

A (Cybernetic) Musing: Anarchy, Alcoholics Anonymous and Cybernetics: Chapter 2

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Introduction

In chapter 1 of this two chapter column (see *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, 20(3), 191-200), I characterised how Alcoholics Anonymous works as an organisation (as I wrote, I am not trying to explain how AA works as therapy). My task now, in (this) chapter 2, is to show that this is essentially both cybernetic and anarchic. I do so by taking some characteristics I believe we find in both AA and cybernetics, and considering how they work in AA using a language of cybernetic concepts. Then I relate these to an-archos, as also described in chapter 1.

Part 3—How AA does it

Control

Let us start with the obvious: control. As we know, cybernetics, in Wiener's (1948) original characterisation, was built around control. Control has, unfortunately, several meanings, including restrictive and facilitative control.² Cybernetics is generally concerned with facilitative control, and, when applied where control is restrictive, it is normally used to convert restrictive to facilitative.

AA has a very obvious form of control by (self-) feedback through its *conscience meetings*, in which members monitor and discuss the performance of a particular meeting group.³ These are meetings without hierarchy: "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern" (Tradition 2⁴). The feedback is thus of the group, by the group, on the group, for the group. It occurs within the group (exercised by members of a particular group) and is, in this sense, self-referential, self-controlling, self-

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2. A further use is the idea of checking: Thus, in Europe vehicle speeds are checked by radar. In many countries, this is also called controlling.

3. I am omitting all mention of God in both chapters 1 and 2 of this column. This is a highly contentious matter: some AA's (remember, those who belong to the fellowship of AA call themselves AA's), influenced by the Oxford Group, believe that AA only works through a Christian God. Others that it works through a (personally conceived) "God as we understand him." Others prefer the notion of a "Higher Power" or "Power Greater than ourselves." I understand this latter formulation as the minimum requirement, but the more missionary might not agree. Whatever the case may be, I chose to exclude discussions that might be of a theological nature, in the conviction that more wars have come about because of zealous religious beliefs than for any other reason.

4. In this chapter, as in chapter 1, I am using on line sources for both the traditions (n.d.b) and the *Big Book* (source of the steps) (n.d.a). These sources are easily available and authoritative. I do not indicate these references.

regulating and/or self-steering (your choice). Those steerers are those being steered. Conscience meetings provide an open forum in which matters of concern to a group's membership concerning the operation and behaviour of their group (and its members) are discussed freely in order to "correct" any errant behaviours (remember the *raison d'être* of cybernetics is error). Feedback can be reinforcing (positive) or reducing (negative), but is applicable only by and to the particular group: there is no reaching out towards other groups, for each group is self-steering, and, as tradition 4 says, "Each group should be autonomous." This facilitative, self-controlling behaviour is intended only so the self may act upon the self, implying stability—not the stability associated with some external reference point (goal), nor involving a power relation (X controlling Y), but through some internal constancy (Glanville, 1997): the stability of continuing to be, of maintaining living.⁵ This is circular control. I distinguish circular control from both linear and feedback guided control where X controls Y: circular control is between the two: X controls Y, while Y controls X.

This sort of control relies on responsibility. AA insists each member is responsible for diagnosing their alcoholism, and taking appropriate actions to recover. Responsibility can be understood as a mechanism by which we control our own behaviour. We can consider our behaviour and conceptualising, changing them to be closer to what we desire. Doesn't this sound like a thermostat?

Communication

To function, cybernetic control needs communication. But that is not the totality of communication: Here, I am interested in AA's communication in a non-mechanical sense, for once the mechanisms of cybernetic communication are established, mood comes into play, and, for many, mood is the substance of communication. While there are structures through and by which communication may occur, in communicating we may be more concerned about how things are said, than about what is being said. We understand this intuitively in our choice of vocabulary.⁶

The choice of a particular word in everyday language use indicates something of the intention of the speaker, priming the listener's response: To say "tell" is not to say "share," although both have the act of speaking in common.⁷

AA's are very careful of their communication moods. Chosen moods are intended to reduce potential argument even where there is great difference—to invite others in. The language reflects an offering made, rather than a position asserted. While newcomers may find it difficult, those who have longer sobriety slip into this mood as second nature. Newcomers are advised to listen for similarities rather than differences.

5. This can be seen as a very abstracted and stripped back version of Varela, Maturana, and Uribe's (1974) *autopoiesis*.

6. In cybernetics, we generally cite 2 possible mechanisms of communication characterised by the noisy channel of Shannon's mathematical theory of communication, and Pask's conversation theory.

7. Normally I talk of the lack of meaning in words, which seems the opposite of what I say here. In another piece I intend to argue a connection between these two views. For the moment, please allow that I see these opposites as complements, depending on context and trade-offs reflecting the difference between an individualist (psychological) and a group (sociological) focus.

This language is the language of both/and, rather than either/or—a point we will return to.

A final note on AA's language. AA does not have a rule book. It has traditions. Traditions are malleable, a description of good practice (behaviour) rather than the prescription of a rule book. The difference is subtle, and crucial.

Complexity—Keep It Simple, Stupid!

Some would like cybernetics to be mother and/or daughter of complexity. I, however, see complexity as a choice (Glanville, 2007): we chose to see the world as complex (for instance, by partitioning wholes into parts). Complexity can also be seen as a side-effect of actions we take: the consequence of error inherent in measurement, approximations in numerical systems, and so forth. In these respects (for instance), we can claim complexity is a choice.

AA is a collection of a bewildering number of bewildered individual drunks (as members of the fellowship regularly call themselves), and might seem an ideal environment for complexity to blossom. However, AA keeps it simple, with a very clear focus.

AA's purpose is simple. "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers" (Tradition 5). This involves "giving it away in order to keep it" which reinforced by Tradition 10: "Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy," and the membership criterion: "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking" (Tradition 3).

AA's simple focus mirrors its early rejection of external financial help. Even legacies from grateful alcoholics are declined. Everything is directly paid by current members, that is, its users: "Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions" (Tradition 7). Money, and the well known complications it can create, have no place in AA except to fund coffee and pay the rent: "An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose" (Tradition 6). Nor should money be made from AA by members: "Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centres may employ special workers" (Tradition 8). There should be no "professionals," no senior members, no superiors.

Tradition 8 is the first of the Traditions that rejects AA "stars." It is restated in Tradition 11: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films." The first part is crucial for AA as a whole. Those who join AA do so of their own will. There is no coercion to join, or to stay. Those who leave, do so of their own volition: AA consists of those who choose membership.⁸ The second part of this tradition

8. In the United States, the courts do deals with AA groups whereby those found guilty of drunkenness are ordered to attend AA meetings. Their attendance is registered by the group secretary. I believe this goes against Tradition 11, and the foundational notion of anonymity (as expressed in Tradition 12).

adjudicates against AA stars.⁹ While many believe it is acceptable to acknowledge membership of the fellowship in the media, not all do, and any such declaration should be made honestly for the benefit of others, not self-glorification.

It is common, at AA meetings, to display slogans. One of these is KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid! AA's strategy is to minimise complexity, and its sources, thus reducing conflict and potential confusion.

The cybernetic lesson to be learnt here is that, for a self-controlling system, the important matters are keeping focussed; motivation (personal goals); equality of people (no stars, no "professionals"). In other words, minimal hierarchy, equal value. KISS KISS!

Responsibility and Logic

In treating what members share at a meeting as an offering rather than a position or argument, AA subtly refuses to allow members to blame others for what they do, and did. Accepting an offering is a positive act: The actor cannot deny responsibility. Responsibility undermines the attribution of blame such as "I only did what I was told." You only did what you chose.

Taking responsibility for one's own actions is at the heart of AA's therapy, beginning with the self-diagnosis of one's alcoholism. Sharing an offering is a way of reminding members of the fellowship that each chooses his/her course of action (response to the situation), living with the consequences. Most alcoholics have constructed their disease as the fault of others—one source of their powerlessness over alcohol.¹⁰ The base from which recovery can be built—not drinking—can be destroyed at any time by taking a drink.¹¹ To drink is always our choice, either explicitly or implicitly (as, for instance, when one puts oneself in the line of temptation).

AA's emphasises the responsibility we must all accept for actions we take. This is associated with the notion of autonomy (itself integral to our individual understanding of the world, leading to plurality), implying each autonomous body is responsible for its actions ("Each group should be autonomous" [Tradition 4], also reflected in AA's attitude to money).

This small constellation of concepts will sound familiar to those interested in second-order cybernetics. It is fired by the logic of both/and, rather than either/or. I wrote a column about the relation between these logics (Glanville, 2006), showing how by placing them in competition, we often downgrade both/and to subservience within the framework of either/or, rather than as an equal. Bateson (1978), who, at the end of his life, argued in favour of both/and pointed out that we live in a time of an

9. Many celebrities are in the fellowship (one meeting in London is nicknamed after the tv show "Stars on Sunday"). These celebrities are not stars in AA meetings, just other recovering drunks. One renowned musician puts on an annual AA concert. He and his friends mill around in the hall while others play, queuing to buy their lemonade and chatting with any passing fellow drunk. You wouldn't find that in a stadium gig!

10. Step 1 states "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable."

11. As alcoholics say, in recovery, one drink is not enough and one drink is too much.

increasing need to accommodate plurality without falling into either/or logic. We see the problems of giving such precedence to either/or logic all around us in polarisation and aggression, whether between people who cannot agree, or between states, cultures and religions in acts of war.

Plurality

Plurality, one consequence of the individuality of the included observer, is at the heart of (second-order) cybernetics. Distinguishing each observer and recognising the observer's inevitable presence in his/her observing (remembering "a subject's delusion that observing can be done without him" [Foerster, 1992]) means we confront a universe (or a plurality of universes) of plurality. Plurality should not be reduced by processes of aggregation into groups if it is to remain truly plural, for aggregation requires us to give up the distinct in each view.

We have seen plurality is at the heart of AA, which grew to understand and accept plurality (the co-existence of individual difference) through experience rather than from the outset: There were too many alcoholics with different, strongly-held beliefs for AA to be both open to all and intransigently monolithic, that is, imposing its own brand of uniformity. What is interesting about AA and plurality, is how it understands connected ideas of, and implements plurality by suggesting and sharing; listening to what others offer and identifying with it where helpful; and not insisting AA has absolute truths to offer. The word tradition allows re-interpretation rather than holding fast to something made concrete in rules. AA accepts the experience, strength and hope each alcoholic reports, is their own truth, not a matter for argument.

Part 4—AA and Cybernetics

I have left it until this section to demonstrate the cybernetics of AA, and, by implication, the cybernetics of an-archy, although I have inevitably touched on some aspects of this, above.

My purpose has been to explore how AA and cybernetics come together, showing AA's way of persisting as an an-archic institution with parallels in, insights from and lessons for cybernetics.

Control and Communication

Let's start with control and communication. AA is interested in facilitative (rather than restrictive) cybernetic control, through self-control of/by each individual rather than hierarchical control exercised from above. Groups are autonomous and self-regulating except where their behaviour might endanger other groups. Group members express their experience without fear of censure or correction, as seen in how individuals exercise their own control and in the self-regulation exercised in conscience meetings. This is a flat organisation: the various wholes (individuals, groups, etc.) behave similarly—that is, self-similarly. The minimalisation of hierarchical control demonstrates the value of unmanageability (Glanville, 2000).

This is reflected in the preference for (the twelve) traditions over rules. Traditions grow as an emergent agreed practice, in contrast to imposed, over-riding “enlightened” reason.

When we discuss cybernetic communication in relation to cybernetic control, we discuss channel capacity, error correction, and, sometimes, meaning. In the working of Alcoholics Anonymous, we talk of mood (below), which is not part of cybernetic discussion. Ashby’s *all possible machines* defines areas that are not cybernetic: Mood is one.

Self-similarity can be understood as a type of (self-) consistency. It’s also a hierarchy buster. Margaret Mead made (self-)consistency central to cybernetics, asking if cybernetic entities behave cybernetically. Foerster therefore named Mead’s (1968) paper “Cybernetics of Cybernetics,” although the preferred term later became *second-order cybernetics*. Cybernetic descriptions treat the cybernetic act of observing the cybernetic system—the observer is a cybernetic device observing a (cybernetic) system made of cybernetic devices. In cybernetics, we treat the observing, as well as the observed system.

Thus, we observe our selves as we observe our others. Reciprocally, others may observe their selves as they observe their others.¹² A self, observing its self, occurs within its system; An other, observing this self, observes from outside the system; and so on.

These differences in how we observe lead to a difference in how we view stability. Generally, we talk of stability viewed from outside. We can, however, understand an internal stability—systems unchanging to themselves, but changing to the outsider: a form of stability of primary concern to second-order cybernetics. AA also values this stability. It is not absolutist, accepting variation and development. It sees stability as internal (Glanville, 1997), a continuing process of reconsideration continually recasting itself: cybernetics theorising AA’s practice.

Constraint

I suppose most readers have faced situations where possibilities overwhelm and choice becomes impossible: variety paralysis, leaving us unable to act.

In practice freedom is not limitless. For example, a (music) synthesiser is limited by the controls a performer can manage. The precision of the performable is constrained by what a performer can do and a listener can hear, even if assisted by technology. To provide more is profligate, not increasing freedom but wasting resources, and (at worst) disabling.

Cybernetics handles this through the concept of constraint. Although not mentioned so much nowadays, Ashby (1956) dwells on it. Consider this example, involving several attitudes to constraint. A road constrains traffic, with obvious advantages. Disadvantages are less obvious. In the 1990s, however, road signs were

12. This is a consequence of what I have called the “law of mutual reciprocity” which demands that if something is possible in some entity, it should equally be possible in any other similar entity.

removed in some towns in Holland and elsewhere. Driving consequently improved. Recently Exhibition Road in London's South Kensington has been redesigned to mix pedestrians and traffic in the same space. The reduction of constraint requires everyone to move knowingly and responsibly.

Constraint is valuable, allowing freedom of action within limits while providing limits that make acting possible.

AA uses constraint in several ways. Perhaps the most important is focusing through singleness of purpose (Tradition 5). AA meetings are focussed on members' sobriety. For instance, periods of grief may threaten the sobriety of members, who may share the threat they feel and actions they take, but are less inclined to share the actuality of that grief.

Other constraints include rejecting gifts and bequests (Tradition 7) and the insistence on anonymity: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films" (Tradition 11). These are constraints limiting behaviours relating to financial responsibility and fame.

As used here, constraint may be considered a synonym for focus. I find constraint more empowering than focus, providing a channel of coherence within which many foci and paths are possible. Constraint allows each to focus in their own chosen way, within this channel.

Circularity

Circularity is central to cybernetics, although some prefer to speak of a spiral quality. I see this difference: circularity captures the organisational (structural) mechanism, while spiral emphasises the growth of experience, in time. The theme of the Macy Conferences (1942, 1946–1952) (Pias, 2003) was "Circular causal and feedback mechanisms in biological and social sciences": circularity is at least as fundamental to modern cybernetics as Wiener's control and communication.

In cybernetic control, what creates the circle of control is often called feedback. I understand feedback as a specialised and restricted form of circularity. The circularity in control is reflected in AA's Tradition 2: "...Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."¹³ This non-hierarchic statement translates thus: leader takes the role of controller and controlled, servant the role of controlled and controller, creating a cybernetic self-controlling system. Each element is controller to the other's controlled. Interestingly, the concept of the "leader/servant," is ancient: for instance, "Ich dien" (I serve), is the motto of the Prince of Wales, originating in the reign of Edward (1330–1376). The notion, leader/servant, encourages humility (another key AA concern). The danger when the powerful lose their perspective and humility is seen every day around the world.

13. A counter example can be found in Harold Pinter's (2000) disturbing film *The Servant* (developed from the novelette by Robin Maugham), where the servant takes over and menacingly runs the life of his master.

Plurality

Wiener's Cybernetics was not much interested in plurality. Plurality enters cybernetics with the explicit consideration of observing, in second-order cybernetics—already a concern at the Macy Conferences.

Plurality arises from the active involvement of the observer, recognising each observer is particular and distinct, so their observing will also be particular and distinct.

This recognition is a central tenet in AA, deriving from the pragmatics of experience. If for no other reason, this demonstrates we may assume a connection between AA and second-order cybernetics.

Wholes and Parts

If all observer's observations are to be accepted as valid and inescapable, second order cybernetics must be anti-hierarchical. More exactly, second-order cybernetics places heterarchy in experience, rather than in any Mind Independent Reality. This anti-hierarchical concern is similar to that of AA when it introduces autonomy (tradition 4 instructs us "each group should be autonomous"), which is what the self-responsibility and individuality of each implies. There are no sub-groups or super-groups, just separate groups in the presence of each other.

The study of the relation of wholes and parts (mereology), has a long history. The notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts is a clarion call of systems/cybernetics, although better expressed in Boulding's slight rewording: the whole is different to the sum of its parts, which insistently de-hierarchialises the relationship.

Thus: a part is a whole in a role.¹⁴ In second-order cybernetics, individuals are autonomous, separate, distinct, responsible for (and to) their selves, different. Heterarchy is a way of organising: composing together, rather than being contained within the Objects of our observing. Saying grass is green composes together "green" and "grass," rather than asserting "green" is a property of (within) "grass."

In my understanding, Cybernetics is interested in form rather than content. It allows us freedom to construct our content. Cybernetics studies the form in which communication may be "channelled," rather than the poetry of meanings. In so doing, it asserts that this poetry is ours rather than the system's, expressing the freedoms and values of being human.

AA and NOT Cybernetics: Mood

Finally, we should consider certain ways AA works which are not cybernetic. As I have argued, cybernetics is concerned with mechanism, whereas much of AA depends on content. While Pask was developing the mechanism of Conversation Theory (Pask, Scott & Kallikourdis, 1973) he often referred to the philosopher H Paul Grice (1975) who also discussed conversation, but with an emphasis on meaning and "implicature."

14. George Klir asked me if he could use this quote as a chapter title. When I saw the chapter it was named "A whole is a part in a role." Klir insisted there was no significant difference. I disagree, profoundly.

In this column, I have used *mood* to capture AA's choice of language in a gesture towards Grice. I believe the mood implied in AA's choice of words such as share, suggest, identify and tradition, etc, is different to the mood of talk, argue, agree and rule. The vocabulary AA chooses, aims to direct how we appreciate what is being offered.

Conclusion: Anarchy, Alcoholics Anonymous and Cybernetics

In chapter 1 of this paper I explored the proposition that there is a strong relationship between Anarchy, Alcoholics Anonymous and Cybernetics, giving an account of how AA organises itself, and the cybernetic concepts that relate to this.

In this chapter, I have shown how the strategies AA uses can be understood as instances of cybernetic concepts, understandings and tools, bringing these fields together. Recall *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* characterisation of *anarchy*:

anarchism, cluster of doctrines and attitudes centred on the belief that government is both harmful and unnecessary. (Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/22753/anarchism>)

I am left with a concluding task: to show the connection of Alcoholics Anonymous to an-archos—anarchy.

Autonomy, Plurality and Mutualism

Autonomy (a term that has become increasingly important in cybernetics) is at the heart of AA which sustains autonomy by accepting plurality (each has his/her own views) and mutuality (what I have you might have)—and consequential responsibility. Recapitulating, AA insists each individual—and group—is responsible for its own behaviour, and provides conscience meetings so members can reflect on their behaviour as individuals and a group, to seek improvement. The group, by switching roles, controls itself—as do the individuals—in an expression of circular control. This is explicit in AA's 10th step: "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." The control exercised in AA is self-control. No one person imposes his/her will on others: "Our leaders are but trusted servants" (Tradition 2). AA insists individuals should not be aggregated to form some fictional, uniform unity.

We often say an anarchic society (such as I have described), is unimaginable, or unrealistic: People can't live in this manner, so we need structure and hierarchy to manage society. AA, using the behavioural mechanisms it has developed to promote autonomy, pluralism and mutualism (which we see supported by theoretical understandings explored in cybernetics), operates without imposed hierarchical control, yet with respect for the variety and integrity of individuality, which is at the heart of an-archos. These, and their concomitants found at work in AA, are exactly what is needed if an-archos is to work.

Hierarchy, Self-similarity and the Observer

In self-similar systems, what we call wholes and parts take the same form. Cybernetics has several such: Varela, Maturana and Uribe's (1974)'s autopoietic units when used in social systems, may be constituted of other autopoietic elements. Pask's (Pask Scott, & Kallikourdis, 1973) psychological p-individuals, housed in mechanical m-individuals, may concatenate so that people may form into a crowd with a mind of its own. My own Objects are perhaps the clearest example of this, existing as inhabitants of a universe itself an Object.¹⁵ I have argued all Objects, although of the same form (self-similar), are unique: thus, plurality. Hierarchy comes from one Object composing observations of others into heterarchies.¹⁶

Self-similarity exactly describes the relationship between individuals and an AA group. To maintain the autonomy of individuals and plurality in groups, we need a logic of both/and, which does not pit one position against another (as with an either/or logic). Nor should we destroy the distinction of the individual (the uniqueness of individual experience) by false aggregation.

In AA, the led are equals of the leaders. No individual has authority over another. The description *servant*, helps the alcoholic maintain sobriety. AA's agree, amongst themselves, that some will take positions of service (leadership) for a period, subject to continuing agreement.

AA constructs a flat, leaderless fellowship of plurality, which recognises and respects the individuality of each along with the necessary differences in their understanding. It "lends" leadership without threatening plurality and equality.

The cybernetic understandings of (non-) hierarchy, self-similarity and the observer, implemented in the workings of AA, is a further realisation of an-archos. AA is a clear example of an-archos working without natural hierarchy, where groups and members are similarly formed (self-similarity), and valuing the individuality of each observer.

Attraction, Anonymity and Mood

As we have seen, one important aspect of how AA works is scarcely mentioned in cybernetics. Where cybernetics is primarily concerned with mechanism, AA is also concerned with what I called mood. AA's vocabulary is non-confrontational, neither imposing nor demanding. AA's make offers, without implying they should be accepted. The tone is unsullied generosity. What is said in meetings is (within the limits of human frailty) neither manipulative nor a power move. Members share what they wish (relevant to their recovery) without censure, threat or imposition. The complementary assumption is that others listen attentively, without censure and with humility. A meeting is no place to show someone struggling how much better than

15. Objects are, I argue, the meta-system within which other second order cybernetic systems exist. They deal with the problem of how, if we all observe differently, we may nevertheless believe we observe the same "object of attention." First introduced in 1975, the original text was recently republished (Glanville, 2012). I will not try to explain them further, here, but have promised the editor an extensive (re-)presentation for this journal.

16. Heterarchy is hierarchy with more than one top point. It is therefore a more general case than hierarchy.

them you are, nor to instruct others what to do: Each AA is responsible for their own condition.¹⁷

There is a concomitant in how AA seeks new members. Tradition 11, “Our public relations policy is attraction rather than promotion,” captures this: It is up to you to decide you need what AA has to offer. Members accept the need to change, seeing AA as helping them do so. Motivation is within. AA simply makes its presence known! It gains members through attraction: there is no coercion. The lack of coercion, in particular, is forged in freedom.

Anonymity makes open sharing possible, an important condition when many need to share shameful and possible illegal acts. But it is more than that. It mitigates against stars, by promoting humility. This is why AA is so careful in its approach to media. Hence the concept of attraction rather than promotion. It is also an-archic in its approach to essential equality.

The above indicates, I believe, that AA is arranged to produce a mood supporting a flat fellowship lacking power control, superior roles and positions, with self-regulation at its centre. This, surely, is an-archos.

Freedom, Focus and Constraint

We have seen how, using concepts familiar from cybernetics, the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous organises itself to allow the participation of each member, respecting the essential differences that are found in a fellowship of recovering alcoholics. Each member may share what they will, listening generously to what others share. Members support each other, unless this might undermine their sobriety or the continuing viability of AA. This is freedom: freedom of the individual, and freedom not to damage the freedom of others or of the fellowship.

This anarchic freedom is again safeguarded by AA’s flat structure, by the Traditions and by the language in which AA describes itself. It was not imposed, but grew out of the meetings of the early groups, and the experience and wise humility of the founders.¹⁸

Thus

We see the deeply rooted similarities between cybernetics, Alcoholics Anonymous and an-archos.

But

Whenever we make arguments such as this, it is important to remember that (as far as I know) there is no established connection between cybernetics and AA. On initial glance they look to be quite different: cybernetics is concerned with control, AA is concerned with giving up control. Nor does modern cybernetics have temporal

17. AA likes to talk of alcoholism as a disease. Since, however, there is no cure, I prefer the word condition.

18. Bill W notes how he began to cherish the status of founder, and enjoy being the centre of attention; then he realised this was bringing him close to drink. His “celebrity” ran counter to the ethos of modesty AA had developed and threatened his sobriety.

precedence: AA was founded in 1935. Modern cybernetics officially began in 1948 (with the publication of Wiener's (1948) book) although the first recognisably cybernetic paper might be Rosenblueth, Wiener and Bigelow (1943). The antecedents of AA go back to the Victorian era (although alcoholism is as old as fermentation); those of cybernetics and an-archos are Greek.

However

Bill W. wrote about the connection between AA and anarchy:

When we first come into A.A. we find here, as we have observed before, a greater personal freedom than any other society knows. We cannot be compelled to do anything. In that sense this society is a benign anarchy. The word "anarchy" has a bad meaning to most of us, probably because one of its excitable adherents long ago threw bombs around in Chicago. But I think that the gentle Russian prince who so strongly advocated the idea felt that if men were granted absolute liberty and were compelled to obey no one in person, they would then voluntarily associate themselves in a common interest. Alcoholics Anonymous is an association of the benign sort the prince envisioned. (Wilson, 1957, pp. 224-225)

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