour and UKIP activist Anne Marie Waters and Liberty GB leader Paul Weston.
- Chapter 3 sees Bartlett attending a 'weekend experience' organised by the Psychedelic Society, and investigating the evidence that controlled use of psychedelic drugs can provide positive spiritual experiences

and be used to treat mental health problems.

- Chapter 4 looks at the workings of Prevent, the UK's anti-terrorism initiative.
- Chapter 5 tackles populist politics: swerving the more obvious US/UK examples, here Bartlett focuses on the success of Beppe Grillo and the Five Star Movement in Italy.
- Chapter 6 is about communal living and eco-villages. Its main subject is Tamera, a rural Portuguese commune largely made up of German expats.
- Chapter 7 is about activism and direct action. It concentrates on climate change activism and sees the author joining a Reclaim the Power protest and meeting anti-fracking groups.
- Chapter 8 tells the intriguing story of Liberland, the newest country in the world, founded on disputed land (between Croatia and Serbia) and intended as the first free republic based on the principles of radical libertarianism.

The book I thought of most often while reading *Radicals* was Jon Ronson's *Them*, but Bartlett (mostly) avoids painting the people he encounters as humorous eccentrics. (Sometimes, however, their absurdities speak for themselves, as in a sequence when Anne Marie Waters turns out to be drunk during the launch of Pegida-UK, or one of the Tamerians claims she can communicate with wild boar through meditation.

Sometimes they're a bit more disturbing – Tamera again: one of the senior members of the community gives a worryingly vague answer about its 'Love School', where children are 'accompanied' by adults through their first 'encounters and love experiences'.) Bartlett's writing is very straightforward, clear and fair, considering both sides of every argument and taking the radicals' ideas seriously. If there's a downside, it's that it can be a little dry in places – this isn't one of those non-fiction books that grips you like a novel might. That said, as someone who's used to racing through books, this was a welcome change of pace.

This shouldn't be confused for a comprehensive account of radical politics: it's more of a curated selection of (very different) fringe views, inviting the reader to consider which 'radicals' we might, one day, come to consider entirely reasonable. It's a thoughtful, considered study which perhaps doesn't match the sexier and more dramatic appeal of *The Dark Net*, but is no less engaging.

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Serage says

I enjoyed this one very much. Great journalism.

Also, I would have loved it if Jamie Bartlett could moderate a debate between Christopher Hitchens and Ayn Rand.

J. Kent Messum says

*Review originally published in the New York Journal Of Books: <http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-...>

Jamie Bartlett is back, following up his stellar debut 'The Dark Net' with something equally enlightening and unnerving for the modern age. 'Radicals Chasing Utopia' is an in-depth look at a selection of outlying organizations that all feel they hold the key to the future, or at least the futures they envision. These radicals range from unconventional to unhinged, brilliant to bat-shit crazy. They've convinced themselves that their

extreme ideas have merit, but hold back on judgment and hear them out because they just might convince you, too. Bartlett, ever the knowledgeable guide through murky political and technological waters, introduces us to the radicals he investigates with these words:

"It's the hubris of every generation to think that they have arrived at the best way of living. But all the things we now take for granted, all the modern wisdoms we hold to be self-evident, were once derided as dangerous or foolish radical thinking."

Seven groups are on the target list, with a chapter dedicated to each; transhumanists, European nationalists, a psychedelic society, an Italian Internet-based political party, a functioning free-love commune, a collection of climate change activists, and a tiny new country founded on Libertarian principles. Bartlett embeds himself with these groups and approaches each with a commendable balance of genuine open-mindedness and healthy skepticism. He's the kind of writer that can sift through complexities to find value in supposedly absurd or dismissed ideas, be highly critical while avoiding cynicism, and also be skeptical of skeptics themselves.

A merchant of information, Bartlett offers readers a great deal within these pages. If knowledge is what you're after, you won't be disappointed. Each organization is outlined, infiltrated, dissected, and reviewed. Background and applicable history, multiple points of view, pros and cons are all presented. Bartlett's writing is smooth and authoritative with a noticeably friendly tone. He doesn't miss a beat, keeps you constantly interested, and even allows for the occasional good laugh. When subject matter gets complicated, the author thankfully doesn't, breaking down and filtering the material so readers can digest it more easily.

These "radicals" often flourish, but sometimes squirm under the spotlight that Bartlett shines on them. They alternate between fascinating and frightening. They are people living on the fringes of society, intelligent misfits and outcasts dedicated to their causes and callings who view the paths they forge ahead as the only way forward. No doubt some of them are crazy, but readers won't be able to shake the feeling that they may be "crazy as a fox."

It would be easy to dismiss these radicals if they didn't seem to constantly be on the cusp of what humanity potentially faces. What is it they know, or think they know, that the rest of us don't? The answers may be surprising and the supporting data equally alarming. In a world where popular ideas are becoming more insular, radicals are the ones thinking outside the box. What's more, they could very well be our best hope for the future.

"A liberal democracy with no radicals would atrophy and degenerate: society would become ossified, gripped by a dreary and monotonous set of unchallenged dogmas and received wisdoms that save people the trouble of thinking for themselves. This is precisely what has happened over the last thirty years. All the right words come out of the modern liberal's mouth—listening to the people, human rights, democratic values, tolerance, etc.—but the brain isn't properly engaged, it just auto-pilots through these platitudes."

Most of us have been asleep at the wheel too long, lured into a false sense of security in a world that has the increasing potential to be turned on its head at any time. The radicals among us sense imminent danger and impending doom. The mainstream may not have the answers, so it's society's outsiders who try for more abstract solutions and do so on their own terms. A highly recommended read, 'Radicals Chasing Utopia' could influence you to chase after some of these utopian organizations and ideas, or make you want to flee from them just the same.

Camille says

An interesting mix of stories of "radicals" trying to change the world in their own image.
