

# A Revisioning of the Hierarchy

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## Abstract

*The modern Western Weltanschauung, affirming an empirical view of the world, tends towards a singular analysis of complexity. Compartmentalization and dissociation are emphasized, and reinforced by the structure of the Simple Hierarchy that the Weltanschauung promotes. Within human institutions, this structure characteristically gives rise to unsatisfactory political environments, which are rightly criticized by feminists. But the network which is advocated as an alternative appears severely limited in its capacity to structure complexity, and may be indicative of a loss of sense of qualitative structure to the world.*

*A critique of the Simple Hierarchy is presented. The potential of hierarchical structures is discussed, with reference to the Traditional perspective [1]. A revised appreciation of the hierarchy indicates its potential for human development, in concert with the network. Problems stem not from the hierarchical structure, but from the specific types of hierarchy used, and how these are understood and applied.*

## 1. Introduction

Recent discussion, both academic and lay, has evidenced a rejection of the hierarchy and has advocated the network as an ideal alternative. But both rejection and advocacy seem to occur all too often at the level of blind assertion. The hierarchy is perceived to be the source of all evils, and the network the solution to all problems. The unexamined nature of this shift in perspective - in the absence of informed and dispassionate debate - is disturbing in the light of the profound effect such perspectives have on global issues. The matter is by no means clear-cut.

## 2. Compartmentalization and dissociation in the modern western *Weltanschauung*

In a well-known paper [2], Christopher Alexander warns that within any organized object, extreme compartmentalization and the dissociation of internal elements are the first signs of coming destruction. The modern Western *Weltanschauung* exhibits such compartmentalization and dissociation. A simplistic discrete atomistic spatial analysis is promoted that denies the possibility for higher-dimensional harmonic integrity, and actively discriminates against notions of interpenetration and overlap [3].

Analysis takes precedence over synthesis, concomitant with an emphasis on looking outward at the world, rather than inward. This is indicative of the transformation of the fundamental attitude of the human mind in the West from the *vita contemplativa* (where ancient and mediaeval man and woman sought the contemplation of God through nature), to the *vita activa* (where modern man and woman attempt to dominate nature and to supplant God).

The seeds of this orientation lie in the Aristotelian world-view that gives precedence to the empirical over the ideal. In the world of common experience, matter exhibits an exclusive nature. Each point in space in the real world is conceptually either empty, or occupied by just one material object. Similarly, extension exhibits a mono-dimensional nature. The physical experience of time and space is that to get from one point to a distinct point one must proceed continuously through intermediary regions of that time or space, rather than enjoying a discontinuous displacement from one to the other through higher dimensions.

As metaphors for the nature of reality and of consciousness, these are limiting. In everyday life, two material objects cannot simultaneously occupy the same space, as the presence of one excludes the other. But this gives rise to a logical Law of the Excluded Middle, which conceptually favors seeing the world in

simplistic black-or-white terms. Consequently, ideas, realities, and ideological and theoretical stances are seen as mutually exclusive. Binary logic replaces the *coincidentium opposorium* of Tradition. Similar thinking lies behind an atomistic reductionist view, which suggests that the cosmos consists of discrete particles, and which holds by implication that any particle is in essence singular in nature. Time becomes a sequence of discrete instants that are disconnected except through immediate linear aggregation.

These schema favor discrete differentiation, and discriminate against notions of overlap and interpenetration. Architecture in this materialist conception becomes the art of putting discrete material objects together, characteristically by placing them independently or by abutting them one to another. Spaces are also conceived as individual objects, and related through proximity and abutment. The house becomes an aggregate of discrete mono-functional zones, related by corridors solely dedicated to connection. Specialists study one tightly defined area of expertise; and a university department is structured as a simple agglomeration of such specialists.

A conceptual approach of this sort proceeds from a singular analysis of space and time. It does not readily account for speculative theories of synchronicity, cosmic wormholes, parallel universes, or the “hundredth monkey” [4]. In contrast, the BBC television series *Dr Who* exploits the idea of effortless teleportation through time and space by means of the *Tardus*; Abbott’s *Flatland* [5] provides a fascinating insight into the non-continuous experiencing of a higher-dimensional entity by the inhabitants of a lower-dimensional realm; and linear thinking is now complemented by de Bono’s lateral thinking [6].

### 3. Patriarchy and feminism

Characteristic of the Western *Weltanschauung*, compartmentalization and dissociation are particularly evident in hierarchical power structures. In recent years these have been criticized, particularly by the feminist movement. Criticisms of patriarchal structures have considerable justification, as serious discrimination against women has been practiced over a long period of time, and regrettably remains characteristic of modern society.

Starhawk [7] describes how, in a patriarchy - which literally means rule of the fathers - very few men are allowed to enact the role of father outside the limited family sphere. The structure of hierarchical institutions is taken to be pyramidal: one man at the top controls many below. Men compete for money and

power over others. The majority, who do not reach the top of the chain of command, are forced to remain immature, enacting the roles of either dutiful or rebel sons. Good sons eternally seek to please the father by obedience; bad sons seek to overthrow him and take his place. Either way they are cut off from their true desires and feelings. Patriarchal religions reflect a cosmos in which a Father God exhorts his children to obey the rules and do what they are told, lest they align themselves with the Great Rebel. Their psychology is one of war between sons and fathers, who eternally vie for exclusive possession of the mother, who, like all women under patriarchy, is in Starhawk’s opinion the ultimate prize for success. And progressive politics are reduced to alignments of rebel sons, who overthrow the father only to institute their own hierarchies.

This is penetrating criticism. But a few observations are in order. Firstly, hierarchies need not be pyramidal. The sets of natural numbers, their squares and cubes form a hierarchy of levels; paradoxically each set is of the same infinite size. Secondly, centralized pyramidal hierarchical institutions need not be inherently exploitative - if members discharge their duties selflessly, variations in privilege may in all fairness be maintained in an equitable order - orchestral music is not achieved by ensuring each performer makes the same amount of noise! The question needs to be addressed as to what extent it is the political structure *per se* that gives rise to exploitation and discrimination, as opposed to the extent of individual, communal, and social interpretation and use or abuse of that structure.

### 4. A traditional perspective

Here it is essential to distinguish modern societies from traditional societies. Traditional societies are permeated by the sense of the Sacred, and traditional understandings lie at the core of every aspect of society. By contrast, modern societies are radically secular in nature, even though they contain residual vestiges of traditional institutions. Thus what are considered to be traditional values and practices in modern societies sometimes bear little resemblance to those found in authentic traditional societies. It is unfair to criticize tradition because of the modern breakdown of the family and decline of Christianity in the post-Renaissance West. René Guénon [8] suggests that modern Christianity is not representative of traditional Christendom. Similarly, the modern urban centers of societies such as India are not representative of traditional Hindu society. In modern society, it can

be argued, it is not tradition which is at fault, but our understanding and practice of it.

Feminist criticism, in my opinion, does not do justice to the ideal nature of the hierarchy in authentic tradition. In Hinduism, the proper *Guru-Chela* relationship is assumed to be one of domination-subordination. From a modern “enlightened” viewpoint, this is seen as abhorrent. But within that tradition, this relationship is considered merely a prerequisite for the student’s spiritual growth. He needs to learn complete surrender to the Divine, symbolically incarnate as the Guru. In so far as the Guru is acting selflessly, he is then considered to act as a channel for the Divine on behalf of the student, and takes serious responsibility for the student’s spiritual progress. The dominance-submission relationship in this context can only fairly be criticized in view of its effectiveness as a means of spiritual realization of the pupil, within a spiritually vital tradition. Caution is therefore advisable before unthinkingly projecting one’s liberated view-point onto others who exist in different and by no means less valid cultural and religious frameworks. Fair criticism needs at least to present credible alternatives, and to make valid comparison with their effectiveness. Preferably, criticism should proceed from within tradition; these criteria are lacking in Marxist analyses.

A related and sensitive issue is the relationship between men and women in a traditional society. Often this also is overtly characterized by dominance-subservience. But in the traditional understanding this relationship is derived from and respected for its canonic and symbolic value, and it is necessary to take this into account. It provides a means of liberation for those concerned from their historical and accidental personalities, by allowing for a transcendence of individual values. This capacity for transcendence is markedly absent in modern enlightened societies, which from a traditional perspective are misguided in seeking liberation here below, which is seen as freedom from limitation. They seek, mistakenly, to bring Heaven down to Earth. By contrast, traditional societies offer liberation above, by preserving freedom through such limitation as is necessary for a healthy society. They seek to reveal Earth as Heaven [9].

Relationships between Men and Women that are idealized as active-passive or giving-receptive offer positive potential in the context of the system in its entirety, and the individual’s place within such a system. These are significant issues that need to be addressed; it is possible to stress individual liberty excessively to where in consequence society breaks down. A balanced view needs to be presented, rather

than focusing on what are presumed to be the exclusively negative aspects of a situation.

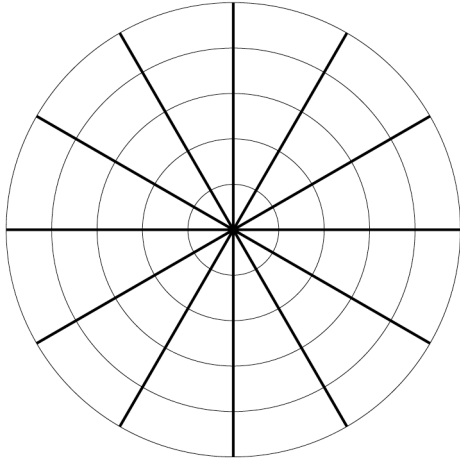
## 5. History and structure of the hierarchy

Feminist thought advances the network as an alternative to the hierarchy. The networks proposed are essentially horizontal in nature, intrinsically denying or ignoring qualitative differentiation and thus differentiation of level. In a similar sense, Post-modernist theory favors decentralization and relativization over the implicit centralization and what is misunderstood as the absolutism of the traditional hierarchy. I suggest modern criticisms of the place of the Absolute in traditional understanding are misinformed and lack perception, and that genuine understanding springs from authentic realization.

This modern change in outlook can be traced back to the time of Galileo, and even back to Aristotle. Koyré suggests [10], in relation to what some see as the spiritual revolution of the sixteenth century: *“The dissolution of the Cosmos means the destruction of the idea of a hierarchically ordered finite world-structure, of the idea of a qualitatively and ontologically differentiated world, and its replacement by that of an open, indefinite, and even infinite universe, united and governed by the same universal laws; a universe in which, in contradiction to the traditional conception with its distinction and opposition of the two worlds of Heaven and of Earth, all things are on the same level of Being. The laws of Heaven and the laws of Earth are merged together... All this implies the disappearance from the scientific outlook of all considerations based on value, on perfection, on harmony, on meaning and on purpose.”*

Burckhardt provides a clear illustration of this difference between Aristotelian and Platonic thought [11]. The diagram, shown in Figure 1 below, is to be taken in its “theocentric” sense, comparing the center with the “unexpanded” divine origin, and the different levels of existence stepping out as they descend into the physical world. It is Aristotelian to consider each of the different circles or that which they represent, as separate entities, and that makes the center, too, separate from the rest. In contrast the Platonic view considers the analogies that link all the different levels of reality. In visual terms this is expressed by sending rays or radii out from this center to intersect all the circles. All points on the same radius, on whatever circle they are situated, are thus related; they are like traces of the same essence on different levels of existence. From this it may be inferred that Aristotelian thought applies chiefly to the logical order

or continuity of a certain level of existence, while the Platonic view is to observe the symbolic character of a thing, through which it is connected vertically to realities of higher planes.



**Figure 1. Platonic & Aristotelian World-Views**

Guénon's masterly work, "*The Multiple States of Being*" [12], develops the Platonic view, and is representative of the *Philosophia Perennis*. More recently, Snodgrass has presented a brilliant analysis of the cosmological and metaphysical spatio-temporal notions implicit in the Traditional Indian view, and the embodiment of these notions in architecture, in particular in the Buddhist Stupa [13].

From this perspective, the horizontal network is equivalent to one circumferential ring or shell of the diagram, and limited to one level of being. By ignoring qualitative differentiation, it is restricted in its ability to structure complexity. Thus the network reduces positive and natural higher-order pattern to its lowest level. This loss of a sense of discrimination pervades modern society which expends huge amounts on weaponry, entertainment, sports adulation, and consumer trivia - whilst proving incapable of providing basic human needs of food, potable water, fuel, clothing, shelter, health services, education, communications and other essential resources to all.

It is not hierarchical systems *per se* that are at fault, but the specific types of hierarchies that are promulgated in social institutions, and the ways in which they are understood and utilized. A restricted view of hierarchies is taken, and this springs from the *Weltanschauung* that favors compartmentalization, and reduces paradigms to those derivable from the outer physical world of experience.

The term "hierarchy" is said to derive from Pseudo-Dionysius. Lancelot Law Whyte points out that the idea runs from Plato, Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius, with his angelic and priestly hierarchy, through mediaeval philosophers to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century thinkers of the Florentine Academy, and many German thinkers. In recent times, contributions to this field have included Lovejoy's "Great Chain of Being" (1936); various symposia, including "Hierarchical Structure in Nature and Artifact" [14]; and a cluster of significant essays and books.

The value of the hierarchy as an organizing principle is well known throughout history, because of its capacity to structure complexity [15]. There are different kinds of hierarchy; and it may be that the horizontal network emerges as a subset of these [16]. Further, it becomes difficult to find any structure that is not in some sense hierarchical. Number, time and space, the structure of the physical universe and of language all appear to be hierarchic. Networks may also be analyzed in hierarchical terms - they exist firstly as wholes, and then at the levels of their elements and relationships. An element informing its acquaintances with specific information is effectively acting as the parent of its children, and thus as a local hierarchy, even though the roles may also be reversed.

At its most general, the hierarchy is determined by a plurality of levels, there being a meaningful sense in which levels are distinguishable from one another. Together with this is the sense of a single dimension that distinguishes one level from another on a range of values that is conveniently taken as linear. This contrasts with presenting alternatives that are distinguished by no qualitative difference i.e. equivalence, or by multi-dimensional differentiation. But either case could be considered as the hierarchical differentiation of one level into its components.

At minimum the hierarchy consists of two levels, together with the sense of a vertical (or radial) and therefore qualitative differentiation, as opposed to a horizontal (or circumferential) and therefore equivalent differentiation [17]. No level need be differentiated into elements, until its superior levels are so differentiated. In traditional Metaphysics, the duality Absolute-Relative is considered one such hierarchy, though not invariably. The relationship is hierarchical in that the Relative realm of multiplicity is considered to spring from and be sustained by the non-duality of the Absolute, to which it ultimately reverts. But it is also held that there is an absolute disjunction between the realm of the Relative and the Absolute; as Schuon says: "*There is assuredly no common measure between the supreme Principle and its cosmic*

*manifestation, for the latter of itself is nothing, while the Principle alone of itself 'is', and remains unaffected by its expressions; but as on our level of reality we do exist, there must certainly be possible points of contact between us and God; it follows then that the incommensurability between the two terms must in a certain way be blurred, as in fact it is precisely at those 'points of intersection' which we can call 'manifestations of the divine.'*" [18] Paradoxically, the duality is also considered side-by-side, as two sides of the same coin, so Tantra holds that "*Samsara is Nirvana; and Nirvana is Samsara.*"

Implicit in the hierarchical structuring of levels is an asymmetry. God is above, and Man and Woman, or Creation, are below. In a qualitative sense, the Traditional hierarchy of Spirit or Intellect, Psyche or Soul, and Body is taken to mean that a vertical discrimination is both possible and essential between these various principal aspects of being. (Elsewhere I apply this schema to clarify the place of the Sacred in domestic architecture [19].) But in the Traditional perspective, this is balanced by the complementary view. In Tantra, the *Sadhana* of the *Mantra* is advocated for material things as well as spiritual, as these are the foundations on which the whole spiritual structure stands. The Upanishad says, "*the earth is his lowest member whereon he rests abidingly*" [20], and one has to start at the base to reach the summit.

The hierarchy is criticized for its vertical asymmetry, leading inevitably to a power relationship of dominance-submission whereby the lower is determined by the higher. Ostensibly the power relation is only one way between levels, which creates exploitative structures of privilege. But in the network, power relationships can oscillate between entities, which reduces the risk of exploitation. Effective communication requires feedback; the one-way system of the totalitarian hierarchy mitigates against this.

Bateson has researched the types of social oppositions that are found between human groups, particularly relationships of complementary and symmetrical opposition [21]. He is particularly interested in the dynamics of these oppositions, in which, in the absence of arrangements of reciprocity and other checks, *schismogenesis* develops - the oppositions are dialectically heightened until the system breaks down. The vertical complementary opposition of the hierarchy can result in *schismogenesis*, as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, that is, until the revolution! But the horizontal symmetrical opposition latent in the network can also lead to *schismogenesis*, as all men and women are equal, but some become more equal than others. The

rapid and unstable change of modern society, in comparison with the long-term stability of traditional societies and institutions, leads me to wonder if in fact *schismogenesis* is more likely in a network.

Some human hierarchical institutions develop as fascist structures of absolute dominance. These are to be deplored. However one readily conceives of hierarchies where a relaxed dominance-submission relationship is voluntarily entered into, to the mutual benefit of both parties: I seek a teacher whose wisdom I respect, and am content to be his student and respect his discipline. Within a hierarchical institution, there is no reason *per se* why discussion of issues should not lead to consensus agreements, that are then formalized as directives from the superior to the inferior. The Tantric perspective discussed illustrates an ecological sense in which the vertical differentiation of the Traditional Hierarchy can be understood.

Whyte [22] posits a working hypothesis for the hierarchy that: "*A structural level, or unit, in a structural hierarchy can be usefully be defined... as a 'three-dimensional system of parts, (i.e. structures or processes) involving (within certain thresholds) characteristic constraints imposed on the degrees of freedom of its first-order parts, so that the properties of the unit are not the same as the simple linear summation of the properties which the same parts display when isolated (i.e. when they are not subject to those constraints).' The new properties of the higher level... may arise in at least two manners:*

(i) *when, in a more or less random system of interacting units, a global threshold is passed, e.g. when a global potential energy function becomes greater than the total of the two-term interactions, resulting in 'synthesis' of the new form, 'clustering', etc.; or*

(ii) *when, within a partly ordered unit or a system under global constraints, local thresholds are passed, so that 'fragmentation,' 'dispersal of a unit,' etc., occurs.'*

These notions may be related to, on the one hand, the evolution of Global Consciousness. Fred Hoyle said [23], in 1948, "*Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from the outside is available... a new idea as powerful as any other in history will be let loose.*" At the same time as it becomes apparent that a Global Civilization is a matter of extreme urgency if life on this planet is to survive, conceptual frameworks to achieve this are being advanced [24]. On the other hand, these notions may also be related to the Deconstructivist approach advocated by Post-modernism, which implicitly legitimates a fragmentation of consciousness. This gives grounds

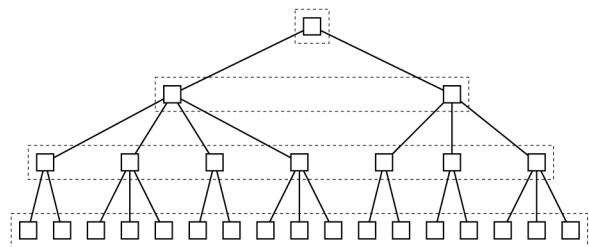
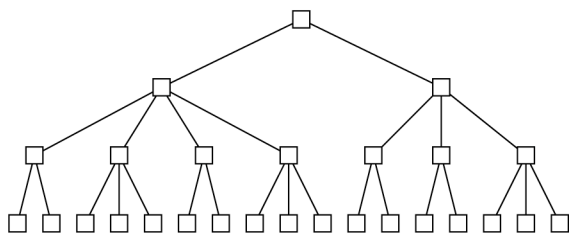
for concern: it may merely represent a regression of human consciousness on the part of an elite, in the face of a highly stressful and threatening environment. The state of the world is unlikely to improve if we indiscriminately tear its institutions and traditions apart, and if, ostrich-like, we bury our heads in the dunes and lose ourselves in the wondrous immediacy of grains of sand.

In the face of acute global mismanagement, it is reprehensible to unquestioningly discard the hierarchy and embrace the network, unless it can be proven that the network as an organizing principle is more capable than the hierarchy of managing the complexity that characterizes modern society. We need instead to reconsider our situation, by reexamining such

possibilities as hierarchical networks, the hierarchy as network, and hierarchical structuring and networking as complementary alternatives of *modus operandi*.

## 6. A critique of the simple hierarchy

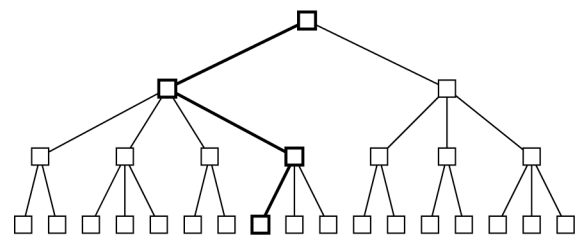
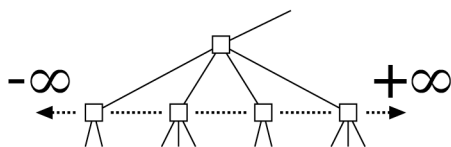
Consider the degradation of a hierarchy when subject to ego-centered politicization. A structural property of a hierarchical power system may be that it tends over time towards a totalitarian system, which I term a degenerate Simple Hierarchy. The common understanding and application of this structure in modern society indicates properties that may often prove inimical to a healthy social environment.



**Figure 2. Degenerate simple hierarchy (left), and with implied discrete levels (right)**

Firstly, this hierarchy is usually taken to imply mutually exclusive levels. An element is considered to belong only to one level, rather than potentially functioning on multiple levels simultaneously. Secondly, the differentiation of an element at one level into sub-elements at the next lower level is discrete. It is conducive to sub-elements being considered in isolation and as being disconnected from one another -

they only relate vertically through their common parent. This is emphasized by their linear arrangement, which is conceptually open-ended and thus potentially infinite without, as in Figure 3 (left). This differentiation is simplistic. Whilst sometimes applicable, it obscures richer patterns of interconnection. The structure favors arbitrariness over natural pattern.



**Figure 3. Linear pattern of differentiation (left), and singular network of simple hierarchy (right)**

Thirdly, the structure is singular; just one pathway connects any element to the apex as center, as in Figure 3 (right). The degenerate Simple Hierarchy imposes a single dimension pattern to vertical stratification. There is no redundancy, and communication between elements at different levels is dependent upon one particular set of intermediary

elements. Such a single chain of command allows for political exploitation. Fourthly, it becomes tenable for insight, initiative, and inspiration, to flow only down the hierarchy. At each horizontal stratification those below only receive; those above only give. At the same time, power and resources tend to flow only upwards, so in a different sense, those below only

give, and those above only take. Resources are concentrated in the hands of those who least need them, at the expense of those who need them most. The individual's primary orientation is upwards, so that superiors are nurtured whilst inferiors are ignored. The combined effect of such factors is a hierarchy characterized by vertical relations of fear of one's superiors and scorn of one's inferiors, together with destructive competition with one's equals. This inequitable structure is a perversion of the traditional Hierarchy, where ideally relations are characterized by reverence to one's superiors, benevolence to one's inferiors, and constructive cooperation or fraternity with one's fellows [25]. Whilst the distribution of resources conforms to social differentiation, the ideal Traditional institution attends to the needs of all.

Associated with the politicized degradation of the rich matrix of being into a Simple Hierarchy is an ontological deprivation. The process of visualization and the exercise of imagination are viewed as political acts [26]. Individual initiative and creative behavior are perceived as threats to the power structure. If not conforming to the dictates of the institution, they are seen to threaten the hold of power superiors have over their inferiors. Therefore the external substance of the inspiration is to be received from agents further up the hierarchy, who are privileged in having a mandate to create, define, and manipulate reality.

The workings of the imagination are expected to conform to the social expectations of the institution. The capacity and need for the individual to receive directly and to form his or her inspirations, and thereby to make an authentic contribution is frustrated. But it is in this very creative act - which is denied - that the possibility of ontological regeneration occurs! The spontaneous creative healthy individual contributes his innermost self in his work; in doing so he not only recharges her personal universe, but also his world, his acquaintances, and his community.

Taken together, these three factors - of discrete differentiation in firstly a vertical and secondly a horizontal sense, and of singularity - tend to produce for each element a sense of isolation from other members of the hierarchy. In accord with the Western Weltanschauung, the degenerate Simple Hierarchy favors exclusion over inclusion e.g. rather than giving rise to systems of shared space where personal spaces interpenetrate, these spaces are considered mutually exclusive. In a similar sense, what are seen as private areas of academic expertise may be zealous protected.

The side-on view by which the structure is usually modeled together with the poverty of structural pattern tends to reinforce a sense of alienation from the whole.

This is emphasized by the tendency of the totalitarian degenerate Simple Hierarchy to deny the individual his center, which is subsumed into the institutional head. The imbalance generated may then be abused to control the momentum of the individual who attempts to regain his lost wholeness [27].

This pattern conforms to the double-bind hypothesis advanced by Bateson as a theory of schizophrenia. The schizophrenic personality develops in a learning situation. A person is regularly placed in a situation where he must obey conflicting rules, usually by a parent. In Balinese culture the double-bind is almost exploited as a means of training proper Balinese adults to be detached, uncompetitive, and formal. In contrast, in a culturally incongruous setting, the double-bind produces people who are unable to function socially, or rarely, artists and clowns who transcend the categories of their environment in a creative fashion. Bateson found that porpoises can also be placed in a double-bind: through the frustration of conditioned expectations they can be forced to breach conditioned habits of response to stimuli, and to make transcontextual responses. He generalized his theory, arguing: "*First, that severe pain and maladjustment can be induced by putting a mammal in the wrong regarding its rule for making sense of an important relationship with another mammal. And second, that if this pathology can be warded off or resisted, the total experience may promote creativity*" [28].

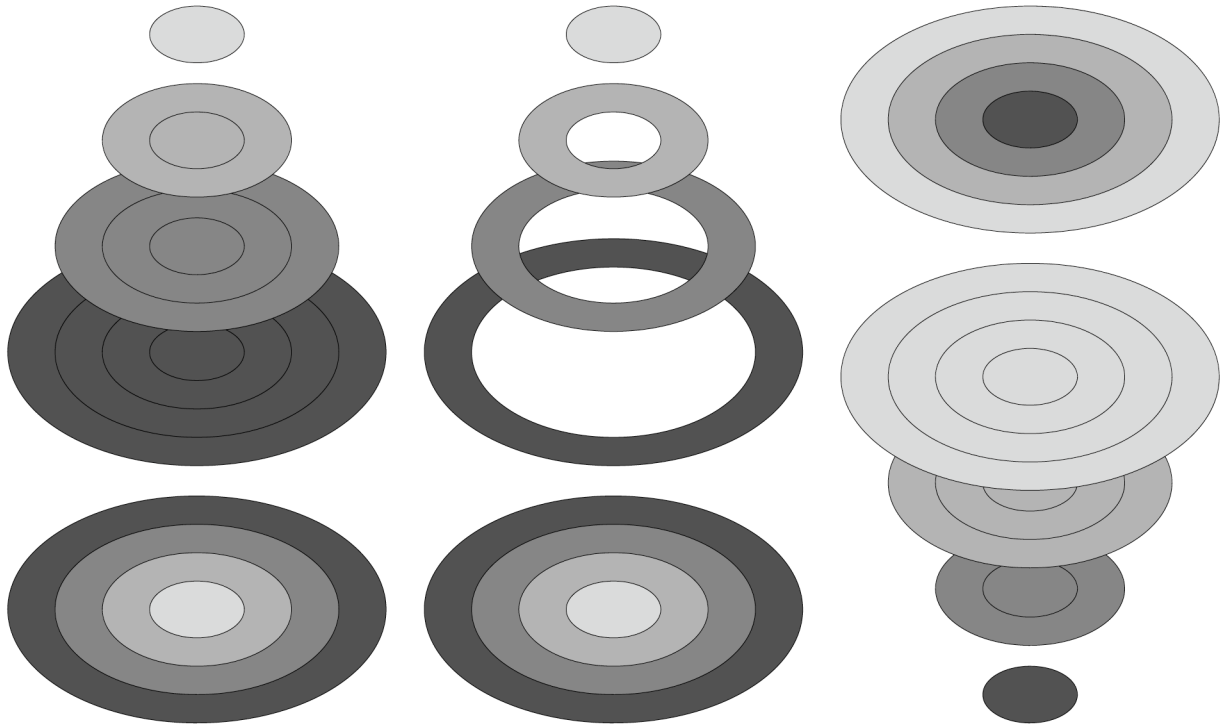
This seems to be a fundamental political device. The Simple Hierarchical institution actively places its members in double-bind situations, mainly as a political device to neutralize them and stabilize a political milieu, (and secondarily on occasion as a means of programming creative transcontextual behavior). For example, a superior might simultaneously exhort an inferior to perform whilst preventing her from doing so. Or he might determine a situation that results in her poor performance, whilst criticizing her for it. But the effect of such schizophrenic-inducing environments is simply that individuals become alienated from themselves; from their fellows; and from the institution as a whole.

## **7. Towards a more healthy hierarchy**

The use of the hierarchy might well be improved by considering some structural developments together with some altered perceptions of its potential. I find it helpful to balance the use of the side-on view of the hierarchical structure with a centralized plan view, which facilitates an inclusive view of the whole.

Firstly, the range of possibilities of relationship between levels is broadened from just the discrete, to include overlap. Two such possibilities are suggested; in the heliocentric model, the higher levels of the hierarchy are more central, and are embedded or contained within peripheral lower levels. Thus more subtle states lie within more gross states. In the

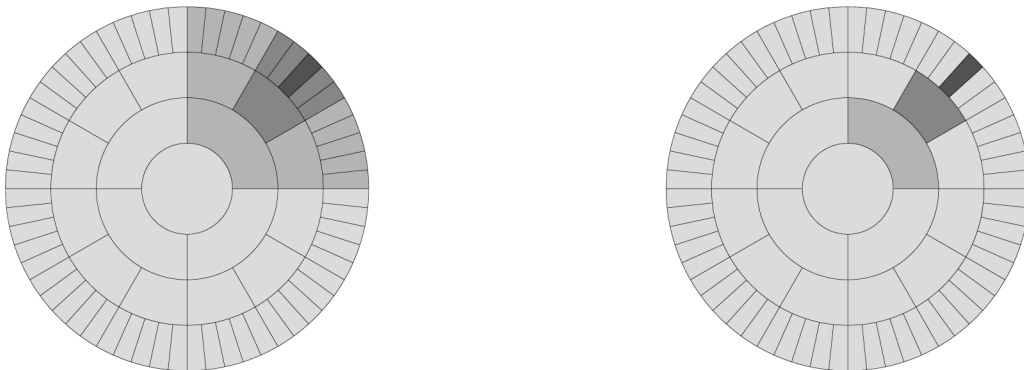
geocentric model, the gradient is reversed, so that inner lower levels are embedded in more inclusive peripheral levels. Thus the higher level includes the lower. Burckhardt describes how both of these readings, well known to Mediaeval philosophers, are equally valid and may be used to advantage in opposing and complementary ways [29].



**Figure 4. Heliocentric hierarchy with overlap (left), discrete heliocentric hierarchy (center), and geocentric hierarchy with overlap (right)**

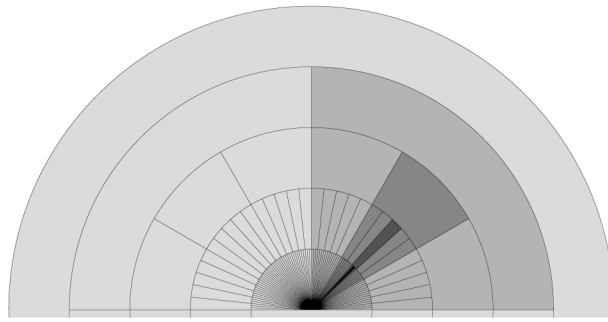
In Figures 5 and 6 below, I develop these for discrete differentiation into sub-elements. In both overlapping cases, sub-elements lie embedded within

elements of higher level. Each element embraces the sub-elements it contains of lower levels, and is in turn embraced by its superior elements.



**Figure 5. Overlapping heliocentric hierarchy (left), and discrete heliocentric hierarchy (right)**

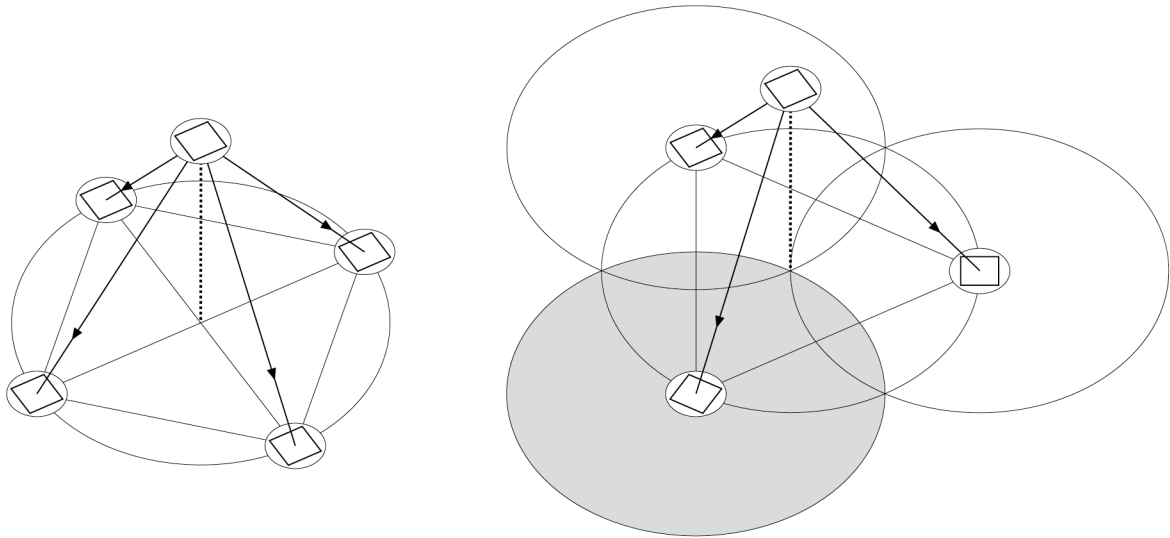




**Figure 6. Overlapping geocentric hierarchy**

Secondly, in Figure 7 below, the differentiation of an element into sub-elements is extended to include possibilities of direct interrelation (left) and of overlap between fellow sub-elements (right) [30]. This overcomes a potentially excessive horizontal or circumferential compartmentalization and disconnection, while recognizing that a certain degree of both is advisable for evincing order. I suggest it is preferable to structure sub-elements cyclically rather

than linearly. By inverting the infinite extension of the line into the finite extension of the circle, a better sense of the whole is obtained. The potential of infinite intension may be exploited. Patterns of interrelationship between sub-elements are made more intelligible: these may be shown as aspects of circumferential nodes, whilst sub-elements that overlap might be depicted as overlapping circles or Venn diagrams.



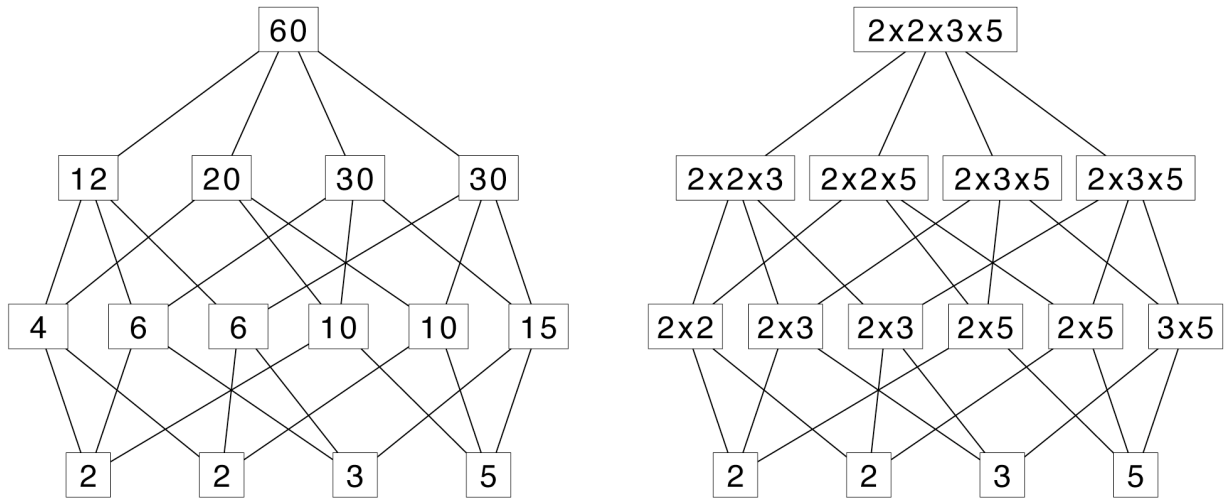
**Figure 7. Cyclic differentiation of element into interrelated sub-elements c.f. Fig. 3, (left), and cyclic differentiation of element into overlapping sub-elements (right)**

Thirdly, as shown in Figure 8 below, the singular nature of the Simple Hierarchy is redressed. Horizontal interrelation or overlap of sub-elements, facilitated by cyclic differentiation, provides vertical redundancy to the hierarchy. The potential for multiple channels of communication between elements of different level is achieved. Interpenetration and overlap applied to the structure of the hierarchy mean

that it is no longer Simple. In such a Complex Hierarchy, elements at different levels are connected by a variety of pathways rather than singularly as in the Simple case. This has advantages of providing redundancy and richness, at the possible expense of unworkable complexity. In a similar fashion, Shlichta advances the hierarchical decomposition of an icosahedron into pentagonal caps, triangular faces,

edges, and vertices, as an example of overlap in hierarchical structures [31]. Alexander’s semi-lattice

[32], and the rational decomposition of composite number (shown in Figure 8) provide other examples.



**Figure 8. Rational decomposition of composite number**

In addition, a Gnostic Hierarchy is suggested, and illustrated in Figure 9 below. This is centered at multiple levels. Each cyclic differentiation of an element into sub-elements provides a centered local network for those sub-elements. Therefore horizontal interaction between sub-elements is fostered. This structure may be developed in an iterative manner as a cone of cones, or pyramid of pyramids.

Further, each element is recognized to have its own authentic center. Each element is therefore provided with immediate access to the center at personal, group or communal, and institutional level, and is thus open to immediate apprehension of that which lies at or beyond the center. While the apex-center and the graduated levels of the hierarchy retain their relative superiority, the institution respects and provides for vital individual and group needs. An enlightened institution which models itself on the Gnostic Hierarchy respects for all of its members a capacity for direct inspiration from the source. (In contrast, in the degenerate Simple Hierarchy, this is falsely identified with its mundane embodiment - “the boss”.) There is then the capacity for inspiration to flow up the hierarchy, as well as horizontally in the local network. Further allowance might be made for full horizontal networking at each level [33]; and the entire institution could be expected to function as one horizontal network on occasion [34].

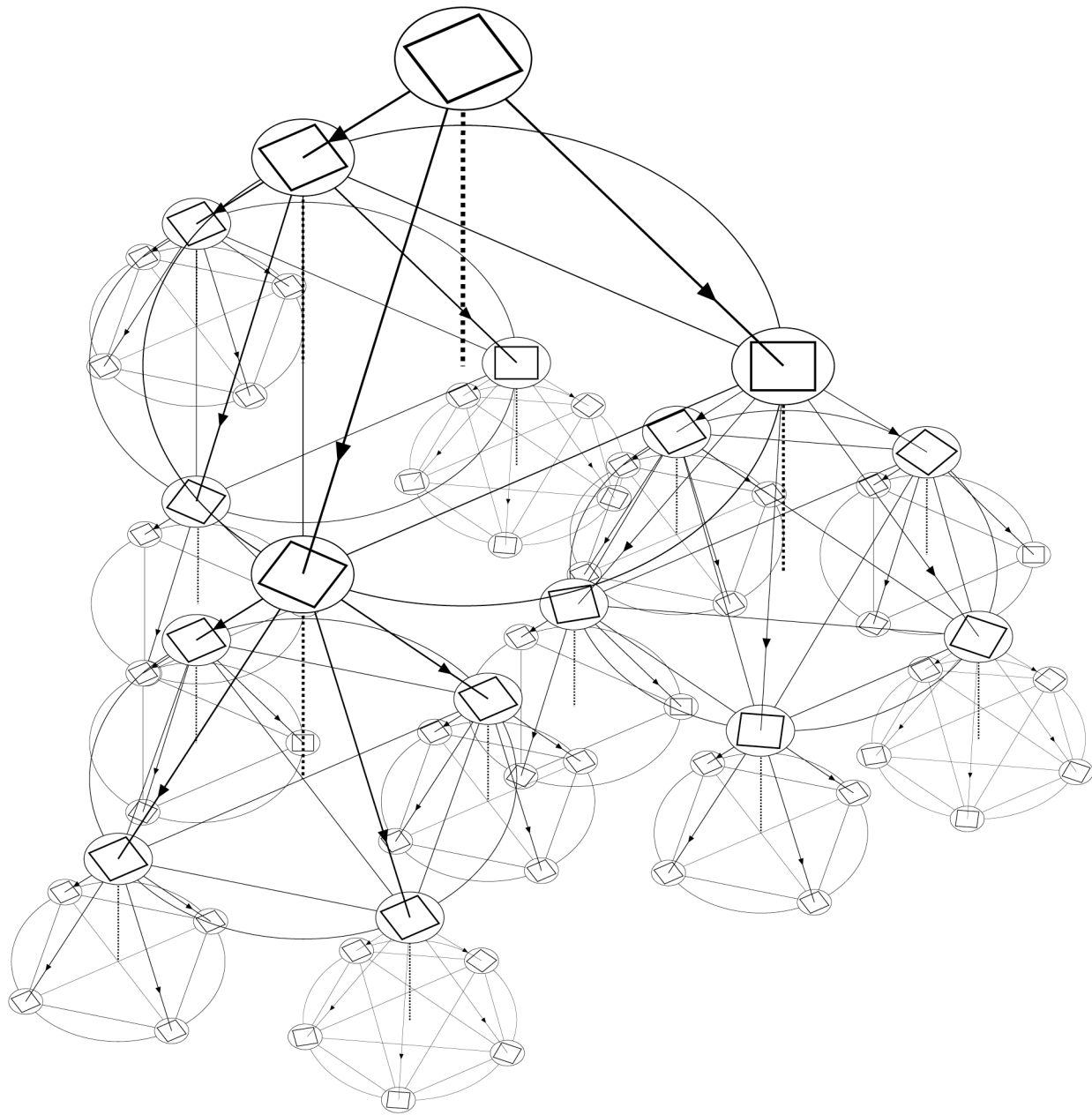
In addition to providing a sense in which each individual functions as the institutional center, the

enlightened institution recognizes the capacity of its members to image the entire structure. An individual therefore functions on occasion and in microcosm as the whole institution, as characterizes holographic structure. A Buddhist sutra reads: “*In the heaven of Indra there is said to be a network of pearls so arranged that if you look at one you will see all the others reflected in it. In the same way, each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object, and in fact is every other object.*” [35]

The individual thus shares the potential and the responsibility of performing his work as a whole person. Patterns of these kinds, akin to the Platonic view discussed in relation to Figure 1, are those that tend to differentiate Traditional Arts and Sciences that see any and all activities *sub specie aeternitatis*, from modern secular disciplines. In a similar sense Eliade points out that to traditional man, each center is the center.

## 8. Conclusion

I have reservations about the contemporary abhorrence of hierarchies and the advocacy of networks. These reservations spring from formal studies of systems that suggest that hierarchical order is natural, widespread, and may be essential for structuring complexity. The network may not share that organizational capacity and may be indicative of a loss of a sense of qualitative structure to the world.



**Figure 9. Gnostic hierarchy**

I recognize that hierarchical political institutions have a capacity for gross abuse, in sustaining structures of privilege that may become severely discriminatory. However, I argue that the problems stem not from the hierarchical structure *per se*, but from the specific types of hierarchy used, and how these are understood and applied. These limitations spring from the modern Western Weltanschauung which affirms an empirical view of the world. The concomitant singular analysis of complexity

emphasizes compartmentalization and dissociation; but these factors have become extreme and dangerous in modern society. The excesses of misapplication of the Simple Hierarchy, particularly to political institutions, need to be redressed by a revisioning of the potential of the hierarchy in general, having regard to the alternative structure which the network offers. Finally, I suggest that the network and the hierarchy provide complementary modes of consciousness, the interplay of which is essential for wellbeing.

## 9. References

- [1] Tradition is used here to specifically refer to those cultures where a sense of the Sacred is paramount.
- [2] C. Alexander, "A city is not a tree". *Design*, #206.
- [3] R. C. Meurant, *The aesthetics of the Sacred*. The Opoutere Press, Auckland, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edn, 1989. See *On the structure of the field of inquiry*, and, *Field differentiation: Interdimensional harmonics*.
- [4] See L. Watson, *Lifetide*. Bantam Books, New York, 1980, p.147.
- [5] E. Abbott, *Flatland: a romance of many dimensions, with illustrations by the author, a square*. Barnes and Noble, New York, 1963.
- [6] E. de Bono, *Lateral thinking: Creativity step by step*. Harper & Row, London, 1973.
- [7] Starhawk, *The spiral dance*. Harper & Row, London, 1979, p.96.
- [8] R. Guénon, *The crisis of the modern world*. Luzac and Company, London, 1975.
- [9] Unlike Tantra, Vedanta teaches world renunciation.
- [10] A. Koyré, *Metaphysics and measurement*. Chapman & Hall, London, 1968, p.20.
- [11] T. Burckhardt, *Moorish culture in Spain*. McGraw Hill Book Co., London, 1972, p.133.
- [12] R. Guénon, *The multiple states of being*. Larson, New York, 1984.
- [13] A. Snodgrass, *The symbolism of the stupa*. Cornell University: Studies on SouthEast Asia, New York, 1975.
- [14] Huntington Beach, November 1968: L. L. Whyte, A. G. Wilson and D. Wilson, eds, *Hierarchical structures*. American Elsevier, New York, 1969.
- [15] *Ibid*. This symposium provides a comprehensive and informed discussion of hierarchies.
- [16] The feminist patterns advanced by Starhawk, *op. cit*, tend to be stars or centralized networks, which from one perspective could be considered as hierarchies.
- [17] See René Guénon, "The symbolism of weaving", *The Symbolism of the Cross*. Luzac & Co., London, 1975.
- [18] F. Schuon, "Manifestations of the divine principle", *Stations of Wisdom*. Perennial Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1961, p.77.
- [19] R. C. Meurant, *The place of the sacred in the home*. Proceedings of the 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, New Orleans, March 1986. Republished as Ch.I of the author's *Natural Harmony - Essaying Structural Morphology*. The Opoutere Press, Auckland, 2006.
- [20] *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.2), quoted in S. Shankaranarayanan, *Sri Chakra*. Dipti Publications, Pondicherry, 1970, p.4.
- [21] G. Bateson, *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Paladin, St Albans, 1973, p.11.
- [22] L. L. Whyte, "Structural hierarchies: A challenging class of physical and biological problems". Whyte, Wilson and Wilson, eds, *op. cit*. p.6.
- [23] Quoted in N. Myers (Ed.), "The Fragile Miracle: Crisis or Challenge?", *The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management*. Pan Books, London, 1985, p.21.
- [24] See R. B. Fuller, *World Resources Inventory*, and *The World Game*, Philadelphia: University City Science Center; J. E. Lovelock, *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth*. OUP, 1979; B. M. Hubbard, *The Evolutionary Journey*. Evolutionary Press, San Francisco, 1982.
- [25] See A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1978. The proper understanding of the vertical relationship of the Traditional Hierarchy is encapsulated in the marriage of Sacerdotium and Regnum. Granted the consent of both parties, what the one enjoins, the other performs. This is understood not only externally, as in the feudal relationship between Vassal and Serf, or between Patron and Artist; but also internally, as the relationship between Self and Ego, or between Wisdom and Power.
- [26] R. C. Meurant, *Radical tradition -seven essays concerning yoga and meditation, traditional architecture, sociopolitical power, and the Philosophia Perennis*. The Opoutere Press, Auckland, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn, 1989. See V: "The Role of Meditation in Enhancing Visualization and the Architectural Imagination - From Karma to Dharma."
- [27] A process characterized by receding horizons.
- [28] Bateson, *op. cit.*, p.12.
- [29] Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, pp.130-3.
- [30] A related issue is Fuzzy Set Theory.
- [31] P. J. Shlichta, "Overlap in hierarchical structures", in Whyte, Wilson and Wilson, eds, *op. cit*.
- [32] Alexander, *op. cit*.
- [33] This is simply developed as a cone of transverse levels, each level comprising a circle of elements of that level, with interrelationships shown as aspects. Vertical relationships between elements and their sub-elements are shown as lines on the conic surface.
- [34] By collapsing the hierarchy into the horizontal plane.
- [35] Quoted in K. Wilber, ed., *The Holographic Paradigm and Other Paradoxes*. Shambhala, Boulder, 1982, p.25.