

Library.Anarhija.Net



# Defying Power

Different Views on How Best to Understand the  
Evolution of the State

Peter Gelderloos

Peter Gelderloos

Defying Power

Different Views on How Best to Understand the Evolution of the  
State

May 5th, 2018 (Part I) and June 28th, 2018 (Part II)

Retrieved on July 2, 2018 from <https://c4ss.org/content/50774> and  
<https://c4ss.org/content/50991>

[lib.anarhija.net](http://lib.anarhija.net)

May 5th, 2018 (Part I) and June 28th, 2018  
(Part II)

# Contents

Part I . . . . . 3  
Part II . . . . . 10

## Part I

Since its publication, I have come across two reviews of *Worshipping Power* that I would like to respond to, not to bat a discursive ball back and forth, but to engage with the flow of conversations that form an integral part of our interaction with the world around us. One is William Gillis' "The Tangled Paths of State Formation and Resistance," and the other is Kristian Williams' "Mystifying: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation."

Much of Gillis' review focuses on a very interesting question that I want to save for last. First, there are a couple more technical matters. To begin with, I would disagree with the characterization that "The fight between authoritarianism and anti-authoritarianism is ultimately a fight over values far more than it is a fight over particular conditions or tools." Later, this same affirmation resurfaces in regard to markets, when Gillis praises the book for its accuracy about "markets not obliging inequality, hierarchy or states"

There is a constant interplay between values, institutions, and social organization. Agency and the strategies of specific groups play a major role in this process, but structural inertia is also capable of carrying the day. What's more, there is a crucial difference between tools and machines. Machines produce social realities, whereas tools merely amplify agency. I'm not sure whether Gillis would say there is nothing deterministic about technology (understood as an entire social complex of machines and practices), but I would not.

As far as markets are concerned, Gillis' second characterization is accurate. Markets do not deterministically create hierarchy or states. However, markets are without a doubt dangerous to freedom and interesting to states.

As far as I can tell, those societies that practiced market institutions over long periods of time, without developing strong hierarchies or states as a result, kept a large part of social life outside of the market and had practices that enabled the self-defense of

their economic autonomy. The quantitative logic of markets is potentially damaging to life. It is a virus that if unleashed is capable of destroying everything (even the market itself, if we are to follow Braudel's assertion that capitalism superseded and consumed market dynamics).

For markets to be made innocuous, a society needs unimpeded, non-monetized access to their basic means of survival. Land, as well as people's vital activity, must be inalienable, which means they cannot be bought or sold. In a society where the basis of existence is a healthy commons, I believe that people can safely experiment with a wide range of mechanisms for distributing all the other goods and services that round out our lives. But collective mechanisms of self-defense against accumulation, enclosure, and quantification are vital.

James C. Scott expresses the view that markets were actually troublesome to early states. The work of merchants was harder for rulers to track and tax, so they discouraged it at times in favor of a model of accumulation based on landed laborers. I don't dispute that this was a characteristic of the land-based states of southeast Asia Scott focuses on, at least in certain moments in their development.

But the archipelagos of the Mediterranean and the Java and Banda seas give us quite a different model. While states in those areas did not create commerce and markets, they did not hesitate to pursue them, to redesign them, and then to harness them to extract unprecedented amounts of value that led to an exponential expansion of the technologies of social control and warfare that continues to this day.

On a more trivial level, Gillis claims I made a factual error in dating the appearance of agriculture and plant domestication to 10,500 (actually I give a range of dates), rather than 23,000 years ago. This comes down to a minor confusion regarding the difference between cultivation and domestication. Cultivation, which certainly happened in Palestine 23,000 years ago, and probably in many other

There's also the question of the relationship between society and the youth. Rather than the boy scout model of harnessing children into a patriotic corps that mindlessly supports the community project, over-structuring childhood so that the young have an easy time of finding "their place," children should be left in an antagonistic position with respect to their community. This means to a certain extent that they need their own space, a space partially outside the community. If they have autonomy, are given respect, and are taught the basics of self-defense (which also means parents defending themselves against their children when they enter the little dictator phase), they will not fail to see the forms of complacency and hypocrisy creeping into their society, and fight against them.

I'll end talking by about alienation, land, and relationships. A society that doesn't want to go down the road of the authoritarian apocalypse should never treat the land or other aspects of nature as things that can just be bought and sold. Relationships of domination with nature prefigure relationships of domination in human society, and they also provide the possibility for regimes of exploitation and accumulation that permit a nascent elite to construct the weapons and fund the war against all the rest of us. And the more degraded our natural environment is, the harder it is to turn to it as a refuge when we attempt to escape state power, a guerrilla base when we attempt to destroy state power, and a shrine when we realize the need to develop an anti-authoritarian, ecocentric spirituality.

If we understand that we are a part of nature, then it is easier to see how social relationships are just an extension of natural relationships. Because it's vital to find a balance between social mobility and the sanctity of relationships. It's easier to deal with stress and conflict if we're able to move around and find our place—or find the patterns of nomadism that suit us—rather than being stuck within a society. However, mobility should not mean alienation and rootlessness, as it does under capitalism. We live through our relationships. They should be inalienable.

places and even earlier, is simply the sowing and harvesting of plant foods, typically wild cereals. Contrary to the prevailing stereotypes regarding non-civilized peoples, any hunter-gatherer community is capable of doing this, but in most conditions, it would be a waste of their effort. Domestication, on the other hand, requires far more dedication over a much longer period of time, as it implies the production of new species intentionally selected for human consumption. This is the process that only began about 11,000 years ago.

Another observation Gillis makes regards the "hostility" I evince towards academics. It's a contradiction I am unable to resolve: admiration for those whose studies have expanded my horizons or challenged my beliefs; hatred for the institutions they work for; scorn for those who make their paycheck fine-tuning this system. But we don't have to stop at the contradiction of the radical academic. Why not include the radical writer, making a name for himself by talking about revolution?

A certain professor, asked to write a blurb for the book, politely asked me, "Are you sure you want me to?" At first I was surprised, until I realized that in the book I had just written, the hatred and the scorn for academia far outweighed the admiration.

I thank Gillis for highlighting that hostility and also the contradictions that surround it, especially when those lead one to take a utilitarian view of knowledge, as I do, ambiguously, by suggesting that the pursuit of knowledge must be justified. Gillis is right to spurn the idea that "we must interrogate every flight of investigation and demand to know its pragmatic utility for the social order" (their characterization). But I would argue that their interpretation misses out on the ambiguity in my statement. I wrote, "Learning is only worthwhile if it helps us fight, to live healthy, to live free." They respond:

*What a terribly impoverished notion of "living free"! Surely inquiry and creativity are themselves part and parcel of freedom, not merely servants or tools. Is freedom*

*just some passive state of being we're trying to retreat to?  
Or is it an active, striving, reaching sort of thing, that necessarily includes learning for its own sake, exploring for its own sake, dreaming for its own sake?*

Actually, I haven't provided any notion, impoverished or otherwise, of "living free." I leave that to the reader. And if a reader such as Gillis requires unbridled curiosity and independent inquiry to live free, so be it.

Gillis' warning about a utilitarian view of learning stands. I share those concerns. But let me add a warning about science "unleashed," a notion that receives praise from the dominant moralists of the day. Museum basements across North America and Europe are filled with bones stolen from indigenous burial grounds across the world. This was done by trained scientists as part of their unbridled search for knowledge. And peace-loving Albert Einstein was indispensable to the invention of the nuclear bomb. To anyone with common sense, this would have been predictable — the military always gets first dibs. But sometimes, highly intelligent people can be really, really stupid.

Then there's the recent revelation that some of Chomsky's linguistics works had military applications, and that the Pentagon made use of MIT and other universities by giving scientists there the feeling that they had absolute freedom in their work, they were simply funding free inquiry that would benefit "humanity."

Okay: utilitarianism is a straight-jacket for knowledge. But curiosity is never neutral. How do we continue to practice free inquiry in the middle of a battlefield? I don't trust those who claim not to be on any side, because I can see who signs their paycheck, even if they don't notice.

Gillis' argument about authoritarianism below the state threshold is the one that interests me the most, but I want to save it for last, to end on a good note.

But in our internet society, ostracism is a first resort. It's common practice. If someone rubs you the wrong way, you troll them, you drag them, you get them excluded, and then you block them. This practice has extended to social movements. Anyone who treats ostracism lightly is fighting against any possibility of liberation in our lifetimes.

On the other hand, practices of critique and ridicule—especially against those with more power and status—are very common in traditional anti-authoritarian societies. Those can have a place in our own movements, but only if our bonds of solidarity are stronger. The ideal conclusion to ridicule is that the object of the critique blushes, they shut up for a while, maybe they storm off and pout, but eventually they come back to again share their gifts with us, and we welcome them back warmly. The purpose is to give those in the peanut gallery the power to intervene, not to permanently silence anyone or to break the social bond. Of course, this means that practices of critique and ridicule need to be accompanied by intense practices of caring.

Ridicule without caring is dangerous because it can lead to stigmatization, the horizontal creation of a value hierarchy in which some members of the group are permanently scorned or belittled. Such a practice can serve as a motor for the production of ever worse kinds of hierarchy.

In fact, so much comes down to questions of emotional maturity or manipulation, that it seems vital to encourage a culture of personal and collective growth, and the best possible practices of education and child-rearing, in which children are given both autonomy and encouragement to learn, along with every possibility to self-actualize. I would also strongly favor combative over idyllic child-rearing strategies. Children shouldn't grow up in a perfect, peaceful world. They should learn the absolute necessity of self-defense. There will be no utopia. Humans will always have the capacity to treat one another poorly, and children need to learn how to protect themselves and assert their limits as a part of growing up.

be valuing the long, thankless, and difficult process of accompanying those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm as they go through their healing process. These processes are very different. The former requires loving support and regaining power over one's life, and the latter requires strong criticism and an emphasis on learning empathy. But both are necessary for restoring a healthy community.

At this point, though, I would make a distinction between punishment and vengeance. Vengeance, such an ugly word in statist society, is retribution that is not sanctioned by the broader community or society. It's not punishment, because it doesn't make higher claims to objective justice. At most, it seeks to satisfy a fully individualized justice. I think *Bash Back!* showed how vengeance can be a vital form of healing, in case Frantz Fanon hadn't already made that clear. Vengeance is an important way of ensuring that we never surrender our freedom of action to the community, and it also makes sure that those who harm the least powerful—those who are excluded by majority morality—or those with a talent for winning over mediators and public opinion, can still face consequences for their actions. Some societies combine mediation and accountability mechanisms with semi- or fully normalized practices of vengeance. A combination of compassion, collective healing, and direct action is probably a good idea: when the vengeance tradition becomes more powerful than any mechanism for mediation, then you have systematic feuding, which can get pretty gnarly and isn't terribly conducive to personal or collective growth. So it's not a technique without its dangers.

Perhaps the most dangerous power of accountability mechanisms is the power to ostracize. Ostracism—fully excluding someone from their social group—is basically social murder. And it seems that stateless societies around the world traditionally recognized this. They reserved ostracism as an absolute last resort, only for the most extreme and incorrigible cases. In a communal society, ostracism is rightly seen as being just as bad as killing someone.

First, I want to quickly respond to the other review, written by a decidedly grumpy Kristian Williams. Williams' disapproval lies on two foundations: that I offer no clear thesis regarding the causes of state formation; and that I give tautological explanations for state formation.

From the beginning, Williams uses the snarky tone that is more fashionable among writers trying to build their career profile than those engaged in the solidaristic project of trying to foster stronger collective struggles. One of the many problems with such a tone is that it looks much worse when you get your facts wrong, as all of us will inevitably do at some point, and as Williams does repeatedly throughout his short text. Embarrassingly for Williams, he has missed the last fifty-odd years of anarchist research into state formation, which is a pretty bad omission for someone writing a review on the subject.

It seems that Williams doesn't recognize the validity of non-academic formats. He complains that "it is not until the final chapter that we encounter anything as definite as a thesis statement." He says "the approach is opaque" and lacks "any clear direction". The thesis he identifies, quoted from my last chapter, is that "state formation is a multilineal process and not a teleological, progressive evolution."

Williams is not above telling a white lie to make his point. He claims I have no thesis until the last chapter, and while I reject his assumption that all critical writing must follow the style of the academic paper, I recognize that his university education might have made him a bit small-minded. But don't they teach kids not to deliberately misrepresent a source?

Here's a quote from the introduction. In fact, it's the last paragraph of the introduction, just the place where they teach those who paid tens of thousands of dollars to certify their brains to look for and find a thesis statement. (Hey Gillis, there's that hostility again. What should I do about it?)

*It is now undeniable that there are multiple pathways in the evolution of states. I will not offer a single cause nor a single evolutionary model. There are several models we could consider, building off the work of a great many specialists. However, within each model, I find more particularities than similarities. As such, throughout the following chapters, which are divided thematically, I highlight the basic models when they appear, but place the weight of the narrative on the particularities of each case. This may not be the best format for rapid summarizing, but its advantage is in avoiding potentially dogmatic simplifications.*

Hmmm. That looks pretty damn similar to the thesis that Williams claims I don't express until the last chapter of the book. It also looks like I explain what my approach will be, and what direction I'll be going in. Williams might have been comforted by a chronological organization to the book, instead of my "wandering" thematic approach, but I explained that too in the introduction. Putting all the emphasis on the original states props up the "Pandora's Box" fallacy of state superiority, and a progressive telling of history tends towards white supremacist mythologizing backed by the fallacy of a unilineal history.

History unfolds in loops and spirals, full of backtracking or sudden changes in trajectory, far more often than in a progressive series of A-B-C... It also unfolds simultaneously on all continents. A truly chronological telling is impossible. Many historians have created such a narrative by ignoring non-European populations until the West invaded and conquered them. These historians' perspective follows the hegemonic center and ignores the margins, to the point of completely dismembering history and making it impossible to perceive relations of influence and evolution. I could have been more explicit on this last point, but I guess I wasn't expecting such bad faith readings, and from an anarchist no less.

Another important element in this kind of conflict mediation is the lack of a written law code. People's actual needs take precedence. The needs of the person harmed, the needs of the person who harmed, the needs of disputing parties unable to solve a conflict on their own, the needs of the rest of the community who allowed harm to take place, who are being affected by the conflict. A law code replaces respect for people's needs with obedience to authority, and it allows a small group—those who have the most power in the process, of writing it—to shape their society's morals. Without a written code, everyone can be constantly involved in shaping and challenging the common ethos. If it's an unending debate, everyone is empowered to participate. The moment the debate ends, people trick themselves into thinking they've discovered final solutions and have no more need for personal or collective growth, and they have created the specter of obedience.

Then there's the question of punishment and response. I believe that punishment is an authoritarian practice that institutionalizes community power to do harm and seeks to justify, *a priori*, doing harm to those who do not have community support. Subsequently, the community has no ethical arguments against doing harm, no moral superiority over those it punishes, and therefore it locks itself into a dynamic of "might makes right," a judicial arms race. What's more, punishment dehumanizes the person who is punished, and in the case that they have actually harmed anyone and not just broken some written law, punishment prevents them from the growth and healing they need to go through not to harm other people. It's been pretty well demonstrated by now that prison systems and other punishment regimes reproduce the harms they supposedly are meant to stop. This makes perfect sense for a state, because states thrive off of interpersonal violence. But how does it make sense for anarchists, feminists, and other radicals? I think people who posture as wanting to go really hard against those who cause harm within our circles should be unmasked as merely reproducing the harm that they get power from opposing. We should instead

constantly one click away from being unfriended. Social network technologies are by nature an addiction, a dependency-fostering medium, and addiction substitutes the family bond.

This mass-produced destruction of meaningful, solid relationships in our society, and the celebrated immaturity that accompanies it, may be one of the most pernicious forces for protecting hierarchies and domination within our movements for liberation. Much of this has to do with conflict resolution. Dependency on police and judges, as well as the alienation and insolidarity that arise from antisocial crime or conflicts between neighbors, make it easy for the state to rule us. Monopolizing and institutionalizing conflict resolution and harm reduction (usually through law codes and the logic of crime and punishment) was an important task for early states.

Many anti-authoritarian societies traditionally had specialists in conflict resolution and mediation, usually older people who could claim neutrality by being equally related to all people involved (imagine that a grandparent has an equal familial relation to all their grandchildren, in the case of a conflict between cousins). And mediation is both a calling, dependent on a certain sensibility, and a skill that requires a great deal of practice. In anti-authoritarian societies, one of the most important elements seems to be that the mediators have no specialized enforcers. They are not allowed to own the conflict the way a judge does, nor force their verdict on anyone. People in the conflict choose to accept their intervention (suggesting the need for many different mediators, so there is an actual choice), and the resolutions they propose have to win community support.

In other words, people never surrender their autonomy or their own judgment, not those directly involved in the conflict or harmful situation, and not those around them. Curiously, the conflict resolution and accountability strategies that most anarchists have opted for never disassemble the logic of the prison system. Rather than denying the authoritarian logic that someone has an absolute claim to the truth, they simply change who is allowed to exercise that power. Unsurprisingly, the power gets abused.

What about the other shortcoming Williams picks up on? His perceived tautology is as follows:

*Gelderloos slides toward a kind of cultural determinism, and disastrously pushes the notion to the point of outright tautology: "Placed in the same adverse situation, a society with anti-authoritarian, cooperative, and reciprocal values will find an anti-authoritarian solution, while a society that values hierarchy may likely form a state." On that same page, he puts it more strongly, adds in primitive accumulation, and reverses the cause and effect: "economic accumulation is inconceivable without the hierarchical structures and spiritual values that states and proto-states create.*

Both of my statements are in line with Clastres' groundbreaking studies in the sixties and seventies and reconfirmed in detail by James C. Scott's current work. Williams is looking for a materialist explanation for the State, but he has arrived half a century too late. I recommend Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was discredited ages ago. The materialists offered a mechanical explanation for state formation, which is appealing to the scientific mind. But their hypothesis is simply not born out by the historical record. It gives us a theoretically useful lens for studying certain moments of state formation, but it fails to take into full account the political and spiritual production of that which is considered material and natural.

Williams' bemoans my failure to provide explanations for how a state-forming culture might emerge. Sadly, he missed that too. Every single chapter contains historical examples of how state-forming cultures were strengthened, sometimes as a product of social evolution, sometimes as the result of strategic decisions by would-be elites. Every. Single. Chapter.

Perhaps Williams is looking for a single, tidy, deterministic cause that brought state-forming cultures out of a smooth, egalitarian,

prelapsarian past. Maybe, the temperature and rainfall levels at which such a culture forms, or the specific components and fuel source of the *authoritarian culture machine*. But state formation is not that simple, nor was there ever an innocent human past free of power dynamics.

For those who like it simple, I suggest the following exercise. Spend a day with your housemates, trying to come up with all the ways that you could make the street you live on more prestigious than the next street over, and also ways that it might become more prestigious by chance, without you lifting a finger. Now imagine you had years, generations, to do this. If you think, at the end of the exercise, that there would be a common thread linking all of your devious plans, or one external factor that would determine their success or failure, then you are inferior specimens of human creativity. Such nefarious creativity is hard to contain within a tidy theoretical model.

Anyone can have a bad day and write a stupid article. Lord knows I have. I just hope that's the case with Kristian, and that his future writing is as good as *Our Enemies in Blue*.

The most interesting question, I have saved for last, but it will have to wait until the next installment: William Gillis' question about hierarchies that thrive below the state threshold. In Part II: how to confront the kind of authoritarianism that could exist in non-state societies, post-state societies, and even our own counter-cultures...

## Part II

In Part I of this article, I responded to William Gillis' review of *Worshipping Power: An Anarchist Vision of Early State Formation*. I wanted to give special attention to what I found to be his most interesting critique.

ally, everyone is related to everyone else. Most European languages have an infinitesimal kinship vocabulary that shows the poverty of nuclear families. The fact that we have only one word for "cousin," any horizontal relation further removed than sibling, makes us something of a joke on the world stage. But we can build a new richness by recognizing more forms of consanguinity and also non-sanguine family relations (referring to whether or not someone is said to be related "by blood"). For the latter, Christianity gives us the "god-parent," but such an adoptive familial relationship is by no means a Christian invention.

In fact, different forms of adoption should have an important role in any anti-authoritarian family model. Adoption—the explicit choice of taking on the long-term responsibilities of the family bond—enshrines a kinship logic based on solidarity rather than involuntary association. Adoption allows the family to be a tool of resistance in situations of repression and migration, taking in those who are orphaned by conflict or by the prison system, as well as those who have to flee state effects (like environmental destruction, war, and poverty). Adoption also negates the Western rationalist assumption that an ethnicity is a genetic community and therefore an essentialist and separate human group. The normalization of widespread adoption, not just of children but of anyone, shows that an ethnicity is the affirmation of a shared cultural practice. And the habit of many anti-authoritarian societies to claim belonging to multiple ethnic groups, as an extension of the multilateral kinship logic, breaks the power of ethnicity to serve as a motor for borders and ideas of racial superiority.

The biggest obstacle to reconstructing family through the proliferation of more horizontal, elective, and multilateral kinship bonds is that consumerism has made us forget how to make a commitment. People from Generation X can't even assemble an impoverished nuclear family, while those who were raised on Facebook don't properly know what a relation is. The family bond, that had already degraded to the superficial level of a consumer choice, is now

or even worse, that claims not even to be a spirituality, such as scientific rationalism.

Therefore, the kinds of spirituality with the most anarchistic possibility are consciously metaphoric, flexible, and reliant on non-professional, diffuse participation in their creation and regeneration. Beyond the mode, the content should probably include an emphasis on cycles of renewal, revolt, ecocentrism, freedom, community, and reciprocity. Because spirituality is ultimately storytelling, it also gives us a unique opportunity for remembering *our* history of struggle, free from the stultifying effects of institutional history-keepers. The folks at *Otherworlds Review* clearly have this in mind.

The spirituality, as well as the ways of sharing reproductive tasks and the kinship patterns, should be non-patriarchal. This is vital. Patriarchy seems to be the most resilient form of hierarchy in human history, as well as a necessary precondition for state formation. Many cultures surviving colonization have traditional, non-patriarchal forms of gender organization, and as part of a revolutionary process we can develop (and are developing) social forms with no gender categories whatsoever.

The sky is also the limit for different possible family structures. However, there have been enough bad experiences with alternative families within our radical movements to show how the Western notion of freedom as “no attachments” leaves its mark and leaves, often, the most exploited member of the failed experimental family holding the check. Or the baby, as the case may be. This suggests that it may in fact be necessary to have culturally inscribed expectations of responsibility for care. (Sometimes, just sometimes, we’re not actually smarter than a million years of human experimentation). But by no means do such expectations need to fall solely on the biological mother or on a heteronormative mother and father figure, as in the nuclear family model.

The experiences of anti-authoritarian societies suggest the advantages of multilateral kinship models. The multilateral part means that we trace family in as many directions as possible, so that ide-

Gillis takes me to task for focusing too much on the anthropological definition of the state, analyzing how societies cross the threshold from having hierarchies that don’t constitute a state to having stronger hierarchies that do.

This focus on a very specific subsection of power structures is interesting but it leads to a conclusion a little far afield from anarchism’s concerns. What’s the most critical element to starting multi-tier coercive administrations? The creation of values that enable universal centralization. This is certainly true as far as it goes, but the more interesting and anarchist question is what leads to domination at all, in any flavor or organizational structure?

It’s a good point. And one that led me to imagine adding another chapter to the book, one which I’ll outline here:

#### **Defying Power: An Anarchist Vision of Active Statelessness**

I could start by voicing an enthusiastic, “What he said,” regarding James C. Scott’s research (*The Weapons of the Weak, The Art of Not Being Governed...*) into the characteristics of populations in resistance to state authority in Southeast Asia, particularly as regards food production, kinship, geography, and heterodox religion. However, I would like to add to some of these areas, discuss a couple others, and also open the field to consider hierarchy below the state threshold both in our movements today and in a hypothetical post-state future.

It might help to start by specifying what we mean by hierarchy. At an analytical level, hierarchy is not any situation of inequality or ranking. It is a ranking system capable of reproducing itself, in which what is ranked is access to power. Curiously, the term’s original meaning is “rule by a high priest.”

What is the opposite of hierarchy? Liberal concepts of freedom have little to offer, as they are based in a mythical social contract,

the guarantee of rights that have little to do with quality of life and access to power, and the achievement of an ill defined *equality*. No human group enjoys anything approaching perfect equality, which makes sense, as the latter is a mathematical concept that maps poorly onto social relations. The tension between sameness and difference defines human communities, and those that have rejected hierarchy do so not by eliminating difference but by making impossible the unification and centralization of power, such that difference simply cannot fuel a hierarchical social relation.

If we understand that power is everywhere, then a social practice of non-hierarchical power would require the non-alienation of power. Power would always reside within the human activities that create it, rather than being controlled and redistributed by self-reproducing institutions. The power of the gardener would remain in her hands, and if she ever did decide to form part of an association of gardeners for the coordination of work and the sharing of materials, she might blend her power with others, but would not lose legitimate recourse to that power, as in the case of a guild that holds a monopoly over a certain kind of productive activity and which is governed by an internal group of leaders with privileged access to the product.

Another property of non-hierarchical power is that it is not commutative. One kind of power cannot be swapped with another kind. There is no fixed exchange rate between the power of the gardener and the power of the healer or the storyteller. Their powers never flow together to a central point of legitimation and control. Thus, not only is power dispersed in such a society, it could never be centralized because on a metaphysical level it has not been unified. We can speak of many powers in such a society, not one power. Arriving at such a practice requires us to entirely break with politics, the reification of the *poleis*, which was the point of legitimation and centralization for a patriarchal, contractual, and proprietary notion of power in the militaristic slave economies of ancient Greek city-states.

Anarchist involvement in the 15M movement in Barcelona in 2011 revolved largely around the attempt to break up unified power. This manifested as a tension between direct democracy, which quickly evolved into an authoritarian and bureaucratic process, and decentralized organizing and decision-making.

Linked to the necessity of decentralization and disunity is the need for complex as opposed to simple status. Any society in which people can be ranked in a linear fashion is one that is prone to hierarchy, and one that has probably undergone a severe cultural process of erasing or belittling many of the criteria by which people can be evaluated. There is no truly egalitarian group free of status, but it is a particular group that only recognizes one kind of status value. Historically, this has often involved valuing culturally masculine traits at the expense of culturally feminine traits.

By valuing people according to an unending list of abilities and qualities (a good singer, a good cook, a good hunter, a good mechanic, a good mediator, a good connector, a good healer, a good fighter, a good midwife, a good translator...), we can live a fuller life with more paths to self-actualization, and we prevent any one kind of power from having undue influence over the others. We could formalize many of these roles, or not, but it requires constant effort to prevent the emergence of a calcified value hierarchy that would heap disproportionate rewards on some kinds of status and forget about others. And constant effort, over multiple generations, usually means ritualization and inclusion within a society's mythos.

This brings us to the question of spirituality. Every society has a spirituality. Ways of framing knowledge, explaining one's relationship with the world, and telling origin stories always surpass empirical fact and rely on culturally subjective constructions. From an anarchist standpoint, the most dangerous spirituality is the one that is reproduced by a professional institution, without popular participation. Perhaps the most dangerous subset of this type is the spirituality that claims to be unquestionable, such as monotheism,