

# The Problem of Order and the Specter of Chaos

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## Abstract:

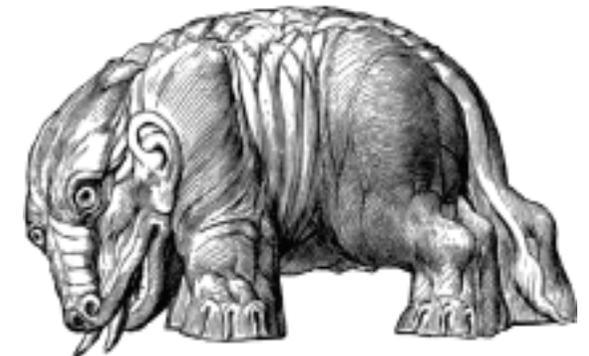
Social theory seems predominantly occupied with the question of how and why social order exists. Often, this question presupposes an improbability of order and a primordially of chaos. Systems Theory is a paradigmatic case, and provides a particularly clear articulation of this presupposition of disorder and chaos. This is demonstrable in Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann's appropriation of Hobbes, which – mistakenly, as I will argue – attributes pride of place to the concepts of fear, war and chaos in Hobbes' theory. I turn to Henri Bergson's early criticism of the underlying logic behind the 'problem of order' to explain the assumptions behind and limitations to the presuppositions of Systems Theory. Finally, by comparing Émile Durkheim's analysis of Darwin's theory of evolution to Parsons' reading of Darwin, I show why the 'problem of order' need not be *the* fundamental question for social theory. I will conclude this discussion by arguing that social theory would be well advised to move beyond the problem of order that proceeds from the implicit assumption of a primordial disorder.

## Keywords:

dt.: Ordnung, Chaos, Systemtheorie, Henri Bergson, Invention  
engl.: order, chaos, Systems Theory, Henri Bergson, Erfindung

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Niklas Luhmann has argued that “How is social order possible?” is *the* leading question of sociology (Luhmann 1981a). In this regard he is part of a systems theoretical tradition initiated by Talcott Parsons. Systems theory transferred the problem of order from Thomas Hobbes, made it a popular subject in sociology, and actualized it for the analyses of contemporary societies. While order has commonly come to be seen as one of the fundamental questions of sociology, the specific nature of Systems Theory’s framing of ‘the problem of order’ becomes apparent by contrast with other theories. For instance, while Georg Simmel likewise raises the issue of social order, he nevertheless approaches it from a different perspective. For Simmel, this question has nothing to do with the problem of order but is grounded in the formal relation of individuals to social wholes, i.e., the problem of the “objective form of individual souls” (Simmel 1992, 41). For him, society is neither completely collective nor entirely individual but a space with multiple social orders in which individuals can move between both individualized and collectivized spheres (53). Thus, Simmel offers an alternative to two concepts: to utilitarianism – where society is solely explained through the particular motives and desires of individuals –, and to collectivism – where social structures explain the individual’s motives and desires. Contrary to Systems Theory, the problem of order is of no concern for Simmel. Systems Theory however is entirely constructed from a very particular interpretation of Hobbes’ theory. In order to utilize his approach, Parsons and Luhmann need to prepare and transform it for their needs.

In the following I will outline the way Systems Theory appropriated – and misinterpreted – Hobbes’ social theory. At the center of this approach lies a privileging of the concepts of fear and chaos, which are then transposed onto distinctively systems-theoretical terms, the *reflexive awareness of over-complexity* that, Systems Theory will go on to argue, ensures social order. After showing that the problem of order and the mechanism of fear are in fact not at the centre of Hobbes’ theory, I analyze criticisms of the problem of order in the writings of Henri Bergson and Émile Durkheim. Durkheim, whom Parsons cites as an authority of the problem of order, in fact shows that society is actually a condition to which the problem of order does not apply.

## From ‘fear of death’ to ‘awareness of uncertainty’

Parsons and Luhmann share very similar interpretations of Hobbes, interpretations which serve as the cornerstone of their attempt to conceptualize and resolve the problem of order in Systems Theory. In Parson’s rendering of Hobbes, the problem of order emerges in situations of intersecting desires, i.e., when resources are too scarce to satisfy the identical needs of two (or more) actors. According to Parsons, this situation necessarily leads to what Hobbes calls a “state of war”. Parsons argues that Hobbes’ “state of war” is “not order at all but chaos” (Parsons 1949, 92). The terminological slide from a Hobbesian “state of war” to a Parsonian/systems-theoretical “chaos” is significant. (I shall return to this issue below.) For Luhmann, the fear that is supposedly at the center of Hobbesian social order – the fear of chaos (i.e., fear of the “state of war”) – explains why all actors agree to give up their natural right to fulfill their individual desires: “Hobbes maintained that every human being fears all others and is thereby induced to preventive hostility, which all the more compels the other, who has been calculated into this equation, to try to get a jump on him” (Luhmann 1995, 116).

When systems theoreticians transport this Hobbesian *fear of war* into the Systems Theory framework, it emerges as the ‘*awareness of uncertainty*’: i.e., the knowledge of the “improbability of social order” (117), that everything “could also be otherwise” (107). But instead of civility and peace, all these actors can attain is a “higher degree of probability” of order (308) compared to random chaos. Thus a Hobbesian “state of war” becomes a probabilistic reckoning; it signifies the *improbability* of social order – and by implication, an inherent tendency towards *disorder* (in systems and environments).

At first sight disorder seems far from a prominent element of Parsons’ criticism of Hobbes. Parsons argues *pace* Locke *contra* Hobbes that “most societies would not dissolve into chaos on the breakdown of government, that hence there must be some other element of normative order than fear of governmental coercion” (Parsons 1949, 97). Hobbes’ mistake, according to Parsons, lay in positing a divide between a political order (sovereign authority) and the state of war or nature. (To Parsons, Hobbes’ ‘state of war’ and ‘state of nature’ are identical – a problematic conflation.) The real opposition, for Parsons, lies between normative order (social principles, norms and values) and factual order (state of war or nature).

Thus chaos is not a universal but a particular chaos, i.e., it is only classifiable as chaos “from the normative point of view” (92) of particular social orders. In this sense, the social world with its normative order is fundamentally differentiated from nature with “factual order”. It is only the breakdown of *normative* order that Parsons describes as “state of chaos” (91). Consequently, chaos from a normative point of view can still “result in an order in the factual sense, that is a state of affairs susceptible of scientific analysis” (92). In contrast to normative order, factual order is everything that can be applied to the laws of nature and studied in natural science. For instance, the struggle for existence might seem “chaotic from the point of view of Christian ethics, but that does not in the least mean that it is not subject to law in the scientific sense, that is to uniformities of process in the phenomena” (92).

Despite this specification, i.e., the limitation of “chaos” to disorder from a particular normative point of view, Parsons nevertheless retains the fundamental duality of an ordered system versus disorder, a duality that he claims – falsely, as I will show – is at the core of Hobbes’ theory. Even though Parsons does account for multiple “interpenetrating” normative systems, these can only observe one other as either chaos or factual order. We will find a similar construction in Luhmann, where every alternative to the ‘order’ in question – everything from random chaos to complex systems of interaction – becomes simply ‘environment’. In Parson’s theory, each normative system would have to treat both neighboring systems and the environment either as chaotic – as pure randomness – or as factual nature, as systems that follow the laws of nature.

In Systems Theory, the problem of order is never applied to competing normative orders, i.e., orders that appear to one other as something other than *either* organized *or* chaotic. This presents a conceptual problem because systems or actors within a system do not simply treat everything outside of the system as over-complex environments. They always make more complex, non-binary differentiations. From a systems-theoretical perspective, war might seem highly organized for those who invade but will be pure chaos from the standpoint of those who are attacked. The building of a new highway might efficiently organize traffic but might leave the area blighted, and plunge the residents into a (systems-theoretical) state of chaos. Yet in both cases, treating these events as the outbreak of chaos from the perspective of those whose systems dissolved will neither explain resistance nor adaptation to new conditions. Rather, what needs to be shown is how systems operate with the contrasting complexity of neighboring systems – how they affect it and

how they are being affected by it. Instead of explaining how other systems are random chaos or factual order for each other, what is needed is a pluralistic concept that explains the mutual flow of complexity.

## **Relating to the environment: (Inter-)Penetration, Coupling, Resonance**

It may seem that Parsons and Luhmann have already introduced inter-systemic complexity through their respective concepts of “interpenetration” (Parsons) and “structural coupling” (Luhmann, adopted from Maturana) [1]. While Parsons coined the term ‘interpenetration’ for the relations between cultural and social systems, Luhmann has convincingly argued that in Systems Theory, ‘interpenetration’ in fact has a more general meaning, and describes other systemic relations as well (Luhmann 1978, 299). Despite these refinements, in Systems Theory the relations between systems do not qualitatively differ from the relations between systems and their (non-systemic) environment, because, as Luhmann explains, every other system and its complexity “can be handled in the system only as environment” (Luhmann 1995, 180). Thus Luhmann describes interpenetration as “an intersystem relation between systems that are environments for each other” (Luhmann 1995, 214). In a contrapuntal move, Parsons speaks of a “zone of interpenetration between [...] the two components of which, though composed of parts of both systems, crosscut one another and constitute one subsystem” (Parsons; Platt 1973, 36). This potentially flattens out the zone of interpenetration, which was initially composed of two different systems.

Among researchers the location of interpenetration in Systems Theory is contested. Each system is comprised of four functions: adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, pattern maintenance or latency (collectively referred to as AGIL). Is interpenetration itself a sub-system (as Parsons seems to argue above) that regulates a system’s relation to the environment (see also Luhmann 1978), or is it rather a medium in which systems interact, and thus neither function nor system (Jensen 1978)? In any case, it is safe to say that interpenetration is somehow related to the latency or pattern maintenance of a system. “Institutionalization gives rise to a zone of interpenetration” (36). Through this formulation, Parsons gives latency function a prominent place, a place at the

[1] Luhmann sometimes also uses a simplified version of Parson’s *interpenetration* and Maturana’s *structural coupling* when he describes “the relation between system and environment with the concept of *resonance*” (Luhmann 1989, 15).

origin of interpenetration (Parsons 1991, 66). This conceptual construction confirms the general pattern in which pattern maintenance (or latency) is hierarchically prior to the other functions within the AGIL paradigm, including the relations and interchanges with other systems and environment. The four-fold classification Parsons develops rests on the fundamental dichotomy of system and environment. At first glance, interpenetration seems to suggest that each side of the dichotomy, as well as all four systemic functions, is equally important. But this is far from the case, since the latency function is in fact at the center of the classification, thereby determining all other functions. According to Parsons,

The logical outcome of dichotomizing on both of the two primary cross-cutting axes of differentiation [i.e., system and environment] is a four-fold classification of function. In terms of previously established usage, the four functions are referred to as pattern-maintenance (internal-means), integration (internal-ends), goal-attainment (external-ends), and adaptation (external-means). Among the four, *pattern-maintenance occupies a special place in that it is the focus of stability in both of the two main respects.* (Parsons 1977, 233; italics mine)

Parsons' clear bias toward the internal systemic order is magnified in Luhmann's approach to interpenetration and his concept of "structural coupling":

[T]he concept of structural coupling explains that, although systems are completely self-determined, they develop by and large in a direction tolerated by the environment. In structural coupling, the inside of the system can be termed irritation (or disturbance or perturbation). [...] Irritations arise from an internal comparison of (initially unspecified) events with the system's own possibilities, especially with established structures, with expectations. There is hence no irritation in the system's environment and there is no transfer of irritation from the environment into the system. It is always a construct of the system itself, always self-irritation – albeit occasioned by environmental effects. (Luhmann 2012, 66-67)

In the citation above it is clear that environmental influence remains purely negative. This is the other side of the coin of Luhmann's constructivism, in which every effect of the environment is a *construct of the system itself*. In reality, the environment is in fact not chaotic, because it would be impossible to reduce complexity without a minimum of structural similarity between system

and environment. However, and this is decisive, by differentiating themselves from their environments, systems *treat* their environment *as chaos*. It is neither a relation of *familiarity* or *resemblance* but simply “irritation”, i.e., a relation that disappoints, that does not fit into a preconceived plan and – in Parsons’ words, from the normative perspective of the system – that is nothing but *chaos*.

As we have seen, in Systems Theory actors operate with an *awareness of uncertainty*, with the knowledge of the “improbability of social order”, that everything “could also be otherwise”, and that the only attainable security is a “higher degree of probability” of order. Systems Theory calls such conditions ‘interactions under double contingent conditions.’ Double contingency describes the situation where (at least) two actors attempt to observe and anticipate each other’s actions. Parsons credits Hobbes with seeing the inherent instability of double contingent situations: “[A]s analyzed pre-eminently by Hobbes, in an interaction system the possibilities of instability far exceed those to which isolated actors are exposed in relation to environments containing only nonactors, e.g., physical objects, as the significant objects” (Parsons 1968, 436-437).

Irritations in double contingent interactions are simultaneously the problem and the solution: they increase and reduce instability. Not only must all participants be reflexively *aware* of the double contingent situations in which they find themselves (“Ego must be able to anticipate what alter anticipates of him to make his own anticipations and behavior agree with alter’s anticipation” [Luhmann 1995, 304]), they also need to be *willing* to solve this contingency (“[N]o social system could get going if whoever initiates communication cannot know or would not be *interested* in knowing whether his partner reacted positively or negatively to his communication” [113; italics mine]). Thus the concept of double contingency not only describes a situation of instability and uncertainty, but also requires a certain attitude, a reflexive awareness of a looming communicative chaos and the active willingness to avoid it.

If in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* fear of death is what compels men to voluntarily surrender their natural liberties, thus avoiding violence and war, then in Systems Theory the awareness of instable interactions (Systems Theory’s equivalent of fear) enables successful communication and interaction. In both theoretical frames, argue Parsons and Luhmann, the improbability of order can only be solved by reflexive decisions. If the improbability of order is a discursive rather than an ontological formation, i.e., a *self-description* by the system, then the most important point is the con-

struction of awareness in which the world seems precarious and unstable. In this respect, Systems Theory is a continuous work on the awareness of contingency, the constant reminder that “every dissolution of an order results in the improbability of its recombination” (Luhmann 1981b, 30). Thus, for Systems Theory the problem of order is always more than simply a matter of perspective. It is above all an organizing principle that requires reflexive attention.

In this reflexive awareness, chaos serves a negative and a positive function. On the one hand, each system is confronted with an environment that seems to be chaotic, an environment whose over-complexity needs to be reduced in order for a system to create its own structure. This is the negative aspect of chaos: chaos needs to be kept out in order for a system to increase the complexity of its own type of structure. On the other hand, chaos and pure chance are also functional mechanisms insofar as the awareness and consciousness of chaotic possibility is the very ordering mechanism of social systems.

From this it is clear that Systems Theory does not show how social systems *in general* create and construct social order. Rather, it traces specific mechanisms of communication in very particular situations: by staging a specter of communicative chaos, actors end up in a *reflexive awareness* and irritation, and consequently, an *affective state of alertness*. Beyond this imagined fear of communicational disorder, derived from a misreading of Hobbes’ concept of fear of death, there is no other mechanism that explains why actors would be *interested, willing* and *motivated* to engage in communication.

A clue that interpenetration and structural coupling is never about the multiplication, the merging or transformation of order, but always simply about increasing the complexity of the existing system (while remaining closed off to modes of complexity external to the system), is Systems Theory’s description of the contact with neighboring systems as environments that observe each other as “over-complex”. The use of the term “over-complexity” is decisive. Its terminological resonance with complexity theory is deceptive, for Systems Theory is not really interested in the various forms of complexity in the environment. Rather, over-complexity is, like Parsons’ factual order, nothing more than an empty signifier that represents everything that is incomprehensible for the system in question. For instance, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers treat the emergence of *Order out of Chaos* from a seemingly similar perspective, but differ fundamentally (from Systems Theory) in their realization that “order (or disorder) is more complex than was thought”

(Prigogine; Stengers 1984, 287). Instead of presenting disorder as the perception of over-complexity from within any system, i.e., as something that is inherently incomprehensible to the system, they are interested on the contrary in how a system “receives its identity from its relations with others” (95). In such thinking, the structural maintenance of the system is accomplished by a process of fitting (“Einpassung”) into a milieu in Uexküll’s sense (1922, 268). By contrast, Systems Theory operates conceptually with the suppression of the distinctiveness of adjacent milieus, portraying the latter simply as irritating chaos. The concept of the “structural coupling” of autopoietic systems attempts to avoid the self-referential operation of systems, but it fails to introduce a true complexity and capacity for interaction between different systems: “Only in exceptional cases (i.e., *on different levels of reality*, irritated by environmental factors), can [a system] start reverberating, can it be set in motion” (Luhmann 1989, 15, italics mine).

## The (Mis)readings of Hobbes

Systems Theory’s reliance on the duality and dichotomy of order/chaos is evident from its flattening of Hobbes’ theory. A closer look at Hobbes’ *Leviathan* will present us with an approach to the question of order that is not solely fixated upon or derived from a fear of chaos, a theory that accounts for the multiplicity of social orders and the genuinely inventive character of social life.

Criticizing Parsons’ preferred Hobbes interpretation has become almost a tradition in itself (see e.g. Macpherson 1962, Camic 1979, Krieken 2000). Macpherson points out that Hobbes’ social theory is not based on the opposition of nature and society, because even the famous state of nature is populated by deeply socialized individuals; it is “an abstraction from civilized society” (1962, 23). Instead of creating an ahistorical or pre-historical ‘state of nature’, what Hobbes really does is imagine what happens to *fully socialized (‘civilized’) citizens* when their government collapses. So Parsons’ claim about Hobbes, that there is a fundamental dichotomy between the political order of sovereign authority on the one hand and a state of nature on the other, is flawed because even the state of nature is populated by fully socialized citizens with norms and values, which they have carried over from their previous societies. First of all, as much as the state of nature is not a state without society, it is also not “war of all against all” as Parsons claims (1949, 89). Rather, the state of nature is simply a *state without a State*, it is a society without a State. Howev-

er, it is a very particular one, namely where “where every man is judge” (Hobbes 1998, 93), where “all men are equal” (102) and where “private appetite is the measure of good and evil” (105). (As it turns out, the utilitarianism Parsons attributes to the entire social theory of Hobbes [Parsons 1949, 90] only refers to the state of nature.) And only in very specific and unfortunate conditions would such a constellation turn into a state of war. (Ironically, the desired objects around which a war would break out in the state of nature are precisely no natural matters but remainders of the civil state, for example where people “plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat” [Hobbes 1998, 83]). Thus, Parsons’ normative order (of social norms and values) in fact cannot replace and is not commensurable with Hobbes’ political order. Moreover, Systems Theory’s conflation of Hobbes’ “state of nature” with the “state of war”, i.e. the reduction of these two different conditions to a generalized condition of ‘chaos’, is deeply problematic.

The problem behind the systems-theoretic understanding of chaos may be elucidated through an examination of the role of ‘fear’ in Hobbes’ thought. Many authors, including Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss, understand Hobbes’ *Leviathan* as an approach that defines the social and political spheres mainly by a regime of mutual fear. Recently and characteristically, Roberto Esposito reads fear in Hobbes as “*fundamentum regnorum*. Fear isn’t only at the origin of the political, but fear is *its* origin in the literal sense that there wouldn’t be politics without fear” (Esposito 2010, 22). In opposition to Montesquieu, who understood fear only as a mechanism of despotism, it was Hobbes who made fear the center of every form of the social. According to Esposito, this fear is also not just any abstract fear, which shape-shifts and might appear in different forms (fear of violence, fear of loss, angst, etc.) but is the ultimate ground and abyss – fear of death. In this sense, Esposito is the thinker who most explicitly links the question of the possibility of social order to the ever-present threat of collapse, disorder and chaos. Esposito makes fear of death in Hobbes an institutionalizing and therefore a productive element: “The only way to contain the dangers implicit in the originary deficiency of the animal-man appears to be the construction of an artificial prosthesis – the barrier of institutions – that is capable of protecting him from a potentially destructive encounter with those like him” (141). Thus, Esposito again reproduces the myth of fear as the engine of institutionalization: Hobbes, it goes, is first and foremost the theoretician of fear, for whom state of war equals state of nature – “the famous *bellum omnium contra omnes*” as Carl Schmitt once called it (1936/37, 623). Fear of being killed by a superior other can only be

replaced by the fear of a superior sovereign but can never be sublated: “Fear does not disappear [...] It is reduced but doesn’t recede. Fear is *never forgotten*” (Esposito 2010, 23). Systems theory, as we have seen, continues this tradition of thinking about fear: fear of chaos not only functions negatively, as a protective state of alertness, but also positively, as the basis for the ordering of the social world.

A close reading of the *Leviathan*, however, reveals a considerable contradiction of this common interpretation that places fear at the heart of Hobbes’ thought. Fear of death is, contrary to Esposito’s claim, not a general category of the political or the social. Instead, it is but one of many affects, and it overwhelms only in a very specific constellation: in times of war, in the state of nature. Again, state of war is related to state of nature (without being identical) and is thus a very particular type of social order. And even then it is far from the only type of affect: “The Passions that encline men to Peace, are Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them” (Hobbes 1998, 86). Contrary to common belief, Hobbes does not exclusively deduce social order from the common affect of fear. First of all, aside from fear Hobbes consistently refers “to the first and fundamental law of nature” to “*seek peace*” (87, 100-102) as the reason for men to lay down their natural rights. Furthermore, the above quote mentions for the state of war a variety of affects other than *fear* of death: *desire* for happiness and *hope* for the actualization of particular ideas. In the state of war, aside from the reaction of fear, positive affects also emerge that aim at *other* and *new states*: “Desire of Ease, and sensuall Delight, disposeth men to obey a common Power: Because such Desires, a man doth abandon the protection might be hoped for from his own Industry, and labour. Fear of Death, and Wounds, disposeth to the same; and for the same reason” (66). Not only fear and the search of peace, but also desire for ease and delight, for something new and other, lead members to agree to the formation of government.

Hobbes neither bases his social theory on the distinction between state of nature and society, nor introduces fear as a dominant ordering mechanism; nor, for that matter, does he emphasize any dominant mechanism for the constitution of the social. What he does however is to create lists for comparing states of nature with states of government, where natural states simply refer to societies without a State. Thus, fear of death is just one among many other ordering principles and,

according to Hobbes, not all of them are related to violence or can be explained by its prevention. Only a severe misreading of Hobbes, presenting the history of societies as a birth out of primordial chaos, can explain why Systems Theory disregards the multiple features of social and political life in Hobbes. Instead of approaching the problem of order as a singular case it turns it into its foundational principle and buries it under the labels of autopoeisis and over-complexity.

### **The problem of order: a problem of non-order and non-problem**

Henri Bergson's metaphysical examination of the problem of order is instructive. His interrogation of the primordial role attributed to disorder can help us think through System Theory's claims. The problem of order, Bergson warns, even when formulated in a positive sense, is actually about the *absence* of order, about non-order and nothingness: "Never indeed would one be astonished at the existence of something, – matter, mind, God, – if one did not implicitly admit the possible existence of nothing" (Bergson 1946, 71). And never would anyone be asking about the possibility of order if one did not implicitly admit the possibility of disorder. Furthermore, this thinking does not simply admit the possibility of disorder but attributes a primordially to it. What lies behind this question – and the problem of order in general – is the notion that an absence of order or the improbability of order somehow requires fewer logical assumptions than the notion of order, or rather that it carries no presuppositions whatsoever; it suggests that questions such as 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' or 'How is order possible?' operate with only a minimum of conceptual presuppositions. Bergson has shown how this is a fundamental logical misunderstanding and that it creates empty problems: "the habit of proceeding from emptiness to fullness is the source of problems which are non-existent" (112). The logic behind these questions assume that order – social or otherwise – fills a primordial nothingness, non-order or chaos into which the world might fall back at any time.

Bergson argues that the notion of nothingness and disorder in fact requires more assumptions than order, involving at least three logical steps. First, an attempt to relate particular elements to one other. If and when this attempt fails, some elements become arranged within one type of order, while the remaining elements will be moved into its negation – non-order. In this sense, the notion of non-order is really the negation of a particular attempt to conceptualize an order, a step

that has been preceded by the (attempted) assembly of elements and the failure to fully unite them within one system or order. Therefore, the concept of disorder and chaos is based on a fundamental *disappointment*. “‘Disorder’ and ‘nothingness’ in reality designate therefore a presence – the presence of a thing or an order which does not interest us, which blunts our effort or our attention; it is our disappointment being expressed when we call this presence absence” (74). Consequently, for Bergson, the notion of non-order and chaos is a false problem because “one cannot suppress one arrangement without another arrangement taking its place” (74). Hobbes’ approach is a very good example here, because while his state of nature is also a logical abstraction “from civilized society”, it is, as we have seen, far from identical with disorder and chaos. Rather, it designates specific (alternative) values and norms (that are inherited from the previous societal form). For Hobbes, chaos is a very particular constellation within the state of nature. Thus, terms such as disorder and chaos designate a normative view of those who deliver a value judgment about a present situation.

## **Primordial Inventions**

The problem with assuming that there is a ‘problem of order’ becomes all the clearer in this final comparison of Systems Theory with Émile Durkheim’s sociology, more specifically, in the comparison between their respective approaches to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. It was Parsons who equated Hobbes’ “state of war” with Malthus’ “struggle for existence”, a concept he also saw at work in Darwin’s thinking (Parsons 1949, 113). Parsons criticizes Darwin for “biologizing” the model of the survival of the fittest that Malthus had initially intended only for a human sphere bound by a normative order. Without the specific conditions of a normative order, the social struggle for existence is nothing but “anarchy”, thus a non-ordered space (114). Although Parsons in this instance follows a canonized reading that is authorized and legitimized by a strong secondary literature, a reading that identifies Darwin’s theory mainly by the model of natural selection, his reading reduces Darwin’s ideas to a theoretical reiteration of the vision that sees social order as essentially a struggle for existence within a ‘state of war’.

Ironically, Émile Durkheim, whom Parsons views as predominantly occupied with the problem of order (308), criticizes precisely this interpretation of Darwin. In *Division of Labor* Durkheim

correctly points out that Darwin in fact does *not* argue for the survival of the fittest or rather, for the struggle for existence. Durkheim criticizes the appropriation of Darwin's theory by those who want to base social life on a struggle for existence among egoistic actors, painting "for us in the saddest colors this primitive humanity whose hunger and thirst, always badly satisfied, were their only passions" (Durkheim 1964, 196). Thus, not only does he contend with a particular interpretation of Darwin – one to which Parsons subscribes – but also objects to the understanding of social life as a struggle for existence.

Durkheim is well known for replacing the notion of egoistically struggling individuals with a more fundamental "feeling of solidarity" within a group (56). Durkheim characterizes 'primitive societies' as bound by a "collective conscience". With increasing complexity, such "collective conscience" becomes weakened; in an interesting twist, Durkheim's portrayal of complex societies and their evolution (which stems from the *dissolution* of the "collective conscience" that marked primitive societies) mirrors Hobbes' portrait of the 'state of nature', in which societies operate without a sovereign principle, without a State or without "sovereign authority". In this 'state of nature', there are nonetheless, according to Durkheim, mechanisms for socialization and solidarity. Durkheim's entire book revolves around the argument that the dissolution of a binding (collective) conscience does not necessary lead into a 'state of war' of all against all; rather, the dissolution creates a different type of solidarity: "It is the division of labor which, more and more, fills the role that was formerly filled by the common conscience. It is the principal bond of social aggregates of higher types" (Durkheim 1964, 173). Thus, Durkheim shows that so-called primitive societies (societies with a small degree of differentiation) as well as differentiated societies (with highly complex divisions) are primarily *solidary societies*, and a different type of solidarity emerges when social differentiations increase.

In which case, conflicts or disorder are never primordial; rather, situations of conflict are always special cases and are contingent upon specific constellations of social differentiations. Societies also develop other options that implicitly avoid those conflicts. The problem that preoccupies Durkheim is not the solution to the problem of order (as Parson claims), but rather the multiple possible developments of societies without a sovereign principle (or collective conscience): how they transform solidary relationships while developing highly complex, and thus distanced and indirect, relationships.

Against those who read Darwin as a theoretician of the struggle of existence, Durkheim argues that Darwin's evolution implies rather attempts at overcoming and avoiding this existential struggle. Instead of a struggle for existence, evolution may more accurately be described as a movement that leaves behind struggles, conflicts and competitive situations. This requires a movement of differentiation, a becoming *other* and *different*. Since the struggle for existence becomes most intense if the actors are very similar, evolution is primarily an introduction of difference: "Animals, themselves, prosper more when they differ more" (267). For a biological species, evolutionary differentiation means for instance, moving into uninhabited territory, transforming unused resources or moving when everybody else sleeps etc.

For Durkheim, social differentiation does not entirely differ from evolutionary differentiation: "In the same city, different occupations can co-exist without being obliged mutually to destroy one another, for they pursue different objects" (267). The division of labor described by Durkheim is by no means a neoliberal mechanism for the increase in productivity and efficiency, but rather, primarily a social mechanism for adjusting to new conditions

The division of labor appears to us otherwise than it does to economists. For them, it essentially consists in greater production. For us, this greater productivity is only a necessary consequence, a repercussion of the phenomenon. If we specialize, it is not to produce more, but it is to enable us to live in new conditions of existence that have been made for us. (275)

Thus the division of labor is a *social invention* that has nothing to do with the struggle for existence; rather, it is an invention that makes possible complexity and differentiation in the new conditions from which we receive our identity.

## Conclusion

Until today, the inventive mechanisms of societies are very often overlooked. Instead of tracing the historical changes of societies and the way they implicitly escape the problem of order, social theories often remain in a paradigmatic view that explains change through antagonisms (Marx; Engels/ Gramsci/ Laclau; Mouffe), conflicts (C. Wright Mills) and struggles (for recognition, e.g.

Hegel and Honneth). However, such constructions ignore the fact that the struggle for existence is a particular type of order, *but not a fundamental or primordial one*. Furthermore, when I speak of escaping or avoiding the problem of order, I do not refer to a solution to the ‘problem of order’, because that would (re)turn the escape from this struggle (in)to this struggle itself. Rather, the inventive mechanisms (of Durkheim for instance) do not belong to ‘the problem of order’, as they are solutions to entirely different problems. As we have seen from our analysis of Bergson, a problem and a solution are mutually contained in each other, and once a problem is properly stated it implicitly contains its solutions (Bergson 1946, 57). For example, the solution to mass panic first needs to be framed. It may, for instance, be formulated as a problem for Transport Science. But that means mass panic has to be seen as a problem of transport in the first place, one worthy of its solution, and not ‘merely’ a religious or personal problem. Transport Science ‘invents’ mass panic as a problem and consequently dedicates itself to the finding of a solution or to its research. Thus, reading Durkheim’s division of labor as a solution to the problem of order is a misunderstanding, for it is a solution to a completely different problem. Here, avoiding the struggle for existence is simply an indirect means – a “secondary utility” (Gehlen 2004, 121) – in dealing with new conditions.

Clearly, it is this fundamentally inventive aspect of (social) order, namely, the invention of problems that contain a particular sphere of solutions, which has not been adequately considered in the tradition of social theory. Instead of tracing how social institutions invent problems (Seyfert 2014), what social theory very often does is to understand social institutions as solutions of existing problems: inclusion of egoistic desires, solving the problem of order, mastering the improbability of successful communication and so forth.

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