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# Order: A Conceptual Analysis

**Shiping Tang**[1]

**Abstract** Order is one of those terms that have been much talked about but never rigorously defined. After a critical survey of existing definitions of order, I propose a more rigorous definition of order. I then develop a framework for measuring and comparing order. I go on to show that without a rigorous definition of order and a proper framework for measuring and comparing order, a central debate regarding order has committed the error of conceptual conflation. Finally, I illustrate the value of the new framework with Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* as a masterpiece on the forging of order.

**Keywords** Order · Definition · Measurement

## 1 Introduction

The problem of (sociopolitical) order has been an enduring and fundamental question in social sciences, deeply ingrained into our thoughts since ancient China and ancient Greece.[1] In a non-trivial sense, social sciences have always been a science about order (Parsons 1937, 89–94; Wrong 1994).

Unfortunately, order has been one of those terms that have been much talked about but never rigorously defined, not to mention measured. Most students of order have been interested in how order is forged and maintained, how order changes and evolves, and how order shapes individuals: Defining order has never been their key

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[1] By "order" as a noun, I mean social-political order, and nothing else. There should be no difference between political order and social order: all social orders are products of politics, thus political.

✉ Shiping Tang
  twukong@fudan.edu.cn; twukong@yahoo.com

[1] School of International Relations and Public Affairs (SIRPA), Fudan University, Shanghai, China

concern. Not surprisingly, the relationship between order and many concepts that are related to or connected with it such as authority, power, freedom, legitimacy, and justice remains unclear.[2] Worse, without a rigorous definition of order, much of our discourse, including some of the most prominent treatises on power, freedom, legitimacy, and justice, can only be somewhat muddled. The stakes of getting order right is thus self-evidently high.

This article offers a conceptual analysis of order. Not only do I propose a definition of order and a framework for measuring and hence comparing order, I also address several key terms and issues that are closely connected with order.

The rest of the article unfolds as follows. Section 2 provides a critical, although brief, survey of existing definitions of order. Section 3 then proposes a more rigorous definition of order and differentiates order from several key terms that are closely connected with order. Section 4 proposes a framework for measuring and comparing order. Section 5 addresses peacefulness, stability, change, and sources of change and stability, terms we are most interested in when we discuss order. Section 6 underscores that a central debate on order has committed the error of conceptual conflation, partly due to the lack of a rigorous definition of order. Section 7 illustrates the value of our new framework with Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* as a masterpiece on the forging and maintaining of order. A brief conclusion follows.

## 2 A Critique of Existing Definitions

Concept is the foundation for any science. According to Goertz (2006, esp. chap. 2), as a minimum, a concept must be explicit at three levels: basic, demarcation, and operational. At the basic level, a concept must capture the core nature of the object to be defined. At the level of demarcation, a concept must differentiate its object from other related or easily confused objects. At the operational level, a concept must be made operable for measuring, however crudely: a concept that is not operable for measuring is of little empirical utility. For a definition, the operational level is optional but the first two levels are mandatory. According to such criterion, no adequate definition of order exists, despite the enormous amount of ink spilled over it. Worse, as becomes clear below, because order contains a normative level, it is a complex concept with more than three levels.

The problem of order has been dubbed the Hobbesian problem (Parsons 1937). Thus, one would expect Hobbes (1651 [1985]) to have given order its first definition. Yet, Hobbes had mostly deliberated on why a community needs order and what order demands from the sovereign and its subjects, and a definition of order is nowhere to be found in his oeuvre.[3]

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[2] Each of these terms may require a separate treatment. Here, I can only briefly touch upon the relationship between order and these terms when appropriate. For my detailed discussion on power, see Tang (2013b).

[3] Unsurprisingly, discussion of order without naming it does not do better. For instance, despite situating his discussion of power within the discourse on order, Haugaard (1997, 124) stated that "social order as a whole is the totality of untidy overlapping systems".

Both Durkheim and Weber talked mostly about the source of order, how an order can be established, and types of order. For Durkheim (1893 [1984]), "mechanistic solidarity" and "organic solidarity" depict two ideal types of social order and thus two kinds of societies. For Weber (1978, 50–51), the key question is whether order is "by voluntary agreement or being imposed and acquiesced." For all his extensive discussion on order and other related concepts such as power, authority, domination, legitimation, and legitimacy, Weber was mostly interested in categorizing order and how different types of order come to exist and persist. He never provided an explicit definition of order at the basic level.

Parsons (1937, 89–94) identified the "problem of order" as the fundamental problem of social sciences. Indeed, Parsons' whole corpus can be understood as a sustained engagement with the problem of order. Thus, one would also expect Parsons to have provided us with a rigorous definition of order. Unfortunately, Parsons (1937, 91–2) went straight to differentiating "factual order" from "normative order"—the kind of order he favored—without defining order even in the minimal sense. Giddens (1979, 1984), whose structuration theory is essentially about the reproduction and transformation of order, also never bothered to define order other than noting order should be "a loose synonym for 'pattern' or the antithesis of 'chaos'." (Giddens 1976 [1993], 105–6).

Indeed, even treatises with "order" in their titles do not bother to define order rigorously. Huntington merely contrasted order against "violence, instability, and disorder." (1968, 1) Likewise, despite surveying a diverse literature on order from various civilizations, Harle (1998, ix) simply contrasted order against "chaos" and "nothingness". Similarly, North et al. (2009, esp. 13–18) only noted three possible components of order: (organized) violence, institutions, and organizations. More recently, in his two massive volumes on order, Fukuyama (2011, 2014) too offered no rigorous definition of order. Finally, in a volume ostentatiously titled *The Problem of Order*, Dennis Wrong too failed to define order.

Of course, some definitions of order do exist. A commonly held and yet misleading definition of order is that order is patterns of behavior. In international politics, Hedley Bull defined (international) order as "a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society." (1977, 8, 16–21) Similarly, Elster (1989, 1–2) discussed two notions of social order as "that of stable, regular, predictable patterns of behavior" and "that of cooperative behavior".

This definition of order as behavior or regular patterns of behavior, whether cooperative or conflictual, however, is seriously flawed. *Certainly, although rules within an order do constrain and facilitate subjects' behaviors, subjects can also disobey those rules.* Consequently, a regular behavior pattern merely indicates that an order may exist but is not order itself, and violation of an order does not mean order does not exist. As Weber (1978, 37–8) put it: "Submission to an order is almost always determined by a variety of interest and by a mixture of adherence to tradition and belief in legality, unless it is a case of entirely new regulations." Also, when order is defined as a pattern of behavior, it becomes tautological when we try to explain behavior with order or a lack of it. Order is not behavior (Weber 1978,

29–36), and "absence of cooperation" is not disorder (Wrong 1994, 12; cf. Elster 1989, 1–2).

Two definitions of order are more useful. Hayek (1982, vol. 1, 36) defined order as "a state of affairs 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." Although Hayek was mostly interested in touting the possibility of and the virtue of "spontaneous order(s)", his definition comes closer to a definition of order because it emphasizes regularity within a system. He also correctly recognized that rules are a key part of any order.

Jeffrey Alexander (1982, 92) defined order as "how individual units, of whatever motivation, are arranged in nonrandom social patterns." His definition of order is generic and neutral because he correctly recognized that defining order normatively non-neutrally inevitably brings epistemological problems. Alexander also noted that without a proper definition of order, much conceptual conflation has bedeviled some of the most critical debates in sociological theory (1982, 90–94; see the discussion on Wrong 1994 in Sect. VI below). Yet, as becomes clear in Sect. 3 below, Alexander's definition is more a definition for an ordered system than for order itself, and yet system and order are different.

Overall, none of the existing definitions comes close to a rigorous definition of order. Indeed, all of them suffer from several common shortcomings. First, they often mix up the basic level with other levels (see Table 1 for a summary). Second, they often confuse the basic nature of order with outcomes that derive from the interaction between order and other factors (e.g., order as patterns of behavior). Third, they often define order with moral undertones, and such a practice inevitably brings epistemological problems (Alexander 1982). Finally, they fail to provide a framework for measuring and comparing order, and thus are of limited empirical utility.

Although none of the above mentioned works has provided a rigorous definition of order, several useful elements can be extracted from them. First, most definitions of order note that order means some kind of stable expectation or predictability about agents' behaviors and social outcomes existing within a (social) system (e.g., Parsons 1937, 91–92; Hayek 1982, 36; Wrong 1994, 5; Haugaard 1997, 121).[4] Second, almost all definitions of order assume that order is underpinned by some kind of monopolizing of violent power, most of the time. Third, many have emphasized an institutional component of order. For example, both Durkheim ([1893] 1984) and Weber (1978, 34–6) singled out convention (i.e., social norms or informal rules) and law (i.e., formal rules) as two major pillars of order. Both had pointed out that norms are more effective in small communities whereas formal rules are more necessary and effective in large ones.[5] My definition will build upon these useful discussions.

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[4] Here, it is important to stress that predictability within a social system should not be restricted to just "human conducts" or actions/behaviors (e.g., Hayek 1967, 66; Wrong 1994, 5; Lebow 2008, 4). See below.

[5] Yet, formal rules may be possible only when some kind of an order is there in the first place!

**Table 1** Order defined: a multi-layered scheme

| Item/level (layer) | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Order: the basic level | Predictability of things within a community or social system |
| Order: the second level (demarcation/ differentiation) | Order is different from authority, power, domination, peace, structure, stability, and legitimacy etc |
| Order: the measurement or operational level (the third level) | Scope (space and size of population), monopoly of violent power, institutionalization (coverage/density and intrusiveness), and subjects' internalization (of the rules and legitimacy of an order) |
| Sources of the stability of an order (the fourth level) | Monopoly of violent power, institutionalization (coverage/density and intrusiveness), subjects' welfare under an order, and subjects' internalization (of the rules and legitimacy of an order) |
| Legitimacy of an order (the fifth level: normative) | Legitimacy is a holistic term |
|  | Objective legitimacy is a strictly procedural term: the only legitimate order is a liberal democracy |
|  | Subjective legitimacy: legitimacy of an order as perceived by power-holders, subjects, and bystanders |

## 3 Defining Order: The Basic and the Second Level

At the ontological (hence the very basic) level, order is the degree of predictability (or regularity) of what is going on within a social system, presumably because agents' behavior, social interactions, and social outcomes within the social system have come under some kind of regulation.[6] *A system exists whenever two units are somewhat connected with each other (Jervis 1997, 6). The size of a social system can range from a family, to a village, tribe, chiefdom, organization, state, and the international system. A society is always a social system* (for a more detailed discussion, see Tang 2011a, 2013a).

In other words, an order exists within a social system whenever there is some predictability within the system, and "the antithesis of [factual order] is randomness and chance in the strict sense of phenomena conforming to the statistical laws of probability" (Parsons 1937, 91). This is the first level of our definition of order.

Defined as such, order is a holistic term, first and foremost: order is a term for describing a social system, not for describing individual agents or other components of a social system.

Second, order also is a continuum, from chaos (disorder) to (robust) order (Parsons 1937, 91; Wrong 1994, 9–10). Put differently, even in a well-ordered society, there is much room for anomie, deviance, resistance, and protest (Merton 1968, 131–94; Wrong 1994, 9–12). And this fact that order is continuum is one of

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the key reasons why order has to be measured, however crudely: order cannot be meaningfully discussed without a bit of measurement.

Third, order covers agents' behavior, social interactions, and social outcomes, rather than one or two of them alone. This point is extremely important: existing definitions of order tend to be limited to regulation of agents' behavior (e.g., Bull 1977, 8; Elster 1989, 1–2). Although predictability with agents' actions is a key dimension of order, it is not the only dimension of order (Wrong 1994, 5, 12). Most prominently, order also implies some predictability regarding social outcomes that are only partially underpinned by agents' actions and their interactions. Within a society with sound order, one not only expects certain behaviors from his/her friends and opponents when s/he wakes up every day, but also expects some regularity within social outcomes such as that the post-office will be open tomorrow.[7]

Finally, because our definition says nothing about the exact type of an order, it allows for all kinds of order (e.g., spontaneous, imposed, mechanistic, organic) and all possible pillars of order (e.g., power, norm, institutionalization).

Our new definition of order allows us to explicitly differentiate order from several concepts that are closely connected with order. This differentiation is the second level of our definition of order.

Foremost, the following relationship between order and several other concepts, *society/a social system > order > structure > norms/institution(s)*, can now be substantiated.[8] More concretely, order is only a property of a (social) system, but not the (social) system itself (Lebow 2008, 4). Order is usually underpinned by some kind of social structure and thus broader than structure, with norms and institutions being a key dimension of a social structure (for a more detailed discussion of these terms, Tang 2011a, 2013a).

Second, order is different from (types of) political regime, although political regime may be the first word that comes to our mind when we talk about order: regime, as a meta-institution, is only a key component of order at the level of the state. Also, because at the basic level, our definition does not contain power, stability, legitimacy, and authority, order is automatically differentiated from these (related) terms.

Finally, no discussion of order can be complete without an explicit discussion on the relationship between order and change. Here, suffice to say that order does not exclude change. On the contrary, order makes orderly (social) changes possible. Indeed, only changes can make order and order can only exist through changes: order thus implies changes simply because the human system is a dynamic and self-transforming system. Consequently, an equilibrium-minded stand toward order is untenable and unhelpful because such a stand implies that order is incompatible with change (Lebow 2008).

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[7] Of course, social outcomes are more difficult to predict than agents' behaviors, not the least because social outcomes are underpinned by the interactions of agents' behaviors within specific social and physical contexts. For a more in-depth treatment on the differentiation of idea, action, and outcome, see Tang (2016).

[8] For a physical system (e.g., a house), structure usually refers to its backbone. For a social system, structure can be narrowly defined as the institutional system of the social system (Tang 2011a, 2013a).

## 4 Measuring Order: Four Dimensions

Because some authors have been interested in some kind of measurement of order, they have provided some initial discussion of this problem. Several useful points can be extracted from these discussions. First, an obvious indicator of order is how much violent power it has monopolized, even though violence has usually been a key instrument for forging order. Second, although most authors assume that an order somewhat relies on violent power, they also argue that any order that relies on the frequent exercise of brutal power is fragile and thus unstable. Hence, a possible measurement of the stability of order is the degree to which it depends on the exercise of brutal power. Third, both institutionalization and internalization contribute to the stability of a given order (e.g., Elias 1939 [1994]; Parsons 1951; Berger and Luckmann 1966). Critically building upon them, this section proposes a framework for measuring and comparing order as the third level of our definition of order.

The operational or measurement level of order has four dimensions. *The first dimension is the number of subjects and the amount of space covered by the order.* Weber (1978, 901) put this dimension most explicitly, "the minimal condition of political community is forcible maintenance of orderly dominion over a territory and its inhabitants." (See also ibid, 902–4). Durkheim (1893 [1984], 400–01) too recognized this dimension, noting that the stability of order is actually quite high in simple societies (e.g., bands), partly because it covers a small population. As human societies move to more complex communities over a larger space and with a larger population, imposing and maintaining order becomes increasingly difficult. Hence, an order that rules over a larger population is more difficult to forge and maintain than an order that rules over a smaller population (Lebow 2008, 7–8).

Although power is not order itself, power underpins, most, if not all, social order *beyond the egalitarian order in primitive tribes* (Fried 1967; Service 1971). To establish order, a key task is thus to maximize or monopolize (relative) violent power within a community or a society (Weber 1978, 902–4). As Hobbes (1651 [1985], 17: 223) put it: "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." The amount of violent power that an order has monopolized, and can thus deploy when it needs, is therefore the second crucial dimension for measuring order in the period after human societies had progressed to egalitarian societies at the level of band and tribe: the more violent power an order has monopolized, the more robust the order.

Because an order may have monopolized a vast amount of violent power, it may be easier if we measure an order's monopoly of power indirectly by measuring the amount of un-monopolized violent power. This measuring approach can be operationalized as the "(relative) distribution of power" among (key) units within the system, a notion that enjoys wide currency in international relations (e.g., Waltz 1979). It also implies that few human systems can attain an absolute distribution of power: relative distribution of power has been the norm. In this sense, order can indeed be measured "in terms of the violence, coups, insurrections, and other forms of instability" within a society (Huntington 1968, vii, 4).

In fact, a relative measurement of the monopoly of power is very useful, if not indispensible, not only for understanding some key differences between domestic

(hierarchical) order and international (anarchic or quasi-hierarchical) order but also for understanding change in distribution of power as a key cause of change of order within a social system, domestic or international. Equally important, measuring "(relative) distribution of power" as a key dimension of order also accommodates the possibility that a relatively equal distribution of power can underpin an order. In both domestic politics and international relations, the notion that de facto balance of power among (some) key power centers or states can serve as a pillar of stable domestic or international order reflects this intuition. Indeed, measuring "(relative) distribution of power" as a key dimension of order also accommodates the possibility of decentralized order without power being centralized at all, for no concentration of power is only a specific form of power distribution. The cautionary tale here is that we shall not expect any firm relationship between relative distribution of power and an order's stability or peace because an order's stability and peace is underpinned by the interaction between the pillars of order and other social contexts (see Sect. 5 below).

A key point should be noted here: defining the monopoly of power as a pillar of order is different from measuring the amount of monopolized power by measuring the relative distribution of power among key units or players within a system: *the former is an ontological exercise, whereas the later an operational or a methodological one*.

Third, an order almost always implies some degree of institutionalization (e.g., Durkheim 1893 [1984], Weber 1978; Elias 1939 [1994]; Berger and Luckmann 1966, 69–70; Huntington 1968; Wrong 1994; Haugaard 1997, chap. 5). The degree of institutionalization is therefore the third key dimension for measuring order. The institutionalization of an order within a community is determined by and can thus be measured alone by two sub-dimensions: (horizontal) coverage of issue areas or density (i.e., number of rules/norms, covering how many issues) and the (vertical) degree of intrusiveness (Elias 1939 [1994]; Foucault 2000; see also Berger and Luckmann 1966, 97–109). The more issue areas institutionalization covers, the denser the institutionalization. The deeper institutionalization penetrates, the more intrusive the order. These two dimensions essentially measure the whole institutional system (or "structure", narrowly defined) of a social system (Tang 2011a).

The fourth dimension for measuring order is subjects' internalization of the specific rules (institutions) and norms within an order. Although subjects' internalization may not be necessary for erecting and maintaining order and internalization cannot be the only pillar of an order (cf. Parsons 1937), subjects' internalization of the specific rules (institutions) and norms of an order does partly underpin an order's durability and stability (see Sect. 5 immediately below). Quite evidently, this dimension of internationalization is inherently tied to subjects' support for an order, or "subjective legitimacy" (see below).[9]

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[9] Without defining order, Elias (1991) argued that the stage of development of a society is determined: (a) by the extent of its control over extra-human nexuses of events, that is, over what we sometimes refer to rather loosely as 'natural events'; (b) by the extent of its control over inter-human connections, that is, over what we usually refer to as 'social nexuses'; (c) by the extent to which each of its individual members has learned, from childhood onwards, to exercise self-control. Elias' second and third dimension actually measure order (see below).

## 5 Peacefulness, Stability/Change, and Sources of Change/Stability

In discourses of order, we are mostly interested in three related properties of order: stability (i.e., durability), peacefulness, and legitimacy. These three terms are related, not least because all three terms must be understood holistically when addressed in connection with order: after all, order is a holistic term.[10] Moreover, peacefulness within a social system is a function of the stability of the order of the system, which is in turn unpinned by four key pillars (see also Sect. 6 below).

Stability, peacefulness, and legitimacy are also distinct. Most critically, whereas stability and peacefulness are exclusively empirical notions with normative implications, (objective and subjective) legitimacy is mostly a normative notion with an empirical foundation. As such, I hold pillars of stability and peacefulness to be the fourth level of order whereas legitimacy is the fifth level. This section mostly addresses stability and peacefulness although I do touch upon legitimacy briefly here and in the next section when addressing the two major approaches toward order because how we approach an order's legitimacy is inherently underpinned by how we approach the order itself. Again, like order, legitimacy is a very complex concept that requires a separate treatment that can only be offered elsewhere.

### 5.1 Peacefulness vs. Stability

*Peacefulness is not a property of an order, but strictly a property of a social system.* In contrast, stability can refer to either an order or a system. Hence, stability is not peacefulness, as Waltz (1979) pointed out long ago although he was talking about stability of the international structure as the relative distribution of power within an international system.

Peacefulness merely means a lack of internal war within a state/community or a lack of interstate war within a regional or international system. Peacefulness does not necessarily mean stability of a system. A social system underpinned by an order that relies mostly on brutal violent power can deter its subjects from revolting (for a while, at least) and thus remain peaceful for a while. Yet, such a society is inherently unstable or fragile.

Moreover, in principle, a social system (underpinned by an order) can be stable without peacefulness, for a while, at least. For instance, the ancient Greek city-state system lasted for centuries despite often rampant wars. In fact, as Lebow (2008) pointed out, spirit/honor was a critical pillar of the order within the ancient Greek city-state system, and an honor-based order pins its stability precisely on the use of force when one's honor is challenged.

Evidently, measuring an order's peacefulness is straightforward. For measuring an order's stability, a useful indicator may be the frequency of a sovereign's deploying of violent power. As noted above, although the more robust the order the more violent power it has monopolized, frequent deploying of violent power to squash dissent and resistance often indicates that the order is fragile. In contrast, if

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[10] In fact, legitimacy is a useful term only when we talk about order (as a holistic term), but not so when talking about other non-holistic terms such as power and justice (see Sect. 6 below).

an order relies mostly on non-violent means to resolve differences and grievances from subjects, the order is more stable.

## 5.2 Sources of Stability and Change

Stability of an order is underpinned by four pillars: the order's monopoly of violent power, the institutional system (or structure) of the order, the amount of improvement of subjects' welfare under the order, and individuals' internalization of the order's overall legitimacy and specific rules and norms. As noted above, the more violent power an order has monopolized, the more stable the order. The institutional system of an order impacts the order's stability through two channels: the degree of institutionalization (along the two sub-dimensions, coverage and intrusiveness) and subjects' welfare. The more institutionalized an order, the more stable the order. The more individuals' welfare improves under an order (via its specific institutions), the more stable the order.

Although the degree of subjects' internalization is part of the foundation of the stability of an order (because internalization can come back to strengthen an order), the relationship between internalization and the stability of order is much trickier. Internalization itself is a function of the degree of institutionalization, the degree that subjects believe that their welfare has been improved (this leaves open the possibility of "false consciousness"), and the amount of time that order has reigned (Elias 1939 [1994]). Apparently, the more time an order has reigned, the more likely its subjects would have internalized some of its rules. There is therefore a somewhat circuitous relationship between stability of an order and internalization. Yet, this also means that contra to the implied conclusions of many (e.g., Durkheim 1893 [1984]; Berger and Luckmann 1966, 65–109), the degree of internalization of the rules within the system is *not* an inherent property of an order, but rather an indispensable component for understanding the stability of an order.

Subjects can also internalize the (real or manufactured) legitimacy of an order, in addition to specific rules within an order, and this internalization of an order's legitimacy can contribute to stability. *Yet, internationalization does not confer objective legitimacy*: only a proper procedure of making and maintaining order can confer objective legitimacy to an order. In fact, internalization may indicate much *objective* illegitimacy as *subjective legitimacy* because internalization is often backed by unjust power under an illegitimate order, as Foucault (2000) had astutely revealed. As such, there is no firm relationship between stability and (real or manufactured) legitimacy: although stability may reflect objective legitimacy, stability does not imply objective legitimacy, contra the harmony approach toward order (see Sect. 6 below).

Our differentiating order from the sources of stability of order is critical. Ontologically, differentiating order from its stability and the factors that underpin stability allows us to avoid a common pitfall that equates (or measures) order with stability. Order itself does not necessarily imply stability: an order's stability is an outcome derived from the interaction of a host of causes, including the degree of internalization by subjects, the amount of power the order has monopolized, and the

extent that subjects' welfare has improved under an order (Tang 2011a, chap. 4). In sum, stability of an order is a property of order, nor order itself.

Epistemologically, differentiating order from its stability and the factors that underpin stability allows us to avoid a tacit tautology in understanding order that carries critical normative implications. The tautology is to explain an order's stability with improvement in subjects' welfare (e.g., the prevalence of justice) under the order and the legitimacy of the order. As becomes clear in Sect. 6 below, all the schools within the harmony approaches toward order, from functionalism in sociology to the neoclassical economics approach toward institutions in economics, have committed this error (for earlier critiques, see Wrong 1962; Dahrendorf 1968, chap. 6; Oberschall and Leifer 1986; Tang 2011a, chap. 1). As such, these schools within the harmony approach tend to paint a rosy picture of any seemingly stable order and cannot imagine a critical approach toward a stable order. In contrast, differentiating order from its stability and the factors that underpin stability allows us to embrace a genuinely issue-based and thus critical institutionalism toward order, power, and justice (Tang 2011a, chap. 5).

### 5.3 Stability vs. Change in Order

A detailed discussion on changes of order is beyond the scope of this article. Yet, some principal statements can be made. Just as there are many causes of stability of an institution and an institutional system (as a major component of order, see Tang 2011a, chap. 4), an order can be stable for a variety of combinations of different factors.

To begin with, whenever an order is established, it tends to have some stability, not the least because "the manifold vested interests which tend to favor conformity with an established order help to perpetuate it." (Weber 1978, 37) At the same time, however, no order can remain the same: change is always the norm (Lebow 2008), even if we usually do not pay much attention to the accumulation of small changes of an order. Indeed, changes are necessary for the stability of the overall order: more often than not, only by allowing non-rupture changes in institutions, practices, and their meaning, can the overall order be maintained (Lebow, ibid). Related, although order can certainly be transformed via rupture, order can also be transformed surreptitiously, or modified via reproduction.

Because there are four key pillars of an order, changes to an order can have four broader sources: changes in the distribution of power; changes in the institutionalization (or institutional change), changes in subjects' internalization (or rejection) of the rules and norms that underpin an order, and changes in subjects' welfare under an order. Significant change in the distribution of power (say, after a power struggle) within an order usually points to a transformation of an order: new power-holders may simply want to erect a new order to their own liking. Likewise, changes in the institutionalization and internalization within an order may also foretell the order's transformation. Finally, when some subjects' welfare is severely jeopardized, these subjects may decide to change or even overthrow an existing order.

## 6 Two Approaches Toward Order and Conceptual Conflation

In light of our more rigorous and multi-layered definition of order, it becomes possible to grasp that a central debate on order has explicitly or implicitly conflated order at the basic level with order at the third level (i.e., measurement) and the fourth level (i.e., pillars of the stability of an order; see table I for details).

There are two fundamentally divergent approaches toward order: the conflict approach and the harmony approach. These two approaches hold almost diametrically opposing stands on a host of issues associated with order, such as pillars of stability and legitimacy of an order and justice under a particular order (for a more detailed discussion, see Tang 2011a, b; see also Dahrendorf 1968; Wrong 1994, 205–12; van den Berg and Janoski 2005; see Table 2 for a summary).[11] For our purpose here, the conflict approach identifies (naked) power and institutionalization/internalization backed by power (e.g., Hobbes, Marx, Weber, Gramsci, Bourdieu, and Foucault). In contrast, the harmony approach identifies the advancement of common interests with or without institutions (e.g., neoclassical institutional economics) and normative consensus as subjects' internalizing and conforming social norms (e.g., Confucius, Parsons). The differences of the two approaches are real and critical.

Unfortunately, without grasping that order is a multi-layered concept, proponents of the two approaches have committed the error of conceptual conflation. *More concretely, the two competing approaches have taken their preferred solutions to the problem of order (or different pillars of order) to be different orders*. We thus have normative order (via internalization), power-backed order (with or without institution), and interest-based order (with or without institution). Yet, these are not separate orders: order in the real world is almost always underpinned by combinations of the four pillars, and only the relative weight of these different pillars varies. Thus, improvement of common interest may dominate in some social domains (e.g., market transactions) whereas power-backed institutions may dominate in some other social domains (e.g., political competition). Still in some other domains (e.g., daily etiquette), norms (via internalization) may prevail (Elias 1939 [1994]). Yet, these domains are parts of an overall order, and more than one pillar of order exists even in these domains. When proponents of these different approaches take different pillars of order to be different types of order, they collapse the third and fourth layer of order with the basic level of order thus committing the error of conceptual conflation.

To illustrate, we turn to Dennis Wrong's (1994) well-versed yet under-appreciated treatise on order. Building on his justly famous essay "The Oversocialized Conception of Man" (Wrong 1961), Wrong (1994) did much conceptual analysis for order. He defined order in terms of predictability and rule (ibid, chap. 3). He further cautioned from equating solutions to the problem of order with the

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[11] Although different strains within the two approaches also differ from each other (e.g., the Austrian School vs. neoclassical economics), strains with the same approach share far more similarities than they have been willing to admit. Thus, like van den Berg and Janoksi (2005), I also hold the position that both approaches should be broadly understood to hold different strains. Other dichotomies (e.g., voluntaristic vs. coercive; pluralist vs. elitist) roughly capture the same divergence.

**Table 2** Two major approaches toward order

| Conflict approach | Harmony approach |
| --- | --- |
| Order is mostly imposed by (often violent and unjust) power. | Order emerges spontaneously, naturally, without much power involved |
| Order is maintained by (violent and unjust) power. Even internalization of the norms within order has been often backed by (violent and unjust) power | Order is maintained because order brings benefit to individuals and/or individuals internalize norms |
| Individuals tend to (and/or should) resist order | Individuals tend to (and/or should) conform to order |
| Order compels and induces at least some individuals to resist (social norms within) order | Order induces individuals to adapt and internalize (social norms within) order |
| Existing orders tend to be unstable and illegitimate | Existing orders tend to be stable and legitimate |
| Order changes mostly with changes in distribution of power, brought by resistance, revolt, revolution, and war | Order changes smoothly and adaptively, if changes at all |
| Prominent schools/strains: Marxism, Weberian sociology, critical theory, and post-modernism (including feminism) | Prominent schools/strains: neoclassical economics, structural functionalism, the Austrian School |
| Prominent authors: Hobbes, Marx/Engels, Weber, Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu | Prominent authors: Plato, Smith, Durkheim, Parsons, Hayek |

problem of order itself (ibid, 8–9). Finally, he pointed out that transforming the problem of order into a problem of shared knowledge or "meanings" as Simmel (1910), Durkheim (1893 [1984]), and Parsons (1937, 1951) do tends to reify the problem of order (Wrong 1994, 5). Because Wrong has failed to appreciate that order is a multi-layered concept, however, he too conflated order (at the basic level) and the different pillars that may underpin the stability of order (the fourth level), his earlier forewarning of conflating the solutions to order with order itself notwithstanding.

To begin with, Wrong's "four levels of order", that is, "the *psychological* or the nature of human nature including the intrapsychic, the *social psychological* or micro-social relations among persons; *the sociological in the strict sense*, or how social groups form and sustain themselves in what has often been called "civil society"; and *the political,* including the internal conflicts that make up the content of politics within nation-states and international relations", (ibid, 6; emphasis added.) are really a mixture of the scale of an order and the specific domains within an order.

More critically, when addressing Parsons' (1937, 91–92) differentiation of "factual order" (i.e., order in the real world, or order as regularity) and "normative order" (order as rule), Wrong (1994, 37–42) takes factual order and normative order to be two different types of order that can (and perhaps should) be synthesized. Yet, once we follow Parsons' scheme in taking factual order and normative order as two kinds of order, we shall end up taking normative order as something that stands at the same level or layer as factual order. Wrong failed to grasp that this is exactly where Parsons had fatefully misled us into the trap of taking the solutions to order to

be order itself (cf. Wrong 1994, 8–9). The same blunder has been committed by Durkheim (1893 [1984]) when he failed to appreciate that his two forms of solidarity merely capture two ideal types of order underpinned by different pillars (norms/conventions vs. formal rules/institutions) rather than two factual types of order.

Properly understood, the presence of rules (i.e., institutionalization) and subjects' conforming to them (with or without internalization of these rules) are two pillars that underpin the stability of an order. As such, even though in principle there can be order based exclusively on one of the four pillars (i.e., monopoly of violent power institutionalization, subject's welfare, and subjects' internalization of rules and norms), most, if not all, orders in the real world (i.e., factual orders) are always underpinned by some combination of the four pillars. Indeed, Wrong (ibid, 38) came very close to admitting this point, stating: "Such a normative order also constitutes a reliable factual order insofar as its rules are generally lived up to in behavior, but a factual order might exist in the absence of normative order."

Wrong's treatment of order thus serves as a perfect illustration in that even such a sophisticated treatment as his suffers from important defects without a rigorous definition of order.

## 7 Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* as a Study of Order

In this section, I further illustrate the value of our new definition of order and framework for measuring order with Norbert Elias' masterpiece, *The Civilizing Process*. I show not only that Elias' treatise is explicitly a masterful treatment on the forging and maintaining of modern order from medieval Europe but more critically that Elias had in mind a framework for measuring order that is remarkably similar to the one proposed here although he never defined order rigorously and explicitly advanced a framework for measuring order. Moreover, the fact that *The Civilizing Process* is a masterful treatise on the forging and maintaining of order partly explains its enduring stature in historical sociology and the broader social sciences, despite its shortcomings (e.g., too much Freud).

Elias first unambiguously pointed out that "the society of what we call the modern age is characterized, above all in the West, by a certain level of monopolization." He then explicitly underscored that this monopolization had two sides—the monopolization of violent power and the monopolization of taxation—and that these two sides depended on each other (1939 [1994], 268). Elias further stressed that this process of monopolization had been underpinned by the often life-and-death competition to monopolize violent power and taxation among different lords. And as some lords (too many to be named) were eliminated from the system, the victors gradually expanded the size of the territory and the number of subjects under their rule, backed by growing military might and purse.

As rulers consolidated their grip over a territory and a population, rulers also began to institutionalize more formal rules, most prominently, taxation and the fielding and maintaining of a standing army, but also other rules that forbid knightly feuding and private exercise of violent power (Elias 1939 [1994], 257–362). Under

this new order, "individuals are compelled to regulate their conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner." (ibid, 367) Thus, barons and knights were turned into servants in the sovereign's court and professional military commanders whereas peasants into Frenchman, English, or Germans.

Moreover, the state began to implement, exercise, and refine bio-power over subjects' mind and body. These constraints as instructions covered table manners (i.e., eating, drinking), nose blowing, spitting, courtesy, and finally, sex. Gradually but steadily, these external constraints penetrated our body and mind and became "internalized" and thus part of our psychology, consciousness and unconsciousness: "social" (i.e., external) constraints eventually became self-constraint (Elias 1939 [1994]; see also Foucault 2007).

Through his theoretical apparatus and historical narrative, Elias was able to synthesize the conflict approach and the harmony approach (see above). More concretely, Elias was able to combine the four pillars of order singled out by the two approaches: (naked) power and institutionalization backed by power singled out by the conflict approach; the advancement of common interests with or without institutions and subjects' internalizing and conforming social norms singled out by the harmony approach. By so doing, Elias avoided both the functionalism fallacy of the harmony approach that order is harmonious and "spontaneous" and the extreme position by some proponents of the conflict approach that order is impossible without violence. Elias also transcended the micro and macro divide that has deviled social sciences and extended Freud's insight that human psychology is a product of socio-historical changes rather than a biological evolutionary alone.

## 8 Concluding Remarks

Social sciences have always been a science about order and disorder. Indeed, a key reason why things such as power, authority, governance, socialization, hegemony, internalization, governmentality, and resistance, command so much of our attention is because they deal with critical aspects of the forging and maintaining of order.

Yet, order has never been rigorously defined, not to mention measured. In this article, I advance a definition of order and propose a framework for measuring order. I also address the relationship between order and many terms that are often associated with or related to it. I then show that our new definition of order and framework for measuring order allows us to not only grasp that a key debate on order has committed the error of conceptual conflation but also better appreciate Norbert Elias' masterpiece, *The Civilizing Process*.

Our new definition and framework should have wider normative and empirical applications. Empirically, one can expect that indicators of order can be deployed as independent variables when exploring the underlying factors of economic growth and political development. Indeed, civil war and other indicators of political instabilities have been shown to be significantly associated with poor economic performance in cross-country growth regressions, in numerous studies (e.g., Kang and Meernik 2005; Jong-A-Pin 2009; Klomp and de Haan 2009), including our own

(Tang and Tang, unpublished manuscript).[12] Meanwhile, due to the enormous destruction inflicted by interstate wars in the past centuries, the question of "international order" (e.g., what is the future of the Pax Americana order?) has long occupied students of international relations and generated a large and sophisticated literature (e.g., Ikenberry 2014). Yet, "international order" too has never been rigorously defined, partly due to the lack of a rigorous definition of order in the broader sociology and political science literature. With a new definition and framework in hand, we can now probe deeply and systematically into "international order". Normatively, getting order right also paves the way for a better understanding of legitimacy, for legitimacy is inherently tied to order. These tasks, however, can only be tackled elsewhere.

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[12] Obviously, these findings can be readily linked to Olson's (1993) famous dictum that a "stationary bandit" is better than a "roving bandit" when it comes to promoting economic growth.

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**Shiping Tang** is Fudan Distinguished Professor and Dr. Seaker Chan Chair Professor at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs (SIRPA), Fudan University, Shanghai, China. His most recent book, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford University Press 2013), receives the "Annual Best Book Award" from the International Studies Association (ISA) for the year of 2015. He is also the author of *A General Theory of Institutional Change* (Routledge 2011), *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010), and many articles in leading journals in international relations, comparative politics, and philosophy of the social sciences.