

Dialogue and Anarchy

William van den Heuvel

1996

As I understand it, Bohmian dialogue is supposed to be dialogue among equals. It is part of the proposal that there shall be no moderator and there shall be no predetermined topics. In other words, there is no set of rules and there is no ruler either. It seems to me, one of the most noticeable characteristics of Bohmian dialogue is that there is no hierarchy. In fact, one could almost say, Bohmian dialogue is anarchy. But let me first quickly explain what I mean by the terms 'hierarchy' and 'anarchy'.

Hierarchy: Remember, the word 'hierarchy' literally means "a system of rules". The main term 'arch' (as in hierarchy) is derived from greek Arkhos, meaning Ruler or Leader. E.g. monarch is short for "mono arch". Thus, a monarch is, by definition, a sole ruler: a dictator.

Anarchy: The absence of a hierarchy implies anarchy. Etymologically speaking, the word 'anarchy' literally means "the absence of an arch". So, when we speak of a form of dialogue without rules and no ruler then this satisfies the literal definition of anarchy. In other words, Bohmian dialogue is pure anarchy (in the original sense of the word). The modern usage of the word anarchy has somehow twisted the meaning and now tends to refer to the state of chaos resulting from the absence of rules rather than the absence of the rules itself. Nevertheless, 'anarchy' was just another way of saying "we are all equal", at least that was the original intention, and that's also what I mean.

Admittedly, anarchistic dialogue (i.e. "among equals") does tend to become somewhat chaotic, at least on the surface of it, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. Provided the dialogue is sustained for a while something mysterious may eventually happen. In spite of the frustration and the sense of despair that is so characteristic of anarchistic dialogue, some curious kind of order seems to emerge out of the chaos. This order is not a man-made achievement but it is a sense of coherence that somehow emerges "between and among us". This happens unexpectedly on its own accord and it wouldn't have happened if there were no anarchistic chaos.

Based on this surprising discovery I now tend to think of anarchy as a necessary condition for the emergence of coherence. I.e. there appears to be a natural tendency towards coherence but this is a phenomenon that happens spontaneously in the process of free-flowing dialogue. It probably won't happen if the flow of dialogue were directed by a moderator, or if it were constrained by some rules, or influenced by an expectation that something must happen. Any form of expectation seems to interfere with the appearance of the unexpected.

One of the reasons for having a somewhat larger group of let's say 20 "equals", is to prevent the possibility of people coming to some kind of consensus or agreement. Any form of agreement or consensus would be a man-made order. I am not saying this is necessarily a bad thing; I am just saying this is not what I am talking about. Consensus or agreements can well be acts of intelligence; i.e. they may be very useful and even necessary at the time, but agreements tend to become rules and when this happens it is extremely difficult not to slip back into some form of hierarchy.

A dialogue group of about 20 "anarchists" virtually guarantees that they can not agree on anything. In particular, they can not agree on such questions as to what is dialogue, or how to do it, etc. It is important that we don't know what dialogue is because otherwise "thought" could get a handle on it and would seize control. "Thought" would then become the ruler, so to speak, and this would severely restrain the spontaneous emergence of coherence.

According to my Oxford dictionary, 'spontaneous' means "acting or produced by natural, instinctive, or voluntary impulse". It also means "of (its) own accord". So, any natural coherence that may emerge on its own accord from anarchistic dialogue must come from natural, instinctive, or voluntary impulse. This is in contrast to artificial coherence that comes from rules imposed by a ruler.

In my view, "thought" is a kind of ruler that imposes its rules, hence it suppresses the spontaneous emergence of natural coherence. Any imposition by "thought", such as a particular ideology, religion, or a predetermined topic, or having some kind of agenda, would ultimately block the natural flow of the dialogue which must be free to find its own way towards coherence. It cannot be brought about by conscious attempts.

"Thought" does have an important role to play; not as a ruler but more as a servant: it should serve to carry out the implications of what is revealed by the natural coherence that emerges out of the chaos resulting from anarchistic dialogue. So, the first thing "thought" must do is to become aware of its purpose and stop suppressing the very thing it should serve. But it is a rare ruler who voluntarily becomes a servant.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



William van den Heuvel
Dialogue and Anarchy
1996

http://www.david-bohm.net/dialogue/Dialogue_and_anarchy.html

usa.anarchistlibraries.net