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Social Order in Sociology: Its Reality and Elusiveness

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ABSTRACT

In the past, as well as in the present, depending on certain circumstances, sociologists tend to espouse one or the other of the contradictory answers proposed by political philosophers: social order is the result of some people being able to coerce others into obedience; or it rests on the general agreement among the members of the society; or it stems from their striking bargains with each other which are to every one's individual advantage as well as the collective advantage. I argue that it is unhelpful to consider these viewpoints as mutually exclusive categories. For the sociologist, social order must be a matter for empirical investigation. It is obvious that each of the above stated old philosophical views has its own grain of truth inherent in it, for each comes near to describing what is observed in some societies, or part of societies, of different types, at different periods of history, in particular situations or circumstances. But to consider each, as a 'theory' of social order of universal validity, is to put it mildly unrealistic or absurd. To escape from this unrealistic approach which pervades some sociological discussions of social order it is pertinent to remember that social harmony is very often not achieved, and that social order and disorder are very much relative terms. I therefore posit that the actual state of relative order to disorder in a particular society or part of society is the outcome of complex forces of dependence and interdependence, of cooperation and conflict, of strength and weakness, of alliance and cleavage between people and groups. Thus, in this paper, a treatise is put forward, for the emergence of social order within the context of the theories of social integration and conflict in sociology. The essence is to describe how social order emanates under different circumstances with a view to analyzing its reality and elusiveness in daily social interactions in society. It appears that reality is in some sense Janus-faced (integration and conflict being the two unpropitious faces) and, despairing of ever encompassing both aspects in one theoretical framework. The big question is that: should the choice of reality be left to the whim of each sociologist?

KEYWORDS

Social Order; Integration; Conflict; Reality; Elusiveness; Sociology

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