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Organisation and Social Order
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PART ONE: SOCIAL ORDER AND POWER IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

'Social order' is one of those terms whose meaning is plain enough for ordinary, familiar, usage, when the circumstances in which it is uttered and to which it refers are manifest and understandable, but turn out to be messy and complicated when social scientists or philosophers try to unpack all that it can possibly mean or to determine some 'universal' meaning. 'Power' is notoriously the most difficult of these terms; 'social order' runs it close.

Most of the complications about the notion of social order stem from the kind of ambiguity which Sartre found in the idea of organisation (see above, pp.-- --). What it comes down to is whether organisation is regarded as something endogenous (i.e. existing and maintained by actions in which they engage and attitudes which they adopt collectively), or exogenous (i.e. something which has an existence over and above its participants, or may have been imposed on them, and may in fact go on existing without its present members).

This endogenous-exogenous dimension, though complicated to handle in connection with organisation, assumes a more fundamental importance when it comes to social order. By far the most frequent reference nowadays to the idea of social order is to what is called 'public order': the maintenance under laws enacted by government of that orderliness in the conduct of everyday life which is supposed to prevail in any kind of society - which indeed makes society possible, a precondition of its very existence.

In social, political and legal theory, social order in this 'public order' sense bespeaks a familiar cluster of long-standing problems. Such problems arise in the first place from the fragility and uncertainty that beset the orderliness, whatever its level, that prevails in any society.

The central question is the familiar one of 'how is society possible?' - how can any kind of social or public order be maintained in the face of all the entrenched inequality, flagrant injustice, discriminatory practices, political conflict, blatant acquisitiveness, disorder and violence which pervades society - our own as well as virtually all others, past and present? How is it possible to contain the complex rivalries and hostilities that exist within the family, in kinship systems, in the everyday discourse of neighbourhood and community, or in the exploitative relationships embodied in the power and authority in which the organisations and institutions that constitute the activities and settings of individual lives seem to be grounded?

Hobbes is usually credited with the definitive formulation of the problem, in this first

sense of social order as public order. Left to themselves, men - driven by greed, love of mastery over others, and pride - are naturally competitive and contentious. It follows that the state of nature among humankind is, in his over-familiar words, a war of all against all, and the life of man therefore "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". The way to salvation (civilised life) is pointed out by reason, which impels him to surrender his 'natural rights' to a sovereign who would be empowered by all to use their combined force to compel obedience to law and the fulfillment of contracts.

It could, I suppose, be argued that Hobbes' observation was a fairly unremarkable conclusion to be drawn from the barbarities of the Thirty Years War in Germany, the Fronde in France, and the disorders of civil war in England and Scotland. His contemporary, Pascal, who lived through the same events, was driven to write "*Tous les hommes se haïssent naturellement l'un l'autre*". The twentieth century, one has to remember, has been still more prodigal with testimony of the same kind.

But the conclusion Hobbes drew is now reckoned, following Macpherson, as amounting to no more than a counterfactual hypothesis - "a logical abstraction drawn from the behaviour of men in civilized society".¹ "His state of nature is a statement of the behaviour of men as they now are, men who live in civilised societies and have the desires of civilised men, would be led if all law and contract enforcement (i.e., even the present imperfect enforcement) were removed. To get his 'state of nature', Hobbes has set aside law, but not the socially acquired behaviour and desires of men."²

This kind of argument does not, however, take us very far. It leaves aside the question of how 'civilised society' ever came into existence - of how such socially acquired behaviour and desires come to be adopted by men. To speak of civilised behaviour and desires as 'socially acquired' is simply tautologous. Hobbes' 'natural self' is 'economic man' writ large, driven by fear and vainglory as well as greed. Why should such a creature ever have come to envisage a contract which obliged him to submit to a sovereign who would then impose law and enforce contracts so that he could live in a civilised society of which he could have had no prior knowledge and in any case is presumably 'unnatural' to him? The light of reason alone is not enough, as Durkheim pointed out more than two hundred years later; given the proclivities Hobbes ascribes to 'natural man', one must suppose that reason would be put to use to serve rather than thwart them.

Standing over and against this first Hobbesian question, there is also a reverse question. It is just as difficult to see how a regulatory system of public order, *per se*, could generate, reflect or even accommodate the personal attachments and social involvements that pervade the same relationships and institutional structures.

Although the active discussion of the term dates from the time when Hobbes pointed out what life would be without it, it contains social, political and moral problems the roots of which lie ultimately, along with so much else, in classical Greece. Yet when we backtrack that far into the past, the problem seems to have disappeared. Both aspects, the

¹ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, O.U.P., 1962, p. 26.

² C.B. Macpherson, *ibid*, p.22.

regulation of behaviour in public life and commitment to one's fellows, are seen as constituted in and by the action of individuals, who are naturally disposed to strive towards 'the good life' - the life that is best for themselves. This is to be found in a civilised order of society: man is a social animal and as such owes everything to the social and political community in which he was born, and which he feels bound to sustain.

When it comes to the idea of power one faces problems too far-reaching and complicated for an initial summary treatment to be other than misleading. What I shall do is to discuss different aspects of power at the different stages at which each becomes most relevant.

As it stands, the sentence quoted from Arendt in the foreword (Preliminaries, p. --) to the effect that political power derives from people's ability to act in concert bypasses the problem of how it is that when people 'act in concert' it is usually at the behest or in support of people who are deemed powerful simply because of their support. What has changed since the earliest years of classical antiquity is knowledge of the ways in which, and the degree to which, the power inherent in collective action of different kinds can be used, appropriated, or expropriated.

Kenneth Arrow's proposition also turns out to have the same sort of question buried inside it: '*cui bono?*'. Who in practice are those individuals whose values 'are more fully realised' by organised collective action? Is it all those who make up the collectivity, or the majority of them, or a few, or just one?

This is nowadays taken to be no simple question to answer. Indeed, in the form 'Who gets what?' favoured by political scientists, the question is supposed by some to be what politics is all about. So it is worth remembering that for most of recorded history the answer to the question 'Who benefits?' was so obvious as to make it not worth asking. Rationality didn't enter into it. With very few exceptions, those with power or authority over the resources represented by organised collective action saw to it that they themselves benefited more than others, sometimes to the exclusion of others. The question then reverts to one of how it is that organisations which allocate the benefits arising from their activities so unequally manage to sustain themselves. And again for most of recorded history, the chosen instrument has been physical coercion by violence, the threat of violence, or the fear of it.

The second and third chapters of Part One deal with some of the ways in which political power, in this most simple and extreme form, was exercised by the governmental system which lasted far longer than any other in the history of Europe.