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The Idea of Order: Enlightened Revisions

Mon naturel me contraint à chercher et aimer les choses bien ordonnées, fuyant la confusion qui m'est contraire et ennemie comme est la lumière des obscures ténèbres.
Nicolas Poussin

Abstract: Order has been ascribed both to nature and to society. There is a long tradition of claiming that the social order and the natural order are closely linked. Radical enlightenment challenged that tradition. According to Spinoza (*Ethica*, pars 1, appendix) to call something orderly simply means that we can easily imagine and remember it; ascribing order thus betrays merely something about us, not about things. This challenging idea never became Enlightenment mainstream. In fact, ties between an objective natural order and our own human order were widely popularized in the 18th century. Yet one strand of thinking, set out to undermine traditional views of order, turned up trumps. The British Enlightenment succeeded in undoing the time-honoured equation of order and hierarchy.

I. Kosmos/Taxis

'Order is of the essence', parents tell their children. 'Why?', children ask. And right away, we are in the midst of embarrassment. Yet, embarrassment apart, the idea of order has got its attractions and one has been foremost among them: Both in the way we understand the given world – nature – and in the way we set up that snippet of the world we might be able to set up at all – society –, the idea of order seems to make sense. Perhaps it even allows us to connect the two. Through the idea of order, nature can be understood in social terms[1], or, reversely, social arrangements – established structures or proposed ones – can be represented as natural and hence as necessary[2]. The two operations can even be hooked upon each other: Nature can be construed socially to begin with, in order to then project such 'nature' onto society or the state. Historically, though, do we have a clue, what came first with regard to the idea of order: approaching society from nature, or the other way round?

1 Cf., *e.g.*, Dante Alighieri, *De monarchia* [1316?], ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci, *Le opere*, vol. 5, 1965, bk. 2, ch. 6, 193: "Propter quod patet quod natura ordinat res cum respectu suarum facultatum, qui respectus est fundamentum iuris in rebus a natura positum. Ex quo sequitur quod ordo naturalis in rebus absque iure servari non possit", "Hence it is obvious that nature orders things in consideration of their powers, and this consideration is the foundation of justice in things posited by nature. From this it follows that the natural order of things cannot be preserved without justice".

2 Cf., *e.g.*, Anonymus [*i.e.*, Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach], *La politique naturelle ou Discours sur les vrais principes du gouvernement* [1773], ed. Jean-Pierre Jackson, 2008, *passim*.

Methodically, we tend to get our hands on ideas via words.[3] For the European idea of order, this seems rather straightforward. Following the Latin 'ordo', we get 'ordine' in Italian, 'ordre' in French, 'order' in English, 'Ordnung' in German. As we move historically one step further back, however, ancient Greek confronts us with a whole array of etymologically unrelated words: 'thesis'/'diathesis', 'kosmos', 'taxis'. All of these words refer originally to human activities. 'Kosmein', for instance, means 'to ornate'; Anaximander (fr. 12A10 Diels) and Anaximenes (fr. 13B2 Diels) boldly applied the related noun to the physical universe.

'Taxis' originates in the social sphere as well, yet clearly in the military sphere: the word frequently refers to a battle-line. Plato, for instance, is aware of the military meaning (*Republic* 468a, *Laws* 746d, 755c, 878d); at the same time he lets 'taxis' expand into a word for social order: "kata tēn taxin tou nomou", "according to the order of the law" is a phrase used in the *Laws* (925b; cf. *Republic* 587a). When Plato employed the term in this way, philosophers had actually generalized it much further already. All things, Anaximander had asserted, pay each other just penalty respectively for their injustice after the order of time ("kata tēn tou chronou taxin") (fr. 12B1 Diels).

Anaximander's nature is quite social. No human image of nature has ever been cleared of social features. But there are degrees. The ancient conception of nature least akin to society was that presented by the atomists. Even Democritus, however, would not get by without "taxis" – at least if we follow Aristotle's (*Metaphysics* 985b17, *Physics* 188a24) explanation of atomist principles. According to that elucidation, atoms do not just display figure ("schēma") and take position ("thesis") but they also – in the way they mutually hold together, Democritus's "diathigē" – exhibit order, "taxis". Plato's universe, as set up by the "demiourgos" of the *Timaeus*, more obviously looks like a state; consistently, it bears the character of "taxis" as well (*Timaeus* 30a). Aristotle follows line: "ouden ge atakton tōn physei kai kata physin. Hē gar physis aitia pasin taxeōs", "Nothing natural or in accordance with nature is disordered. For nature is the cause of orderliness for all things" (*Physics* 252a4).

Aristotle links his claim to a criticism of genetic theories of the universe. Its "taxis", Aristotle maintains, has not come about; rather it has been in place forever. The order of nature is eternal: "hē de ge tou kosmou taxis aïdios" (*De caelo* 296a33–34). Yet the eternity of the cosmos does not imply that there was no cause to it. On the contrary, the fact of order's permanence seems to imply the existence of something eternal securing that permanence (*Metaphysics* 1060a26). To argue his point, Aristotle goes right back to the military origin of 'taxis'. What is good in an army subsists both in the order ("en tē taxei") and in the commander-in-chief; to a higher degree, however, Aristotle claims it to subsist in the commander. For the commander is not what he is by virtue of the order; rather, the order is by virtue of him ("ou gar houtos dia tēn taxin all' ekeinē dia touton") (*Metaphysics* 1075a11–15, cf. 1075b25). The analogue to the commander-in-chief and thus the cause of the order of the universe is God, the Unmoved Mover.

Aristotle thus raises and answers a crucial general question regarding order: Does it presuppose someone who orders – a designer, arranger, organizer, director of sorts? No ancient author appears to deny that for the social order; here the ordering authorities seem obvious: rulers, lawgivers, commanders of all kinds. Philosophies diverge on the question of nature's order. The "demiourgos" of Plato's *Timaeus* or the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or Stoic Providence cause order. The pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On the World* (*Peri kosmou, De mundo*) says: "'cosmos' is used to signify

3 Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas' [1969], in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully, 1988, 29–67, 64

the orderly arrangement of the universe, which is guarded by God and through God" ("legetai [...] kosmos hē tōn holōn taxis te kai diakosmēsis, hypo theou te kai dia theon phylattomenē") (391b11–13).[4] No such organizer figures in the philosophy of atomism. Epicurus's gods do not care about the order of the universe and do not have to care about it because it takes care of itself. Or rather, it does not even take care. Yet order there is, order without taking care.

The first of these positions represents philosophical mainstream, elegantly summarized in Cicero's definition of order: "compositio rerum aptis et accomodatis locis" (*De officiis* 1.40.142), "composition of things in suitable places adequate to them". Composition here is meant to imply a 'composer'. But a composing agent by itself does not guarantee order. As expressed in the terms "aptis" and "accomodatis", Cicero takes order to be not just a descriptive notion, but rather a normative idea.

II. Domus/Dominus

Within ancient thought, then, order is or, at least, can be a feature both of the natural and of the social world. According to one marked strand, the natural and the social order are seen as closely tied to each other, or even as one and the same. Augustine's definition of order, set out in *De civitate Dei* (19.13), turns out to do hardly more than to vary verbally Cicero's explanation of the term's meaning, covering both of those spheres: "Ordo est parium dispariumque sua cuique tribuens loca dispositio", "order is the disposition of equal and unequal things, attributing each to its proper place". Normativism is indicated by taking up the formula of justice "suum cuique"[5], and disposition implies a disposing agent. So much fits the Platonic tradition entirely. We may spot an element, however, that appears to counteract it. Augustine keeps Cicero's reference to "locus", "place", that seems to work for material items only, missing the spiritual order that was central to Plato and is, on different terms, central to Augustine. Yet thinking of order seems to be bound up with place and space, however spiritual it aspires to be. God is always on top of the hierarchy; nothing could keep him at the bottom. Buried in a tomb, he resurrects and ascends to heaven. Along that line, order is essentially hierarchical[6]. The "tribuens" must reside above the things he attributes to their places. The equation of order and hierarchy holds for nature – as projected in the idea of the 'scala naturae' – as much as for society.

Augustine brings a hierarchical understanding of the physical and political cosmos to the fore by defining "ordo" in terms of parity and disparity ("parium dispariumque"). Parity would be the state of being equal. There may indeed be equals, Augustine believes. But if every candidate for positions to be distributed were by nature equal, all could lay claim on equally highly valued positions or, lacking such, on one and the same position. The outcome were not order but rather a clash of competing claims. In fact, however, natural inequality is assumed; hence the formula "suum cuique" codefines order. Each being whatsoever should receive his or her honours, better ones more, less good ones less, so that, as a result, the latter end up in lower positions and the

4 For the Greek text and English translation see [Pseudo-]Aristotle, *On the Cosmos* [1st century AD?], ed. David J. Furley, 1965. For the idea of divine guardianship over the cosmos cf. Plato, *Laws* 907a; for "diakosmēsis" cf. Plato, *Symposium* 209a, *Timaeus* 23e, 24c, *Laws* 853a.

5 Cf. the phrase "tenere cuique proprium" in the very first sentence of Augustine's early dialogue *De ordine* (1.1).

6 Cf. [Pseudo-]Dionysios Areopagita, *De coelesti hierarchia* [ca. 500 AD], *La hierarchie céleste*, ed. Günter Heil, transl. Maurice de Gandillac, 2nd ed., 1958 (Sources chrétiennes 58/2).

former in higher ones: that very state constitutes order in nature and society. Injustice and, on the same token, disorder would prevail, if "equals and unequals were to receive a certain equality", as happens, according to Plato, in a "state without rule" ("politeia anarchos"), otherwise known as democracy (*Republic* 558c, cf. *Laws* 757a–758a).

According to the ontological conception of order – possibly inaugurated by Anaximander (fr.s A10 and A11 Diels) and Anaxagoras (fr.s B12 and B13 Diels), elaborated by Plato, developed in Neoplatonism and taken up by early Augustine in *De ordine* – order stands to disorder as good stands to bad/evil and as being stands to non-being. The aftermath of Augustine's definition of order from *De civitate Dei*, a work of the early 5th century, could be followed up to the 17th century, to Malebranche. To do so might be worthwhile; yet the drawback would be another history of an idea neatly sealed off from social history. The Ciceronian-Augustinian definition of order looks formal and lofty; yet social practices underpinned it that turn out to be quite concrete and not at all lofty: those of the household, led by the 'pater familias'. The house as unit of production is the basic social institution connecting classical antiquity with medieval feudalism. 'Domus' is the sphere of the master, 'dominus'. He produces and reproduces order. The master of the household disposes "of equal and unequal things, attributing each to its proper place". Women, children, serfs are among those things. The underlying assumption is that they tend to wander off from their proper places. They each desire more for themselves than "sua cuique". Hence the agent of order has to assume correcting functions. He averts disorder by driving those moving out of their apt position back into it.

The Greek word for household is 'oikos'. An exposition of the rules governing the household is called 'oikonomia', economics. Aristotle sharply contrasted the order of the 'polis' to the order of the 'oikos'. Yet when he set out the contrast in his *Politics*, the polis was already a thing of the past. Hence the household advanced to be the very paradigm of order. 'House' in this context acquired a

- spatial,
- economic (in a narrower sense of the word),
- social and
- political

sense at the same time, for it would mean

- building, home,
- property, possessions, estate,
- family and
- governance, rule.

The household's different purposes coincide in the person of the master, the 'oikos despotēs'. Personal dependence structures the order of the house. That order is not necessarily blissful harmony, rather it is based on the master's power to break, if necessary, the will of any member of the household resisting order's requirements. Order demands permanent vigilance as well as corrective action. John Millar, the foremost social historian within the Scottish Enlightenment, recognized the tie between economic and judicial power as a key to the origins of the feudal system: As members of a family came to depend upon a master "for subsistence", they got under his "supreme jurisdiction, in punishing their offences, as well as in deciding their differences; and he subjected them to such regulations as he judged convenient, for removing disorders".[7]

7 John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: Or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which Give Rise to Influence and Authority, in the Different Members of Society* [1771/1806], ed. Aaron Garrett, 2006, 200

Christianity had universalized that model of order from the start. The Gospel according to Matthew (20:1) equates the "Kingdom of the Heavens" ("basileia tōn ouranōn") with "oikodespotia", the landlord's dominion. The world itself was now conceived of as a house.[8] From Tertullian onwards, "Oeconomia" was used as a term of Christian dogmatics: It referred to the divine government of the world that structured history according to God's plan designed for man's salvation.[9] The pagan world had been vexed intellectually by the paradox that order, the natural state of affairs, needed constant intervention. Christianity, in the dogma of original sin, offered a perfect explanation why this had to be so. Christianity also neatly connected divine and mundane order; as the notorious medieval English four-liner has it: "The rich man in his castle, / The poor man at his gate, / God made them high or lowly, / And ordered their estate".

III. Ordo/Imaginatio

Doubts about order are not uncommon in philosophical works of the early modern period. In aphorism XLV of the 'Aphorismi de interpretatione naturae et regno hominis' from his *Novum Organum* (1620), Francis Bacon declares:

> Intellectus humanus ex proprietate sua facile supponit majorem ordinem et aequalitatem in rebus quam invenit; et cum multa sint in natura monodica et plena imparitatis, tamen affingit parallela et correspondentia et relativa quae non sunt. Hinc commenta illa, in coelestibus omnia moveri per circulos perfectos.[10]
>
> The human intellect of its own nature easily supposes more order and regularity in things than it finds; and though there be many things in nature which are singular and full of imparity, yet it devises for them parallels and corresponding phenomena and relatives which do not exist. Hence the fiction that all celestial bodies move in perfect circles.

As the comparative form of the adjectival qualification – "majorem ordinem" – indicates, however, Bacon disagrees with the tradition merely over grades, not over matters of principle. By way of contrast, 17th century radical Enlightenment[11] mounted a devastating critique of the ontology of order that had dominated philosophy from Plato and Aristotle through Scholasticism to the revival of Platonism in Renaissance thought. Order, in that tradition, had been seen as an immanent feature of the universe ('ordo essentialis'). In Scholasticism, of course, the teleological argument had been based on this tenet. The well-ordered design we observe in nature was supposed to entitle us to infer a benevolent designer (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 2).

In the appendix to the first book of his *Ethica*, composed from 1661 to 1675 and published 1677 in *Opera Posthuma*, Benedict de Spinoza raises the issue of order ("ordo") and confusion ("confusio"). The section poignantly exemplifies the Enlightenment project to criticize illusion by way of rational argument. In the concept of order Spinoza attacks, God is seen as a steering authority ("rector") above nature. Those who

8 Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christiana topographia* [around 550], *Topographie chrétienne*, Greek – French, 3 vols., ed. and transl. Wanda Wolska-Conus, 1968–1973 (Sources chrétiennes 141, 159, 197)

9 Adolf Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte,* 2nd ed., 1893 (Grundriss der Theologischen Wissenschaften IV/3), 81

10 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* [1620], *The Works*, ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis and Douglas D. Heath, Reprint 1963, vol. 1, 165

11 On this notion Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750*, 2001, 3–13. A seminal study is Margaret C. Jacob's *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, 1981 (Early modern Europe today 3).

do not know the nature of things, Spinoza argues, do not speak of things but of what they imagine things to be ("imaginantur"). They mistake power of imagination ("imaginatio") for understanding ("intellectus").[12] Consequently, not knowing things and their nature, they believe that there is order ("ordo") within things. For whenever things are distributed ("dispositae") in such a way that, as they are presented ("repraesentantur") to us by the senses, we can easily imagine ("imaginari") and hence remember ("recordari") them, we call them well-ordered ("bene ordinatae"). Whenever the opposite is the case, we call them ill-ordered ("male ordinatae") or confused ("confusae"). Now, those things that are easy to imagine ("imaginari"), Spinoza goes on, are more agreeable ("grata") to us than others less easy to imagine. As a consequence, human beings prefer order ("ordo") to confusion ("confusio"). They do so, as if order ("ordo"), irrespective of their own imagination ("imaginatio"), were something within nature itself.[13] By implication, to any order imagined alternative orders are imaginable.

Consistently, Spinoza discards the 'scala naturae' and the 'crown of creation' altogether. "Equus nemque ex. gr. tam destruitur, si in hominem quam si in insectum mutetur" (*Ethica*, pars 4, praefatio), a horse will be destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. There is no hierarchy of perfection, Spinoza points out, no ascending order by reference to which things can be judged good or bad.

We take for order, the *Ethica* teach, what is in fact merely a congenial relation to our imagination. This tenet is hardly innocent; it subverts the core of Jewish and Christian religion. If Spinoza is correct, God could not have created heaven and earth in order to enact man's salvation. Neither intentions nor emotions – like wrath or love – can be ascribed to God. If we imagine God acting for the sake of order in the universe, we would represent him as an imperfect being and hence as something other than God. For whoever were to act for the sake of an end, would necessarily want something which in some way or other he lacks.[14]

Spinoza rejects the idea that man is the crown of creation to be redeemed by God not just because it makes no sense to speak of man as the crown. He also rejects it because, according to the *Ethica*, there is no such thing as the creation of the world. Of course all depends here on what is meant by 'creation'. God exists before at his will bringing the world into being *ex nihilo*: this is the understanding of that term on which Spinoza shatters faith in creation. Demonstrating that it is impossible for God to exist but the world not to exist, Spinoza dismisses the book *Genesis* as imaginative fiction.[15]

Yet Spinoza's argument goes beyond combating religion. It challenges the foundations of Western metaphysical thought. The *Timaeus* had raised the cardinal question why the "demiourgos" had taken up work at all. Plato's memorable answer, resounding over centuries, pronounces that God deemed order ("taxis") to be better ("ameinon")

12 Spinoza's account of "imaginatio" is discussed in Filippo Mignini, *Ars imaginandi: Apparenza e rappresentazione in Spinoza*, 1981; Michèle Bertrand, *Spinoza et l'imaginaire*, 1984; Daniela Bostrenghi, *Forme e virtù della imaginazione in Spinoza*, 1996 (Studi filosofici 19); Don Garrett, 'Representation and consciousness in Spinoza's naturalistic theory of the imagination', in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann, 2008, 4–25. For the 17th and 18th century philosophical attack on the imagination see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, 1998, 341.

13 For an analytical assessment of the argument cf. Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 1984, 289–314.

14 Cf. Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas* [1930] *und zugehörige Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Meier, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 3rd ed., 2008.

15 Cf. Sylvain Zac, 'On the idea of creation in Spinoza's philosophy', in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, 1991, 231–242.

than disorder ("ataxia") (*Timaeus* 29d–30a). If such unqualified praise of order is taken as a foil to Spinoza's claim that so-called confusion merely indicates that something transcends the narrow limits of the human power of imagination, we realize that the account of order set out in the appendix to the first part of the *Ethica* amounts to insurrection.

What could this fundamental epistemological challenge to the order of nature, as traditionally understood, mean for the understanding of social order? Spinoza's discussion of order, characteristically, occurs in the context of his assault on teleology, discrediting all purpose in nature.[16] In the philosophical and theological tradition, nature's order had served as the norm for social order; this was the point of natural law doctrine from Aristotle onwards. Yet if order were no inherent feature of nature to begin with, then the latter could not serve as a norm for social order (cf. *Ethica*, pars 4, praefatio). Social order had to be conceived of anew. This was achieved by the British Enlightenment of the 18th century. There is little doubt that Spinoza would have been disgusted by the acquisitive ethics of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* or Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. He upheld the philosophical tradition of contempt for money. But as Spinoza discredited the idea that reality was inherently ordered in the manner of teleology, he opened up a path to modern liberalism's revisionary conception of order.[17] In the words of Jonathan Israel, Spinoza became "the source and inspiration for a systematic redefinition of man, cosmology, politics, social hierarchy, sexuality, and ethics".[18]

Israel has, however, called "the Scottish Enlightenment" a "formidable adversary of Radical Enlightenment".[19] While Israel's stress on "the great chasm between Radical Enlightenment and the moderate mainstream"[20] has certainly opened fresh vistas upon this intellectual movement as a whole, we need to realize the challenges posed by the philosophically radical Spinoza to the moderates as well and the ways they were dealt with by the latter. There may have been more bridges than the image of the "chasm" would allow for. To consider Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith or John Millar political

16 For the link between doubts regarding purpose and doubts regarding order cf. Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1998 (Quaestiones 11), 195.

17 As we know from the correspondence between Spinoza and Henry Oldenburg, secretary to the Royal Society, Spinoza was known in Britain from the 1660s (Sarah Hutton, 'Reason and revelation in the Cambridge Platonists, and their reception of Spinoza', in *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, ed. Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, 1984 (Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung 12), 181–200, 181). Cf. Rosalie Colie, 'Spinoza in England, 1665–1730', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 (1963), 183–193. The Scottish Enlightenment was indebted to Spinoza through its key figure David Hume. Hume's hostile references to Spinoza in the *Treatise of Human Nature* [1739/40] (ed. Lewis A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. Peter H. Nidditch, 1985, 240–244) are laced with irony. For discerning accounts of the relationship see Wim Klever, 'More about Hume's debt to Spinoza', *Hume Studies* 19 (1993), 55–74; Annette Baier, 'David Hume, Spinozist', *Hume Studies* 19 (1993), 237–252.

18 Israel (note 11), 159. As Israel points out, it has been "common, and still is, to claim that Spinoza was rarely understood and had very little influence, a typical example of an abiding historiographical refrain which appears to be totally untrue but nevertheless, since the nineteenth century, has exerted an enduring appeal for all manner of scholars. In fact, no one else during the century 1650–1750 remotely rivalled Spinoza's notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and non-absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority".

19 Jonathan I. Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, 2010, 177.

20 Loc. cit., 131.

moderates[21] is fair enough. But, specifically, the conception of order they developed marks a bold departure from the tradition sketched above – bolder indeed than the views of order of many politically radical authors who stuck to the idea of attributing proper places, if only, by way of revolutionary action, the attributors were exchanged.

IV. Plurality/Spontaneity

Spinoza marks an "exorbitant caesura"[22] – what Winfried Schröder by these words has claimed for moral philosophy generally, also does hold specifically for the idea of order. In the traditional conception of order, it was assumed that chaos would break out once individuals would start to do what they liked. They would be unpredictable. Only a master steering their course could coordinate individuals' actions and thus prevent anarchy. Spinoza, however, in his *Ethica* (pars 4, prop. 35, cor. 2), reasoned thus: "Cum maxime unusquisque homo suum sibi utile quaerit, tum maxime homines sunt sibi invicem utiles", "When each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to another". Spinoza's conclusion to a deductive inference was transformed into a claim based on experience by the British Enlightenment of the 18th century.[23] Against traditional precepts, authors from Mandeville to Smith advanced the stunning idea that individuals each strictly adhering to their advantage would behave in a highly 'orderly' and calculable fashion. In fact, their self-considering behaviour would be more orderly than that of individuals each oriented by philanthropic feelings towards some common good. For in fact these would be oriented towards what each of them imagined to be the common good – a rather imponderable sentiment compared to straightforward individual advantage.[24]

The complex order itself, the outcome of individual deeds, however, would not be predictable according to that line of reasoning. Nobody who was trying to plan and steer the course of events would be able to catch up with it. Adam Ferguson, one of the protagonists of the Scottish Enlightenment, calls the social outcome, in a classic formulation, "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design".[25] No master, however experienced, would achieve by efforts at coordination what is brought about by free citizens' non-coordinated action. Law merely frames their actions, but does not set them goals. Within the limits of the law, Ferguson recommends, citizens should be entirely free to do and believe whatever they like. In fact, Ferguson argues, individuals in civil society do pursue quite "different objects" and hold "separate views". And such pluralism of aims and opinions is said to be "more favourable" to societies' flourishing "than what human wisdom could ever calmly devise".[26]

21 Loc. cit., 9–10, 14–17, 57–59, 111–112, 130–131, 180–181, 236.

22 Winfried Schröder, 'Spinoza im Untergrund. Zur Rezeption seines Werks in der 'littérature clandestine", in *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, ed. Hanna Delf, Julius H. Schoeps and Manfred Walther, 1994, 142–161, 149: „Die unerhörte Zäsur, die Spinozas Moralphilosophie in der Geschichte dieser Disziplin darstellt".

23 The undeniable contrast in style of reasoning is often overstated, to make it look like incompatibility of doctrine. "Spinoza's philosophy", Jonathan I. Israel appropriately objects, "is inherently empiricist in its premisses at least (and in some respects, perhaps, more consistently so than Locke's), and hence not at all 'rationalist' in the sense Anglo-American philosophers have in mind when they point to the wide gap between 'empiricism' and 'rationalism'" (*Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752*, 2006, 46).

24 Cf. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph*, 1977, *passim*.

25 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* [1767], ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, 1995, 119

26 Loc. cit., 225

When the new idea of order was first introduced in the early 1700s – half a century before Ferguson framed it in an historical narrative –, it bore the character of paradox. This is amply testified by Mandeville's Fable of the Bees, published in 1714. The paradox of order emerging from a conflict of elements was not without precedent; Horace's "rerum concordia discors" (Epistolae 1.12.19) and Ovid's "discors concordia" (Metamorphoses 1.433) would have been present to cultivated writers and readers in the 18th century. But these classical references would hardly have been understood as stimulants for contemporary social theory – Mandeville's field of thought.

Social order, Mandeville claims, emerges in the better case not from the labours of an authority; rather

> it is never better attained to, or preserv'd, than when no body meddles with it. Hence we may learn, how the short-sighted Wisdom, of perhaps well-meaning People, may rob us of a Felicity, that would flow spontaneously from the Nature of every large Society, if none were to divert or interrupt the Stream.[27]

Like Ferguson and Adam Smith later in the century, Mandeville, viewing the traditional custody of order, was appalled by the incongruity between intentions on the one hand and the outcomes of actions on the other hand. In which way, he wondered, are we to construe, by way of contrast, an unintended, "spontaneous" emergence of order? Famously, the *Fable of the Bees* bears the subtitle "private vices, publick benefits". By "private vices", the author refers to individuals' selfish impulses, "publick benefits" mean social welfare. In terms of genre, "private vices, publick benefits" was a maxim, indeed, a paradoxical maxim – not in the later sense of an apparent logical contradiction, but in the older sense of 'para-doxon', *i.e.*, a deviation from established opinion. The 'doxa' of the traditional conception of order implied that beneficial effects had to have worthy causes, whereas vile origins had to lead to unwholesome outcomes.

In which way, according to Mandeville, do "publick benefits" emerge from "private vices"? The "passion of pride" is a case in point. Mandeville defines:

> PRIDE is that Natural Faculty by which every Mortal that has any Understanding over-values, and imagines better Things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all his Qualities and Circumstances, could allow him.[28]

Such over-estimation seems eminently anti-social. If all were to refer themselves to higher positions within the whole than apt for them, conflicts between individuals would appear inevitable. On the traditional idea of order, there needed to be a master who would castigate pride and push proud individuals back to their proper place – applying Augustine's "ordo est parium dispariumque sua cuique tribuens loca dispositio". The more fix the hierarchy, the better it should cure of pride.

As Mandeville was well aware, pride manifests individuals' desire to distinguish themselves from others. To satisfy that very desire, though, proud individuals need those others, specifically their admiration. Hence the very passion that aims at nothing but glorification of the individual does actually socialize. That it does so, is not at all that passion's goal; rather it is a necessary condition for reaching its goal. There may be many things you can have all by yourself; not so, however, the peculiar thing called recognition.

Virtuous behaviour, Mandeville claims, does not contribute anything to public welfare. Ascetics do not go shopping. Also they do not ponder how they might satisfy their

27 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* [1714], ed. Frederick B. Kaye, 2 vols., 1924, vol. 2, 353. On the formation of Mandeville's thought Israel (note 11), 623–627.

28 Mandeville (note 27), vol. 1, 124. Cf. Israel (note 23), 259.

cravings in better ways; for they actually attempt to suppress them. Human beings' inventiveness, says the *Fable of the Bees*, has resulted from their striving to "sooth their various Appetites".[29] Restriction or prohibition *vis-à-vis* these appetites must crush human curiosity and inventiveness. Though in the service of selfish drives, curiosity and invention would bring about results bound to turn to the advantage of others as well; in the verse of Mandeville's doggerel poem:

> THUS Vice nurs'd Ingenuity,
> Which joined with Time and Industry,
> Had carry'd Life's Conveniencies,
> Its real Pleasures, Comforts, Ease,
> To such a Height, the very Poor
> Liv'd better than the Rich before.[30]

Vice leads to progress, desire creates plenty: once more this must be understood as paradoxically new, taking the offensive against the old foundation of order. According to Plato, human desire is by nature insatiable ("physei aplēstotaton", *Republic* 442a). If, however, desire cannot set itself bounds nor is kept within bounds by superior power, then it must clash with other desire. Trying to satisfy itself at the expense of others, such desire will create utter disorder. A place enmeshed in such a state of affairs Plato calls "city of the pigs" ("hyōn polis", *Republic* 372d).

The old conception of order was driven by fear of luxury. The idea of need rather than desire guided that conception. What was needed should be in place, no less than this, but, more importantly, not more. Hence there had to be some supervising agency to cut back desire wherever it were to go beyond necessities. Responding to that consideration, Mandeville shifts perspective. Instead of admiring the management of order supposedly brought about by supervising agencies, he takes offence at their barrenness. To stifle consumption must mean to stifle production.

V. Intention/End

The *Fable*'s author is fond of natural imagery – the bee-hive or the flowing stream. Yet beneath the surface of such figures of speech, Mandeville's reasoning points quite into the opposite direction. His book contributed, in Michael McKeon's apt words, to "the birth of the sociological imagination, which demystifies what appears given by recognizing it as, not natural, but social or cultural".[31] By the same token, Mandeville, unfolding his new idea of "spontaneous" order – as distinguished from order by arrangement –, takes a step from a relatively simple way of thinking to more complex ways. Traditionally, order was understood in terms of plain correlations. If the whole was to be in order, all of its parts had to be in order or, respectively, brought in order by way of disciplinary measures. Contrastingly, Mandeville conceives of society as a system: The interaction of its elements can create features that are not features of any individual element. In his own provocative words: "Thus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise".[32] Rhyme here works as a sense-binder – "Vice" and "Paradise" make for a nice clash. The solution to this paradox is temporal: The reproach of its first part is taken from the old Christian valuation that referred to individual intention and action, whereas

29 Mandeville (note 27), vol. 2, 128
30 Loc. cit., vol. 1, 26
31 Michael McKeon, 'Historicizing patriarchy: The emergence of gender difference in England, 1660–1760', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (1995), 295–322, 303
32 Mandeville (note 27), vol. 1, 26

its second part's praise refers to the new system of a market economy as a whole. The irony lies in the term of praise; instead of calling the new order excellent or the like, Mandeville applies to it the old name of the state of absolute goodness, "Paradise".

The anti-hierarchical aspect of Mandeville's thought does not stem from egalitarianism. Some end up rich, others poor. Yet this is not 'hierarchia', 'ordo sacer'. It is entirely profane. Hence by "the whole Mass a Paradise" Mandeville cracks a good joke. A literal reference within the old ideology of order, "paradise" turns into an ironical metaphor within the new. Converting old terms of order into metaphor for the purpose of articulating a new idea of order: that issue of necessity brings up the most worn-up of quotations from Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* from 1776:

> As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in support of domestick industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the publick interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestick to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it.[33]

Adam Smith's entire thinking circles round the problem of "the order of society"[34]. To produce order, along its old idea, a ruler was needed who would have in mind the common good ('bonum commune') and who would discipline individuals contravening that purpose. According to the new idea, order is conceived of as an unintended side-effect of the actions of many individuals each of which follows his or her interest. Separately, they pursue their goals, yet the result is as if it had been coordinated. Order has not been the end, but it does eventuate. In this way, the time-honoured equation of order and hierarchy is shattered. This is the upshot of Adam Smith's cautiously crafted rhetorical masterpiece. Counter-Enlightenment thought can be understood as a sustained attempt to reverse this step. Thus Juan Donoso Cortés in his *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo, considerados en sus principios fundamentales* of 1851 sets up a project to reinstall the equation of order and hierarchy.[35] Clearly this is by no means senseless. After all, also capitalism has created its peculiar system of gradation, managerial 'hierarchies'. Yet that succession of dignities is itself the product of a labour market (within a frame of rights rather than privileges) and thus of the kind of mechanism first described and analyzed by those who revolutionized the ideology of order in the 18th century.

33 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [1776], 2 vols., ed. Roy H. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner, 1976, 4.2.9, 1, 456. Cf. James Tobin, 'The invisible hand in modern macroeconomics', in *Adam Smith's Legacy: His Place in the Development of Modern Economics*, ed. Michael Fry, 1992, 117–129. See also *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759/90], ed. David D. Raphael and Alec L. Macfie, 1979, 4.1.10, 184sq. On this passage Georg Johannes Andree, *Sympathie und Unparteilichkeit. Adam Smiths System der natürlichen Moralität*, 2003, 157sq.

34 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759/90], ed. David D. Raphael and Alec L. Macfie, 1979, 1.3.3, 61

35 Juan Donoso Cortés, *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo, considerados en sus principios fundamentales* [1851], ed. José Luis Gómez, 1985

While Mandeville relishes mockery and debunking, Smith does not. Yet both attempt to convey a new idea of order by tapping its old idiom. An essential element of the traditional image of the authority in charge of order was the intervening hand. It had pervaded the emblematics since the early 17th century.[36] The hand would quite literally show the ruler's grip. With his hand he would castigate the bad and raise the good; without the hand that chastises and bestows honour all order, conceived of in the traditional way, would break down. Adam Smith, however, transfigures that social fact of the feudal epoch into a metaphor for the era of the bourgeoisie.[37] No actual hand is meant to intervene. Thus the new way of thinking is spelled out in a figure of speech comprehensible to old ways of thinking. The invisible hand now personifies the impersonal, the mechanism of the market. Where Spinoza had broken images, Smith forms transitions between them. As the new idea of order moved from the margins to the centre of the society, its rhetoric could be tempered.

The discontinuity in conceiving order, breaking a tradition of more than two-thousand years, is thus attenuated by Smith through a diction that makes the visible hands of masters appear not so much oppressive – as they certainly were in many ways –, but rather just redundant in view of the market's invisible hand. Its invisibility indicates the idea's novelty. But even here we discover a reference to something old; for the hand of the supreme master of order, God, had been invisible. In this way, the market, as Smith conceives of it, metaphorically participates in a once religious layer of meaning. That the invisible hand remains a trope is not obscured. But through such verbal imagery, the enlightened philosopher hints at a consoling vision of secular providence.[38] To accept new ideas can hurt; but old images may mitigate the pain.

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36 See, *e.g.*, Jakob von Bruck-Angermundt, *Emblemata politica*, 1618, 5, 9, 21, 29, 53, 105, 129, 141, 181, 185, 189, 193, 205, 209. Cf. *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* [1967], ed. Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, 1996, cols. 1008–1022; a characteristic idea was to place an eye in the middle of the hand (cols.1010–1012), thus joining vision and action, prognosis and intervention: „da sollen die hände [des Fürsten] augen haben / wie dieser gegenwertige Sinspruch außweiset / damit sie zuvor recht sehen / was sie thun" ("[The prince's] hands should have eyes / as the present epigram demonstrates / so that the princes see by way of anticipation / what they are about to do" (col. 1012).

37 Missing the rhetorical transposition, Danielle Allen pronounces: "Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' will naturalize once again the very idea that Mandeville is uncovering" (Danielle Allen, 'Burning *The Fable of the Bees*: The incendiary authority of nature', in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal, 2004, 74–99, 81). Taken literally, the hand could only be a hand either human or divine. It could not be human because it is the very point of Smith that no human authority should direct the market transactions. It could not be divine either for, whatever Smith may have believed about God, he did not regard it his business to privilege "the support of domestick" – Scottish or British – industry over "that of foreign industry". Other Europeans, after all, were Christians, too, and could have made claims on the Christian God. Order, Smith realizes, can arise spontaneously, unintended by either gods or humans. The argument against literal readings of the "invisible hand" is vigorously set out by Emma Rothschild in her *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment*, 2001, 116–156.

38 Cf. Isaac Iselin, *Versuch über die gesellige Ordnung* (Basel: Schweighauser, 1772), 63. Iselin later reviewed the first German translation of Smith's *Inquiry* for the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* edited by Friedrich Nicolai, vol.s 31/2 (1777), 586–589 and 38/1 (1779), 297–303. On "providential rhetoric" in the Scottish Enlightenment cf. Israel (note 19), 111.