

# Chapter 6

## Two Concepts of Order: An Essay on Harmony and Order versus Spontaneity and Revolt in Western Thought

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Every human group faces the problem of how to reconcile the tension between, on the one hand, the requirement of public order and the need for a coordinated and cooperative life in common with others and, on the other, the expression of individual needs, desires, and freedoms, which may sometimes conflict with each other. The Western philosophical tradition has typically conceptualized this tension as one between the collective goal of political order and the individual value of freedom as “negative liberty,” which may or may not support a right of revolt against an order perceived as unjust.

The point of this essay is to explore a set of moments or conceptual breakthroughs within this Western tradition that demonstrate one way of partially resolving the tension. In this paper I am thus interested in exploring the concepts of order and harmony versus spontaneity and revolt from within the Western tradition, with which I am most familiar, in an effort to start a dialogue between two apparently different—some would say incommensurate—philosophical worldviews. I will take the contrasts and nuanced relationships between these four concepts as the starting point of a larger reflection about the difficulty of conceptualizing social life as harmonious without silencing individual voices or blocking the possibility of change.<sup>169</sup> I will more specifically attempt to identify moments in Western thought that have allowed for a transformation in the Western understanding of political

order and social harmony, from one that implies the rigid control of individual spontaneity and the impossibility of revolt to a modern (liberal and democratic) concept of order that encourages spontaneity, feeds on it to a degree, and attempts to institutionalize revolt such that it stabilizes rather than upsets the system. My hope is to offer a clear picture of the Western conceptual solution to what is, in many respects, a universal problem and to do so in terms accessible to both the Western and Eastern traditions. Hopefully this picture will be useful in helping to identify a comparable solution, or a contrasting one, in the Eastern tradition. From there, the possibilities are endless. They include, among others, a comparative approach to both worldviews, drawing out clear parallels between various authors and schools from both traditions, or perhaps the “invention” of new paradigms within Western and Eastern philosophies on the basis on insights borrowed from one another.

Let me begin by emphasizing a particular contrast that needs explanation. Arguably, most premodern Western philosophers—from Plato to the late medieval thinkers—embraced the identification of political order with both a socially harmonious whole and a rather rigid hierarchical organization. The whole was harmonious to the extent that the parts in it—different groups of people—played their roles, and only their roles, in a relatively unchanging hierarchy. At the top of that hierarchy were the rulers, whether kings, masters, or lords. At the bottom were the ruled—producers, peasants, and the lowest of the low, slaves and serfs. Somewhere in the middle were the intermediary categories of the military and the clergy. This ideal of order offered, in theory at least, very little room for individual freedom as we today conceive of it, let alone the possibility of revolt.

In practice, of course, things were not as tidy. Aristotle observed (and deplored) the natural entropy that makes order turn into disorder and well-functioning regimes become corrupted over time. Further, even the most perfectly implemented, rigid order must have had to deal with the inevitable minor and less minor rebellions of individuals resisting the system. Nonetheless, it is generally acknowledged by historians and political theorists, such as Benjamin Constant, that the “liberty of the Ancients”—the liberty of citizens in republican, precommercial states, usually at war with one another—was the liberty of individuals as citizens, not so much the “modern liberty” of individuals as private individuals. Such liberty found its expression in the fulfillment of an impersonal duty, not in the satisfaction of idiosyncratic preferences or the pursuit of spontaneous desires. In the ideal governing the ancient world, therefore, not only was individual spontaneity very much controlled, but each class was assigned a function. Being born in a class was, in theory at least, a life sentence to fulfilling that function and no more (and no less). That’s because the possibility of rebelling against such an order—the possibility of deviation, change, and indeed revolt—was not built in the ideal.<sup>170</sup>

Today, by contrast, in the Western world, dissenters, conscientious objectors, norm breakers of all kinds are not only tolerated; they are celebrated. Modern liberal societies value dissent, for the most part as a source of social energy and

creativity. The expression of individual spontaneity and disagreement is seen (again at least up to a point and within limits) not as a social disease threatening the life of the body politic but as a vaccine that will make it stronger. Artists—the norm breakers par excellence—are thus sometimes as influential these days as some heads of state (think Hollywood actors and rock stars). As to revolt, it has now been elevated to a James Dean attitude, by which anything from haircuts to slogans on T-shirts can count not just as an expression of individuality but as a form of rebellion against the system. Perhaps as a result, because liberal societies offer so many outlets for feelings of frustration and anger and for expressions of dissent and difference, actual outbursts of violence are fairly rare—not because of the repression that would ensue but because things do not need to get so out of hand for things to change. What liberal societies have, occasionally, are public demonstrations. Those, however, are not meant to overthrow the whole political order but merely to shake it, let off some steam, and induce internal reforms.

How did the West move from one worldview to the other? Has the East made that move, and if so, how does it compare to the Western transition? Is there anything one side can learn from the other?<sup>171</sup> I will limit myself here to answering the first question by pinpointing two key breakthroughs in the history of Western thought: first, the initial reconciliation of order and spontaneity within the social contract tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which replaced the priority of the collective with the priority of the individual; and second, the linkage between order and harmony, on the one hand, and free discussion, deliberation, and unregulated spontaneity, on the other. Though the first attempt at reconciling order and harmony with spontaneity and revolt would turn out to be unstable and unsatisfying, for reasons I discuss below, social contract theorists like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau made it possible to conceptualize spontaneity, freedom, and even revolt as legitimate elements of a theory of political order, and conversely they put the burden of proof—the need for justification—on any form of political, institutionalized order. Eventually, this opened up the necessary space for thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—beginning with John Stuart Mill, followed by pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and economist Friedrich Hayek—to develop a more nuanced account of the relationship between social harmony and individual spontaneity. As I will show, out of Mill's famous defense of freedom of thought and expression and his argument for representative government as "government by discussion" come Dewey's portrait of democracy as social inquiry, in which truth and harmony depend on deliberation between heterogeneous views, and Hayek's model of self-organizing spontaneous orders, exemplified in the market. I will argue that these two branches stemming from Mill are not only the culmination of the liberal tradition opened up by the social contract theorists but also represent the great achievements of modern Western thought.<sup>172</sup>

The first part of this paper offers some general reflections about the concepts of order and harmony versus spontaneity and revolt as interpreted within Western

thought, drawing out some of the more obvious contrasts and oppositions. The second part traces the first major breakthrough in reconciling these opposite elements to the social contract theorists, who develop the idea of a political order as first and foremost a guarantee for individual liberties. The third part connects the Deweyan tradition of deliberative democracy and the Hayekian defense of spontaneous orders to Mill's arguments about liberty and government by discussion.

## A FEW REFLECTIONS ON THE DUALISM HARMONY AND ORDER VERSUS SPONTANEITY AND REVOLT

I suggested in the introduction that the contrast between harmony and order on the one hand and spontaneity and revolt on the other was political, comparable to the classical Western opposition between law and freedom, positive and negative liberty, or even law and justice. Neither harmony nor spontaneity, however, are political concepts per se. *Harmony*, which means “agreement” and “concord” in ancient Greek, is first and foremost a musical and, more broadly, an aesthetic concept, characterizing a certain combination of elements—notes, colors, dimensions—that induces a pleasing feeling in the observer.

Applied to the political world, *harmony* suggests a polity in which different classes live in peace with each other and agree on the ends of the community and in which a sense of respect and civility permeates social interactions. Plato's ideal republic is the paradigm of such a social order. For Plato, the most harmonious polity was that in which philosopher-kings ruled, whereas the most disharmonious and unhealthy polity was a democracy, where all sense of hierarchy was lost, resulting in a regime characterized by a cacophony of desires, which he also compares to a costume of jarring colors.<sup>173</sup>

The concept of spontaneity is not directly opposed to those of order and harmony, but it has a clearly upsetting potential for them. Whereas order and harmony belong to the world of culture, spontaneity characterizes the self-generating elements of nature, like the blooming of a flower or the unconstrained manners of a child. Spontaneity more generally characterizes anything that does not require application, planning, and labor.<sup>174</sup> The closest political concept with which spontaneity can probably be associated is that of negative liberty—or “freedom from” any form of constraints, particularly those imposed by society.

Harmony and spontaneity can be at odds. Harmony is itself a kind of order, and like order it is a relational concept that evokes an arrangement between parts (tunes or proportions). Harmony is to spontaneity what the music of Rameau or Bach is to the improvisations of a jazz band. Yet while there may be something disturbing about the unpredictability of jazz, the disharmony need not be grating. The spontaneity can be playful, agreeably surprising, exciting.

Unlike “harmony and spontaneity,” the conceptual couple “order and revolt” is, I believe, explicitly Western, political, resolutely antithetical, and much grimmer overall.<sup>175</sup> There exist many definitions of the concept of order, but for our purposes the following ones will suffice. Order can be:

1. A condition of methodical or prescribed arrangement among component parts such that proper functioning or appearance is achieved
2. The established system of social organization
3. A sequence or arrangement of successive things
4. The prescribed form or customary procedure<sup>176</sup>

The common point of these definitions is to emphasize a static, sometimes preexisting arrangement of component parts that guarantees the proper functioning or appearance of the whole. This order can be an object, a time sequence, a form, or a procedure. While it shares with the concept of harmony the idea of a whole organized according to certain rules, order is far from a musical notion. Rather, order evokes the austerity of law and justice. It also has the threatening face of those who guarantee that order: the army, the police, judges.

Spontaneity and revolt, by contrast, suggest life, chaos, and disruption. Revolt in particular screams the threat of revolution and even anarchy—better no order than that order. Thus revolt is a more menacing concept and more antagonistic to the idea of order, even when it actually paves the way for, and demands, a new kind of order. On the other hand, whereas revolt is a temporary aberration, a moment of violence that is not sustainable in the long term, spontaneity is consubstantial to any form of life and cannot be eradicated without eradicating life itself. Spontaneity is a repetition, where revolt is a transition. Revolt need not be fatal for any existing order. Spontaneity is something that must be accommodated in some form or another.

So far we have associated order with a form of political or social organization and opposed it to individual spontaneity, thus suggesting a broader opposition between nature and culture or nature and human organization. One of the great discoveries of the social sciences, however, is that not all human orders are artificial and intentional and that many orders can be characterized, however paradoxical this may sound, as “spontaneous.” Nature contains many orders that have not been planned or designed, such as crystals or the ways in which irons fall within a magnetic field. Human orders themselves, such as the family, the clan, the market, need not be the deliberate design of anyone in particular. They are rather the unplanned result of human interactions that, over time, have ended up crystallizing in certain predictable patterns, which one may call laws (in the sense of common law, not positive law) or norms. These laws and norms may be crushing for the individual, such as the norm of genital mutilation or honor killing; alternatively they may be enabling, such as the laws and norms of the market. An

order need not be an organization—that is, an arrangement planned by anyone in particular—to deserve the name; rather, to be an order, it must allow for a certain amount of predictability. We will see in section three of this paper how Hayek uses this discovery to conceptualize a new kind of human order. At this point, it is enough to observe that there is more than one way to conceptualize the relationship between order and harmony on the one hand, and spontaneity and revolt on the other.

Now that we have drawn the most obvious similarities and oppositions between these concepts, we can formulate the political question that underlies them: How do we create a social world characterized by harmonious relationships—not just between rulers and ruled but among the ruled themselves—without crushing spontaneity and creativity? Can we create the conditions for that harmonious order to evolve over time without breaking apart? In short, can there be any form of harmonious order that is not oppressive and repressive to individual spontaneity?<sup>177</sup>

I will now focus on the first moment of transition in Western thought that made it possible to think of spontaneity and revolt together with order and harmony. This first moment, I argue, is to be found in the writings of the social contract theorists, expressed as an attempt to confront the duality of (positive) law and (negative) freedom.

## THE SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY MOMENT

The philosophical break in Western thought that allowed for thinking beyond the radical opposition between political justice as harmonious order and individual freedom as lawless license occurred with social contract theory. Social contract theorists were aware of the contradiction between order and liberty, and they strove to offer a conceptual reconciliation balancing the two.

Social contract theorists started from the premise that social orders are for the sake of individuals and not the other way around. They rejected the Aristotelian view of man as a political animal and posited instead natural individual rights; political communities thus are artificial constructs into which human beings enter only by (tacit or explicit) consent. With this conceptual revolution under way, it became necessary to carve out a space in theories of political authority for individual freedom and even the possibility of revolt.

From that perspective, social contract theorists marked a radical departure from the ancient world by shifting the burden of proof onto all existing political authorities. They asked the question: What makes this political order legitimate? Their answer was that a given, *de facto* political authority is legitimate only to the extent that it stems from the consent of the subjects and fulfills the function for which it was created in the first place: at minimum, preserving citizens from the threat of violent death, as in Hobbes; at best, implementing the general will, as in Rousseau; and, somewhere in between, safeguarding subjects' property (including

their lives), as in Locke. For the social contract theorists, political order was now for the sake of individuals, not the other way around.

Once political authority is legitimized, however—once the social contract has been entered—the degree to which political authority is supposed to make room for individual freedom, spontaneity, and even revolt can vary quite drastically. In Hobbes, for example, the Leviathan provides a stable order, for the sake of which individuals at war with each other in a chaotic state of nature surrender their natural rights and liberties, including the right to render justice themselves.<sup>178</sup> What Hobbesian individuals lose in natural freedom—the spontaneity to do whatever pleases them, including killing others—they gain in civil freedom, which is the liberty to do what the law does not forbid. This liberty can be, in fact, fairly extensive. The problem is that nothing protects subjects from the occasional arbitrariness of the sovereign. Because the law is reduced to its most positive expression—justice is what the sovereign says it is—there is no appeal beyond it. Because there is no justice but what the sovereign speaks, it is impossible to denounce as unjust the commands of a ruler, even a despotic, arbitrary one.<sup>179</sup> In other words, if the sovereign decides that the life, liberty, or property of a citizen needs to be taken to serve some interests of the state (provided this is genuinely an interest of the state that can be justified in rational terms and that conforms to the laws of nature), he is entitled to them all.<sup>180</sup> In Hobbes, therefore, room for spontaneity is precarious. In any case, it certainly does not include the right of revolt. Revolt would be indeed tantamount to reclaiming the right to render justice yourself, which was surrendered in the social contract. In truth, the only right that individuals retain under Leviathan is a right to flee from their executioners, or at least the right to try to do so and not to be punished for trying.<sup>181</sup>

In Locke, the situation is less dire because the social contract is not based primarily on the fear of violent death but on a desire to avoid the “inconveniencies” of an otherwise relatively peaceful state of nature.<sup>182</sup> As in Hobbes, the government is legitimate to the extent that it has elicited the tacit, if not explicit consent of the governed. But unlike Hobbes, Locke acknowledges that even an initially legitimate government can ossify into a tyranny and turn lethal to the individual rights it was meant to secure. One particularly sacred limit is the property of subjects. While the government is entitled to send soldiers to a certain death,<sup>183</sup> nothing can justify taking a penny from any subject without his consent.<sup>184</sup> The Lockean view of the political order is not that it secures life only, as in Hobbes, but that it creates the condition for the safe enjoyment of one’s property. In that respect any arbitrary act on the part of the government violates the social contract and entitles individuals to rebel against the government authority. Individuals retain this right unconditionally because, unlike for Hobbes, subjects do not abdicate their judgment of justice to the sovereign. They are entitled to interpret the laws of nature in their own ways, and no one but God can say if they’ve interpreted them rightly or wrongly. That said, Locke also acknowledged that if the violation does

not amount to a series of offenses, individuals are more likely to make a mistake in their assessment of injustice. So in practice for Locke, the right to overthrow the government arises only in cases where the people had to suffer “a long train of abuses, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way.”<sup>185</sup>

In Rousseau, the reconciliation between order and freedom is ensured by definitional fiat. In Rousseau’s view, the general will is said to be oriented toward the common good, and thus it cannot err. Whatever it wills, citizens ought to will it too. Consequently, coercion of all according to that general will is not coercion of any one.<sup>186</sup> Civil freedom is not just what one is at liberty to do in the silence of the law, as in Hobbes; it is obedience to that very law. Freedom is “positive” in Isaiah Berlin’s sense of the term:<sup>187</sup> it is an empowerment of the individual through the political order and his status as a citizen. In Rousseau, there is no contradiction between order and freedom, as they are simply two sides of the same coin. The practical implications of this highly abstract understanding of individual freedom in the political order are potentially worrying, as many commentators have pointed out. In fact, it can be said that Rousseau in some respects marks less a step toward modern liberalism than a full step backward toward the liberty of the ancients—that is, a step back toward a conception of social harmony that left very little room for individual spontaneity.<sup>188</sup>

Regardless of the nuances between all three authors, the common point is that order—political and social—is no longer the first and foremost value, as it arguably was in the ancient world. Even for Hobbes, the defender of the most absolute version of political authority, the political and social order is both chronologically and logically secondary to individuals’ natural rights and freedoms. Conversely, the focus on individual rights brought by social contract theorists makes room for the possibility of individual spontaneity—in the guise of negative freedom or freedom from restraint—and even, to a degree, the possibility of revolt. The role of spontaneity as freedom of the individual is perhaps more ambiguous in Rousseau, but even he acknowledges the central primacy of individual rights. With all these thinkers, therefore, individual freedom and the social-political order are reconciled by making the political order a means to the end of a more stable, safer form of freedom, which can be enjoyed only in a polity—namely in political freedom. This freedom is bound by laws, but it is also protected and enabled by them. In other words, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau (as well as others not considered here) allowed Western philosophy to conceptualize the reconciliation between the collective goal of public order and fundamental individual rights and freedoms by founding the former on the latter.

None of the social contract theorists, however, provide a complete and truly satisfying answer to our problem—for two reasons. First, because their views represent an outright rejection of the holistic approaches of ancient philosophy, these thinkers have little to say about the ideal of a harmonious community, which just isn’t their concern. In fact, with them the idea of an entire community



flourishing drops entirely from view. Second, and quite paradoxically, despite their emphasis on the primacy of individual rights, social contract theorists end up justifying a rationalistic political order that is fairly constraining of individual freedoms. Freedom as spontaneity is either to be enjoyed in the silence of the law (in Hobbes and Locke) or exchanged for the “positive freedom” of the citizen, which is arguably much less spontaneous and, according to some commentators (for example, Isaiah Berlin), not really freedom at all. Furthermore, because entering the social contract is an act of reason and the outcome of unanimous consent, these authors can conceptualize only the possibility of an order that is the rational and planned result of individuals’ conscious intentions. For an alternative model, which makes room for the possibility of order as a by-product of unconstrained spontaneities, we need to jump forward to the classical liberalism of John Stuart Mill. Mill celebrates both government by discussion (what we now call deliberative democracy) and a free market of ideas as the background for it. John Dewey and Friedrich Hayek will later develop each of these ideals in complementary ways, or so I will argue.

## ORDER AND SPONTANEITY IN LATER LIBERAL AND DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT

John Stuart Mill is an indirect heir of the proto-liberal theories of Hobbes and Locke (much less those of Rousseau). Yet, unlike those authors, as a more direct heir of Bentham’s utilitarianism, he rejects the natural law tradition and particularly the idea of natural rights (whether rooted in nature or God). Mill to a degree reconciles the holistic perspective of the ancient world, for which the good of the community forms the primary standard of the good of individuals, with a liberalism of individual rights as instrumental to this common good. For Mill, the main argument for liberty as negative freedom—what I have identified here with spontaneity—is that it is essential to social utility. Finally, Mill combines this defense of individual freedom as conducive to social utility with a defense of government by discussion, which forecasts the contemporary paradigm of deliberative democracy.<sup>189</sup>

As far as the role of freedom in his philosophy is concerned, Mill brings us closer to a full reconciliation of order and harmony with individual spontaneity in two ways. First, he points out that the problem that preoccupied early liberal thinkers—that of the proper limits of government—does not disappear when the sovereign is the people themselves. On the contrary, there is something more subtly pernicious in the kind of tyranny that a majority can exercise on individuals compared with the obvious despotism of a king or an aristocracy. Modern representative governments are supposed to rule for the sake of all and are designed to maximize the chances that they do so (through periodic elections and other accountability mechanisms); this does not, however, mean that individual freedom is safe. From this point

of view, Rousseau was wrong in thinking that the general will can never err and that it can remain sufficiently general. On the contrary, says Mill, who rehearses here an insight from Tocqueville, the problem of the democratic age is to protect individual freedoms from the people themselves, or their representatives. In this sense, Mill's definition of the harm principle—that the government is only justified in limiting individuals' freedom when our actions can harm others<sup>190</sup>—extends the social contract theorists' problematic to the democratic age.

The other way Mill contributes to our problem is by making the case that these individual freedoms are actually instrumental to the social good. In this respect Mill entirely breaks from the social contract theorists. To make the case that individual freedoms are conducive to the greater good, Mill asks us to take a diachronic, long-term perspective on the interests of man. In *On Liberty*, he argues that allowing individuals to pursue their own definition of the good life and to express their views freely in the public sphere—no matter how improper, unconventional, or disturbing those views may be—is necessary to the discovery or rediscovery of truth. In his famous argument against the legitimacy of silencing one dissenter, Mill writes, “The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.”<sup>191</sup> In other words, for Mill, freedom of expression—an outlet for spontaneity—is instrumental to the pursuit of truth. What is left unsaid in this passage, but undergirds the rest of the book, is the belief that the discovery and rediscovery of truths of all kinds are always good things overall—things that mesh with public utility and are in fact partly constitutive of social utility. To the extent that social utility includes sociopolitical order and harmony, therefore, spontaneity becomes instrumental because it tempers the risk of ossification through the rejuvenating effect of dissent, differences, even mistakes.

Importantly, Mill conceptualizes social utility as social progress, something dynamic, oriented toward the future and the discovery of new truths or the reactivation of old ones. A social order is for Mill, in essence, always first and foremost an orderly disorder, or at least an evolving one. One could say that Mill advocates for individual spontaneity at the cost of some social harmony (since he celebrates eccentrics and norm breakers) for the long-term sake of a dynamic, healthy social order. Mill thus helps us think of political and social orders as no longer static but dynamic, in flux, and involving some degree of conflict, dissent, chaos, and therefore dissonance.<sup>192</sup>

Although Mill mostly believes that truth is best pursued by many different people in the sphere of public opinion, he also endorses representative government as government by discussion, thus suggesting that truth could also be reached through rational exchanges of arguments, not just the chaotic free flow of ideas of a liberal

society. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, for example, and in spite of the title, Mill seems to have in mind the Greek ideal of public discussion among citizens (not their representatives). We thus also find in Mill the premises of what is now called deliberative democracy. To see each branch of Mill's thought come to fruition, however, we are better off turning to two very different authors. First, the American pragmatist John Dewey develops a fuller picture of democracy as a social inquiry—that is, as a quest for truth conducted not just through the deliberations of a government but those involving the entire citizenry. Second, for the idea that truth sometimes better comes about as a by-product of the interplay between freely flowing ideas, we need to turn to the economist Friedrich Hayek.

Unlike what Mill suggests (and Hayek later provides foundations for), Dewey does not think that truth can triumph simply through the disorderly clash of dissenting opinions in the market of ideas. For him truth involves consonance and, indeed, a certain degree of rational harmony. It should be pursued through political means, by discussion among an informed and self-aware public. Whereas Mill writes from the liberal point of view, Dewey is concerned with the mode of government and how this mode of government can tap the intelligence of the public, past and present.<sup>193</sup>

Dewey writes in the age of mass democracy and a largely absentee public—the “phantom public” denounced by his contemporary Walter Lippmann.<sup>194</sup> In *The Public and Its Problems*,<sup>195</sup> Dewey attempts, among other things, to resist an antidemocratic current according to which democracy is merely a transitory phase and government in the end is always a matter of “experts.” To counter that claim, Dewey goes back to an argument in favor of democracy that he finds in Tocqueville, according to which the main strength of democracy is that it involves “a consultation and a discussion which uncovers social needs and troubles,” “forces a recognition that there are common interests, even though the recognition of what they are is confused,” and “brings about some clarification of what they are.”<sup>196</sup> From this point of view, for Dewey, the main value of majority rule lies in what precedes it: “antecedent debates, modification of views to meet the opinions of minorities, and the relative satisfaction given the latter by the fact that it has had a chance and that next time it may be successful in becoming a majority.”<sup>197</sup> Even though Dewey acknowledges the role of minorities—since “all valuable as well as new ideas begin with minorities,” even “a minority of one”—he also stresses that “opportunity should be given to that idea to spread and to become the possession of the multitude.”<sup>198</sup> In other words, even if it is true that there are only a few people with valuable insights, the value of their ideas can come to fruition only when they manage to convince the rest of their fellow citizens that they are right.<sup>199</sup>

The argument in Dewey can be rephrased as follows: democracy fosters discussion, which clarifies the nature of preexisting common interests and goals. In the age of mass democracy and the machine, Dewey thought we ought to return to an ideal of face-to-face deliberation because,<sup>200</sup> aside from the educational

effect of talking to one another (also noted by Mill), truth can triumph only when everyone ultimately becomes convinced of the superior view through what is best described by Habermas as “the forceless force of the better argument.”<sup>201</sup> In other words, whereas Mill celebrates the chaos of the market of ideas and does not focus on the active search for a consensus at any given time, Dewey invites us to look for a domain of shared views through a rational and deliberative exchange of arguments. One could say that for Dewey more than for Mill, a certain harmony of views is necessary to a well-functioning democracy. Importantly, however, and just like for Mill, the content of “truth” and the corresponding consensus are likely to change over time. Thus, while he requires moments of agreement, Dewey, as a coherent pragmatist, thinks that truth is in fact a form of opinion, mutable in nature and context dependent.<sup>202</sup> Social harmony is required for Dewey, but it cannot be a rigid tune.

An essential condition for the public to come to its senses and form the Great Democratic Community is, for Dewey, the communication of ideas rendered possible by art. “Democracy . . . has its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.”<sup>203</sup> Like Mill in a way, Dewey advocates as a crucial condition of an effective democracy (or a “representative government,” in Mill’s terms) the existence of a dynamic and spontaneous civil society where the arts in particular are flourishing. Yet, where Mill thinks that true knowledge is bound to emerge out of the chaos of a “market of ideas” and thus recommends a liberal principle of *laissez-faire* in the sphere of ideas, Dewey accompanies his liberal recommendations with a voluntaristic program of education policies. The government, he believes, has to inculcate in its citizens if not a specific content then at least the principles of an inquiring mind and the technical skills that go with it—for example the ability to think for oneself and to defend one’s views in public. One reason for the eclipse of the public diagnosed by Dewey is the incapacity of scattered individuals to find, identify, and even express themselves as a community united by a common purpose and sense of shared destiny. True democracy could be realized, Dewey reasons, if and only if people develop the skills that make them able to take advantage of their right to political participation. Whereas a certain degree of social harmony is sacrificed in Mill for the sake of truth, it is actually to be reactivated and rationally sought in Dewey. This is not to say that the two authors’ views are incompatible—far from it. One could argue that Mill’s market of ideas is the idea incubator for a sound and productive democratic debate among citizens. Conversely, the collective and intentional search for consensus helps acknowledge and temporarily crystallize some of the truths that bubble up from Mill’s market of ideas.

Friedrich Hayek takes Mill’s intuition about the epistemic properties of a free market of ideas to new heights. Hayek’s views supplement Mill’s in part because they offer an answer to the question: What should we seek a consensus—that is, harmony—about? What should we simply leave out of political debates? What,

in other words, should be left entirely to individual freedom? The crucial part of Hayek's answer is not so much the specific reply to this question (economic transactions<sup>204</sup>) but rather his rediscovery of the distinction between two types of order: order that can be achieved through intentional, rational planning and order that is "spontaneous," by which he means "self-organizing" rather than natural. The first type of order he calls taxis; the other, cosmos. It is only with the first kind of order, which involves some constraints on individual spontaneity, that harmony can be intentionally sought. In self-organizing orders, however, spontaneity should be given free rein because harmony can be only its indirect by-product and not the result of a direct intervention. As a result of this rediscovery, Hayek famously offers a new definition of order that encompasses both rational and spontaneous types. An order for Hayek is thus "a state of affair in which a multiplicity of elements of various kinds are so related to each other that we may learn from our acquaintance with some spatial or temporal part of the whole to form correct expectations concerning the rest, or at least expectations which have a good chance of proving correct."<sup>205</sup> Hayek was writing against contemporary socialistic conceptions that intended to replace the spontaneous order of the market with the purely rationalistic one of political decision making. Such a confusion of orders—the merging of political and economic orders by having all decisions related to the latter, from production levels to prices, made by the former—is, for Hayek, both impractical and dangerous.

A rationalistic (socialist or otherwise) approach to economics is impractical in Hayek's view because it presupposes, on the part of the central agency in charge of implementing the politically designed economic order, more computing capacities than could possibly be gathered at one time in even the best minds of the best governmental teams. The impossibility of performing the calculus of the right economic order—that is, setting the price of consumer goods, the level of workers' wages, levels of production, and other economic parameters to create a well-functioning whole—is due to two things for Hayek. One is the sheer enormity of the amount of information to be processed; the other is the fact that, even assuming full information at a given time, the order is constantly evolving in such unpredictable ways that human planning simply cannot ever catch up with it. Or, to put it another way, there is no economic order outside of the actual transactions of free individuals.<sup>206</sup> This double complexity is why, according to Hayek, it is better to let that infinitely complex calculus be performed at every instant by the unthinking mechanism of the market.<sup>207</sup>

Such a man-made order is unable to deal with the infinite complexities of human interactions and thus risks impoverishing them by too much regulation. But it is also easily threatened by manifestations of dissent, which pave the way toward more and more control and toward the transformation of the government into an authoritarian and potentially totalitarian organization. In that sense, the socialistic order Hayek was fighting against shares traits with the ancient order

that characterizes, for example, Plato's aspirations for a just republic (except for the class distinction). Socialism seeks to implement an egalitarian society in highly rigid, controlled ways that ultimately sacrifice individual spontaneity to the collective goal of social harmony.

In light of the complexity and emerging nature of the economic order, and the dangers of trying to design and control it, Hayek thought it best to keep the interactions of individuals in the economic sphere as free from rationalistic intervention as possible. Of course, the extent of the "possible" here is bound to remain a matter of controversy. One may agree with Hayek's view of the market as a spontaneous order (as I think one should) and yet disagree with the extent to which it could be corrected by rational decisions. The debate crucially depends on empirical claims about the imperfections of actual markets and how rational intervention—political regulations—can help fix them. But the original insight remains powerful and I believe true: In some domains of human life, including economic interactions, order and harmony are best attained as the result of horizontal and free-flowing individual spontaneities rather than a rational order imposed from the top down, even one that is the result of democratic and open-ended deliberations.

What Hayek brings to the table, therefore, is a conceptualization of order as dynamic, self-organizing, and constantly self-rearranging. It is, in a way, a horizontal concept of order, by contrast with the hierarchical, vertical concept of the ancients and even of the social contract theorists.

## CONCLUSION

We started by noting the obvious tension between the concepts of order and harmony on the one hand and those of spontaneity and revolt on the other. This brief journey through moments of Western thought shows that the tension can be partially resolved, although usually by leaving one term outside of the equation. We saw that the social contract theory reconciled political order and spontaneity, in the guise of negative freedom, by making political order an instrument for the preservation of some degree of negative freedom. The theory also, in its Lockean version at least, made room for the possibility of revolt and political change. The reality of social contract orders, however, was to privatize spontaneity by rendering it possible only in the silence of the law. As to revolt, it was the necessary counterpart of a political order so rigid as not to allow for easy change. With the rise of representative governments, the political order becomes more flexible and responsive to social changes. The problematic of John Stuart Mill becomes that of integrating individual spontaneity with the social order by showing how it is instrumental to human progress. The notion of a rigid, hierarchical political and social order gives way to a more flexible, dynamic kind of order, where harmony is no longer the primary value. Society becomes a space where individuals should be

encouraged to express themselves for the benefit of all, even when they clash against established norms. Within that liberal order, Dewey and Hayek help us refine that new concept of order. Dewey reintroduces the possibility of harmony with the search for a deliberative consensus that feeds off the collective search for truth. Hayek suggests that in some domains of human affairs, particularly economics, society is better off letting individual spontaneities play out and produce their own unpredictable harmony. Among these more recent thinkers, the concept of revolt is largely absent, because in their more organic view of social order, there should be no need for violent disruptions. Revolt is civilized by Mill into demonstration, protests, civil disobedience, petitions, or simply a minority vote. In Dewey it can be more efficiently expressed as disagreement in the collective discussion. In Hayek's view of the economic order, revolt has no place at all.

Each of these three thinkers, it can be argued, has conceptualized the relationship between social or collective order and individual freedom and spontaneity with respect to specific tenets of modern Western ideology: liberalism, democracy, and the free market. All three authors give us a story about how to reconcile the tension between the stability and predictability wanted in an orderly whole and the disruption and unpredictability inevitably brought by individual spontaneities. What is interesting is that in all three models—the Millian order of a liberal society, the Deweyan order of a democratic society, and the Hayekian order of a free market—individual spontaneity is not meant to be tamed, reduced, or formatted, except under specific circumstances. It is instead encouraged, cultivated, or more neutrally harnessed. What gets sacrificed, perhaps, is a certain type of order and the static harmony that goes with it. Order, for those thinkers, comes as a flux of contradictions and disagreements that resolve just in time to be reborn in a different form. From an individual perspective, this may give an impression of disorganization and chaos, yet it is an order arguably more stable and resilient over the long term than the static and surprisingly brittle orders of the ancient world or even the rationalistic order of the social contracts. It takes perspective and time to learn to appreciate the unplanned regularities in the apparent chaos of liberal societies, democratic public opinion, and the free market—a bit like learning to appreciate contemporary music and free jazz's violation of harmony in favor of a new kind of free and spontaneous musical order.