

System explained by Humberto Maturana

Triggering change in human social system; Escaping traps; Totalitarian system

Speaker 1, Humberto Maturana:

SPEAKER 1: Humberto, you said and explained how human social systems are constituted as networks of conversation through the emotions of love. I think you've also suggested that there are only two ways that change can be triggered in human social systems. Would you care to expand on how change occurs and how change is triggered?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: think that for a-- let us say, for the particular characteristic that the social system has to change what you have to do, of course, is to change the conversations because the conversations constitute the doing and the emotions associated with those doings. Now, I think that this cultural changes, changes in social community, to take place must somehow inspire the change of the emotioning so that the conversations change.

Now, this can happen in reflection for example. And reflection is an operation in the motion. It's an operation through which one releases certainty and looks at the circumstances in which one is living. And as that happens by releasing the certainty, you begin to operate here in objectivity in parentheses. And the whole domain is open for conversation. And this process do change. You see, because your structure changes in the dynamics of the conversation.

So, in the moment in which you open space for reflection, you open a space for change through what you reflect in your reflection. What you look, what you see, your emotional change and the manner in which you will relate with the others will change precisely because your structure has changed in this process. And this can happen in the-- so somewhere I wrote if you fall in love this happens immediately because you begin to see the circumstances in which that which you begin to love or to accept exist. So, reflection.

And the other circumstance and the possibility of change arises is when some somebody that comes from somewhere else arises or arrives in a place and opens a space of reflection has a different behavior, and either you treat it in this way by refusing any reflection with respect to the other and then you immediately put the person outside the social domain, or you open

a space of reflection through the validity of the circumstances in which the behavior of this foreigner is there. And again, this changes the conversations and the possibility of change in this human community. But they have the impression you had something else that I may have said, and I don't remember.

SPEAKER 1: I think you used an example of when traveling, we often encounter the other. And this creates the space for reflection on our own circumstances.

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Essentially, they have grown more or less in the same way, because this other can come from abroad or you can go abroad. And what I may have said in some occasions is that totalitarian systems reduce reflection by reducing traveling abroad or reducing visitors, and in the extreme, like in Orwell 1984, by interfering with love, love for the other or for oneself, which immediately opens the space for reflection.

SPEAKER 1: I think the other area that struck a chord with me was in the immersed in the emotion of love and having to make decisions about maintaining that relationship and that was as a point of significant change.

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Yes, because what is important is the other. So, you open space for reflection precisely because the other is important and so you are not in uncertainty in the relation with the other. But it is interesting that reflection is such a powerful triggering for change of state for getting out of any trap because reflection consists precisely in getting out of a trap by releasing certainty.

Now, suppose that you are for some reason in a hole, you got trapped, there is a television series which is very interesting in this, which is called MacGyver, some people have seen this, which MacGyver is a person that knows a lot of chemist's chemistry and physics very well. And whenever he gets into a trap, he finds ways of getting out by using the local circumstances to make a hole in the wall or breaking a lock. But what is interesting in this film is that he's usually depicted with somebody else.

Now, this somebody else is despair. We are trapped. We cannot get out. We are trapped. And MacGyver says, well, let us reflect for a moment. MacGyver, by doing that, accepts the legitimacy of the circumstance and then can look at it. And this is an act in love. And by doing that of course you are out. Immediately you are out because you can see your circumstances and the circumstances can help you to be outside from where you are in these particular circumstances of MacGyver. But in general terms, reflection is an opening for getting out of any trap and it's an opening for getting out of cultural traps or behavioural traps in the community, or in a family or in therapy.