

On Hierarchy

Hierarchy is an unfortunate misnomer. Etymologically, *hier* means “sacred” and *archy* means “ruler”, giving us “sacred ruler” as the etymological definition of hierarchy. Theocracy has hierarchy; you could even say that certain conceptions have God as a hierarch. In popular usage, however, it’s used to refer to echelons of authority, inside and outside of government. Because anarchists oppose rulers, many, maybe most, also claim to oppose all hierarchy. That would make sense if we’re talking about “sacred rulers”, but we’re not. They oppose echelons of authority found within many types of organizations. Should they? Would they be consistent anarchists to oppose organizational “hierarchy”? I don’t think so, especially when we consider that the authority exercised in non-governmental organizations is done so on the basis of consent, ie. the individuals who comprise the lower echelons of authority give their permission to the higher echelons to direct them in value-producing ways. Nobody’s illicitly “controlling” or “exercising power” over anyone else, so the anarchist opposition to organizational “hierarchy” is a *non sequitur* from anarchist principles. And that’s today’s two cents.

Skyler.