**7Th Lecture 6th November 2020**

**MSc Sociology 3Rd Semester Regular**

**Sociology of change**

**Topic: Order and change**

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The term social order can be used in two senses: In the first sense, it refers to a particular system of [social structures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_structure) and [institutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institution). Examples are the ancient, the feudal, and the capitalist social order. In the second sense, social order is contrasted to social chaos or disorder and refers to a stable state of society in which the existing social structure is accepted and maintained by its members. The problem of order or [Hobbesian problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hobbesian_trap), which is central to much of [sociology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology), [political science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_science) and [political philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosophy), is the question of how and why it is that social orders exist at all.

[Thomas Hobbes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes) is recognized as the first to clearly formulate the problem, to answer which he conceived the notion of a [social contract](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_contract). [Social theorists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_theory) (such as [Karl Marx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), [Émile Durkheim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Durkheim" \o "Émile Durkheim), [Talcott Parsons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talcott_Parsons), and [Jürgen Habermas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%BCrgen_Habermas)) have proposed different explanations for what a social order consists of, and what its real basis is. For Marx, it is the [relations of production](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relations_of_production) or economic structure which is the basis of social order. For Durkheim, it is a set of shared social norms. For Parsons, it is a set of social institutions regulating the pattern of action-orientation, which again are based on a frame of cultural values. For Habermas, it is all of these, as well as communicative action.

Social order is a fundamental concept in sociology that refers to the way the various components of society work together to maintain the status quo. They include:

* [social structures](https://www.thoughtco.com/social-structure-defined-3026594) and institutions
* social relations
* social interactions and behavior
* cultural features such as [norms](https://www.thoughtco.com/why-a-norm-matter-3026644), beliefs, and values

Definition

Outside the field of sociology, people often use the term "social order" to refer to a state of stability and consensus that exists in the absence of chaos and upheaval. Sociologists, however, have a more complex understanding of the term.

Within the field, it refers to the organization of many interrelated parts of a society. Social order is present when individuals agree to a shared [social contract](https://www.thoughtco.com/social-contract-in-politics-105424) that states that certain rules and laws must be abided and certain standards, values, and norms maintained.

Social order can be observed within national societies, geographical regions, institutions and organizations, communities, formal and informal groups, and even at the scale of [global society](https://www.thoughtco.com/globalization-definition-3026071).

Within all of these, social order is most often hierarchical; some people hold more power than others so they can enforce the laws, rules, and norms necessary for the preservation of social order.

Practices, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are counter to those of the social order are typically framed as [deviant and/or dangerous](https://www.thoughtco.com/labeling-theory-3026627) and are curtailed through the enforcement of laws, rules, norms, and [taboos](https://www.thoughtco.com/folkways-mores-taboos-and-laws-3026267).

Social Contract

The question of how social order is achieved and maintained is the question that gave birth to the field of sociology.

In his book *Leviathan,*English philosopher Thomas Hobbes laid the groundwork for the exploration of this question within the social sciences. Hobbes recognized that without some form of social contract, there could be no society, and chaos and disorder would reign.

According to Hobbes, modern states were created to provide social order. People agree to empower the state to enforce the rule of law, and in exchange, they give up some individual power. This is the essence of the social contract that lies at the foundation of Hobbes' theory of social order.

As sociology became an established field of study, early thinkers became keenly interested in the question of social order.

Founding figures such as [Karl Marx](https://www.thoughtco.com/karl-marx-biography-3026494) and [Émile Durkheim](https://www.thoughtco.com/emile-durkheim-3026488) focused their attention on the significant transitions that occurred before and during their lifetimes, including industrialization, urbanization, and the waning of religion as a significant force in social life.

These two theorists, though, had polar opposite views on how social order is achieved and maintained, and to what ends.

Durkheim's Theory

Through his study of the role of religion in primitive and traditional societies, French sociologist Émile Durkheim came to believe that social order arose out of the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices of a given group of people.

His view locates the origins of social order in the practices and interactions of daily life as well as those associated with rituals and important events. In other words, it is a theory of social order that puts [culture](https://www.thoughtco.com/culture-definition-4135409) at the forefront.

Durkheim theorized that it was through the culture shared by a group, community, or society that a sense of social connection—what he called solidarity—emerged between and among people and that worked to bind them together into a collective.

Durkheim referred to a group's shared collection of beliefs, values, attitudes, and knowledge as the "[collective conscience](https://www.thoughtco.com/collective-consciousness-definition-3026118)."

In primitive and traditional societies Durkheim observed that sharing these things was enough to create a "mechanical solidarity" that bound the group together.

In the larger, more diverse, and urbanized societies of modern times, Durkheim observed that it was the recognition of the need to rely on each other to fulfill different roles and functions that bound society together. He called this "organic solidarity."

Durkheim also observed that social institutions—such as the state, media, education, and law enforcement—play formative roles in fostering a collective conscience in both traditional and modern societies.

According to Durkheim, it is through our interactions with these institutions and with the people around us that we participate in the maintenance of rules and norms and behavior that enable the smooth functioning of society. In other words, we work together to maintain social order.

Durkheim's view became the foundation for the [functionalist perspective](https://www.thoughtco.com/functionalist-perspective-3026625), which views society as the sum of interlocking and interdependent parts that evolve together to maintain social order.

Marx's Critical Theory

German philosopher Karl Marx took a different view of social order. Focusing on the transition from [pre-capitalist to capitalist economies](https://www.thoughtco.com/communist-manifesto-4038797) and their effects on society, he developed a theory of social order centered on the economic structure of society and the social relations involved in the production of goods.

Marx believed that these aspects of society were responsible for producing the social order, while others—including social institutions and the state—were responsible for maintaining it. He referred to these two components of society as the [base and the superstructure](https://www.thoughtco.com/definition-of-base-and-superstructure-3026372).

In his writings on [capitalism](https://www.thoughtco.com/capitalism-definition-p2-3026124), Marx argued that the superstructure grows out of the base and reflects the interests of the ruling class that controls it. The superstructure justifies how the base operates, and in doing so, justifies the power of the ruling class. Together, the base and the superstructure create and maintain social order.

From his observations of history and politics, Marx concluded that the shift to a capitalist industrial economy throughout Europe created a class of workers who were exploited by company owners and their financiers.

The result was a hierarchical class-based society in which a small minority held power over the majority, whose labor they used for their own financial gain. Marx believed social institutions did the work of spreading the values and beliefs of the ruling class to maintain a social order that would serve their interests and protect their power.

Marx's critical view of social order is the basis of the [conflict theory perspective](https://www.thoughtco.com/conflict-theory-3026622) in sociology, which views social order as a precarious state shaped by ongoing conflicts between groups that are competing for access to resources and power.

Merit in Each Theory

While some sociologists align themselves with either Durkheim's or Marx's view of social order, most recognize that both theories have merit. A nuanced understanding of social order must acknowledge that it is the product of multiple and sometimes contradictory processes.

Social order is a necessary feature of any society and it is deeply important for building a sense of belonging and connection with others. At the same time, social order is also responsible for producing and maintaining oppression.

A true understanding of how social order is constructed must take all of these contradictory aspects into account.