

The Great Society and Its Discontents

by Daniel Pellerin

In tandem with the *rules of just conduct* arises and advances “that spontaneous order which Adam Smith called ‘the Great Society’ and Sir Karl Popper called ‘the Open Society’”¹ – that *extended order of human cooperation* on which, according to Hayek, “our civilization depends not only for its origin, but also for its preservation,” and without which the very survival of the human species as we know it would be called into question.² This essay will trace the parameters of Hayek’s *extended order* in three parts: part I will examine just what Hayek means by “rules of just conduct” and how he accounts for their emergence; what content these rules are supposed to have and how they center on the *protected domain* of the individual; as well as how these rules allow for the extension of *peaceful interaction and exchange* beyond the boundaries of peoples and nations and thereby offer the promise of a true, if nascent, world society. The argument will be complemented, in parts II and III, by a discussion of why, despite the force of Hayek’s argument – and by his own reckoning – we should expect the promise of the extended order to be widely distorted, derided, and disdained.

I The Rules of Just Conduct and the Extended Order

The central concept of liberalism in its original, proper meaning, so Hayek contends, “is that under the enforcement of *universal rules of just conduct*, protecting a recognizable private domain of individuals, a spontaneous order of human activities of much greater complexity will form itself than could ever be produced by deliberate arrangements.”³ The discussion of Hayek’s liberal,

¹ LLL 1.2; compare Ibid. 1.14, 148 and PPE 163. For Smith’s usage, compare WN 99 (bk. 1, ch.8), 301 (intro to bk. 2), 482 (bk. 4, ch. 2), 745 (bk. 4, ch. 9), and 779, 830, 854 (all in bk. 5, ch. 1); as well as TMS 229 (part 6, section 2, ch. 2), 234 (Ibid.), and 235 (Ibid., ch. 3).

² FC 6. Hayek acknowledges that this order is “more commonly ... known as capitalism,” but he accepts that label “only with great reluctance, since with its modern connotations it is largely a creation of that socialist interpretation of economic history.” (FC 6; compare Ibid. 111, TET 63, LLL 1.62) Hayek also refers to the extended order as a species of the *free, abstract, or exchange society* or the *competitive market order* – the conceptual core of the *liberal society* in its original, proper, and fundamental meaning. (LLL 2.190, 3.162, 164, 168; FC 111, 118)

³ PPE 162, italics added.

extended order must begin, then, with an account of these fundamental rules, their emergence, their content, and their significance.

The starting point for Hayek's reflections on the extended order is the thought that all spontaneous order owes its existence to evolutionary selection rather than to deliberate design: indeed evolution and spontaneous order are so closely linked, according to Hayek, that he considers them *twin concepts*.⁴ It follows that the human mind as we know it is not so much the guide as itself the product of civilization, or more precisely, the result of an evolutionary process in which the two were formed concurrently.⁵ Though human ingenuity may have come into play in the contrivance of rules,⁶ their emergence may equally well have been a matter of simple historical accident, analogous to the role of genetic mutations in the more familiar domains of evolution.⁷ Whatever the exact process – lost in the mists of time – by which men happened upon these rules, there is little doubt that the discovery that would prove so very valuable to man's survival was in large part inadvertent: though man's very civilization is built upon such rules, mankind originally *tumbled, stumbled, or even fumbled* its way towards them. As Adam Ferguson famously puts it in one of Hayek's favorite passages, "Nations stumble upon establishments, *which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design.*"⁸ For what allowed these rules to prevail was not human design or intention, nor even a dim awareness of their implications, but the better chances of survival they afforded the groups that adhered to them. Thus the connection between the rules of just conduct and population growth (which will also concern us later) could hardly be more immediate: these rules are the ones that allowed men "to be fruitful and multiply" most successfully, and inasmuch it is only they that allowed the species as we know it to survive, one might even say that we did not so much select them as they selected *us*.⁹

Remarkable as the progressive spread of the rules of just conduct has been, however, their historical advance has been far from unhindered and their relationship to government, which is so often credited with their very creation, is an especially ambivalent one.¹⁰ On the one hand, "Although it is conceivable that the spontaneous order that we call society might exist without government, ... in

⁴ PPE 77; LLL 3.158.

⁵ CL 23-24, 36, 40-41; RS 181.

⁶ On the role of play, compare Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), which Hayek cites approvingly.

⁷ FC 20.

⁸ Compare LLL 1.17-18, 20, 150, 2.136, 3.164; CL 57, 59; Cairo 31, 32; FC 14, 76. Italics added.

⁹ FC 13, 14. On the close connection between the rules of just conduct, the exchange-based extended order, and population growth over the ages, compare especially FC 39-41, 43, 122, 126-127, 133.

¹⁰ Not that motives or mind-like qualities ought ever to be attributed to rules of conduct: but as Hayek frequently points out, it is one of the weaknesses of our language that we can hardly make ourselves understood at all without resorting to such misleading expressions. (Compare especially FC 106-107)

most circumstances the organization that we call government becomes indispensable in order to assure that those rules are obeyed." No advanced civilization, at any rate, seems yet to have developed without such assurance. On the other hand, however, the same governments have invariably tended, sooner or later, to abuse their power and severely hamper, or even crush, what they had previously fostered, though not created.¹¹ Whether we look to Rome, to imperial China, or to mediaeval Europe, continued progress was often made possible because circumstances – often "times of trouble" and periods of political anarchy – constrained and limited governments.¹² Even in England, perhaps the most energetic engine of the modern extended order, "the freedom of economic activity that ... proved so favorable to the rapid growth of wealth was probably in the first instance an *almost accidental by-product* of the limitations that the revolution of the seventeenth century had placed on the powers of government."¹³

What, in particular, has made possible the extension of peaceful order beyond the small group is the adoption of *abstract* rules that are purpose-independent and can be applied impartially to all.¹⁴ The Great Society thus introduces a distinction, unknown to pre-civilized man, between the pursuit of *concrete, common ends* (now reserved for strictly private and voluntary associations within the wider order) and adherence to *universal rules of just conduct* that is demanded of all members of the extended order. Once this transition has been made, the definition of concrete common purposes – so familiar and instinctually ingrained from our earlier mode of life – becomes an anachronism and indeed a major threat to peaceful cooperation.¹⁵ Leaving behind the life of the small roving band, in other words, must also mean weaning ourselves from the expectation that we could judge and restructure societal patterns according to some universally valid and complete code of ethics, or a common, hierarchical scale of ends.¹⁶ Justice thus acquires an abstract, universal quality: what is *just* about the rules of just conduct, then, is precisely that they can be applied to everyone

¹¹ LLL 1.47; FC 20, 32; PPE 163-164. It should be stressed, above all, that the rules of just conduct are everywhere antecedent to government, just as David Hume writes in his *Treatise*, III.ii.8 (compare LLL 1.162).

¹² FC 32-33, 44-45; CL 166-167; LLL 3.166. There is little doubt for Hayek "that man owes some of his greatest successes in the past to the fact that he has *not* been able to control social life." (CL 38; compare LLL 1.63)

¹³ TET 63, italics added. Compare RS 19; CL 162, 167; PPE 161-62.

¹⁴ Compare especially PPE 165: the passage framing the topic of this essay.

¹⁵ See section III.

¹⁶ FC 20, 79; RS 64-65. Even if societal patterns could be evaluated according to an agreed-upon standard, Nozick points out that no one pattern could be maintained without resort to constant, severe coercion (Nozick 160-164).

without distinction. On none but such a universal basis could the extended order be united and maintained.¹⁷

Pivotal to the emergence of the Great Society is the recognition, through the rules of just conduct, of a *protected domain*, a personal sphere “fenced off,” as Locke put it in the *Second Treatise*, from infringement by others and by all arbitrary authority.¹⁸ As Locke emphasized, however, *private property*¹⁹ has to be understood in a wider sense than one’s material possessions – vital as they are – but rather as the protection of one’s life, limb, and liberty, “that property which men have in their persons as well as their goods.”²⁰ Though freedom must not be confused with power, liberty would lose its meaning if it were confined to the intellectual sphere or otherwise divorced from the freedom to *do* things.²¹ Understood in this broad sense, the “all-important” concept of property as the centerpiece of the rule of law could hardly be more crucial for the rise of human civilization, as has long been recognized and emphasized in the liberal tradition.²² The idea that some things might justly be withheld from the group, and indeed protected from its demands, may well be the single most significant and remarkable milestone in human development if we consider what a radical departure it meant from the instincts governing the archaic small band in which human beings had lived for the preceding hundreds of thousands of years.²³ It is to this milestone, too, that we can trace the beginnings of human individuality and diversity – mankind’s greatest and most distinctive achievement.²⁴

The extended order, Hayek argues, was born when the first human “savage” reached out beyond the bounds of his small band with the offer of exchange for reciprocal rather than common communal purposes: from its very inception, then, the Great Society has carried and cultivated the seeds of a nascent world society, nourishing the hope, however distant, of a *universal peaceful order of the world* brought about by the spontaneous extension of its rules to ever-wider

¹⁷ LLL 1.29-31, 38, 2.142, 143; PPE 166, 168; CL 21, 136, 153, 197, 402; FC 19. The connection with Kantian ethics is evident and explicit. Thus also LLL 1.6: “On these issues that will be my main concern, thought seems to have made little advance since David Hume and Immanuel Kant.”

¹⁸ For Locke’s use of the image of the fence protecting personal property in the widest sense, compare pars. 17 (p. 14), 93 (p. 50), 136 (p. 72), 222 (pp. 111 and 112). At CL 171, Hayek quotes the passage from p. 111, but he does not make much of the fence, which elsewhere, he connects to Robert Frost rather than Locke (LLL 1.107).

¹⁹ Hayek expresses a preference for the term *several* property at FC 110.

²⁰ Locke pars. 85 and 87 (p. 46), 123 (p. 66), 173 (p. 90). Compare Hayek, PPE 167; also CL 158, where Hayek refers to several property as a “bundle of rights.”

²¹ CL 12-13, 16-17, 33. Such confinement, Hayek argues, would quickly dry up even the *intellectual* springs of freedom. (CL 35)

²² FC 63; compare *Ibid.* 30. Sir Henry Maine’s statement can stand for many others: “Nobody is at liberty to attack several property and to say at the same time that he values civilization.” (CL 140, FC 35, LLL 1.172) The insistence that the history of property simply cannot be disentangled from that of civilization itself also appears to be borne out by anthropology. (CL 140; compare FC 157, LLL 1.108)

²³ Compare FC 11, 135; CL 40. See section III.

²⁴ FC 30, 63-64, 79-80, 95, 126; compare CL 13, 139-40, 148, 151, 207, 214, RS 65.

circles of men.²⁵ Of all human institutions, it may well be extended order based on the rules of just conduct that has done most to curb man's instinctive hostility and aggression towards strangers, and to make associates out of those who would otherwise have remained enemies.²⁶ As Hayek points out, not only is trade by far the oldest form of human contact among remote groups, with archaeological evidence for trade over great distances reaching back a remarkable 30,000 years; not only can it be credited, through the law of merchants, with prompting the development of the first rudiments of international law, and of early forms of internationalization among the most developed civilizations even thousands of years ago; but it has also left the most telling marks on language. Hayek's alternative term for the market order, *catallaxy*, for example, "[derives] from the ancient Greek verb *katallattein*, which, significantly, means not only 'to barter' or 'to exchange,' but also 'to admit into the community' and 'to turn from enemy into friend.'" It is an interpretation shared even by the staunchest enemies of the liberal order and the commercial society that it will tend to weaken the hold of the friend-enemy distinction.²⁷

II The Fatal Conceit

If we thought of the extended order as no more than a world-wide conduit for the exchange of distinct goods and services, its immense complexity should be evident enough. In fact, however, such a mental image of its workings would barely scratch the surface of an order so unfathomably elaborate that Hayek deems it "probably the most complex structure in the universe."²⁸ Not only does every single exchange echo, however faintly, throughout the entire extended order, but every good or service exchanged is really a complicated compound of everything used in its conception, which constantly changes with the fluctuating relative values of its component parts. The extended order not only allocates resources in space and time, but reflects every change of preference expressed anywhere within its parameters. It is, in sum, only superficially about physical production and exchange, but at bottom a mechanism for gathering a wealth of information so overwhelming that we cannot even begin to picture it properly. To presume that such a mechanism could be replicated by any centralized entity, however powerful, betrays a grave misunderstanding and, as Hayek puts it, bespeaks a "colossal presumption."²⁹

²⁵ PPE 168; LLL 1.82, 2.148. Compare FC 16, 42; LLL 151-52; PPE 163-64; RS 253-55.

²⁶ FC 13, 65.

²⁷ FC 39-40; LLL 1.82, 2.144, 149; PPE 164. Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* offers the most prominent argument of this kind, which cannot be explored at length here.

²⁸ FC 127.

²⁹ CL 97.

Paradoxically, the “the *fatal conceit* that man is able to shape the world around him according to his wishes”³⁰ may itself be owed to the immense powers of the extended order, an economic system that “has carried us to unforeseen heights and given rise to ambitions that may yet lead us to destroy it.”³¹ For it is the liberal order itself with its enormous accomplishments that raised standards and expectations to the point where visions of a world without evils that had long been tolerated as natural and inevitable could begin to appear more than mere fanciful and wishful thinking. What the extended order wrought, in other words, was by no means mass misery, but, on the contrary, “a system that for the first time in history made people feel that this misery might be avoidable.”³²

Far less paradoxical than this – though it may appear just the opposite in the eyes of many – is the fact that an order coordinated by no more than a set of basic universal rules should prove so much more efficient than any attempt at conscious control could hope to be.³³ Though it might seem more intuitive to think that increases in the complexity of our world should call for a corresponding increase in our efforts at asserting deliberate control, such a response does not heed the full measure of our ignorance: the further we advance, the more relatively ignorant we also become of the myriad circumstances on which the success of our actions, and the workings of our civilization, depend. Compared to our staggering ignorance as individuals, our differences in individual knowledge are far less significant than our vanity might lead us to think. For our collective knowledge exists nowhere as an integrated whole: the challenge that the extended order meets so marvelously is that of allowing us to benefit from such scattered, often not even conscious knowledge, which could never be gathered in one place, never be possessed or controlled by any one agent or agency.³⁴ In other words, “civilization rests on the fact that we can all benefit from knowledge that we do *not* possess” and whose very existence we will not usually be aware of.³⁵

To help illustrate how the extended order allows for the circumvention of individual ignorance, the market mechanism might be best thought of as a gigantic data-collection device, an utterly decentralized *apparatus of registration*, or an *information-gathering process* – or even a highly evolved *method of communication* that makes it possible to transmit, call up, and put to use an

³⁰ FC 27, compare 21, 49; italics added.

³¹ LLL 3.164

³² RS 23, CL 2, TET 65, 69-70.

³³ Compare FC 70.

³⁴ LLL 1.50-51; CL 24-25, 30; FC 14.

³⁵ LLL 1.15; CL 4, 22. Compare LLL 1.14: “Economics has long stressed the ‘division of *labor*’ ... But it has laid much less stress on the fragmentation of *knowledge*, on the fact that each member of society can have only a small fraction of the knowledge possessed by all, and that each is therefore ignorant of most of the facts on which the working of the society rests. Yet it is the utilization of much more knowledge than anyone can possess ... that constitutes the distinctive feature of all advanced civilizations.” Ultimately, of course, all advanced division of labor, too, depends on the gathering of knowledge in accurate price-signals. (Compare RS 55-56)

infinite number of dispersed pieces of information, all of which are continuously assembled and reassembled throughout the system and keep it in balance by constantly adjusting to each other.³⁶ Market competition thus appears as a “discovery procedure,” with prices and profits operating as “tools for searching” and extending the market-participants’ range of vision.³⁷ There is little here, meanwhile, that would cater to our very human craving for intelligibility and control; sympathetic as we may be to the resistance that the market order is therefore bound to engender, however, our very civilization would be jeopardized if we were to indulge it at the expense of the extended order.³⁸

The fact that Hayek speaks quite openly of the *invasion* of even the most remote places by the extended order might put one in mind of Marx’ image of “the heavy artillery with which [capitalism] ... forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate [and] compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to ... introduce ... civilization into their midst.”³⁹ Hayek admits quite readily, too, that the extended order has long “outgrown our capacity to survey or control the sequence of events on which we depend.” Even if our sense of control may have always been more imagined than real, the Great Society, which has conjured up such gigantic powers of production and exchange, does indeed have much in common with Marx’ “sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he as called up by his spells.”⁴⁰ That we should be able to comprehend and control so little can hardly be a source of comfort to us, whether we be champions or enemies of the extended order: “To become aware that we depend heavily on human efforts that we cannot know about or control is indeed unnerving – to those who engage in them as well as those who would refrain.”⁴¹

Perhaps more unnerving still, we cannot even be sure, according to Hayek, that our civilization and its advance is making us happier or “better off” than we would otherwise be. Indeed, the fact that the extended order “selected” rules and institutions for their survival-value alone makes it more than questionable that they would also reliably serve our individual happiness.⁴² What is just as clear, however, and rather more salient, is that only the extended order could have enabled us to multiply our numbers so dramatically. To balk at it now, even if it were possible, would strike at the very roots of human civilization, since “today we can probably even feed the numbers to which mankind has grown only thanks to the intensive utilization of dispersed knowledge that is made possible

³⁶ FC 14, 81, 86, 92, 97; RS 55.

³⁷ FC 99, 104. On the role of competition as opposed to overt cooperation, compare also FC 19, 26, 36.

³⁸ Compare RS 223.

³⁹ FC 121, Marx 477.

⁴⁰ FC 103, Marx 478.

⁴¹ FC 90.

⁴² Compare CL 36, 41, 50; FC 14, 64, 69.

by the market.”⁴³ It bears stressing that even the most frightful consequences of past economic experimentation were always framed and limited in their impact by the persistence of the extended order elsewhere. To see the consequences of a genuine suspension of that order, we would have to imagine a world without the very considerable spill-over effects that the extended order will have even for those who do not participate in it directly.⁴⁴ That such a world would be marked by the most calamitous human suffering and loss of life seems beyond doubt.

But there is yet another sense in which we probably lack a meaningful choice in the pursuit of such progress as the extended order promises, for both internally and internationally, even a sharp decline – let alone a reversal – in the rates of economic growth in the most advanced societies would quickly raise alarming prospects.⁴⁵ However much we may resent being led, by the consequences of past progress, along a path that is not really of our own choosing, even finding ourselves “*not only the creatures but the captives of progress,*” the fact remains that our civilization and with it the peace of the world may well depend on continued progress at a fast pace.⁴⁶ For one, so long as human beings appear to be perpetually restless creatures satisfied not so much by the enjoyment as by the pursuit of their ends, even movement for movement’s sake would be a demand of progress.⁴⁷ Moreover, as Adam Smith pointed out, it is not the richest societies but those progressing most rapidly that offer the best hope of comfort and satisfaction to the mass of the people, and to the laboring poor, especially: “The progressive state is in reality the cheerful and the hearty state to all the different orders of a society.” The stationary state appears hard and dull by contrast; the declining, miserable and melancholy.⁴⁸ Indeed, twentieth-century experience suggests that the fate of democracy itself may be intertwined with that of the extended order in that “the one thing modern democracy will not bear without cracking,” at least in peacetime, is a substantial decline, or even prolonged

⁴³ LLL 2.140, italics added. Compare also FC 133: “Whatever men live *for*, today most live only because of the market order. We have become civilized by the increase of our numbers just as civilization made that increase possible: *we can be few and savage, or many and civilized.*” (Italics added)

⁴⁴ Compare CL 42-49 (esp. 47) on the effective “gift of knowledge” that the rich and the most advanced societies make to others. It is also worth considering that even societies repudiating the extended order most vehemently will likely be forced to develop mechanisms that in effect imitate those of the market, though operating far less efficiently. (FC 87; CL 45-46, 125-26)

⁴⁵ CL 41; FC 134.

⁴⁶ CL 50-53, italics added. Compare FC 134, LLL 3.159.

⁴⁷ Compare CL 41-42. As Hobbes puts it so aptly, “the felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied,” but rather in the “continual progress of the desire, from one object to another, the attaining the former being still but the way to the latter.” (Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.xi.1, p. 57; compare I.vi.58, p. 34-35, and I.xi.2, p. 58) Or, even more succinctly, “to progress is pleasing” whereas “idleness is torture.” (Hobbes, *On Man*, XI.11, p. 51) Though there may well be spiritual wisdom in seeking to soothe men by calming their desires and ambitions, it cannot be a liberal government’s role to seek to do so.

⁴⁸ Smith, WN, I.viii, pp. 79, 93.

stagnation, in a society's standard of living.⁴⁹ If we consider that the most visible fruits of our advances, which must necessarily originate as the luxuries of the few, will create demands for more of the same not only within societies, but also between them, it may become clearer why Hayek concludes his astute discussion of "The Common Sense of Progress" with the warning that "even a small decline in our rate of advance might be fatal to us."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ RS 230. One might recall that it has often been those who laid the greatest store by the powers of human reason who, in times of crisis, became most violently disillusioned and were most ready to join hands with the forces of irrationalism. The response by many European intellectuals to the fascist turn in the 1930s offers perhaps the most chilling cautionary tale in this regard. (LLL 1.32, 34)

⁵⁰ Compare CL 53 and all chapter 3.

III The Revolt of the Instincts

Though we would have much cause to respond with wonder and curiosity to the amazing fact that the actions of billions can be coordinated without the aid of an ordering authority and without the need for coercion, our actual attitude is often just the opposite: a “curious lack of curiosity” about the prevailing extended order, its origins and conditions, and pervasive feelings of resentment and hostility.⁵¹ A good part of “our occasional impetuous desire to smash the whole entangling machinery of civilization” may be owed, of course, to our mistaken beliefs about what we are doing; but not all antipathy to the market order arises from such “relatively rational” sources. A “further, darker dislike,” a set of instincts “more archaic and even arcane” threatens to topple the edifice of the Great Society⁵² – for the intellectual development on which the extended order depends is one “that our emotions have followed only imperfectly.”⁵³

Behind the urge to rein in the extended order lurks a deep-seated yearning, as old as civilization itself, for the intimate, tangible fellowship of the small group, the setting in which and for which man’s enduring emotional constitution was molded.⁵⁴ As Hayek writes,

[M]an’s instincts ... were not made for the kinds of surroundings, and for the numbers, in which he now lives. They were adapted to life in the small roving bands or troops in which the human race and its immediate ancestors evolved during the few million years while the biological constitution of *homo sapiens* was being formed.⁵⁵

These instincts and habits, centering on demands for *solidarity* with and *visible altruism* towards the other members of one’s own group, had to be curbed before

⁵¹ CL 25; FC 62, 84.

⁵² CL 25; FC 18, 89. Hayek notes at FC 18 that the topic of his book “thus resembles, in a way, that of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, except that my conclusions differ greatly from Freud’s.” The dispassionate observer may discover rather more common ground between the two thinkers. Had Freud really been the immoralist, destroyer of culture, and natural ally of socialism that Hayek depicts, he would hardly have dismissed as naive and based on “untenable illusion” the hopes attached by some to the abolition of private property. Surely Freud’s writings deserve no less credit than Rousseau’s for that “wisdom which his disciples missed.” (LLL 3.174-175, 207; 2.191; FC 51, 153; Freud 60, 64-65, 68-74, 81-82, 84, 99-101, 104-109, 110-111)

⁵³ FC 100; FC 89, 100-104; LLL 3.159-61; RS 98-99, 222-224. Distrust and fear are quick to surface wherever ready intelligibility ceases, as it must when barter ceases to be the preferred means of exchange. Though arguably the most powerful tool of freedom and individualism, money, in particular, continues to “conjure up all the unease that people feel towards a process they cannot understand.” (FC 102) Thus also FC 91: “Activities that appear to add to available wealth, ‘out of nothing,’ without physical creation and by merely rearranging what already exists, *stink of sorcery*.” (Italics added)

⁵⁴ FC 113; CL 81.

⁵⁵ FC 11; compare *Ibid.* 135, CL 40. In other words, “what we call cultural evolution took place during the last 1 percent of the time during which *Homo sapiens* existed.” (LLL 3.156)

human communities could be expanded beyond the bounds of the smallest, closed, end-connected groups; but all such constraints continue to grate on our emotional constitutions and are therefore *hated*.⁵⁶ Though kept at bay by rules without which no progress could have been made towards the extended order, our instincts have never been fully subdued: “We have not shed our heritage from the face-to-face troop, nor have these instincts either ‘adjusted’ fully to our relatively new extended order or been rendered harmless by it.”⁵⁷ While the yearning for a morality to match our inherited instincts is a relic from an outdated way of life, which could not be satisfied without threatening the extended order with death and destruction, the facts do not make the necessity of submitting to rules we do not like any less bitter. The result is a simmering revolt of our tribal instincts that can be repressed, but continues to break out anew:⁵⁸

The gradual extension of a common order of peace ... has caused a constant conflict between emotions deeply ingrained in human nature through millennia of tribal existence and the demands of abstract principles whose significance nobody fully grasped. Human emotions are attached to concrete objects, and the emotions of justice in particular are still very much connected with the visible needs of the group to which each person belongs... Only a mental reconstruction of the overall order of the Great Society enables us to comprehend that the deliberate aim at concrete common purposes ... would destroy that larger order in which all human beings count alike.⁵⁹

Our instinctive response to the values of the extended order as artificial, unnatural, callous, and even inhuman bears witness to the fact that “intellectually and morally we have not yet fully matured to the needs of the impersonal comprehensive order of mankind.” In fact, it is only through a long and involved learning process – the development of the individual mind mirroring the evolution of the human race, as it were – that we are equipped for life in the extended order at all.⁶⁰ It is a marvel no less remarkable than evolution itself, in other words, that we – or sufficiently many of us, at any rate – ever rise to the challenges of the extended order at all.

If modern man knew only life in the extended order, the instinctual conflicts tormenting him might quickly become unbearable and the destruction of the Great Society by a relapse into more intuitive habits would be not only “quite likely,” as Hayek warns in his more pessimistic moments, but altogether inevitable.⁶¹ Since the extension of peaceful order had to be bought at the price of reducing its content, attenuating relations of enforceable duties towards the other member of one’s group, civilized man faces a gaping “emotional void,” having

⁵⁶ LLL 2.136, FC 13.

⁵⁷ FC 17. Compare LLL 3.162: “The greatest change, *which man has still only partially digested*, came with the transition from the face-to-face society to what Sir Karl Popper has appropriately called the abstract society.” (Italics added)

⁵⁸ FC 19-20, 76; LLL 2.133, 134, 144, 147, 150, 3.165; TET 21.

⁵⁹ LLL 2.143.

⁶⁰ LLL 2.145, 149; FC 107.

⁶¹ LLL 2.133, 146, 159; FC 20.

lost the assurance of support in case of need as well as the satisfaction of the deep-seated human need to do *visible* good.⁶² The extended order, if it could root out all remnants of earlier forms of association, would also “deny itself what in many respects is still the strongest force making for cohesion, the common visible purpose.”⁶³ While the Great Society as a whole can only survive by renouncing the methods of creating solidarity in the small group, it may at the same time be emotionally viable only because the more archaic structures out of which it arose, and which continue to have such “infinite appeal” to human beings as instinctual creatures, persist in less obvious form.⁶⁴

Whereas much of what the extended order demands of us is counter-intuitive and contrary to our deepest instincts, a manner of instinctual refuge is provided by subordinate organizations that shape our lives in more congenial ways. Among the “many, often overlapping, sub-orders” within which old instinctual responses retain much of their importance, families — Burke’s “little platoons”⁶⁵ — are perhaps most clearly reminiscent of the archaic “small bands” that shaped the childhood of the species and have left so deep an imprint on our emotional make-up. Other private associations likewise serve to balance out the instinctual pressures of the extended order: perhaps most notably churches, but also other organizations of various kinds, including universities, unions, and even corporations. Though mitigating some of the pressures we face within the extended order, however, the patterns and demands we face within such subordinate associations create complications of their own precisely by inculcating and reinforcing habits that can never be those of the extended order. The lessons we are taught as members of families and churches, as union members or employees of corporations, are often appropriate only to organizations, not to the spontaneous order of the Great Society, thus contradicting and confusing the demands to which we must submit as members of the extended order:

Part of our present difficulty is that we must constantly adjust our lives, our thoughts and our emotions, in order to live simultaneously within different kinds of orders according to different rules... [*W*]e must learn to live in two sorts of worlds at once.

Without taking the argument to Marxist lengths of economic determinism, the decline in self-employment that has accompanied much modern economic development has also tended to reinforce the prevalence of organizational thinking.⁶⁶

⁶² LLL 2.146, 149; FC 19, 65.

⁶³ LLL 2.149-150.

⁶⁴ FC 113.

⁶⁵ Burke par. 75, p. 41.

⁶⁶ FC 18, italics added. Compare CL, chapter 8, esp. 123, 128; LLL 1.46-47, 2.105, 134-35, 146. It has been estimated that whereas the self-employed made up perhaps four-fifths of the population in the early nineteenth century, by the mid-twentieth century, the same fraction was now in the employ of organizations. (CL 446)

But perhaps we have been approaching our question from the wrong end; in light of the forces aligned against the extended order, maybe we should conclude by marveling at “how unlikely and even wonderful it is to find such an order prevailing in the greater part of the modern world.”⁶⁷ Likewise, rather than despairing of the fact that socialist thinking in its many guises should continue to find so many adherents – in academic and intellectual circles, especially – perhaps we ought instead to be heartened that some have always resisted its allure. According to Lord Acton’s dictum, after all, the sincere friends of freedom have at all times found themselves outnumbered.⁶⁸ As José Ortega y Gasset puts it even more dramatically,

It was incredible that the human species should have arrived at so noble an attitude [as liberalism], so paradoxical, so refined, so anti-natural. Hence it is not to be wondered at that this same humanity should soon appear anxious to get rid of it. It is a discipline too difficult and complex to take firm root on earth.⁶⁹

While Hayek would not have us underestimate the power of sheer human folly,⁷⁰ he grants that it is often the most intelligent, well-meaning, worthy individuals – those, paradoxically, who owe most to the extended order because they could hardly exist under less civilized conditions!⁷¹ – who are often the Great Society’s most embittered discontents and its most implacable enemies.⁷² Perhaps there has been some improvement in intellectual climate since Hayek could declare it “almost inevitable that, on the basis of such economic ideas as are imbibed as part of the general education of the day, every warm-hearted person ... should become a socialist.” Yet the economic “folklore” that Hayek derides in his memorable 1954 essay on “History and Politics” continues to thrive. Certainly, the “*one supreme myth* that more than any other has served to discredit the economic system to which we owe our present-day civilization” – that is, “the legend of the deterioration of the position of the working classes in consequence of the rise of ‘capitalism’” – is alive and well, and continues to reign largely unmolested.⁷³ Similarly influential, and likewise generally unopposed, is the interpretation of the Great Depression as a signal illustration of the “contradictions inherent in capitalism” – rather than a harrowing cautionary tale about the dangers of monetary mismanagement and sundry

⁶⁷ FC 84; compare CL 25.

⁶⁸ RS xxx.

⁶⁹ LLL 2.133. The fact that a regime of liberty offers not only great opportunities, but also imposes a discipline that can be hard to bear is stressed by Hayek at CL 18, 72, 438.

⁷⁰ Compare TET 35, RS 262.

⁷¹ Compare FC 119.

⁷² Hayek regularly speaks of socialism as “inspired by good intentions and led by some of the most intelligent representatives of our time.” He even concedes “the positive and sympathetic aspect” of the views he is contesting, going so far as to speak of socialism as “noble,” though of course deeply mistaken and misguided. (FC 9, 75; compare LLL 1.6, 139)

⁷³ Hayek, TET 32, 59, 60ff. Compare also CL 118, 273; FC 111, 123-25, 130-32; LLL 1.68.

disastrous *governmental* responses through which times of crisis are turned into economic cataclysms.⁷⁴

It is only too human that the intellectually gifted would be inclined to overrate the value of intelligence not only in their personal dealings, but also in interpreting the workings of the world at large.⁷⁵ Great intelligence, led awry, is also naturally liable to correspondingly great absurdities.⁷⁶ Granted, honest error may be reinforced by less innocent impulses – by envy or resentment, for example; or by the self-serving assumption that it would be the intellectuals themselves who would make those discretionary judgments on which any alternative to the extended order would depend; or perhaps by the likely myopia of those who lead “sheltered lives” as members of certain organizations.⁷⁷ Before judging most enemies of the extended order too harshly, however, we might remember that the views Hayek opposes so effectively are ones to which he himself had once been enthralled and from which even he could extricate himself only gradually and with difficulty.⁷⁸ It is a melancholy thought worth pondering that the thinking man who would fully acknowledge the case for the extended order may have to resign himself to a lonely place among his peers.

⁷⁴ Compare Friedman 44-51. On “shameless” abuses of monetary policy by governments, see also FC 103-104.

⁷⁵ Compare FC 53.

⁷⁶ Compare Hayek’s discussion at FC 56-59 of the “absurdities to which supreme intelligence can be led.”

⁷⁷ FC 82-83, 90, 118, 124; LLL 2.105.

⁷⁸ RS xlv; FC 53, 61, 88. Compare also Nozick ix-x. Thus also Hayek’s opening address to the Conference at Mont Pèlerin in April 1947: “What we need are people who have faced the arguments from the other side, *who have struggled with them and fought themselves through to a position from which they can both critically meet the objections against it and justify their views.*” (PPE 151, italics added)

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