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31st May 2019

Retrieved on 7th August 2020 from
https://mathematicalanarchism.wordpress.com/2019/05/31/
how-to-move-away-from-hierarchy/

theanarchistlibrary.org

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Contents

avoid conflict or simply differences between elements, friction is created, as they cannot fit into the box. This thus not at all mean all contact should be avoided. What I propose is a "local coherence": there is a coherence generated from the bottom-up, where elements see how they can support and link to each other, while no general, overarching idea is formed.

To summarize: I think hierarchy can be opposed by creating cycles with multiple influences, while constantly opposing the emergence of rigid structures, and avoiding the pitfall of wanting universality.

So I guess the question most people want an answer to when hearing about my research, is how we can move away from hierarchy, how can we make a free society possible? I don't yet have a complete respond to this question, and I think there will never be a blueprint for how to get there. But I do have some ideas scattered throughout my thesis, which I will bring together here.

I won't explain these ideas in all its depths, and thus some things might not be immediately completely clear when reading, but I hope this will ignite you to dig deeper into my work ;).

Network approach: cycles

One way to look at hierarchy is as a specific kind of network, namely as a tree structure (think of the tree of species) or a pyramid.

The main feature here is asymmetry: there is a difference between "top" and "bottom". Anti-symmetry is more strictly if influence only goes in one direction, from "top" to "bottom". This is a definition of "power over": someone has power over you when he can influence you, while you have no say in his acts. This asymmetry works both directly and indirectly, and hence in a hierarchy there cannot be any cycles (since then there is indirect influence in both directions).

Another feature of a hierarchy is that each element only has one influence, while in a non-hierarchical structure there can be multiple influences. This makes that an element is not completely determined by its influence, but can combine them in a unique way.

In a hierarchical structure, elements are also in general split into different clusters, where the only connection to another cluster is through a top element. A way to break down a hier-

archical structure is hence to make links between clusters: get out of your circle, subculture, and connect with people outside.

But the other big lesson is to focus on cycles. And not just on simple cycles as one circle, but also several cycles intertwined, where multiple influences are possible. This results in self-maintenance and -production, where the input gets created from the output. With a fancy word, this is called autopoiesis, present in for example living beings.

This autopoiesis makes that the system is self-caused: it causes its own existence, and is no longer merely following the flow of the outside. Being self-caused is exactly what makes us autonomous: to be able to make our own decisions and have control over our own life, independent of outside influences.

But not too much: vicious circle

However, there is also a danger of this self-maintenance, when things go on and on while its purpose is long lost. This usually happens when the system is too closed off, so that rigidity can come into existence.

A vicious circle is an example, which can exist due to positive feedback. Positive feedback occurs when more of A brings more of B, while more of B causes more of A. Hence, A and B will grow indefinitely.

An example are idée-fixes: ideas that used to serve us, but now we just cling to them out of habit, while it no longer helps us. We have become the servitor of the idea. Addiction is an example, recognize the vicious circle in the phrase "I drink to forget my problems, my problems are that I drink".

But we can also see such mechanisms in organizations, which can become rigid. Ways of functioning or goals are simply maintained without questioning, while they no longer fulfill the needs of the people involved.

This can be avoided by an openness to new input, to always question the present structure.

Constant opposition

More in general, what I propose as a mechanism to avoid hierarchy and rigid structures, is 'constant opposition'. Power will always try to emerge, and thus the thing is to constantly try to oppose it as soon as you see it emerging. Power is usually social: it can exist because there is a social structure that supports it. Gelderloos has argued that non-hierarchical societies could be and stay non-hierarchical because there was a mechanism to avoid hierarchy from emerging. An example was that one specific society had a kind of tug-of-war game to challenge gender norms. First, the men and women started on opposite sides, but as soon as one side started winning, someone from the winning side moved to the other side. At the end, everyone had moved several times.

The key element of this idea that the focus is on human agency. We should focus on what we ourselves can do and change. Other theories neglect this human aspect, and focus on big economical and societal forces that shape our world. The world is already determined for us, and we can not influence the world. An example is economic determinism: the believe that the economy and technology determines the cultural and societal. Hence social change only happens when the economical circumstances change.

With determinism, there is always one factor that is decided to be the most important, determining the rest. This relates to the endeavor for universality. Often, people want to put everything under one common denominator : all unite for one struggle, put all ideas under one thesis,... This is a hierarchical way of thinking, where we want to have one top element split up recursively into lower elements. But exactly by trying to