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The Concept of Order in the Processual Sociology[1]

Andrew Abbott

Résumé

Une longue tradition dans la pensée sociale – remontant à Hobbes – considère le problème de l'ordre social. Mais si l'on s'éloigne de l'ontologie sociale statique classique pour aller vers une ontologie de processus, le « quoi » ou le « quand » de l'ordre n'est plus clair. Cet article met en lumière plusieurs concepts d'ordre social. Premièrement, il commente les ordres d'équilibre et leur généralisation en ordres évolutionnaires. Ensuite, il se tourne vers des théories d'ordres temporaux (en termes de périodes et de cohortes) et vers des théories d'ordres spatiaux (en termes de régions et de domination). Puis, il considère des ordres de processus empiriques : l'habitude, la socialisation et la tradition. Enfin, cet article explique des ordres de processus normatifs en se concentrant sur la procédure, l'idée de progrès et celle, contraire, de conservatisme, pour finir avec une discussion de la fiduciarité. *Tous ces concepts d'ordre sont examinés suivant leur degré de contenu substantiel, leur distribution temporelle de l'ordre, leur manière d'appréhender les liens complexes entre les lignages sociaux et leur relation aux groupes et aux individus.*

A long tradition in social thought concerns what has come to be called the problem of order. In the Anglo-American tradition, the most familiar presentation of this problem comes in the *Leviathan*: How is it, Hobbes asks, that human beings with their conflicting aims and impulses can exist together in a society with-

[1] I would like to thank Bernard Harcourt for the invitation to give this paper. It is in all senses a work in progress. Most important, it rests on, but does not set out, a theory of the social process that I am developing in a general theoretical monograph. I regret that space considerations do not allow me to do more than raise the question and catalogue some first-approximation answers at this time.

out destroying each other? This Hobbesian question continues to haunt sociology. Indeed, in *The Structure of Social Action*, Talcott Parsons argued that all post-Reformation social thought began with this question (1949:88), first posed by Hobbes and modified in various ways by Locke, Malthus, and others down to Spencer.

The logical layout of this problem of order is simple. It presupposes disconnected individuals who compete for gain, glory, and security (*Leviathan* I:13). It then asks what is logically necessary for social life to exist among such individuals. This setup focuses our attention on the explanation of cooperation and in particular of the extreme case of altruism, which is – under the usual setting of the problem – impossible *ex hypothesi*. And of course a variety of explanations have been given for this surprising cooperation and altruism, ranging from the argument of force put forth by Hobbes to that of normative consensus advanced by Parsons.

Thinking about the relation between individuals and society as a problem of order is in the first instance a logical rather than an empirical approach. To be sure, empirical examples are adduced by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, but the foundations of their arguments are abstract and deductive. The contrast is easily seen when we compare them with the more empirical classics of political thought: Machiavelli, Vico, Montesquieu, and their heirs. Such writers filled their works with references to specific examples and cases – sometimes ancient, sometimes modern, sometimes both.

Yet there is perhaps a more important difference between the two schools than the contrast between the logical and the empirical. Machiavelli, Vico, and Montesquieu are all historical or genetic writers. Hobbes, Locke, and even to a great extent Rousseau are by contrast less concerned with the flow of historical time; their societies live in an abstract universe of order and disorder. There is, we sense, no real time in that universe; indeed

there is very little particularity of any kind. Universal, contentless individuals band together in order to defend themselves against the equally unspecified horrors of the state of nature. To be sure, the "problem of order" tradition was not unaware of history. Rousseau recognizes that the succession of generations creates a fundamental problem for the social contract, and Locke often uses historical examples to justify his arguments. But their essential conception of order is logical, not historical.

In Machiavelli, Vico, and Montesquieu, by contrast, we are always in a historical world – a time and indeed most often a place. These writers represent what I shall term processualist theories of social life: theories that discuss order and disorder empirically, locally, within an actual flow of historical events. In such views, succession and process are at the center. The social world is a world of events. Through the events, not only biological individuals, but also institutions and rules and governments are themselves always changing. Moreover, one empirical part of this social process can be ordered while another is not. This too contrasts with the "problem of order" tradition. In the latter, to be sure, most writers do implicitly separate a public and a private realm. But these are not empirical realities so much as analytic abstractions that pervade all empirical locations in the social process. The public realm is specifically defined as universal in its orderliness.[2] But in processualist views the many internal boundaries of social life are perpetually changing. Institutions and social groups are not so much fixed beings that can succeed one another as they are lineages of events strung together over time, to which new things are always being bound, and from which old things are always being lost. Nor are these lineages concentric

[2] Rousseau is the most celebrated exponent of this separation. Parsons, of course, did precisely the reverse of Rousseau's separation of the political and the civil, extending the Hobbesian model of order uniformly throughout all functional realms of society.

structures as in the familiar hierarchical list of individual, family, community, and society that echoes through the "problem of order" tradition right down to contemporary sociology textbooks. Rather they crosscut and interpenetrate and divide and rejoin to make a web of structure as complex in the present as it is interwoven over time.

In such a world there is no possibility of a dynamically static government of the kind envisioned in the "problem of order" tradition; neither Hobbes's Leviathan nor Rousseau's Social Compact can exist. Yet we must nonetheless still pose the question of order. Even if we recognize the existence of transition and complexity, we still wonder what concepts we can create within a processual scheme to be the empirical and normative equivalents of order as conceived in the classical tradition. How indeed can we think of a contingent social process as being ordered in some quasi-Hobbesian sense?

Any such new concept of order faces a number of difficulties peculiar to a processualist view of the world. In the first instance, it is not clear that such a concept of order can avoid particular content, as the classical notion generally does. In the "problem of order" tradition, the implicit temporal model of order is a simple equilibrium; departures from order lead to corrective actions that make order return. Most often, the order involved is non-substantive; order is simply the absence of conflict and unpredictability, rather than some particular set of substantive rules. But in a processualist view, society is never in equilibrium. Conflict and unpredictability are the nature of social life. So order cannot lie in their absence.

Second, once we move away from a contentless measure of order, it becomes difficult to say when society is ordered, for the values of one time are not those of another. Given such perpetual motion of values, one cannot decide on the point in time from whose perspective order is to be judged. If, as in the "problem of

order" tradition, we seek a notion of order that will somehow work across time, we might have to imagine substantive orders that can not only envision but actually embrace their own replacement by later orders.[3] That is, we have to imagine different normative orders succeeding each other in a normative fashion. There is a trivial and unsatisfactory way to think about this, of course – assuming that posterity is always right. But it seems silly to assume that later states of the social process are more ordered than earlier ones simply because they succeed them.[4] Such a contentless view of order would indeed correspond to the notion of contentless, a conflictual equilibrium in the "problem of order" tradition. But this view seems almost willfully ignorant, either as an empirical or as a normative concept of order.

Third, the processualist view forces us to confront the issue of "order for whom?" The steady process of succession reweaves lineages over time; classes divide and recombine, criteria of differentiation shift, standards of consumption or behavior are constantly rearranged. The very units of society shift into each other from moment to moment. In such a view, thinking of the succession of orders in terms of society-wide trends such as "permissiveness" or "Puritanism" becomes impossible. We have to envision the possibility that orders differ across the social process at any given moment.

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[3] This sense of an order that envisions its own disappearance pervades E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), for example. It also pervades Lampedusa's brilliant portrayal of the death of an aristocracy in *The Leopard* (1960).

[4] Hence Thompson's effort to rescue the losers from "the enormous condescension of posterity" (1963:13). The professional world is littered with failed professions: railway surgeons, conveyancers, electrotherapists, and so on. The governmental past is littered with reorganized agencies, the commercial past with failed companies and even company forms. Even historians all too commonly side with the winners.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, a processualist view of social life presents us with a new conflict between collective and individual order. In the "problem of order" tradition, this difference of orders takes shape as the issue of personal freedom, the ability of a particular individual to have an order that is different from the dominant, collective one. In literature on this issue – the literature on "the tyranny of the majority" – the issue of individual freedom is usually conceived within a concentric and fractal framework, as if the libertarian claim that drove the Pilgrims to Plymouth Rock were simply a larger version of what led Roger Williams to leave that very Pilgrim colony for Rhode Island fifteen years later or what led Thoreau – two hundred years later and a few miles northwest – to leave the village of Concord for Walden Pond. The problems facing the idiosyncratic individual and the minority social group are identical.

But in the processualist vision, the conflict of individual and social order is neither so simple nor so concentric. For individuals have a term of life, while most social structures – even small minorities – do not.[5] So concepts of order for individual and group must differ profoundly. A social structure can redeem itself and return to order, but it cannot thereby revoke for individuals, whose life is finite, the wounds its disorder has produced in them. Indeed, at the individual level we often think not in terms of order, but rather in terms of outcome, precisely because the individual's experience of order and disorder is time-limited. In processual thinking, then, the reconciliation of individual and group interests must face the fact that individuals' claims for a reasonable future outcome before too much time has passed may place enormous constraints on the present nature of a social system that has itself a much longer period in which to find a possibly preferable order.[6] Moreover, because the various groups into which an individual's life is bound are both non-concentric and perpetually changing, the nature of those constraints changes kaleidoscopically as does the level and quality of the conflict between an individual and the various social orders in which he is involved.

These four issues give a framework for my discussion of concepts of processual order below. I shall evaluate processual order concepts in terms of their degree of substantive content, their distribution of order in time, their treatment of the complex interweaving of social lineages, and their relation to the different orders of social groups and individuals.

This discussion of framing criteria leaves untouched the question of whether we shall take order here to mean empirical regularities or moral rules. This difficulty arises whether we take the classical or the processualist approach. Under either framework, writing about the concept of order seems invariably to join the empirical and the normative. In my view, however, this ambiguity cannot be resolved. Indeed, the power of the concept of order in political theory derives precisely from its forcible union of these two opposing fields of meaning. Nonetheless, in what follows, I shall attempt to maintain consistent terminology by using "regularity" and "regularities" to refer to the order we see when society behaves in a routinely repeated manner and "norms" to refer to rules that have some kind of moral authority.[7]

[5] Only social structures immediately dependent on the lives of individuals – like marriage and other personal contracts – have a term of life as do individuals.

[6] It is ironic that even though processualists generally view both individual and social entities as simple lineages of events and hence resolve *a priori* such thorny issues as the structure and agency problem, they still must face a conflict between individual and social orders because of the association of the former with particular human bodies, which have limited arcs of existence.

[7] Order is thus what I have elsewhere called a syncresis, a term deliberately constituted of ambiguity (Abbott 2001:43). Contemporary usage is blurring my distinction of rules and norms, since computer science regularly uses the word "rules" to denote the reproducible commands that create process regularities, while Parsons and many sociologists who have followed him have allowed themselves to speak

I should note finally that this paper merely gives an overview of existing process concepts of order. One cannot go beyond that in so limited a space. I have ordered the concepts roughly in terms of their departure from the simplest model of order – the classical Hobbesian model with its contentless, atemporal, and uniform concept of order.[8]

I Equilibrium Concepts of Processual Order

In this simplest concept, order is merely the absence of conflict. One defines indicators of conflict or disorder, and order lies in whatever social institutions minimize them. Under such a view, we do not imagine that social order consists in having a certain array of roles, and a certain set of ideal life courses, and a certain set of social institutions as in, say, More's Utopia. Rather, we take social order as the absence of some relatively minimal set of bad things, the most common name for these being "crimes," and the most common minimal set of them having to do with the physical safety of individuals. Logically, there is no necessity that the minimal set of bad things should involve physical safety, enforceability of contracts, and so on, as it usually does in the Western tradition of political theory. Our notion that these things are "not substantive" and that they leave us "free" to construct personal orders – that is, real lives with real contents – is simply a restatement of this view's division of the social process into two kinds of things, one of which is guaranteed and thus seems contentless while the other is malleable and thus seems substantial. One can

of norms – at least in some contexts – as merely empirical aspects of the social system. To maintain clarity, I shall use "regularities" and "norms" to refer to the empirical and the normative aspects of "order" respectively.

[8] Interestingly, this ordering finds a parallel in an increasing emphasis on the normative over the empirical. We apparently perceive the processual as normative and vice versa.

for example imagine a society in which physical safety is not guaranteed but universal education to a very high level is guaranteed. In such a society, there would be lots of assassination, but education would seem contentless and the many and no doubt baroquely complex forms of self-protective behavior would be the substance of diversity in – and in most people's eyes, the main source of the content of – social life.

The essence of this classical approach as a temporal model of order is its definition of order purely in terms of the absence of some small set of things rather than in terms of the approximation of some ideal by a much larger proportion of – or the general structure of – the social process. By virtue of this definition in terms of minimization of some small, "contentless" set, the implicit temporal order becomes one of equilibrium. Order in this model returns because disorder (the outbreak of bad things in the minimal set) invokes some sort of control mechanism that removes the causes of disorder. This is essentially the model of negative feedback formalized by Norbert Wiener and others.[9] Implicit in it are all the various trajectories of regulated time series: convergence, divergence, oscillation, and so on. The first of these is exemplified by the traditional cumulative model of science (as opposed to the punctuated equilibrium model of Kuhn and, later, Foucault). The other two are familiar pathologies of feedback systems. Taken as a group, these concepts – equilibrium, convergence, divergence, and oscillation – capture the idea of a simple, uniform order system governing a whole society as a single unit. This order is dynamic, but only in an extremely limited sense. Deep down, the simple feedback idea captures the entire model of temporal order implicit in the Hobbesian conception of order and its direct descendants.

[9] Interestingly, Wiener ([1948]1962:163) at first thought that social life could not support such models because "social time series" change too rapidly to produce governing parameters that could be used to guide the invocation of negative feedback. He later modified this position somewhat (Wiener 1954).

This equilibrium version of processual order generalizes naturally to the related concept of an evolutionary order, which involves random, undirected proliferation (or division) and then an equilibrium-like convergence within the differentiated suborders. In social theory we usually call this process differentiation rather than evolution and usually underplay the problem of convergence within the suborders. But as a form of order, evolution/differentiation is like dynamic equilibrium in that it is simply a description of certain kinds of regularity. It contains no normative content, as does, for example, the logically similar idea of progress. It merely adds to the idea of equilibrium the ideas of differentiation and proliferation.

Within these two frameworks (equilibrium and evolution), there are a variety of actual feedback mechanisms that maintain order. There is the simple concept of social control; disorder produces a corrective response. (Evolution differs from simple equilibrium in allowing this process to go on in differentiated subunits as well as across the whole society.) There are also more complex, cyclical reinforcement mechanisms such as that whereby advertisers give people what they want and people reciprocally want what they get. Convergence, that is, does not necessarily require feedback between a large process and a small governor, as in the classic Wiener model. It can reflect other kinds of circular relations that become self-governing. All the same, equilibrium processes can drift. Various forms of misunderstanding – indexical meanings, misattribution, and so on – can produce considerable drift even in an enforced or emergent equilibrium. This means that equilibrium models are better than they seem as empirical conceptions of order in societies.

The concept of equilibrium and its subchild evolution involve no substantive content. They guarantee only regularity, not any particular content to it. They can thus make no substantive predictions about the future, and temporally, equilibrium is thus a kind of

dynamic stability. There is no long-run change other than drift, and so there is no immediate problem of identifying the proper temporal point from which to determine order. Similarly, since the concept of order here is global equilibrium, there is no question of order varying through different parts of the social process at a given time. Such local differences are merely incidental to the larger stability. As for my final criterion – the matter of levels – the equilibrium/evolution family of order concepts resolves the conflict of individual and social orders ex ante by assuming that no personal order is achievable without social order. This is indeed the core assumption of these ideas of order (as it was of Hobbes). They imagine exceptions to it only in highly formal terms – conscientious objection, liberty of the individual, and so on – but ultimately the social order is always primary; residence within it gives consent, as Rousseau and Locke both argue.

My first pair of order concepts are thus equilibrium and evolution. They are basically contentless models of empirical order, specified in completely abstract time, largely ignoring local variation in order, but with quite specific mechanisms that produce the regularities observed; in the one case simple feedback and in the other simple feedback within subdividing lines. It is well known that these concepts are sometimes invested with normative qualities. But they are at root empirical.

II Complexifications of the Equilibrium Concept of Order

The other important empirical concepts of order arise when one moves away from the eternal and pervasive quality of these general models. By allowing temporal variation, we get ideas of order in terms of periods and cohorts. By allowing socio-spatial variation, we get ideas of order in terms of regions and dominance.

I shall begin with the idea of order in terms of templates or snapshots, what is usually called periodization in historical writing.

Periodization is itself a purely empirical concept, designating successive sets of social worlds. These social worlds can, however, be seen as successive systems of social order, now often called regimes. In that sense, they improve on the conception of equilibrium order by giving us a way of thinking about change in global order over time. But that improvement is merely arbitrary. For there remains a crucial difficulty: the idea of regimes leaves us with the problem of explaining transitions between them, a problem that fatally wounded Foucault's concept of epistemes. The same question arises for successive social orders, whether we take them in the empirical or the normative sense. They are a useful analytic convenience, but we have no very effective way of thinking about succession between them.

The snapshot approach to thinking about the order of processes thus offers only a limited advance on the equilibrium view. It builds in the possibility of changing orders, but has no particular idea for how that change happens either empirically or normatively. Nor does it make allowance for the weaving of lineages through the social system and for possible diversity of orders throughout that system. On the other hand, snapshots do focus on the actual substance of order – the content of the regularities themselves, in a way that equilibrium does not. The heart of the equilibrium model is simply the measure of disorder, which is usually taken to be an unchanging scale. At least with snapshots we allow the possibility of successive substantive contents to order, which will in turn define different criteria for our measures of disorder. Moreover, the snapshot approach to temporal order can at least represent a succession of different relations of individual and society, as for example in Simmel's notion of the differences of typical characterology between different periods (Simmel 1950:58-84).

Moreover, combining the notion of generations with the snapshot conception produces the notion of cohort order. This allows us to think much more effectively about the relation of

orders for individual and for society. One of the obvious problems with snapshot order is that individuals live across regime boundaries. Most of the people of the "Roaring Twenties" lived the Great Depression as well, and well over half of them also went through the Second World War into the bargain. These periods had fundamentally different social orders in some sense, yet we must seek to define orderly life courses – empirically and/or normatively – for people who experienced them at quite different life stages. The life course defined by young adulthood in the 1920s, family building under terrible conditions in the 1930s, and war dislocation in the 1940s at the prime of life is quite different from the one defined by young adulthood spent in the shadows of the 1930s and then the war experienced as liberation from the personal dislocation of childhood. Yet each must have (at least in theory) its "orderly" version, both an empirically ordered typical biography and a normatively ordered "satisfactory life course." Such a cohort concept of order might not solve the explanatory issues of empirical succession, nor, indeed, what we might call the issue of moral succession – why one life history should be normative for one generation and a different one for the next and yet the two generations might live their overlapping lives in parallel in some normatively just way. But it would at least enable us to represent these problems of succession to ourselves.

The snapshot (and cohort) approaches to order complexify the equilibrium notion by relaxing the assumption of an equilibrium fixed over time. By contrast, another family of order concepts relaxes the assumption of an equilibrium fixed over social space. In the simplest version, these are concepts of regional orders. The most familiar of them come from the longstanding tradition of slum studies showing that slums, which appear to be disorderly in terms of general social norms, are nonetheless characterized by their own particular types of social orders. Such regional orders do permit a practical resolution of the individual/social conflict (in its

tyranny of the majority version), since they create the possibility of interregional mobility; the Roger Williams example shows this well. (Regional orders are often fractals, as the Williams example also shows.) But studies of regional orders have tended to focus on the latter's temporal frailty. Because the boundaries of regional orders are precarious, regional orders decay and interpenetrate with time, forcing us towards fully processual accounts of order that would be based not on the assumption of regional separation, but on normative models for the processes by which regional boundaries change. That is a quite different business.

A somewhat different regional conception combines regionalism and snapshots into an order model in which regional differences embody power differentials. In this approach, the more powerful regions are able to determine the overall social order, leading to comprehensive regime change. Marx's dialectical materialism is the most famous version of this type of conception, although one finds such arguments in many places. Joseph Ben-David, for example, noted the strong succession of dominant nations in the history of science since the seventeenth century – from England to France to Germany to the United States, a quite literally regional change – and attributed this succession to the competitive power of different normative systems for science and scientific communication (Ben-David 1971).

This regional/snapshot view of social order does not, however, really leave the realm of equilibrium temporality. That is, it does not take processualism to the level of social entities themselves. It rather talks about the relative competitive power or social authority of the various regions of order at a moment and asks empirical questions about how and why they might succeed each other. The concept of temporality implicit in such an argument is not really a dynamic one in which every new present raises new possibilities. Rather, there is a given story to history which we can run through again and again, always getting the same

result; historical materialism, with its grand inevitability, is again the best example of this quality of many regional dominance and succession models. As we shall see, the truly processualist approaches to order avoid this inevitability and focus on the process of succession itself.

The second broad class of order concepts thus derives from relaxing the assumptions of the equilibrium model. This buys us some differentiation of orders in time and social space, but does not move us out of the fundamentally static approach to temporality implicit in equilibrium orders. In most cases it brings us much closer to comprehending and certainly to representing the actual content of social orders than do the equilibrium models with their second-order measure of regularity as mere absence of conflict. It also allows us to see how cohort difference and "regional" migration serve as mechanisms to mitigate the conflicts between individual and social orders that become so visible in a processual approach. But as I have noted, none of these ways of thinking about order in the social process really engages with the specifically historical nature of that process.

III Empirical Concepts of Process Orders.

I would like now to turn to a third major family of concepts of order, those focused more directly on the process by which social moments – and by implication, social orders – succeed themselves. These are largely empirical concepts (I shall turn to normative ones in the next section), and thus are concepts that try to explain the succession of social regularities. Since these views seek the origins of order in orderly processes, they are rooted in the dynamism of the present. They differ in their assumptions about the duration of that dynamic present, however. I shall begin with those focusing on the short-term present and move from there towards views with longer time horizons.

An important conception of purely processual order that was prevalent a century ago, though it is less discussed today, is unconscious reproduction – what used to be called habit. Much of social order happens because we simply keep doing the same things over and over, both as individuals and as social groups. Moreover, the relative looseness of most forms of social control means that an enormous amount of practical variation can be embraced within a system of habits without producing any overall sense that there is change. There are no real rules, for example, about how classes are supposed to be taught, and there is an astonishing lack of formal controls over them. But classes wander along staying much the same because of habits and because the variation that might lead to serious differentiation is simply ignored and thus often peters out without having much permanent effect. Habitual order is compatible with enormous local variation. It is only when that variation becomes systematic or when it is systematically selected that habitual order is threatened.

Like the equilibrium concept, the notion of habit does not involve any particular content. Habits can be any sort of thing. On the other hand, unlike equilibrium habit is usually imagined as involving a good deal of drift over time. Since we do not think of unconscious reproduction as directed one way or another (at least outside the Freudian theory of the personality), the concept of order as habit does entail the possibility of random temporal variation. As for spatial variation, habits can apply at many different social levels and of course could in principle vary across social regions. Although logically there seems to exist little difference between habits and equilibria in this quality – one could, for example, easily imagine local equilibria – we usually conceive of unregulated, habitual reproduction as considerably more chaotic than we do equilibrium. Finally, habits do not involve any novel relation between the individual and the social. Habits exist at both levels and could be either reinforcing or contradictory.

Things are somewhat different with conscious reproduction, or as Americans call it, "socialization." Socialization is basically the functionalists' name for the training of young people in the rules of a society. (The French version of this concept, of course not officially defined as functionalist but in many logical ways equivalent to the functionalists' socialization, is "la reproduction" as we find it *du côté de chez Bourdieu*, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977.) Socialization is essentially a reification of the functional "fact" that if the rules of society endure over time, there must be a way in which these rules are "taught" to young people. Unfortunately, this assumption is wrong. Rules often persist for many other reasons besides their inculcation in the young: because there is no pressure to change them, because it is structurally impossible to behave otherwise, because new generations discover similar solutions to common problems on their own, and so on. Nonetheless, conscious reproduction of social rules is often pursued, and so we must consider such reproduction as an important conception of how order emerges in the social process.

Note that this form of order presupposes a flow of control from the social to the individual level. Unlike any other concept of order besides Hobbesian equilibrium – of which it is a logical corollary – socialization assumes a specific flow of determination between individual and social. That flow is devoid of any particular content – we can speak even of "socialization" into the criminal lifestyle as opposed to into bourgeois living – but it nonetheless does have a content, unlike the mere "disorder" of the equilibrium view. That content presumably comes from the core of the social world involved, which can, as my crime example suggests, be at any one of a number of levels. As for its temporality, socialization is usually imagined as taking place over a substantial duration, rather than in an instant. In terms of spatial differentiation, while it can be envisioned as differing in different regions of the social process, it is not usually imagined as itself complex

and internally differentiated. The metaphorical model for socialization is mechanical reproduction, and failures are imagined to occur as mechanical failures of socialization agencies (schools, prisons, etc.) rather than as conflicts between different forms and contents of socialization.

The third and most general empirical model for process order is the concept of tradition. Serious theorizations of tradition are rare, because our literature about tradition is dominated by caricatures. Struggling with the new absolutism, the Enlightenment rejected tradition virtually on principle, as Burke remarked so cogently. And the nineteenth century's immense changes in labor, family, and governance eventually led thinkers from Ferdinand Tonnies to Emile Durkheim and Robert Park to believe that the enormous transformation in their time was a unidirectional, perpetually accelerating process of tradition destruction. We now know that this view of tradition – as a huge placid reservoir ever more rapidly draining as the floodgates open – is wrong. Not only are traditions being created both consciously and unconsciously all the time, but also the pace of social changes – of a dramatic scale in the late nineteenth century – has slowed, at least in the first world. Indeed, to preserve what is for us the familiar world of social change, we now must label smaller and smaller things as "social change."[iii]

A first step towards a better conception of tradition is the recognition that tradition is to some extent relational. The various lineages of society change at varying rates. There is generally one lineage or type of lineages that changes more slowly than the others, and this inevitably becomes identified, in any given society, as the bearer of "tradition." In our society at present, for most purposes this means that tradition is located in "personal lineages," that is, in people. Individuals in fact change more slowly than

[iii] I have elsewhere analyzed this process to some extent (Abbott 2001:195ff).

most of social life, so individuals become themselves the locus of tradition. Hence our sense of "social change," since society changes faster than we do. In a society where individuals died faster, this of course was not the case. There, social institutions often lasted longer relative to individuals, who did not live long enough to see so many of them change. So the longest lasting of those social institutions got labeled as traditions.

This is by no means to suggest that what "is" tradition is not contested and so on. Rather, what is implied here is that the notion of tradition – the idea that there is some part of the social process that changes more slowly than the rest – arises naturally even if we ignore the cultural construction of the past. If we begin with this simple relativist notion of tradition, we can then see how various other things – properties both normative and empirical – get added onto it.

Even in this simple, relational sense, however, tradition has a particular design with respect to my basic criteria. First, traditions have real content. They are about some particular thing. Second, they take temporal duration seriously; indeed the whole concept is based on a notion of long duration. Third, since the concept of tradition presupposes relative difference in temporality, it also presumes differentiation in social space. Finally, as we have seen, the idea of tradition can embrace a quite complex relation between individuals and social structures. In particular, one can find societies in which individual beings are in effect the longest-lasting existing entities. In first-world societies in the twentieth century, for example, labor markets, family patterns, and educational and training regimes have all changed faster than the people involved in them. At other times, the reverse is true.

Tradition is of course something much broader than simply our label for whatever parts of the social process change slowly relative to others. It can refer also to the crosscutting and inter-

weaving of lineages that characterize that process in general. It is thus the richest empirical concept of order in the social process. At the same time, it is often made an explicitly normative concept, as we shall see below in the concept of conservatism.

Habit, socialization, and tradition are thus three micro-processual and empirical conceptions of how order obtains in the social processes. Of these three, habit is a kind of null hypothesis, an image of social inertia and of mechanisms leading to it. Socialization is the conception corresponding to the equilibrium notion of non-process order, a relatively mechanical and abstract model for the reproduction of social order. Tradition is a more contentful and differentiated idea of processually-induced order. Unlike the others, it creates a direct and empirical connection with the temporal and spatial variations of the social process. Above all, it invokes a much richer and more empirical concept of the ways in which the individual / collectivity relation can vary over time.

IV Order in Process – Normative Concepts

I come now to what are primarily normative concepts of order in social processes, concepts not customarily used in social sciences but in other realms. However, since as I argued earlier the normative and the empirical are inevitably combined in order concepts, we must consider these other representations of mechanisms of order in social processes. These normative order concepts can be categorized on the basis on what element of time they emphasize. The first concept I shall examine, due process, only looks at the current instant. The next two views look out from a dynamically moving present: the idea of progress with its vista of perpetual future improvement, and the idea of conservatism with its equally great fascination for the past. I shall then close with a pantemporal model for order: trusteeship. It should

be noted that I am not here discussing any of these views as they are actually argued; they are too complex and multi-layered for such cursory analysis. Rather I am considering them – like my earlier models – simply as abstract models for the ways we discern (and/or establish) order in social life viewed as a process.

It is a crucial fact that all of these concepts involve a dynamically moving present.[11] The content of conservatism or progress, to take the two most obvious cases, changes steadily as the present moves forward. Similarly, due process means due process now, in the present. This dynamism follows directly from the normative quality of these order concepts. Choices for behavior exist only in the present, hence norms to govern those choices must move with that present. By contrast, most other accounts of order in social processes can view time "from outside," in terms of either a complete trajectory (as in Marxian historiography of capitalism) or as an ultimately stable dynamic system, as in the equilibrium view. Even the socialization view of order to some extent partakes of this contentless, dynamic stability. Of all the normative views, only the tradition concept involves a truly dynamic and historical concept of the present.

I shall begin with the concept of due process. Due process is the notion that normative order is maintained if certain procedures are followed. It can even, as in amendment process for the U. S. Constitution, claim to be fully recursive – that is, able to change itself. Due process is in many senses the normative analogue of the equilibrium concept of the "problem of order" theorists. It is contentless, referring only to the following of normative procedures; it thus entails no notion of equity, of substantial justice. (Indeed, the claim that due process simply perpetuates

[11] I am making here McTaggart's (1908) celebrated distinction between tensed and untensed forms of temporality. For an extended discussion, see Abbott 2005.

substantive inequities has been central to meliorist critiques of classical liberalism.) In temporal terms, due process is momenta-neous; it involves nothing more than enforcing a type of process in the current moment, just as the equilibrium model requires only the evaluation of present disorder and consequent invoking of present social controls. Due process has little room for tempo-ral succession or change, as is illustrated by the twin facts that the majority of amendments to the U. S. constitution concern indi-vidual rights rather than governmental forms and that conversely most changes to American governmental forms – the creation of powerful bureaucracies, for example – have happened with noth-ing more than metaphorical Constitutional approval. As for vari-ation throughout society, due process as an order is always intend-ed to be universal and uniformly distributed in the social world, partaking as it does of the liberal faith in a universal political realm set apart from the inequalities and regional variations of the civil society. Finally, due process has in practice been conceived mainly at the individual level, although there is no inherent reason why it should not be a model for social order as well. This indi-vidual emphasis of due process reflects its origins as a remedy for the tyrannies of Leviathan. It is thus the normative expression of the problems that arise when the equilibrium model for social order is taken as a normative model for government, becoming the crucial guarantee against the tyranny of the majority.

By contrast with due process, the normative order con-cepts of progress and conservatism look away from the present moment – in the one case ahead, in the other behind. Both of them involve substantive content, generated by selective imagi-nation of the future in the one case and by a selective memory of the past in the other. Both of them, obviously, also involve a real flow of time and treat that time dynamically. Neither one pays much attention to the differentiation of orders in society. On the contrary, both emphasize a coherence and uniformity

that is in fact not present in the social process as we actually experience it.

The idea of progress is without question the dominant conception of process order in our world, at both social and individual levels. At the social level it provides the general framework for beliefs in everything from scientific cumulation to socialist liberalization, globalization, the new information economy, melioration of economic inequalities, feminism, and so on. At the individual level it provides the core of the idea of "realizing one's potential" whether it be through occupational achievement, successful psychotherapy, happy marriage, or whatever else. The idea of progress has in many senses no lim-its and no denials. At the individual level, it eventually runs afoul of death, to be sure, which few people still imagine as the rebirth that their religions say it is, but it is still the case that much of Americans' personal self-understanding is framed by the idea of fulfilling some form of potential, be it only a poten-tial of pleasure. At the social level, the ideology of progress lives a completely charmed life, unimpugned by the manifold evidence of social stability and even social degeneration.

At least in theory, there is no deep connection between the individual and social instantiations of progress. Optimists like John Dewey run them together – believing that social and individ-ual progress move hand in hand – but there is no necessary con-nection. It is good also to recall (see the discussion of cohort con-ceptions of order above) that social progress often involves personal regression for some part of the population; after all, that is what redistributive taxes are about. In short, the connection between the two levels of progress is generally untheorized. It is also worth noting that the two levels are explicitly decoupled in areas like athletics, modeling, and musical performance (although not academics) where absolute meritocracy (sometimes coupled with faddism) automatically trumps purely personal progress,

against the common rule of seniority. Michael Young's original book on meritocracy imagines what a frightening world it would be if this were more generally the case and we all lost our jobs as faculty when younger people started doing better work than we can (Young 1958).

Like the idea of progress, conservatism too leads a charmed life, although it has in many ways been on the defensive in the last century. Conservative Americans are actively promoting a "lost way of life" that in fact never existed, just as feminists have spent the last decades revolting against a "traditional" family form that became normative only a century and a half ago. But the relative recency of many valued or detested traditions does not stop conservatives from accepting them or meliorists – who usually have a strong faith in the endurance of the past – from rejecting them.

In its most general sense, conservatism is simply the normative version of tradition as an order concept. In this normative use of tradition as a conception of order, two separate things are combined. One is a purely retrospective account of a dynamic past, a past rich in interwoven complexity, leading to the present moment. The other is a teleological understanding of that past as culminating in a present beyond which no change is envisaged. That is, we have on the one hand a concept of order in the social process and on the other hand a concept of largely individual outcome. Even a reflective conservative usually forgets that, had he been forced to live through some of the changes that he retrospectively characterizes as "the rich diversity of the tradition," he would have hated them, just as many conservatives conveniently forget that they are themselves the beneficiaries of recent modifications in yet older traditions of whose destruction they are unaware. Conservatism in that sense is a form of what I have elsewhere called retrospective tensed outcome (Abbott 2005). It accepts as legitimate all changes up to a moving present, but none thereafter. It thus combines a view of social order and a view of personal outcome in very partic-

ular way. As we shall see, this kind of combination is characteristic of normative order conceptions.[12]

Note that although historically the idea of conservatism has been on the political right, there has evolved in the last fifty years a considerable interest in a similarly retrospective meliorism, encapsulated in the idea of reparations (or other punishment) for past social delicts. This is conservative in my technical sense, because it imagines the present in terms of the past, but it is not conservative in the usual sense because it does not involve preservation of past inequities via the preservation of past institutions. Viewing a concept of process order in terms of its temporal assumptions can make for strange bedfellows.

Both conservatism and progress have a fundamental flaw as normative accounts of the working of order in the social process. Each not only ignores one whole direction of the social process, but each also takes a one-sided view of the direction it does choose. Conservatives forget that an enormous amount of "tradition" takes the form of destroying things that were highly valued by some group. Progressives forget that much change consists of rediscovery (the history of social science is quite instructive here, see Abbott 2001, C. 1) and of the destruction of existing valued things, both social and individual. Most especially progressives tend to forget that only winners write history, which inevitably biases our image of the past towards the vacuous assumption that posterity is always right.

This brings me to my last normative concepts of process order, which might be called pantemporal. These are views that explicitly involve the taking of several temporal positions. The

[12] For a profoundly reflective analysis of an extended tradition see Dix 1945. Even Dix's enormously persuasive analysis of the richness of the Christian liturgical tradition sometimes forgets that the building of so rich a heritage required enormous quantities of Schumpeterian "creative destruction," not to mention the perhaps larger quantities of quite deliberate and wanton destruction.

most common examples of these are legal concepts like trusteeship, stewardship, and entail, that either directly or indirectly bind the present holder of some good in the interest of protecting the rights of those not temporally present. Such concepts attempt to maintain in the present the rights of other times. Legally, of course, the rights of the past can be maintained into the present by various forms of inheritance law and trusteeship. The rights of the future in the present, by contrast, have been the subject of fairly systematic assaults in Western law since the Middle Ages, as we see clearly in the development of Anglo-American law, from the destruction of strict entail and of limits on enclosure of common land down to the sale of future interests in the present that is implicit in the legal structure of futures markets and secondary mortgage markets.

At first glance it seems that societies in which pantemporal conceptions of process order have dominated are societies in which there was relatively little social change. Indeed, it seems clear from the historical record that the destruction of general, long-term legal safeguards of future interests was necessary to the evolution of capitalism in the West. Yet it does not seem necessary that trusteeship, for example, should involve immobility. Universities and churches are examples of institutions governed in large measure by trusteeship models of order, and both have changed quite steadily over any historical period we could choose to evaluate. The central issues with trusteeship, as with any pantemporal conception of order, concern how far into past and future the trustees consider their obligations to reach and how rapid is the transition they feel can be tolerated between the one and the other. A central concept in such a system is thus the concept of toleration, which, although profoundly interesting and important, is too complicated to examine here.

As for my basic criteria, trusteeship is clearly content based, although it involves making decisions about the future substantive

content of a lineage when that content is unknown and potentially unknowable. (Imagine planning for the future of university libraries in the present moment, for example.) Yet the unknowability of the future leads trusteeship in many cases to maximize retention of highly generalized future resources – that is, of money – which results in precisely the reverse of content-based decision-making. Temporally, trusteeship is obviously a very sophisticated notion, anchored in the present but reaching out to both past and future. Its recognition of diverse social orders in that present moment, however, seems in practice much less subtle than its temporal diversity, although its broader temporal perspective surely provides a greater ability to embrace the more complex relations of groups that may seem all too simply opposed to one another in the immediate present. The same seems true of its potential to reconcile the abilities of the individual and the collectivity. By taking a longer view, trusteeship provides more diverse ways to reconcile the interweaving interests of these two levels.[13]

With trusteeship, I come to the end of this brief review of normative concepts that specifically locate order in the nature of how we conduct the social process. These four concepts – due process, progress, conservatism, and trusteeship – all rest on a dynamic conception of the present and build out in various directions from that. All involve placing explicitly normative values on particular parts of the social process.

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[13] One can imagine a definition of pantemporal order in terms of a categorical imperative: so act that any person from some larger time period than the present would do your action, assuming some kind of reasonable translation of the situation. This, for example, would require people to foresee possible changes of order such that their own currently moral actions might become immoral. (This is the standard we implicitly invoke in judging retrospectively those who deprived Native Americans of what are now thought to be their rights, and so on. The question is how far ahead – or behind – we are expecting people to look.) This, by the way, is an individual-level conception of order. It isn't clear to me if there is an equivalent social-level one.

V Concluding Remarks

Having undertaken this rapid survey of quite a number of ways of thinking about order and disorder, I shall try to bring the discussion down from the abstract level to the level of thinking about delinquency and in particular about the broken-windows theory and its relatives. While the latter is not my subject, it seems to me that my analysis has some implications for it.

As my argument suggests, the Hobbesian abstract model, the "socialization" empirical model, and the "due process" normative model are the core of the standard account of order in everyday, unreflective political theory. The empirical and normative accounts here share the same defects of the abstract account with which they are associated. None of them provides much of an account of over-time change. None of them helps us think much about conflict of orders in a given moment. None of them has a sophisticated – in social scientific terms even a vaguely credible – account of the relation of individual and society.

Now suppose the heart of the broken windows theory is that little delinquencies lead to big ones – both spatially in a place and perhaps temporally over the life course. What this boils down to in Hobbesian terms – and the theory is very much in the Hobbesian framework – is that we ought to turn up the feedback mechanisms to enforce order, making them sensitive to smaller levels of disorder and making their response to a given level stronger. I'm not particularly concerned with whether this will work, although anybody who has worked with amplifiers will tell you that this procedure is a good way to burst your ear drums. What concerns me is whether it makes sense once we turn away from the idea of a Hobbesian world in which criminals are eternal beings and into one where they are ordinary people with often ordinary life courses who occasionally run afoul of the law. Isn't it in fact the case that the vast majority of delinquents desist over their life course? Isn't it in fact the case that the vast majority of

their activity even in their delinquent years is non-delinquent? Or again, does broken-windows thinking make sense once we move from a world in which not only the level but also the content of order criteria are uniform everywhere into one where order levels and contents vary not only by geography but also by social groups and units? Isn't it in fact the case that much crime arises precisely at the boundaries of orders, and indeed that gaming the boundaries of orders is one of the most admired phenomena in our culture, at least when it takes the form of subtly – often not-so-subtly – figuring out a way to make other people pay you money without really intending to? Isn't this what advertisements, credit card debt, securitization of mortgage debt, and so on are all about?

To me the real difficulty of the broken windows approach, however, is its acceptance of the equilibrium view's minimalist notion of disorder. By focusing on an extremely limited type of disorder, it keeps us from seeing more general processes that shape and change order and disorder in the society. Let me demonstrate this with an example that could be seen as far afield. The accounting scandals of the last years have produced an equivalent to broken-windows theorizing in accounting today – a sort of "back-to-basics" model, in which it is believed that if only accountants get back to doing routine public audits the right ways – counting assets in the field, and so on – the problem of larger scandals would take care of itself. This is a kind of traditionalist approach to order, coupled, I suppose, with a belief in socialization as a source for order. But the problem of course is that new forms of disorder are invented daily in financial systems, because until they are declared illegal huge amounts of money can be made from them. What we need in accounting much more than back-to-basics is a clearer sense of the lineages of accounting, of how new accounting forms and financial instruments arise out of old forms and most important of how to judge whether new

forms are increasing or decreasing the possibility of order in some broader substantive sense. What kind of financial world do we in fact want? It is far more important to ask that question than to spend our time trying to guess whether the latest accounting wrinkle is a really a wrinkle, or possibly a shenanigan, a shady practice, or even a crime. What is important is to figure out how we want the financial world to advance, how much change in its orders we can tolerate.

Similarly, it seems to me, the central problem in public order theorizing today is not whether we can expand the sanitized environments of the suburbs and the gated communities but how we are to arrange a society with vastly conflicting notions of order among different ages and groups of people and in which we can expect those levels to change in ways that are unaccountable to us at present. Focusing on physical crimes – and broken windows are only of importance because they are supposed to lead to physical crimes – leads us to ignore that problem.

Let me close with a homely example. I am on the senior governing board of my university. We don't plan the future order of the place by trying to figure out how to keep kids from plagiarizing papers. And we don't deal with the problem of plagiarism by failing kids for leaving out a footnote or two. But that seems to be the model for broken windows thinking; focus on a small subset of extreme disorder as we define it today and deal with it by getting tough on less extreme disorder. We can and should think about how to find and keep social order in ways that are broader and subtler.

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