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NODES IN A FIELD

Dr Daniel Shorkend

ABSTRACT

This brief essay outlines a model by which to see how interactions between elements change the elements as well as the field, the context and larger "space" or cultural field as the case may be. It explores this by assuming **node a** as the religious impulse and **node b** in opposition to that in ideological terms and describes their interaction as a dialectical oscillation (D.O.) transforming both nodes and the field in the process. Using the encounter between Norse paganism and Anglo-Saxon Christianity and the Soviet suppression of genetics under Stalin, this essay examines how institutions reshape the terms on which people can coexist or disagree. The two cases show how institutions can create new terms of coexistence or restrict the conditions under which people can disagree.

KEYWORDS: node; field; religion; dialectic; peace.

1. INTRODUCTION

A node emanates from a field. It is a coherent formation of some kind, an identity carved in the conceptual or material dimension. For example, an individual, a cell, an atom, a society, an animal, a plant, a galaxy and so on in relation to other such elements – any whole formation, though it holds together usually through tremendous struggle of some kind both within and in relation to elements of its kind. By contrast a field is the space between stars, the ecosystem in which plants and animals subsist, and the very universe the galaxies occupy, but fields can also be more primeval, incoherent, chaos, the original soup that gave birth to a node, the universe itself, and this kind of field is ultimately a mystery, whereas nodes can be subsumed in the form of knowledge as do coherent fields as mentioned above, but beyond nodes and fields, is unknown: if there are no individuals there is no society. If there are only individuals there is no society.

In this essay I problematize the interaction between ideological nodes that propel individuals and societies to act in certain ways, or is it that human nature simply dictates errant policy, irrespective of what values and ideologies are asserted or even because of them. Such are the contours of culture informing and affected by human nature. And history – accurate or not – proves the point: The interaction between nodes and fields is a dialectical oscillation, both creative and destructive.

Invention, science, art, cultural forms would appear to be creative in most cases but more often than not coopts and strengthens political or religious systems or industry that is destructive. So, the question is, is this a perpetual cycle of violence?

I begin with assuming religion as **node a**, consider oppositional grand narratives to religion as **node b** and then in the following section describe the ongoing dialectical oscillation between **node a** and **node b** (and within each node itself) in relation to a larger social and cultural field, and then outline whether peace might be found, either a period of Romano Paxis as it were or ultimate and eternal.

Religion: node a:

Perhaps the deepest idea in a culture, a society, a tribe is the narrative that proports to explain the purpose of existence and how to live given the answers it provides. If this is true, then the underlying narrative even as it morphs within and in relation to other nodes is what might be termed the religious impulse. It determines rites of passage: birth, coming of age, marriage, children, and eventual dying and death itself where the claim is that the person perhaps does not actually die but lives on. It includes all such answers beginning from tribal realities in prehistoric times and later larger societies and paganism and the organized religion that formed later in both the West and the East

These sets of belief and practice have mobilized and directed societies for thousands of years, even when challenged from within as it formed institutions of power and control or from without as the said infidel was seen as hostile and an enemy of God or the gods as the case may be. The knowledge or wisdom is said to be one of revelation and staying true to the teaching one of fidelity and faith. Even as the modern era dawned and new knowledge systems arose, religion has remained tremendously powerful and influential, although industry, individuality, scientific knowledge, the digital revolution and widespread education has undermined the hold of religion, while promulgating in its steed what I would dub secular religion**, node b** (discussed in the next section). The major religions in shaping human thought and consciousness are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. They are mutually exclusive: The Jewish God chose Israel eternally, while Christianity asserts a new covenant has been formed, while Islam say Mohammed is the one, true prophet and the seal of the prophets; Hinduism is pagan and not monotheistic as the first three proport, while Buddhism denies the need for a theistic God at all, or a historical God like in the Jewish sense, but simply turning within and finding a state free of suffering and attachment.

Thus, the major religions are necessarily at odds in many respects: on the question of the Messiah, of death and purpose of life and even of which to say is God or gods or no God at all. Additionally, within each are many variants and much internal contradictions between such sects and within each such a sect itself and so it appears that **node a** holds but loosely together and yet it subsists as a node, whose very existence within a field stirs in the the field giving rise to the formation of its opposition – **node b.**

Secular Religions: node b:

By **node b** I mean secular worldviews that can take on some of the functions of religion. They can give collective life a purpose, define what their members owe to one another, and hold out the prospect of a transformed society. Where institutions protect a worldview's central commitments from criticism and treat dissent as disloyalty, it can become self-enclosed. This possibility is shared by religious and secular movements, even where their accounts of human life differ profoundly.

An instance of this institutional closure can be seen in the Soviet treatment of genetics under Stalin. The agronomist Trofim Lysenko held that characteristics acquired by plants under particular conditions could be passed on to their descendants. In 1948, at a session of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences approved by Stalin, Lysenko's approach acquired official authority, while the genetics he opposed was denounced as bourgeois (Borinskaya, Ermolaev, and Kolchinsky 2019) Geneticists lost posts, laboratories were closed, and the teaching and practice of genetics were suppressed. A disagreement about heredity had become a question of whether a scientist's work was ideologically acceptable to the state.

The resemblance to religious orthodoxy lies in the way authority was exercised. The state gave one account of heredity official standing and weakened the institutions in which it could be challenged. Calling rival research bourgeois made a scientist's presumed political allegiance relevant to whether the research could be taught or pursued. In terms of the present essay, the political node reshaped the scientific field by changing who could teach, what could be investigated, and which objections could be heard. The worldview became self-enclosed through those decisions about appointments, laboratories, and teaching.

The ongoing Dialectical Oscillation (D.O.):
The movement between nodes can also occur within religion itself. The encounter between Norse paganism and Anglo-Saxon Christianity shows how two rival traditions can change their place within a shared cultural field.

In Norse myth, Odin received warriors fallen in battle into Valhalla, where they continued to fight and feast in his service. ("Valhalla" 1911). The image gave a particular meaning to death in battle by carrying the bond between warrior and lord beyond the grave. Anglo-Saxon Christianity placed death within a different account of judgment, salvation, and resurrection. Yet these rival accounts of the afterlife met within a field that exceeded either of them. The wider medieval world of the North Sea linked England and Scandinavia through warfare, settlement, trade, and kingship, while the Church connected both to continental Europe and Rome. It was within this field that a military enemy could become a godson and a Danish conqueror could rule as a Christian king.

After Alfred of Wessex defeated the Danish leader Guthrum at Edington in 878, Guthrum accepted baptism and Alfred stood as his godfather. Guthrum went on to rule East Anglia and issued coins under his baptismal name, Æthelstan (Blackburn 2005). The relationship between the two men had changed in a way that battlefield victory alone could never have achieved. Baptism gave Alfred a way to turn a defeated opponent into a ruler bound to

him by spiritual kinship. It gave Guthrum a Christian identity he could make public on the coinage of his own kingdom. The coins tell us little about his private convictions, but they show how a Christian rite acquired a new political function through the encounter, and how a Danish ruler could adopt its language of authority while retaining a kingdom of his own.

The movement took a different course in 1016, when the Danish Cnut became king of England. The direction of conquest had reversed, yet Christianity remained the public language of kingship. In 1027 Cnut travelled to Rome, where he attended the imperial coronation of Conrad II and negotiated lower tolls for pilgrims travelling from England (Thomas 2020)**.** In the passage from Guthrum to Cnut, we can see what the oscillation produced. At Edington, a victorious West Saxon king used baptism to establish a relationship with a defeated Danish ruler. By Cnut's reign, a victorious Danish king could use the institutions of Christianity to govern England and represent its interests abroad. The eclipse of Odin and Valhalla in the public life of kingship thus coincided with the rise of Scandinavian rulers within Christendom. The field had changed because the people once encountered as pagan adversaries had become participants in the institutions through which Christian England was governed.

The encounter changed the terms on which former enemies could coexist. This raises a further question: under what conditions can such a settlement endure?

2. CONCLUSION

If nodes and fields themselves can change dramatically, as new nodes (cultural forms) and different fields (ideas that inform such nodes) can be encountered and transformed through interaction with new cultures, the world having been discovered as it were, could exploration and discovery and education improve such interactions, though exploration and discovery and education have often led to entrenching or emboldening an already corrupt system, rather than changing it for the good, though it may be that this might still one day happen.

And in a global world, a more connected world we are in a position for an encompassing field and node relationship that engulfs all peoples, a peace between nations if not for a period of some length perhaps a truly new order - and then one lapses into **node a or b** and REALITY WARPS and we are back to a time where there is not peace. Neither religion nor politics are the answer to the question or any singular node in itself: a field that yields for knows it is not the thought, and nodes acting kindly towards one another.

This essay began with the assumption - **Node a** and **b** as central nodes in a field – but this is an arbitrary assumption, and I might have assumed otherwise **node a** could be political versus an oppositional political stratum**, node b** or more interdisciplinary one might have introduced **node b** as art and so on and so forth, recalling that also within each node is a turbulent identity crisis of some kind – and yet the field – constitute perhaps the larger cultural forces impinging on the individual and in some rare cases where individuals themselves change culture.

So, religion could be a central node or simply one of many elements and where once it may have been the field or central node (say Christian Europe of the Middle Ages) today the overarching ideological field in culture and academia in the West is **the** set or overarching narrative in the form of post modernism in the guise of there been no grand narrative, as religion points to mystery or faith or non-theism as in Buddhism. But then no node is central. That is why every discipline cannot in itself know the truth, only a certain aspect of it. Interdisciplinary work highlights that there are analogies between fields. This essay does not neatly belong to any one field.

A change in the field can widen the terms of coexistence or narrow the terms of disagreement. The question is what institutions allow people to do when they differ: whether former enemies can deal with one another and whether dissenters can still speak and work.

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