Beliefs, cultures, and human brotherhood: a vision of social transformation

Richard Moore
rkm@quaylargo.com

Background article:
Gregory W. Lester: *Why Bad Beliefs Don't Die*
http://exchristian.net/exchristian/2002/05/why-bad-beliefs-dont-die.php
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/newslog/message/2314

Beliefs and cultures

In his article, Lester presents us with a psychological explanation for why people hold onto beliefs, even when there is clear evidence contradicting those beliefs. Lester's central thesis is that beliefs function as a survival mechanism, operating independently from rational thought. As a simple example of this he mentions the belief, "The jungle is dangerous". It is important that this belief override current sense perceptions and judgments, which might see the jungle as peaceful and inviting, particularly if we are young and have no experience of the jungle.

He makes a good case for *persistent beliefs* being strongly related to personal survival, and being relatively independent of logical thinking. He also brings in the important point that beliefs are all linked and interconnected in complicated ways. It may seem rational to ask someone to reconsider a relatively inconsequential belief in isolation, and to show them evidence. But that belief is linked to others in unconscious ways, and perhaps that minor threat feels like a threat to our whole understanding of the world, or our sense of who we are, or our sense of security in life.

Lester's discussion is in evolutionary terms, about how the psychology of individuals has evolved, based on the survival value to the individual of certain traits. The discussion can be broadened to bring in *cultures*. In a hunter-gatherer band, beliefs about herbs, plants, animals, other bands, seasons, terrains, etc., would be critical to group survival. Such beliefs tend to be woven into creation stories, and stories of gods, giants, anthropomorphized animals, etc. And conveniently, our brains respond very well to the story format. Also conveniently, persistence of beliefs in individuals serves to enhance the survival the group, by stabilizing and perpetuating the culture.

In the case of lions, social cats, we recognize an evolution of *group* behavior, of the coordinated behavior of the pride as a whole, enabling it to hunt and reproduce successfully, and to deal with the challenges of its environment and competitors. The instincts of individual lions are attuned to the overall group pattern. If we evolved as social primates, then it makes similar sense to consider the evolution of *cultural mechanisms* as being the primary developmental process, and individual psychology as being in service to that.

Culture can be seen as *programmable instincts*. The coherence afforded to lion prides by instincts is afforded to societies by cultures. Babies are wide open to learn any language or any customs, to learn to like any kind of food, etc. When they become adults, the scope of those options has been narrowed way down. What from the outside can be labeled 'culturally specific', to those on the inside is 'how things must be', 'how things should be', etc. What from a rational perspective might be considered an 'assumption' or a 'belief', from a cultural perspective may be an 'obvious truth' – such as 'that mountain is sacred', 'God created man', or 'humans evolved from apes'.

Agreeing with those around you is obviously a culture-supporting individual trait, along with *needing to be part of a group*. Hence people gather into like-minded camps, reinforcing and perpetuating their shared perspectives. Those who challenge the assumptions of a camp are not welcome to be in it; they are expelled just as someone might have been banished from a tribe for transgressing its sacred customs. Thus ideologies, religions, and academic dogmas persist stubbornly – because of human traits that were important to the survival of hunter-gatherer bands.

Lester goes on, in a section called *Implications for Skeptics*, to talk about how beliefs might be discussed without raising the fear alarms. Again this is very useful information, again Lester focuses on the individual, and again I think the cultural perspective may be more useful.

A culture provides a *sense of belonging*, and a *way to understand the world*. It is rather easy to understand that most people would not be comfortable losing either one of those. And our political affiliation is an important part of our cultural identity. It gives us a way of understanding the world, and it gives us something to belong to, something that connects us to the affairs of our society. A direct challenge to political beliefs threatens a person with *cultural homelessness*: nowhere to belong and confusion about the world. A dyed-in-the-wool conservative is not going to join the progressive camp, just because he changes a few of his beliefs – so

where does he go if his faith is shaken in his conservative beliefs? For a progressive, the situation is the same in reverse.

Implications for social-change activists

I think there are some important lessons to be taken from these considerations, as regards how social change might be pursued. We need to think in terms of cultures, rather than beliefs. If we want to enable people to shift their perspectives, we need to provide them not just with information and arguments, but also with a new *cultural home*, and a reason to adopt it.

This is how cults and religions spread. They don't just give you a theological story, they also offer you a congregation, or a cult group, that opens its arms and invites you, at a human level, to *belong*. And in the case of cult recruiters, they have their greatest success with the *vulnerable*: those who are in discomfort with their current cultures, those who would like nothing better than to find a *welcoming new home*.

In today's world, more and more of us are feeling *culturally vulnerable*. Our culture is offering us insecurity instead of security, and fear for the future instead of hope. As conditions continue to worsen, and the evidence clearly indicates they will get very much worse, this sense of vulnerability and insecurity will grow. Already we see this vulnerability manifesting as increased polarization between conservatives and progressives. Each side is seeking security by circling its wagons and becoming more strident. As these trends continue, people of all stripes will be more and more ready to embrace a culture that offers real hope – if such a culture is available to them, and if it doesn't contradict their strongly held beliefs.

I don't propose that we start a new cult or religion. However we can think in terms of a new *social movement*. Social movements also offer a cultural home. When movements hold rallies, marches, and protests, that can be seen as *making the home real* – giving the members an opportunity to be together and manifest their culture. This was very clear with the anti-globalization movement, with its costumes and revelry, imaginative posters and signs, affinity groups, workshops, consensus methods, etc. As protest the demonstrations had little effect, but as cultural manifestations they were very effective. Perhaps that explains why they were so brutally suppressed. The demonstrations weren't directly threatening the establishment, but the growth of that culture was threatening to become a political problem. The police were *raiding the home* of the culture when they disrupted the demonstrations and punished the protestors.

If we want to change the course of society, we need a special kind of social movement. We need a movement that can welcome everyone, and that doesn't challenge anyone's beliefs. Otherwise it would be just one more divisive faction. Only a movement that includes everyone, or at least the overwhelming majority, can hope to make real changes.

We saw such a movement recently in Bolivia, where only the local elites were excluded. That was possible because the overwhelming majority agreed that the existing system was exploiting them. We saw such a movement a bit earlier in Eastern Europe, where the overwhelming majority was sick of Soviet rule. In those cases, the rallying cry of the movement could be political in nature, because widespread political agreement existed. In the West, however, the rallying cry cannot be political, because people are strongly divided in their political views. And as we have seen, such views are nearly impossible to change. The movement can ultimately have political effect, and it must, but it cannot begin with a political agenda.

Human brotherhood as a social movement

Consider the following as a rallying cry: *Welcome to the human family. Here we are all on the same side. Come as you are, and join us*. This isn't a new idea of course, just the old *brotherhood of man*. What can be more inclusive, and what else can be inclusive? Isn't this what our times require? Isn't this what we all really want? Isn't it what we've always wanted? But the idea of the brotherhood of man is not enough. Everyone could sign a petition that they like the idea, and perhaps lots of people would, but that wouldn't have any effect.

We need in addition the various characteristics of a social movement. There needs to be a sense of purpose, a reason to join and get involved. There need to be things that people do and share together when they're in the movement, to provide a cultural home and a sense of belonging. And even this is not enough, if the movement is ultimately going to change the course of society, and change it in a way that achieves the brotherhood of man on Earth.

The culture of the movement needs to be the same as the culture of the new society that we want to create. This is a lesson we learn from the various successful revolutionary movements that have occurred in history. *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* was a great rallying cry for the French Revolution, quite close in fact to 'the brotherhood of man'. But the revolutionary movement itself did not operate by these principles, and the principles were not realized when the revolution was victorious.

The American Revolution came closer to living up to its principles, with its admirable Constitution and Bill of Rights. But the revolution was led by colonial elites, as a top-down process, and those elites ended up in the leadership positions of the new society. Over time power became more and more centralized, and the safeguards of the Constitution more and more eroded. Finally today the Constitution is in tatters and Washington exercises increasingly arbitrary powers. It is the *culture of the movement itself* that ends up being the dominant culture of the new society, regardless of the rhetoric of the movement. *The means always become the ends*.

If we want a society that realizes the vision of human brotherhood, then our movement must operate in harmony with that vision. The rallying cry, or invitation, reflects this, by welcoming everyone to *come as you are and join us, we are all on the same side*. Being on the same side is what brotherhood is all about. In addition, the internal processes of the movement, how it deliberates and sets priorities, must be on the basis of equality, inclusiveness, and fairness for all.

Conservative congregations: an example of a brotherhood culture

Such a culture can currently be found in a great many church congregations, particularly in the fundamentalist denominations. People pitch in and help one another. Someone has a baby, and people take turns bringing them meals for the first few weeks. Someone's recovering from an operation, and a volunteer crew comes in to clean the house. Someone moves to a new home, and volunteers show up to help unpack and paint walls. In various ways people take responsibility for the welfare of their fellow worshippers. It is not that tasks are assigned by leaders, rather the desire to be respected by peers leads people to embrace and practice the respected virtues. Practicing those virtues becomes a *custom* among church members. Participating in that custom becomes the path of least resistance as regards social behavior. Thus is a culture stabilized and perpetuated.

There is a strong feeling of *we are all on the same side* in the fundamentalist churches. They see themselves, and rightly so, as *radicals* in their beliefs (eg creationism), with respect to the mainstream society. Being part of a *radical group* always creates a strong sense of bonding. Without undue exaggeration we can say that fundamentalists see themselves as being *under siege* by the mainstream culture, which teaches evolution in schools, allows gay marriages and abortions, etc. People under siege bond together very closely indeed, and the virtues of trust, mutual respect, responsibility, and cooperation come to the fore. They are survival mechanisms, natural responses to a perceived shared threat.

Shared radical beliefs can create a strong sense of *we are on the same side*. In our human brotherhood movement, where all beliefs are welcome, some other mechanism is needed to create a similar strong sense of being on the same side. I suggest that simply *realizing* we are on the same side can contribute to a strong sense of *being* on the same side. If a fundamentalist and a non-believer, for example, can experience a deep breakthrough in mutual understanding and respect, transcending their differences, that can be an emotionally bonding experience.

Realizing our common humanity: a *conversion experience*

A common theme in action films involves initial enemies, out to kill one another, who suddenly discover they have a common bigger enemy. They then become earnest allies, and this is always a thrilling, emotional turning point in the story. The energy tied up in opposition is released and becomes its opposite to the same degree. Another familiar theme involves a man and woman who can't stand one another at first, and then circumstances cause love to bloom between them. These themes are used so often by Hollywood because we, the audience, respond to them emotionally and pleasurably.

I had such an experience myself, in a conference where strong differences emerged, and it seemed like the gathering was going to descend into chaos. It was a profound experience, and there were two key elements involved, arising from a shift in how we were engaging in our dialog. The first element was *really listening,* letting each person be *really heard.* The second was *really expressing*, saying what is *really important* to you. For the first time I realized that dialog could be serious without being debate, and that common ground can be found despite having different perspectives.

It was an ecstatic moment, a real high, to feel a room full of dissension turn into circle of fellow humans, able to communicate at a level of harmony I didn't know was possible. I had a deep feeling of being *at home* with the group, and a deep realization that this kind of experience could happen with any group. Our common humanity had transcended our differing beliefs, and the realization of our common humanity was a strong bonding experience.

For our human brotherhood movement, this experience of seeing-our-common-humanity can be our version of the *conversion* experience that is characteristic of religions and cults. It is by such conversion experiences that new cultures propagate. Even the drug culture has a conversion experience, of getting stoned for the first time. A conversion experience

goes beyond ideas and the rational. It creates a *feeling* that we have found a new way of being, that liberates us is a way that we didn't know was possible. And a conversion experience brings a new kind of *belonging*, one that feels like *coming home*.

Human brotherhood as a cultural movement

Let's review what we've covered so far. Based on considerations of psychology, and the role of culture in human evolution, it seems that major shifts in mass consciousness can only be achieved through the mechanism of *cultural propagation*. If our goal is to facilitate social transformation, then we need to think in terms a movement that embodies a culture, and which operates in such a way as to propagate that culture. Our social movement must be at the same time a cultural movement.

Based on historical considerations, we need to keep in mind that social movements, if they achieve political victory, lead to the dominance of the movement's internal culture, which is often not consistent with the advertised goals of the movement. If our goal is to facilitate the emergence of a certain kind of society, then our movement must itself embody the virtues of such a society, and the culture of our movement must be the very culture we envision for the transformed society.

If we want to help launch such a movement, we must of course face the question: *What kind of society do we want?* What I personally want, and what resonates with much that I've heard from others, is a society based on the realization, *we are all in this together*, and where we conceptualize humanity as the *brotherhood of man*, rather than as competing tribes, classes, or ideological camps. A society based on the *harmonization of interests*, rather than the *domination of the strongest factions*.

In a standard social movement, based on beliefs and agendas, we would now think in terms of drawing up a *Manifesto of Brotherhood*, and recruiting members who *agree with* the manifesto. Such a movement would be just one more divisive faction in society, and even if it gained dominance it would be unlikely to achieve the principles laid out in its manifesto.

In a *culturally based* movement we don't *talk* about these principles, instead we *practice* them. Rather than existing as a manifesto, the principles need to be the basis upon which the movement operates – how it makes decisions, how it holds meetings, how it treats its members, what objectives it pursues, etc. In such a movement, we don't ask people to *agree* with the principle of brotherhood, instead we invite them into a space where they can *experience* being welcomed as a brother or sister.

The fact is that we don't know what a brotherhood-based society would look like, or how it would operate. In my book I develop some scenarios that I think are plausible, and I'm kind of proud of those, but that's a far cry from knowing how such a society would manifest in the real world of flesh and blood. This is one more reason why only a cultural movement can hope to achieve the kind of society we want. The movement serves as the Petri dish in which the new culture can develop and evolve. A brotherhood culture is an organic culture, a folk culture, and it evolves out of human experience. It isn't pre-defined by a manifesto or constitution, written by folks like us, who are still operating in the old, dysfunctional culture.

To sum up, we're talking about a social movement whose culture embodies the principle of brotherhood. As that movement spreads by cultural propagation, the culture of the new society will be coming into existence, creating itself, like a plant growing. At first there are small groups, then larger groups, then groups learn how to coordinate their activities, etc, always within the cultural paradigm, as emerging manifestations of the cultural paradigm.

There are now two threads that we need to delve a bit deeper into. We need a deeper understanding of the cultural nature of the movement, and a deeper understanding of the activist program of the movement. The culture embodies the goals and vision of the movement, and provides the means of propagation. The program provides the motivation to participate, and the means of bringing about social transformation. These are the forces of yin and yang, yin being the culture and yang being the program. These forces must be in balance with one another, so that they can operate in synergy.

Harmonization dialog: the core of a brotherhood culture

As regards the cultural nature of the movement, much has already been said. There is an *invitation*, along the lines of, *Welcome to the human family, come as you are, we are all on the same side here*. There is a *style of dialog*, that involves *really listening*, and saying what is *really important*. There is a *conversion experience*, where, in the context of a group, one *gets it*, that we really are all part of the same family, regardless of our differences, and that *it is possible for us to operate together* in a useful way within that consciousness.

I can tell you about the conversion experience, but I cannot with words give you the experience itself. Tom Atlee had such an experience on the Peace March he writes about. Jim Rough had the experience in the mill near Arcata, where he developed Dynamic Facilitation. Such experiences

have caused each of us to dedicate our lives to a mission suggested to us by the experience. And then there are Rosa Zubizaretta, Tree Bressen, DeAnna Martin, Jean Rough, Joseph McCormick, some of the wise-democracy folks in Victoria, and others, each with a similar story, and all with lives now dedicated to related missions. The experience can be that powerful.

Similarly, I can tell you about dialog processes, but cannot with words give you the dialog experience. Indeed, the possibility of such dialog is contrary to most people's belief systems. That's why the conversion experience is so powerful – it causes us to change deeply held beliefs about what ordinary people like us are capable of, and to shift deeply held thinking patterns around "us" vs. "them". We have been conditioned from birth to powerlessness and factionalism; the release from that conditioning is a liberating emotional experience.

For now I think it is best to simply suggest a certain image of the dialog process. The image is a group of people sitting around in a circle, say around a campfire. They take turns, each speaking from their heart regarding the issues under discussion. The process continues, and each time around the circle there is more understanding of the full dimensions of the issues and of people's concerns. Eventually it becomes clear to everyone what the best way forward is, what works best for everyone involved. There is no compromise or negotiation, rather the lens of discussion is zoomed back and back, until a wide enough perspective can be achieved that enables the issues to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. To realize this can happen – to *know* that this is possible for groups that include both "us" and "them" – is the heart of the conversion experience.

The circle-process image is a bit idealized and simplified, but it does convey the nature of the dialog that would be involved in a human-brotherhood culture. Since we are all in this together, we want to solve our problems in such a way that we are all happy with the solutions. In order to do this, we listen carefully to everyone's concerns and ideas, and we keep thinking together until we find the best way forward. By really listening, and by saying what's really important, we are able to *harmonize* our different concerns, interests, and objectives. This is how a functional family operates, and how a functional family-of-humanity can operate.

The process of cultural propagation

Let's build a scenario. Every movement starts when groups of activists embrace some agenda, and get out there and start pursuing that agenda. So let's say we have a group in some community, and they want to become a seed of the human-brotherhood movement. The first thing that is needed,

using the organic metaphor, is for the seed to be *fertilized*. That is, the group needs to go through the *conversion experience,* and it needs to learn how to sit around in a circle and engage in *harmonization dialog.*

For a while then, our embryonic group is learning the new culture, learning how to practice it together, letting it ripple through their way of being. Using again the organic metaphor, the group during this stage is an *egg*, within which an embryo is developing. The organism, when hatched, will be a circle of people who collectively manifest the new culture. They are ready for exposure to the outside world when harmonization has been deeply ingrained, through practice, as their routine way of relating to one another.

When this happens, we then have a functional circle of the human-brotherhood movement. Having gone through the embryonic process, the circle is now capable of participating in the activist program of the movement. Initially, the primary program of such a circle would naturally be recruitment and expansion. Small activist groups initiate movements, but movements don't amount to much until a lot more people join in. At a macro level, the global level, the movement would spread by new seeds being planted in other places. At the micro level, the local level, the movement grows by *folding-in* people from the community into the circle, the way you fold in the ingredients of a white sauce.

The white sauce is the growing circle, and new people are invited in gradually, so they can be immersed in the culture, observe it in operation, and so that the circle can give the newcomers sufficient attention so that they can have the conversion experience. If the circle tries to grow too rapidly, the mix gets lumpy and loses its coherence. But grow it must, like a vine reaching for the light.

So our circle grows, let's say from six people, to eight, to twelve, to sixteen, or thereabouts. At that point the circle becomes unwieldy. It takes too much time for everyone to express themselves. So naturally, the circle splits in two. Each circle embodies the culture, and reduced in size each can now resume growth on its own. The movement expands in a community and a society just like kudzu, sending out shoots, and each shoot growing and sending out more shoots. Each circle grows slowly, but the overall movement grows at an exponential pace.

That's the basic recruitment and expansion program, as the process would be expressed from an activist perspective. From a cultural perspective, this is the *cultural propagation* process. Here the yin and yang are working together: the cultural propagation process provides the

expansion that the activist movement needs in order to achieve social transformation.

Before we leave this thread, we need to focus in for a moment on the folding-in process, and the nature of the conversion experience for new members. This is really the heart of everything we've been talking about. We need to have a clear image of this in our minds. For our dialog process, our image is a circle of people, listening carefully to one another, saying what's really important to them, and continuing until harmonization is achieved. Into this image we now bring a newcomer, unfamiliar with this circle process, who may be skeptical of groups in general, and who is there most likely out of curiosity, having been invited by a friend or acquaintance who is in the circle.

The folding-in process is about the new person being immersed in the new culture as it functions. That means that the circle can go on about its business with the new person there, observing. At the same time, the folding-in process is about bringing the person into the circle, getting them to participate, and to experience the *breakthrough* of unexpected harmonization, ie. the *conversion experience*. There are two ways this participation can be encouraged. The new person might be drawn into the ongoing dialog, and be encouraged to express his or her views on the issues under consideration. Or, the person might have things on their mind they would like to talk about, and when they are introduced they can be encouraged to bring up whatever might be concerning them.

In either case, the role of the circle, with respect to the new person, is to treat them as they should be treated in the new culture. That is, the group needs to listen carefully to what the person has to say, and it needs to encourage them to express themselves fully, without being interrupted by comments from others. And then the circle needs to *respond appropriately* to the new person, according to the principles of the culture. That is, there needs to be a round, where each person in the circle speaks from their own heart, regarding the concerns that the new person has expressed, and without dismissing in any way what the new person shared. And then the new person is given another turn, as the rounds continue, and we can assume their next expression is likely to come from a deeper place, after hearing what has been shared by the others, and knowing that their contribution was heard and respected.

Thus can a new person be welcomed into the process, and enabled to participate, without going through any training process, or learning any dialog guidelines, apart from the prohibition on interruptions. Notice how

different this welcoming process is, compared to other kinds of groups and organizations. In a normal group we might be welcomed socially, and asked friendly questions about ourselves, but when the business of the group begins the focus goes off of us, and the group starts giving us its sales pitch, telling us about its agenda, or giving us its sermon. In our brotherhood movement, the concerns of the new person are always center stage, along with everyone else's concerns. The movement is *about them*, they are not being asked to be *about the movement*.

The newcomer is included as a full participating member in the dialog. If they respond positively to the circle, both the process and the people, they are encouraged to return. At some point, perhaps in their first session, or perhaps later, they are going to *get it*, about the transformative nature of the circle process and of the new culture. When that happens, they become a full-fledged member of the circle, of the movement, and of the culture. Then a new person can be invited in, and so on.

Community: a natural focus for movement activism

Having looked in some detail at the culture of the movement, and the propagation process, we can finally turn our attention to the activist agenda of the movement, to the kind of initiatives the movement would be pursuing. The circle process is a face-to-face process, and circles exist within a community. As circles grow and split, the new circles will tend to be nearby the earlier circles. Thus, like kudzu, the growing culture tends to saturate a community and spread outward from there. For this and other reasons, I think that the creation of *harmonized communities* and the pursuit of *community improvement* would be natural activist objectives for our circles.

People living in a community have many shared problems, based on living in the same place. As they dialog about their concerns, these shared problems will emerge, and the circles will develop shared perspectives on how those problems might be dealt with. Hence the process of the movement naturally leads to the identification of potential activist initiatives regarding community improvement.

In addition, people have a natural, inherent yearning to live in supportive, harmonious communities. When people are asked to describe their 'ideal life style', they nearly always include 'living in a pleasant, friendly community'. We humans evolved in supportive, cooperative bands, our band being essentially our entire society. That is what is comfortable to us genetically as a species, and communities are where we can once again

create and experience living in the midst of a supportive, cooperative society. It is from a deep place that we yearn for harmonized communities.

Consider also what it would be like to be in one of these circles. The circle itself provides a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and a sense of comfort and support. It also provides a sense of collective empowerment, in that the circle knows how to achieve a shared perspective on dealing with issues. In such an environment, people will quite naturally be thinking, *Why can't our whole society be like this?* and *Why can't our community be like this?* Hence, for still another reason, there will an impulse toward growing the movement in the community, and a focus on community issues.

Linked circles: the dynamics of community consensus

Let us return now to the scenario we were building earlier. In that scenario we were looking at a movement circle in a community. We considered the invitation process, where new people are invited to join in the circle dialog, and are gradually 'folded in' to the movement culture. We looked at the growth process, where a circle splits in two when it gets too big, leading in the long run to an exponential rate of movement growth, like kudzu sending out shoots.

Let's now zoom in on that scenario, and let's bring in our later considerations, regarding a focus on community improvement, and on building harmonized communities.

As new people join in, their concerns and ideas are folded in to the circle's collective thinking, at the same time as the people are folding in to the circle's culture. The welcoming of their concerns is an important part of welcoming them as people. When they see their own concerns and ideas being taken seriously, they will be inclined to listen sympathetically to the concerns and ideas of others in the circle, and they are then on their way to understanding and becoming part of the harmonization culture.

As regards community, the circle will be developing a consensus perspective as regarding what the main issues and problems are in the community, and developing a shared vision for the community. When a new person joins in, the evolving consensus comes up against a test: does the new person like that consensus, or do they have problems with it? If they have problems with it, that means they have concerns that the current consensus doesn't deal with. The circle then must turn its attention to those new concerns, because that's what harmonization is about, and around the

circle we go until a new consensus perspective emerges, that takes the new concerns into account as well as all the previous concerns.

This is a process that will tend to converge. That is, as the circle grows, there is less and less likelihood that a new person will have serious problems with the emerging consensus. Once the circle gets to about 12, most of the viewpoints in the community are likely to be incorporated. By the time the circle gets big enough to split, the consensus is likely to be one that most people in the community could relate to.

So the split happens, and now we have two circles, each starting off with the same shared consensus perspective on community issues and community vision. Presumably the two circles would want to stay in touch with one another, and would want new concerns and ideas raised in one circle to be brought to the attention of the other. It would make good sense for a couple of the members of one circle to sit in with the other circle from time to time, participating in their dialog. By such means circles could stay in synch, and there would be an evolving consensus perspective, shared among the circles in a community.

When someone does bring in new issues and concerns, the implications of that would ripple out from their circle to other circles. In this way a community-wide consensus can be developed and maintained dynamically, by means of communication among circles. In addition, each member in the movement is always part of the community-wide consensus; their concerns have been taken into account, and if they come up with new concerns, those will be taken into account as well.

From a political perspective then, our process of linked circles can be seen as a community-wide, participatory-democracy process, where everyone participates and everyone's views are taken into account. The problem with participatory democracy, as a theory, has always been the issues of efficiency and practicality. The linked-circle process, together with the folding-in harmonization process, cuts through this Gordian knot.

Movement outcomes: community self-governance

By the time we have two or three circles going, the role of the local movement, as regards its activist agenda, becomes rather clear. The local movement has a perspective on the community, regarding its problems and issues, and a vision for improving the community. This perspective brings in the concerns and ideas of a considerable number of local residents, and most people in the community are likely to resonate with that perspective

From an activist perspective, the movement can now be seen as a community campaign to implement the ideas the movement has developed. In terms of activist initiatives, the movement would presumably print up flyers describing their proposals, give talks to local groups, go on local radio, and generally do those things activists do to promote their programs. And in all these communications, would always be the invitation: *come join us, bring in your own ideas, help improve our community*.

Given that the movement's proposals are likely to be well received in the community, new members would be attracted by the movement's programs, as well as by the enthusiasm shown by the members for the movement. People could be invited to join in a circle as a guest, and it is the *experience* of the process that is likely to keep them coming back, rather than any sales pitch regarding 'the virtues of dialog', or the 'desirability of participatory democracy'.

Although from the outside the movement might be seen mainly as an activist group with an agenda for the community, from the inside people would be very consciousness of the democratic process they are using. They would be just as enthusiastic about spreading their democratic culture, by bringing more people into the movement, as they are about seeing their agenda implemented. Their vision for the community would not only include the specific projects they have in mind, but would also see the linked-circle process as being the way the community should govern itself democratically on an ongoing basis.

At some point the idea is going to arise that the movement put forward candidates for local offices, such as mayor, city council, etc. This would begin to make sense when there are quite a few circles, spread around the community, and people in the community generally are supportive of the movement's proposals. Under these circumstances, the movement could expect its candidates to sweep the elections and take over city hall.

With most activist initiatives, which are issue-based, the link with the political system does not work very well. The best they can hope for is that some politician picks up their issue and implements it. With their goals achieved, the activist group fades away, and we're back to politics as usual.

With our movement it wouldn't work like that. With a consciousness of how their democratic process works, the movement would put forward its own candidates, and those candidates, when elected, would continue to be part of the movement, and would continue to participate in their home circles. Presumably, the city-hall process itself would operate as one more

circle in the movement, part of the same inter-circle synchronization process that has been already going on.

In this way, the community would be operating by an inclusive, participatory-democracy process, even while it retains its existing formal political process. The official powers and resources of the local government would be 'folded in' to the movement. Within the constraints of those powers and resources, the movement would proceed to pursue and implement its agenda – an agenda that would remain dynamic, always undergoing a process of review and refinement via the circles.

When this point is reached, where circles and governance are merged, there is likely to be a wave of new members, bringing in anyone who feels they've been left out, and perhaps wasn't paying any attention to the movement previously. This might bring in new concerns, to be harmonized into the circle process, and by this time we would have a truly inclusive, participatory, democratic process in operation.

The number of circles would tend to stabilize, and not everyone would be participating directly. If one person from a family is in a circle, the family as a whole would probably consider itself adequately represented. Or perhaps someone would be in a circle, and they'd keep their friends and neighbors in the loop on a more informal basis. Some people might be happy with how things are going and not see any reason to participate. And anyone who is unhappy with how things are going, or has new ideas to offer, would always be welcome to join in and get their concerns included in the process.

Democratic self-governance: questions of scale

In closing, let's zoom back, and look at the movement from the macro perspective, in the context of the larger society. The movement spreads by two processes: the planting of new movement seeds in new places, and the splitting-of-circles kudzu process where the movement is established.

The biggest hurdle for the movement will be the planting of that first seed, by some daring pioneer group of activists, somewhere out there in the real world. Once that seed is planted, based on the virtues and appeal of the movement culture, we can expect the movement would begin to grow locally.

When the movement begins to prove itself by successes in that first community, other activists would take interest, and eventually new seeds would be planted elsewhere. Once there are a half dozen or so places where the movement has established itself, then it would be perceived as a

'real movement', and we could expect an acceleration in the rate of new seeds being planted.

In the previous section I focused on the relationship between the movement and a community, and between the movement and the apparatus of local government. But in fact the circle-splitting process does not stop at town borders. The kudzu process spreads out, independent of borders, bringing the movement to neighboring communities and jurisdictions.

We need to consider what this mean as regards the synchronization process among circles. It is easy to imagine that the circles in a community would be able to stay in synch as regards community issues. But when other communities get involved, perhaps with quite different issues, the synchronization model doesn't work so simply. And when there are different local movements, separated from one another, it doesn't make a lot of sense to imagine them staying in any kind of close synchronization, nor is there any need for them to.

I raise this issue, but in fact I think it will tend to sort itself out naturally in a very effective way. In actual practice, communication will occur between circles when there is a reason for it to occur. Within a local jurisdiction, there would tend to be tight synchronization, as we have discussed above, so that coherent governance decisions could be made.

In the case of neighboring communities, what would be of concern would be issues that affect both communities, and conflicts that might exist between the communities. There would be an obvious reason why synchronization would be desirable across both communities, as regards those shared issues and problems. Quite naturally, circles, perhaps temporary ones, would be established that include people from both communities, who would also remain members of their home circles. These cross-over circles would provide a means of folding in the inter-community concerns into the process of both communities, so that consensus synchronization could be maintained between the communities on those shared issues.

Similarly, it would make sense for circles to be set up that include people from a region, such as a bioregion, so that the communities in that region could develop a consensus on regional cooperation, and things like transit systems, water allocations, and local energy production.

As the movement spreads in the society, and appropriate channels of synchronization are established, each community is concerning itself with larger and larger issues. Regional issues become local issues, for each community in the region. Eventually national and global issues become local issues.

Conclusions

That's about as far as I can go in terms of exploring these scenarios. When we get to the point where whole regions, or even nations, have become part of the brotherhood culture, we're talking about a different kind of world, one that it is difficult to imagine with any precision from where we are now.

There would be an international dimension, depending on where the movement spreads outside its original country of origin. The definition of 'what is a national issue' would shift depending on the role of the movement in different nations. So many of the issues between nations now are about competition and conflict. If the brotherhood culture spreads globally, kudzu like, there would be new means of resolving many of those issues.

One could even imagine that national boundaries would blur, and circles in Chicago and Toronto would have more links than between Chicago and Los Angeles. Perhaps people would identify with a circle-of-expanding-interest, growing outward from wherever they live, independent of all existing borders and jurisdictions, and ultimately including the whole globe.

In any case, these explorations into the likely outcomes of our brotherhood movement have not been intended as a guidebook or plan for the movement. The movement is about empowering people to determine their own destiny, in collaboration with their fellows. Anyone's early plans or expectations for the movement must be seen as simply one person's contribution to the dialog of the movement, to be superceded by events we can only now guess at.