

Building an Ethical Underworld – Lessons from the Mafia

by *Khemasuri*

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'Evolution or extinction' by Sangharakshita (1971) – this talk as a response; the Buddha's basic teaching and experience; conceptual constructions of a specific time and culture – 'pratitya samutpada' ('dependent arising') and 'general systems theory'

I want to give this talk because I really want to say some things about how we effect change in the world, and also the place of the spiritual community in doing this.

In 1971, Bhante Sangharakshita – my teacher – gave a lecture called, *'Evolution or Extinction: A Buddhist View of Current World Problems'*. In one part of this lecture he talks about the individual's responsibility for the way the world is, and the role of the spiritual community in promoting change. He talks about the potential of the spiritual community being like an earthworm: an earthworm undermining the existing order and shifting the governing values of the world. And this talk is my response to his lecture.

I am going to start by talking about the underlying essence of the Buddha's teaching, which is known as 'pratitya samutpada', and how systems theory works as the conceptual construction of this essence. Then I will move on to the implications of setting up conditions for change informed by this systems thinking, and then we will look at how the criminal underworld does some of this very well... and then I would like to talk a bit about what we as individuals and members of a spiritual community could learn from this, to be a catalyst for change in the world.

Buddhism, in its 2,500 year history, has spread very widely, and has done so in the spirit of adaptation and assimilation. The Buddha, in discourse, defined the Dharma – his teaching – as:

“...whatever is conducive to dispassion, detachment, leads to a decrease in worldly gains, frugality, contentment, energy, delight in the good, and solitude. This is the norm; this is the discipline; this is the Master's message.”

Sangharakshita, in the *'Survey [of Buddhism]'*, says:

'The Dharma, while remaining essentially changeless, was capable of assuming a thousand forms, because it is in principle simply the means to enlightenment.'

The fundamental experience of the Buddha on his Enlightenment was what was called 'pratitya samutpada', and this is defined as 'conditioned co-production', 'dependent arising', or 'mutual causality'. This insight, this experience the Buddha had, was transcendental; it had nothing to do with any kind of conceptual construction. It was a very particular way of

experiencing the world, and in the Buddha's time it was just known as 'the way things are'.

Pratitya samutpada was described by the Buddha in terms comprehensible to the intellect, and he used various ways of doing this – the Four Noble Truths; the Nidana Chain – and these were conceptual constructs of pratitya samutpada, and they were of his time and of his culture.

But for me, today, in systems theory (which has grown out of scientific understanding) is a conceptual construction of *our* time, and *our* culture, and it can bring us closer to understanding conditionality or dependent arising, which is akin to the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

Differences between causality and conditionality; Cartesian thinking; conditionality through human culture and experience; properties of systems; feedback mechanisms; systems evolving in complexity – change; instability, non-predictability and synergy

So, to begin with I want to look a little bit at the difference between causality and conditionality, and the implications for acting on these as paradigms in terms of the way we view the world.

Causality was expounded by Descartes and others of his time, and it is often known as 'Cartesian thinking'. This moved from a holistic understanding of the world to a mechanistic one, where there is direct cause and effect. So, A causes B. You chop down a tree; you process it; and you get paper at the other end.

Cartesian thinking sees the world as being machine-like; there is a direct relationship between input and outcome. It led to us understanding that we could control the world 'from the outside'; that we were in charge; that we were separate from the world; in fact, as superior beings we could dominate the world via our superior intellect, and the world was there for Man to have dominion over.

Systems theory looks at the interplay of conditions which make up the world we live in – and conditionality means that there are lots of different things going on that lead to a lot of other different things going on.

So in a very straightforward materialistic sense you can chop down a tree and process it to make newspaper... but [chopping down the tree] also destroys habitats of living beings; it uses chemicals that have an effect on the environment; it uses water, which decreases the flow in the river, which means plants are affected, which means we have waste, etc.

So it means that one thing triggers a lot of different other things. And this conditionality can be seen not only in the material world but also in culture, and society, and in our consciousness. It makes a lot of different things understandable, but it is a paradigm shift, and it is very different from the one that we are used to using in the world.

And it has certain properties. I won't go into this in a lot of detail (because I just don't have

time) but it is important to know that all systems are wholes in themselves, and all systems fit into larger systems.

For instance, I am composed of cells, which make up my organs, which make up me, and I am part of my family, and my family is part of society, and all of these are systems within themselves which are connected to other systems; and it is very difficult to affect one without affecting another. Things don't happen in isolation.

All open systems have self-generated goals. So, a red blood cell's self-generated goal would be to carry oxygen around the body. We all have a purpose; it is the goal at the centre of that system. And there are feedback mechanisms operating on that system which actually increase or decrease a derivation from the goal at the centre of that system.

There are two kinds [of system]: there is the self-stabilising kind, which decreases the impact of anything that's slightly untoward within the system, so it strengthens the goal; and there are self-changing feedback systems, which means that the system evolves in complexity.

The system that evolves in complexity is the one that will trigger evolution. In personal terms it is how we learn; and at all levels it is change-producing. And this self-changing, this change-producing feedback, exists at a point of *instability* within a system; so the system has to be a bit unstable. And not only can it lead to change but it can lead to the *collapse* of that system when a new balance cannot be achieved for some reason.

So, I have a mechanism in my body which regulates my temperature: my capillaries open if I'm too hot, or I shiver if I'm too cold. But if neither of those are working very well, I may end up with a fever; the system may break down and not work any more.

All systems have what are known as 'emergent properties', which are dependent on the conditions and the relationships between them. And systems are not reducible to parts; and they are more than the sum of their parts. For instance, the wetness of water cannot be predicted by the qualities of oxygen and hydrogen. When oxygen and hydrogen come together, water is something completely different. And these emergent properties can be unpredictable – literally – you cannot predict them.

And this is the process in synergy. So when things just work together, you just don't really know quite what's going to happen. You're not in charge!

Repercussions for how we act; the Cartesian model of the world and its effect on behaviour; systems theory, actions and consequences; means and ends as the same thing

The difference between a Cartesian way of looking at the world and a systems way of looking at the world has quite a lot of repercussions for how we act. And Cartesian understanding, and the systems approach, lead us to very different perspectives on our interaction with the world. We would see our place in the world differently, we would have the opportunity to behave differently, and we would have to evaluate the effects of our actions very differently

using these two different paradigms.

In a Cartesian model (and this is the one that is largely a dominant cultural understanding in our world today) the understanding is that we do something because we desire a particular outcome, and we expect the outcome to be the one that we desire. We are 'goal-orientated'. We think that if we know enough, we can dominate our environment; we're in charge. And we would consider the means of our actions to justify the ends. We tend to be always looking into the future – [the time] when we can have what we want.

Often we would recognise ourselves, or regard ourselves, as acting in opposition to others who may take what we want from us. We will act competitively, and we will be in a win-lose game: 'I win; you lose', 'you win; I lose'. It is a very isolating way of looking at things. We see ourselves as very individualistic, acting on our own.

Often, because we see ourselves as being on our own and in competition with others, we do become polarised. We divide ourselves from others and the world around us, and this often leads to judgement and blame on others and their actions.

If we don't get what we want, we will experience disappointment and disempowerment. We will see ourselves as not good enough, and often we will have very low self-esteem. And this is really important, because it is a dominant culture that we have in the world at the moment. This is the way that a lot of people see themselves, and the way that they interact with society.

Systems approach says something very different. It says this is a process which involves synergy. It's not a 'win-lose' game – it is a 'win-win', 'lose-lose' game. It is collective and co-operative.

We are all responsible for the way that the world is. The world that we live in is one that we envisage in our minds, and through our minds our actions; and through our actions we bring things into reality. We have to act in this paradigm without understanding the full outcome of what our actions will be. We will act in the knowledge that we cannot but have an effect with everything that we do; i.e. all our actions have consequences, but we will not know always what the outcomes of those actions are. We can't know everything – we just can't. Not only is the world complex, but it is also unpredictable. We never, ever, act in isolation. Regarding ourselves as isolated individuals is not practical.

All systems can grow and adapt, evolve and learn. Change is constant. Whatever we do, we are contributing to either change or stability. We would have an understanding through this [systems] approach that the means are just as important as the ends. The means *are* the ends, in fact. *How* we do something is as important as *what* we do. Our actions – which include our thoughts, our speech, our written words, whatever we do bodily within the world – will have an effect.

And, because of the change-producing feedback mechanisms within a system, actions may be very small but may actually have huge effects. A chance remark... I have a friend who says,

'Small acts of kindness save lives' – and she's right. That *is* what happens, at times.

Social networks, systems and change; 'event-triggering process' – shocks to the system and creative response; change within a community of individuals; the properties of a living community

It also means that, if you want to produce change, it's best not to conform. So it is important to think outside the box. The systems approach always says we are not on our own. We can make connections and friendships with people of common interest – it is actually very important for networks.

I now want to say something about what systems theory has to say about social change.

In systems theory, the emergence of social change is seen as the emergence of novelty within a system. This needs to have certain conditions to be in existence. So, the instigator of the change has to be an open system. It has to be a system which is alive, well, and connected to other systems. It has to be a living network, which in terms of systems theory means that it exchanges information openly – it exchanges energy freely with other levels of systems: family; neighbourhood; your nation; your community; whatever.

Because change is an emergent phenomena, this takes place at a point of instability. So change is always there when there is instability in the system. And the process of change is dependent on these forms of conditions.

I'm just going to give an idea of how you could perceive change within this kind of system; and this could be at an individual level – so change *within me* could be produced by this kind of situation – or it could be at a community level, or within a country, or globally.

You start with an event-triggering process: this could be anything from a chance remark to a cataclysmic event. The event has to be perceived in a way in which it is meaningful – so it cannot be ignored or adjusted to; it is a shock. Perhaps, on an individual level, you hear something that is a shock to you; you cannot accept it with your normal understanding.

The individual, or the community, chooses to be disturbed by this event. The information is then circulated about this disturbance, as to the meaning and value of it. The individual and the community cannot absorb the event or the disturbance, and instability – this important point of instability in the system – starts.

This instability can lead to all sorts of different things: it leads to chaos, confusion, uncertainty, doubt. This can be very uncomfortable, and I'm sure everybody in this room knows what it is like to have this on an individual level – you know – you can't process something, it's just very uncomfortable, it can't make any sense. And there are very strong emotions here: feelings of loss of control; fear; often self-doubt; pain; all sorts of things could happen.

But out of this instability and discomfort there comes a change in the system. There is either

breakdown in the system, or a breakthrough in the system. If it is a breakthrough, it leads to levels of creativity, novelty and change.

The problem – whatever the event-triggering process, and the discomfort brought about by it – is not solved at its *own* level. The new order emerges that cannot be predicted by the previous conditions. These are the emergent properties that I was talking about before.

So, that is how system theory looks at how change occurs.

I now want to look at change within a *community*; a community of individuals. Community, for me, means all sorts of different levels. It is not just the people we live with – it's the people who are on site here today; it's my community as a family; it's my community as a member of the Western Buddhist Order. I belong to a lot of different communities, and everybody here will too.

Because I'm going to talk about communities, I want to take time to explain in systems terms what a definition of the community is.

Living communities are self-generating in thought and meaning, and they have these properties:- they have a common context of meaning; they have a free flow of information through open communication; they hold shared knowledge and rules of conduct – they have their internally generated goals as to what behaviours are acceptable or unacceptable – they exhibit a collective identity and a sense of belonging for the members of that community; and they have recognisable bonds.

What the Mafia can teach us about supporting change; Fritjof Capra's ideas on the criminal underworld's success; what the Mafia does well as a community; towards an ethical underworld

These conditions are true in many institutions, organisations and communities, from the criminal underworld to the Sangha, and I now want to look at how these conditions are conducive to change.

I'm going to start now talking about what the Mafia can teach us about supporting change.

I recently read a book by Fritjof Capra, called '*The Hidden Connections*'. He talks from time to time, in this book, about the criminal underworld being more successful in promoting itself than multinational corporations, in the conditions of globalisation that we have today. He says they are uniquely successful organisations. And he identifies some reasons for this (he talks about the criminal underworld; I'm talking about the Mafia, for convenience).

The Mafia do not originate in traditional institutions of the civil society. They are 'outside the box'; and they are not bound by convention, values, or behaviour. So they are already a system within a larger system, which is unconventional, which is non-conforming.

Because the Mafia community is not bound by society's dominant values, it can *challenge*

dominant values and provide triggers for change.

There are a coalition of grass-roots [Mafia] communities – so they are living systems which are connected to other communities in different ways. They are open systems.

The Mafia's communities are bound by a broad systematic perspective; a common context, which relates to the meaning and stability of that organisation. They have a common understanding amongst them.

They actually use global communication very skilfully to support their principles and practice, so they have what is important to an alive system – a free-flow of information and open communication.

They employ a direct, frank and emotionally charged discourse; they talk to people on the level of emotion and humanity. There is a strong sense of belonging and an acknowledgement of the discomfort of change. They don't pretend that things are easy. So, they engage people on an emotional level.

They have an ability to use symbols and cultural codes effectively. If '*The Godfather*' is anything to go by, the family is very important; so there is the symbol of the family. And there are cultural codes – the vendetta – which will have strong internal meanings for that system, that people can relate to. So they have recognisable bonds in that way.

They value tacit and explicit learning of the culture and skills of that network. They bring on people; they teach them the skills that they need, to become a member of the criminal underworld, to become part of the Mafia. So they share their knowledge freely.

So, although I think we can learn from the Mafia – the criminal underworld – in the way that they organise themselves, and how successful they are, I am not suggesting we adopt their values. I would like to be in a position where I can see the spiritual community promoting a kind of 'ethical underworld' rather than a criminal underworld! We, too, need to promote our own values and principles. And I would like to see the Buddhist community promoting change in the wider world.

Acting ethically is no longer [just] an option, but actually is a *necessity* for our global survival. We need to become an ethical underworld. We need to act on different levels to promote this.

What we can do individually and collectively; the revolutionary nature of the '*metta bhavana*' meditation ('development of loving kindness'); actions and consequences again; taking risks; different ways of doing community; collective change is not comfortable

I'm going to now talk about what we can do on an individual and a more collective level.

On an individual level we self-develop – we go for self-development. We underpin how we are in the world with our ethical practice, and clarity of mind through our meditation. So

developing clarity and awareness is very important.

I think that practising metta – the '*metta bhavana*', the development of loving kindness – is very important; I actually think of it as a revolutionary activity. It will change your relationships with yourself, with individuals, with your society, a great deal, and it will change your actions as well, so that to come from a place of loving kindness is to dramatically change your interaction with the world.

And I think it is important that we act skilfully and ethically as individuals, because all our actions do have consequences; we may not know what they are, but they will have consequences. So we need to act as ethically and as clearly as we can. We need to act on the knowledge that we are interdependent; that the consequences of our actions are borne by others, and borne by the planet as a whole as well as ourselves. My actions don't stop here – they flow into the world, and I don't know what effect they will have, but I know that they *will* have an effect.

By meditating and acting ethically we work against craving; we develop lifestyles that encourage low consumption, economic sharing, right livelihood. We learn to be more contented with what we have. We can live and act in the present moment without an attachment to outcome. We can just live freely in the world, from what is most important to us.

Ethical acts are actually self-validating; they don't need to have an outcome that we know about. They are worth doing in themselves.

We can consider withdrawing support from groups and organisations that don't support spiritual values and principles (and in fact I've done this in the past – I've just thought, 'no, I can't do this any more. This is not working in the way that I want it to.').

And we can just *take risks*. We don't know what's going to happen. We can just *do* something – we can be bold; we can speak out; we can be gently subversive.

Those are all things we can do as individuals, and there are lots of things we can do as collectives, as well; as communities.

We can actually be an active part of a spiritual community, and we can do this on all kinds of levels. We can do it on the level of friendship, just in conversation and communication with another person. We can do it in terms of the people we live with, and the people we relate to, in a very small area of our lives. We can do it in the Sangha – the spiritual community – in all kinds of ways.

I do it as part of a chapter; as part of an Order; as part of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. I belong to the Network of Engaged Buddhists. I have a lot of different kinds of communities. I belong to communities of people who will take work that encourages people to engage in the world, out into the world. That is an important community to me, too; people that I can work alongside in promoting change.

And it is not always through personal contact – I belong to strong communities where I am with people I rarely see, but I keep in contact with. And at some time in the future, sooner or later, we will work together, or produce something together. So it's not always people I need to see all the time.

We also need to be aware that change is not comfortable. We know it's not comfortable on an individual level, but confusion exists when there is change in our society too. Confusion, doubt, and insecurity are part of the process of change.

To belong to a community which understands that, and will support and encourage you, is just fantastic – to be able to have people who understand what you're doing and will support you through difficult times, and be with you through difficult times.

It is important to understand that if we experience strong emotions it's because we are really connected to what's happening outside us. We're not *ill* in any way – it's not a 'problem' – it's not because there is anything *wrong* with us. It is a communication between us and the outside world, based on our feelings and emotions. So we need support to be able to let that sort of thing in freely, and we need to be able to support ourselves to let that sort of thing in freely, through our practice.

The importance of passing on knowledge and promoting another vision of the world; diversity; don't leave your values and principles at home; acting from the heart; the 'infinite game'; profound personal feedback from your efforts

The spiritual community, too, is not bound by conventional values and principles – and this is a real strength. We practice thinking outside the box in terms of normal cultural values. We can be subversive in the nicest possible way!

I think that some of the ways that I operate as an Order member is actually to subvert present cultural values held in our society. It's very important that we recognise that it is good to share our knowledge, and not to hang onto it – to share our talents, our abilities and skills within our spiritual community. This is the free flow of information and energy that I was talking about, which makes a community alive, connected and effective.

So teach others what you know, and learn from people who know more than you do. It's important.

Understand that the use of symbol and myth to promote internal cultural norms will strengthen the Sangha. We've got loads of these – we're just sitting in the right place [*Buddhafield*] to do this! Promote vision; it is very important that we have another vision of the world, and speak of it.

An open system that is alive and working well will welcome diversity. Backed by common values, diversity will strengthen the Sangha through learning, and offer the opportunity for it to evolve. So, diversity is change-enhancing and should be welcomed.

We can use the networks that we have to communicate our values, principles and ideas as a spiritual community: to use our centres; to use our retreats; to teach meditation and ethics to others; to encourage others to self-develop. It is all important work.

It is also available to any of us to join other communities to promote our values and principles. Peace groups, anti-globalisation networks, Friends of the Earth... these are all good outfits. But do take your values and your principles with you! Don't leave them at home.

So, help the Sangha – just step out into the world; interact with the world. Promote [the Sangha's] vision and its values, and challenge cultural norms.

And we need to do this in the knowledge that we may never see the results; we may never know what the results are. But know that we are doing this *because it is important*; because it comes from our hearts, and it needs to be done. We must know that we are in this for the long haul – you know – I will be doing this for the rest of my life. We are part of what is being called by some people an 'infinite game' – a game that has no end. We need to continue doing it.

The personal feedback in acting in this way can be profound – it will increase personal congruency, self-esteem, feelings of being worthwhile in the world – and all of this will release energy. You will have more of a sense of empowerment if you act in this way.

So we might as well act with as much integrity, and as decisively, and with as much kindness, generosity and clarity, as we can manage – and then just let go of outcome. Act according to our ideals and principles; be prepared to be subversive; trust the process; take risks; just do it! And do it *with others*.

In the spirit of my understanding, I let these words flow into the universe, not knowing what the outcome will be, but may it be for the benefit of all beings.

...Thank you.

Questions and Answers

Question 1: Being subversive; practical examples; exemplifying values; with the Network of Engaged Buddhists at the Faslane nuclear weapons base; not being unpleasant – personal responsibility

Khemasuri: I've been asked, over here, if I can give some practical examples of being subversive! Ok... so, in some situations, when my children were small and I used to have visiting families, I always insisted that everybody in the house eat as vegetarians – 'this is my house' – this is how we ate. And on several occasions they went home knowing that their children would eat completely vegetarian food... including broccoli... and went for it!

So it's not the fact that you have to do anything differently; it's just that you can be an example, you can just exemplify, if you like.

I was talking to Vidyasuri, a friend of mine, yesterday. We talked about changing people's consciousness, so I was thinking that I might take part in changing people's consciousness by teaching how to mend your clothes, make one garment out of another, and not go to the shops too often. I mean, it is a subversive value *not* to throw things away; *not* to have things that are new.

And we can do all sorts of things on that kind of level – very small things – like, I work in a very large open-plan office, and somebody comes into my office first thing in the morning and switches all the lights on. And I come in a bit later, and I go and switch them all off (except for the ones that obviously people need for some reason). And obviously somebody found this very annoying, and once challenged me in front of the whole office. They said to me, 'what is it with you, in turning all the lights off?'

And I said, 'Well, I just hate to think that they would need another nuclear power station because we kept the lights on in the office.'

And somebody went, 'wow, you didn't think you'd get THAT as an answer, did you?'

But... it [switching all the lights on] doesn't happen any more!

So sometimes it's just saying what's important to you; because sometimes it just really hasn't occurred to somebody else – that way of thinking – you know?

I think there's all sorts of things that you can do.

As part of NEB (Network of Engaged Buddhists) last year, we went up and did 48 hours outside Faslane (nuclear base). Now, most people were blockading the base. Well, we decided we didn't want to do that, so we sang and danced, and did rituals, and chatted with the police, and gave them cups of tea, and this sort of business.

And we had a very experienced person who was experienced in civil disobedience, and was part of the Ploughshares movement. And at the end of the weekend he said that he had been on the blockade at Faslane many times – over many years he had been up there, doing activities – but he had never ever been on a weekend quite like that; and he was really moved that what we had done was engage people's hearts rather than confront them in a polarising way. And I was really pleased with that, because he's an activist across the world, and he's now just taking a bit of that with him – another way of doing things.

I suppose I'm talking on a level of cultural values which are based on consumerism – which are based on competition, rather than co-operation. You do need to have a bit of clarity as to what you're about and why you're about it.

I'm not talking about just being awkward or rude or unpleasant. In fact, if I do challenge

somebody's ways of going about things, I will always try and do it from [a position of] taking responsibility for myself. So I will say, 'this is the way I look at it' – rather than, you know, 'you're doing that wrong' – I can't say that. All I can say is, 'this is the way that I think about this. This is what I do in this situation' – and let them get on with it.

So, it's not about telling anybody what to do – it's not about preaching, or anything – it is just being completely responsible for *me*, and what I think is important.

Question 2: People and systems resisting change; patience and perspective; do what you can now

Audience Member: ...I'm not really sure what the question is, but it's about the strength with which systems *resist* change. As a species we just seem to resist change so strongly with parts of our natures, and systems will go to incredible lengths, and we will throw people out and kill people... [systems] will close down as far as possible to resist change. Any suggestions how we deal with this?

Khemasuri: ...Patience, and a long view.

...[LAUGHTER]...

Khemasuri: No, honestly! I think the reason why a lot of people get very disillusioned and suffer from burnout in situations is because their perspective is too small, so they expect change quickly; they expect it to be on the terms that they require it. And they want it *now* – you know?

And we're not in charge of any of that. We can just do the best we can, given the circumstances that we find ourselves in, with as much clarity as possible. And patience is in there – yeah.

I can do something now with what I have in my resources, which is *me*. So, I can make decisions now about how I live, and I don't have to wait. And those decisions I make now, feed into my relationships with other people: my friends know what decisions I make now; my family knows what decisions I make now.

A decision that I make now is to talk to you – here – because this is *important* to me. And I will attempt to do what I can in a wider sphere, but I'm only one of many other people – you know – I'm not a big player.

So – do what you can, with as much determination and clarity as you can manage. That is all you can do; and you can do that every moment. Every moment, you can make those decisions.

Question 3: Things seeming to change fast; instability over time

Audience Member: This isn't really a question, but it's about *conditionality* – about the

stuff that you were saying about how we put in what we can, and we don't know what the effect is, so we just have to... we care about our intent. That strange way that... we're using that long haul. Because impossible things do happen; and you can't always track back. And things happen fast sometimes – like, how did the Berlin Wall come down?

Khemasuri: Absolutely...

Audience Member: ...How did Gerry Adams and Paisley...?

Khemasuri: ...Shaking hands!

Audience Member: Extraordinary. And there are years and years of things, and then suddenly, it is like the feather that suddenly tips the scales, but you can't see the feathers accumulating, as it were... and suddenly...

Khemasuri: ...Mm... yeah...

Audience Member: ...and I guess it's all those people labouring away, putting their little feathers on the scales... but sometimes you do look at it and it seems to happen fast.

Khemasuri: Well, I think in a system, once you've hit a period of instability, anything can happen. And that instability can carry on... like an apartheid regime: the instability was there for decades, and then something happened, or somebody happened – we don't know what that was exactly, but actually the system collapsed in the end.

So, in some way it is [a question of] recognising this instability as an *opportunity*. That's really important. And knowing that it's not going to be comfortable; and being prepared to walk into that, just the same.

Question 4: The tendency of activist organisations to polarise with each other; competing Utopian visions

Audience Member: Interesting that you're talking about 'what are the properties that cause change' or lead to change. Within the general realms of activism, it certainly... [INAUDIBLE] ...being applied separately.

Khemasuri: One of the reasons why I withdrew from the political stage some years ago is because I could see the way that a lot of activist organisations were actually not plugged into other but were actually polarised from each other. So in fact they were in opposition, and I could no longer handle that. I didn't find that a productive way of going about things. I would sit with people and think, 'why are we arguing? We are actually on the same side. We're arguing means here – you know – rather than ends. But because we're arguing means, we're not getting anywhere.'

So it's very difficult out there as an activist; I do agree with you – and they are not necessarily plugged into each other. Quite often, in my experience, they are in opposition in some way –

I've got an idea of utopia. I've got a thing that I would like it to be like' – and a lot of people with a political agenda do have this kind of utopian ideal. Because they think in Cartesian thought – *'this input is going to have that output'* – if they don't get this output, they think that somebody else has got it, or is going to have it, or something like that. So they are setting themselves up in competition with each other, in terms of the outcome they would like to see.

And I just don't think it works like that. In my experience of being involved in groups with that kind of pattern of thinking, and non-linking with other groups... it's just not going to work. I feel in my bones it is not a good way of going about things, because it's the outcome which is all-important rather than the action. We don't know what the ends are going to be like; we can only feed in skilful means.

I come from a Trades and Labour background, but have also had quite a lot to do with socialist movements as well as socialist organisations, so factionalisation doesn't work for me.