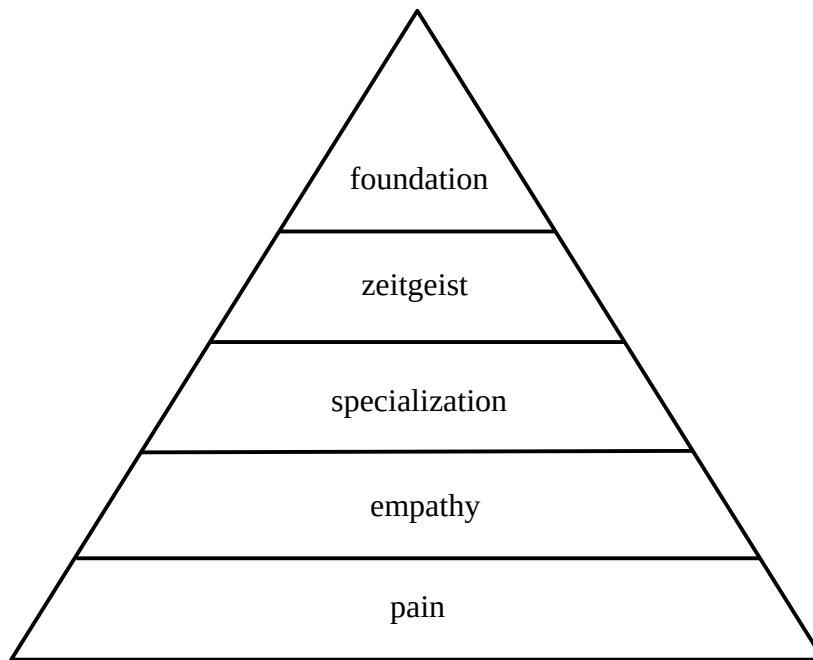# Hierarchy of Helpfulness

by Sven Nilsen, 2023

In this paper I introduce a hierarchy of helpfulness, that describes how a civilization evolves, in the analogue of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, without relying on specific Symbols of Power, such as money or science. This might be used to evaluate use of Symbols of Power.

The hierarchy of helpfulness is as following:

This pyramid reflects Maslow's hierarchy of needs[1], but instead of centered on the individual needs of an organism, it represents the stages of development in a civilization to serve those needs. While Maslow's hierarchy has received lot of criticism within academia, it is still useful in everyday use by people who want a clear diagrammatic representation of personal needs. In particular, the pyramid is criticized from a perspective of the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic societies. However, this distinction itself has been criticized by Donald A. Norman in his book "Living with Complexity"[2] as a cultural projection. While Maslow's hierarchy of needs is not a perfect representation, it serves as a useful tool.

pain	When signals develop inside the nervous system of an organism telling it when a situation is bad
empathy	When an organism can share their experience of pain with other organisms and relate to different experiences of pain from other organisms
specialization	When organisms collaborate to reduce pain overall serving various situations that depend on each individual organism
zeitgeist	When organisms share ideas about their own reflective stage of development as a civilization so the individual organism can plan ahead to a future stage
foundation	When organisms do fundamental research to systematize theories and languages used in a civilization in order to improve all the levels below

Notice that the pyramid of helpfulness does not depend on any specific Symbol of Power[3], such as money or science, in order to understand how a civilization develops. Symbols of Power are problematic because they influence how people make decisions in society. They are also problematic in the sense that people make decisions based on them that might not serve any specific need. So, exaggerated use of Symbols of Power might lead to senselessness or meaninglessness, such as war over resources when accessibility to more resources is technically feasible through collaboration.

A very significant Symbol of Power in today's civilization is money. The most characteristic property of money is that some people can never have enough of it. Compared to e.g. friendship, which serves a specific need, money does not need to serve any need yet still evokes emotions of greeds and moral corruptive behavior. If it was true that people could become more happier through gaining more money, then why do not these people also put more effort into e.g. friendship, which evidently leads to more happiness? The exaggerated focus on money is not balanced with a healthy overall perspective. Instead, people are observed to become more destructive with more money, often undermining their own future, their friends or family's future and the future of future generations. By using the hierarchy of helpfulness, people who are too much focused on money might learn to see the world in a slightly different and more healthy perspective.

The pyramid of helpfulness is also independent on late-stage civilization ideas such as science, which has been criticized as an idealization of methodology by Paul K. Feyerabend in his book "Realism, Rationalism & Scientific Method" (Volume I)[4]. While science is undoubtedly helpful for a civilization, it defies attempts to formalize the discipline based on historical data, as opposed to forming a naive concept of science through methodology and later expanding it as a concept. There are reasons to believe that science is not easy to understand without also understanding our particular civilization and the stages it was going through recently in the past few hundred years. For example, that early scientific revolutions was largely motivated by individuals' desire to prove the existence of a deity. So, it is clear that science has evolved and reinvented itself over time, with our current understanding of it depending on cultural and technological circumstances.

However, one might be skeptic toward the inclusion of "foundation" at the top of the hierarchy of helpfulness, as this is a particular characteristic of recent developments in our civilization. The world is increasingly depending on standardization and integration of global systems to serve the needs of people living on Earth. There is no longer any country that is completely self-sufficient. While there is no official global government at the moment, the multi-national culture requires treating the current civilization as a global phenomena. This development might exaggerate the focus on foundation as a category of helpfulness. Yet, I include it because I do not know what else to put there. Perhaps people will figure out this part in the future and change it.

The overall motivation to introduce a hierarchy of helpfulness is to be able to evaluate Symbols of Power, something that might be critical in a stage of civilization where humanity transitions from human-based labour to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)[5]. It is known than AGI can invent new Symbols of Power, which likely can not be turned off or removed from the world after being introduced. It would be like turning off "money" or "science". It is important to improve the philosophy such that there is understanding of, not only what Symbols of Power are, but also how they relate to civilization and what it means to serve a functional role in society. In this context, I hope that the hierarchy of helpfulness might serve as a tool to evaluate Symbols of Power.

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