

Theory of the Regenerative Order: A Multidimensional Theoretical Socio-Cultural Model

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Abstract: In this work I am developing the theoretical concept that there is only one, utterly unique, socio-cultural *regenerative order* in human society. Current debates regarding family/household have floundered due to a lack of a theoretically rigorous and comprehensive framework. Theory of the regenerative order is intended to answer this need. This regenerative order is centrally about bringing new persons into the world and grooming them as the next generation; one person at a time. This order is *the regenerative engine* for the broader institutional life of any society; ancient or modern. It is partly rooted in the ground plan of the human body, deep biology, but also broadly integrated into the various socio-cultural dimensions, forms and functions of human life. As regenerative, it is the primary institution by which the flux of relentless human change is structured and managed by projecting new human life, the next generation, into the future; one person at a time. This is *the regenerative process*.

The Need for New Theory Construction

In this paper I will begin by briefly assessing the various challenges to family/household in the 21st century¹ by developing a comprehensive theoretical framework from which to analyze, evaluate and debate this complex set of issues. This framework I am calling *The Regenerative Order*. I will argue that this order is ontologically real and serves as *the* properly basic and fundamental socio-cultural institutional order of all human life. There is a severe need for a succinct yet highly complex theoretical framework to integrate, understand and debate the current range of conflicting issues that

¹ I will be focusing primarily on the North American context although this framework is intended to be used cross culturally.

relate to family, household, marriage, kinship, childhood, fatherhood, motherhood, the new sexualities, and the like. Any such framework if it is to be useful must be intuitive, defensible, easily communicated yet philosophically complex so as to capably handle and integrate the wide range of conflicting and disparate issues regarding the family/household. Furthermore, this framework must be more than mere reactionary morality or nostalgic wishful pleading that dreams of reestablishing some bygone or idealistic era of real or imagined family life. Also, it must be more than haphazardly defensive. The real challenges to the regenerative order are pervasive and deep. There is need for a comprehensive, strategic, offensive, bulwark that will enable advocates to marshal a compelling and positive offensive strategy and thereby lead, and not merely follow or react, in the current cultural debates and conflicts. I have therefore developed the theory of the regenerative order as a non-religious framework of ideas that will run parallel to a religious understanding of human family Reality. In this way the set of ideas can be practically used regardless of one's religious or non-religious persuasions. One need only be human and crucially interested in the health and vitality of the regenerative human order and the good of human flourishing. It is designed to be wielded persuasively in the secular and pluralistic context of current cultural debates and struggles. What is at stake here is not simply a preferred religious understanding of humanity but the very human order itself. All persons of all persuasions have a stake in the God given gift of human life and its continued flourishing for this is a God given good.

The paper will proceed as follows:

- 1) The current historical situational context - in a preliminary and brief foray into the issues I will assess the contemporary character and context of family/household theory in the human sciences. Only briefly will I identify important thematic and historical issues that are driving the current cultural debates and conflicts swirling about these matters.
- 2) At the heart of the paper I will then formally introduce and define *the regenerative order* as ontologically real and as a theoretical unit of analysis and work through some of its more salient and dynamic features from the standpoint of the human sciences. This section is necessarily terse and thick. The key issues will be framed around the following questions:

- a) What is *the regenerative order*? How is it to be understood, what are its primary elements, how is it put together and how does it work?
 - b) How do we render an account of *the regenerative order* from the standpoint of the human sciences? What does it explain?
 - c) Finally, how can the theory of *the regenerative order* be used to critically engage the wide array of current cultural debates and struggles surrounding the family/household? The goal here is to use the theory to position ourselves to engage the many current cultural, legal, political, and religious debates regarding, for instance, the new sexualities, alternate family forms, childhood, fatherhood, motherhood, same-sex marriage, the new kinship studies, and the like. We will endeavor to show that these are best critically engaged and rendered manageable when situated within and gauged by the larger institutional order of human life - *the regenerative order*.
- 3) At the end of this paper I will specifically engage, analyze and assess the challenge of the new kinship studies in anthropology as only one of many possible ways of using the theory of the regenerative order.
 - 4) In part II of this paper I will analyze and critique what has been termed the new sexualities using the theory of the regenerative order.

The Current Situational Context

The broadly western world continues to experience a significant array of changes impacting the family. The traditional western family, as it is often termed, is a heterosexual monogamous relationship sealed in the permanent bond of contractual or covenantal marriage and serves as the optimal context for having and raising children. This particular form of the family continues to be significantly pressured and challenged from many quarters and in many ways. The many pressures and challenges are a combination of both practical and conceptual issues. The two are tightly intertwined. Anyone that has tried to defend the traditional western family is predictably peppered with a standard litany of arguments and challenges. For example, comprehensively defining what a family is proves notoriously difficult. The family takes many different forms across many different cultures and there are an increasing number of

non-traditional families of various forms in our own culture. This leads many to argue not only that the traditional family is merely one form among many but also that any and all constituent elements, features, roles, and persons, can be mixed, matched, or changed with minimal real or measurable impact upon the family and the socio-cultural order at large. And so it is contended that all options and practices related to the family are culturally negotiable and changeable; such as forms of sexual preference, sexual orientation, gender, gender related roles, household composition, cohabitation, marriage, including same-sex marriage, motherhood, fatherhood, divorce, division of labor in the home, and all such similar issues. How to find some sense of reference amidst this plethora of conflicting opinions and concerns is challenging.

Currently, the dominant cultural rhetoric is a form of pluralistic moralism, commonly dubbed “multiculturalism” and the oft repeated magical words are “diversity” “tolerance” and “inclusiveness.” Even if one agrees that the traditional family is ideal dissenters typically argue that it often does not work for many people and therefore it is not a practical (or possible!) option in the modern, western world - it should not be the cultural ideal. This set of ideas and beliefs is quite common and permeates most all current discourse and debates related to the family. “Traditionalists” who support the family must always contend against this set of ideas, beliefs and cultural forces. “Progressivists” who do not support the traditional family are typically advocates for the many alternative forms. The issues are politically and culturally polarizing and the skirmishes are frequent and varied. They are wrangled out everywhere from family courts to pre-school readers, from conversations at the kitchen table to the technical problems of the human genome, from the pulpit to the wedding planner, from educational establishments to arcane interpretations of constitutional legalese, from bare backing to spousal benefits – and back again. The rhetorical stream is both dizzying and mind numbing.

Regardless, most all persons of whatever persuasion are family “practicalists” who must daily contend with the practical forces, disciplines and demands that all forms of family life necessitate. And so the war of words and ideas and the practical struggles to make things work takes on a fairly predictable yet pressing character. All of us involved have personal issues at hand and most involved sense there is something much larger at stake in whatever ways this larger something might be understood and lived out.

Current academic and policy thinking on the actual situation and condition of the family/household is no less conflicted than the culture at large. A review of the history of theorizing the family/household in the 20th and 21st centuries reveals a number of things. The first is that theory itself

about family/household continues to change and evolve, as well there is no single dominant paradigm used by researchers studying family/household concerns.² The second is the general neglect of theory³ construction in published materials on family/household in the human sciences. The third thing to note is that there is a fairly long laundry list of disparate theories that theorists currently work with to analyze family/household concerns.⁴ Most of these are partial theories that are used to explain a fairly limited range of processes. The fourth is that, on the whole, theory on family/household might best be described as in a state of disarray. For something that appears to be so self-evidently real in our actual lives it is a bit puzzling to realize that there is no single comprehensive way in which family/household is understood and theorized in the human sciences. It is as though the regenerative order is opaque to us.⁵ Given its complexity and diversity it seems to defy all attempts

² Daniel Scott Smith, “The Curious History of Theorizing About the History of the Western Nuclear Family,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 325-353.

³ Alan C. Taylor and Aparna Bagd, “The Lack of Explicit Theory in Family Research,” in *Sourcebook of Family Theory & Research*, ed. Vern L. Bengtson, et. al (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

⁴ Ibid. p. 24. The range of theories used is surprising. 40% of all articles in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* did not reference theory at all. For the articles that did here are the percentages. Note that some of these values are rounded. Exchange theory (8%), life-course theory (5%), gender theory (4.6%), role theory (3.8 %), systems theory (3.5%), ecology/human ecology theory (3.2%), social learning theory (3.2%), stress/coping theory (3.2%), structural functional theory (3.2 %), symbolic interaction theory (3.1%), theory named after an individual (3.1%), socialization theory (2.3%), symbolic interaction theory (1.9%), resource theory (1.7%), family development theory (1.6%), feminist theory (1.6%), cultural theory (1.6%), social capital theory (1.4 %), intergenerational theory (1.4%), human development theory (1.3%), power/control theory (1.3%), social causation theory (1.1%), cognitive development theory (.8%), interpersonal theory (.8%), identity theory (.6 %), parenting theory (.6 %), behaviorist theory (.5 %), conflict theory (.5%), attachment theory (.5 %), equity theory (.5%). For a more recent review of theories on the family see James M. White, “The Current Status of Theorizing About Families,” In *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*, ed. Gary W. Peterson and Kevin R. Bush, (New York: Springer Science, 2013), Kindle Edition.

⁵ This is a very important but underappreciated point. We have to deliberately learn how to see the regenerative order. I understand the regenerative order to be “epistemologically opaque” and “conceptually opaque” in the sense that Amie Thomasson has noted. That is, a social entity capable of existing even if no one believes it exists as such or has articulated beliefs regarding such an entity (“Foundations for a Social Ontology,” In *Protosociology*, Vol. 18-19, 2003:275). In fact, we have to pick out and train ourselves to see it for what it is and appreciate its complexity and the ways that it both shapes our lives and extrudes into all other domains of life. For example, in politics “individual” rights are given priority but the family/household is eclipsed. In the new communitarianism (e.g. Alisdair

at comprehensive theorizing. Furthermore, there is very little cross disciplinary research and thinking done that links psychology, anthropology, biology, demography, sociology, economics, law, politics, cultural studies, theology, and the like. These various disciplines continue to work and theorize family/household related issues almost exclusively within their own disciplinary bubbles using a very limited range of theory tools that are discipline specific. It should be noted that part of the emphasis in the latter half of the 20th century has been on data accumulation so as to empirically track and analyze the various changes and dynamics of family/household. By all counts this is important and much needed. However, much of this kind of theoretical work that seeks to make sense of empirical data, as valuable as it is, remains little more than commentary on the available data collected. Furthermore, the mountains of continuously gathered data are rarely comprehensively analyzed and synthesized. Additionally, some work is “qualitative” research that may or may not make explicit use of particular theories or be generalizable. As Taylor and Bagd comment on the state of theory in family/household research in sociology, the call in the early 1990’s to forge a closer link between theory and empirical research has not been fully realized.⁶ Perhaps then it is time to rethink theory altogether with regard to family/household.

I am proposing to rethink family/household in terms of *the regenerative order* of human life.⁷ I believe we need to retool the concepts and language that

McIntyre) the family/household is overlooked. In psychiatry, psychology, the inner psychic life of the person is given theory priority and the family is only a therapeutic context. In sociology broader collective forces such as the economy, politics, and the like are typically given priority. In anthropology “culture” is typically given priority. In the “new institutionalism” the family is not a central part of the theory. In academics the prevailing anti-institutionalism means the family/household is marginalized. In education the public educational establishment has generally displaced the pedagogy of the family. In law, rights issues, divorce, abortion, are given priority. Law rarely takes the family as a distinctive regenerative unit into consideration. Family law, though a specialty in its own right, often deals with the pathologies of family disintegration. In practical politics government is seen as displacing the family, in economics the family is rarely the basic unit of consideration, (Gary Becker’s work is an exception; see Bibliography) and so on. In every way we are blind to the opaque family/household as a unit. This is amazing seeing that ALL of us must have some relation to family in some sense and most of us are deeply enmeshed in family life and all would acknowledge that the family has had a profound shaping impact in our lives.

⁶ Alan C. Taylor and Aparna Bagd. “The Lack of Explicit Theory in Family Research,” in *Sourcebook of Family Theory & Research*, ed. Vern L. Bengtson, et. al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005): 25.

⁷ The fundamental idea of regenerativity is this: it is that utterly unique, dynamically living process by which a living kind order of beings - whose members are subject to beginnings, becomings, relentless change, aging and death - deploy inherent creative causal

we use to think about, talk about, theorize, and empirically study family/household and all of its related elements. I will argue for an understanding of family/household as institutionally nested within a larger and more comprehensive regenerative order and to analyze empirical data in terms of regenerative processes and dynamics. As A.F. Robertson points out, if we want to know why things happen we have to study processes, because it is dynamic things, not static things, which cause and incur change. Regenerativity is clearly dynamic and transformative introducing real novelty into the world; one person at a time. If we interpret family/household through a fixed set of types and categories, as is typical in the human sciences, then its active and dynamic role in the forming and reforming regenerativity of socio-cultural life will be lost to us.⁸ Additionally, to bemoan that the family is changing in our culture is not the best way to think about the relationship between change and the family. Instead I intend to deliberately reverse this order and argue that the regenerative order is the fundamental means by which relentless change is managed and structured across time in any and every culture. Given the processes of relentless change, regenerativity is a primary stabilizing force. Such change requires the stabilizing processes of regenerativity. Elsewhere, I have set

powers of pro-creation to bring truly novel and different beings of the same kind into the world and groom them as the next generation, by which their distinctive order of beings is capable of flourishing and thereby regenerated. Regenerativity itself is not uniquely human but the human regenerative order is distinctive in distinctively human ways. Regenerativity, in the way that I am using it, is a much fuller, broader, and comprehensive term than mere “reproduction” or “procreation” and all such similar terms. These terms typically lay the focus upon human birth. Although, regenerativity includes these processes, it is more than just birth. As I am using the term, it involves the entire sweep of regenerative activity between generations as defined in the theory of the regenerative order – the multigenerational, regenerative projection of new human life into the future as a necessary though not sufficient condition of flourishing. Regenerativity is expansive and resists reductionism.

⁸ A.F. Robertson, *Beyond the Family: The Social Organization of Human Reproduction* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991): 159. See also Norman, B. Ryder, “The Centrality of Time in the Study of the Family,” in *Family Systems and Cultural Change*, ed. Berquo Elza and Peter Xenos (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992); as well see Jetse Sprey, “Theorizing in Family Studies: Discovering Process,” in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 62, February, 2000: 18-31. Also, Tamara K. Hareven, “The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change,” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, no. 1, (February, 1991): 95-124. James White, introduces, “transition theory” into family theory as a start to understanding the dynamic and changing character of family/household. See his *Advancing Family Theories* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

out a multi-dimensional socio-cultural model⁹ that enables us to identify and track the distribution and dynamics of the various dimensions of the regenerative order and how they work with the wider socio-cultural order.¹⁰ Additionally, I propose to use the regenerative order as a basis for comparative studies across differing family/household systems in different periods of history and across different cultures. Cultures may have differing family/household systems, differing structures and differently working functions but there is only one regenerative order instantiated in any given culture. This order is the fundamental social ecological order of human life – a complex, tightly specified, inter-fitted system of nested, interacting, basic natal elements and processes that serve as the developmental context for human life to be birthed, thrive and flourish. Our humanness emerges out of regenerativity and regenerativity is built into our humanness. Later in the study¹¹ I will focus on a single element that works as a key moral component of the regenerative order; the *regenerative aspiration*.¹² This concrete aspiration is a moral commitment to future generations of kin in light of previous generations of kin. Actual children are the fruit of this concrete aspiration. Consequently, I think that this aspiration can be measured, analyzed, and characterized for any society. I will argue that there is a strong moral/spiritual and normative component to this aspiration.

I contend that if we retool our understanding of family/household in terms of the regenerative order then this will better enable us to engage the many sided and complex debates regarding the family/household both in our own culture and across widely differing cultures. Because the regenerative order is unitive yet dynamic and multidimensional it enables us to understand and interpret family/household in a unified, dynamic and complex way. On the one hand we are interested in more fully understanding how the regenerative order is extruded into and drives all other institutional dimensions of a society.¹³ This is what I mean when I refer to the regenerative order as *the*

⁹ This is not developed in this paper but can be forwarded upon request. For purposes of this paper it is important to bear in mind that what I am developing here is a segment of a wider socio-cultural theory that is background to the regenerative order project.

¹⁰ A key question of analysis this - what are the constitutive conditions, structures, powers, capacities, or capabilities that create the possibility for regenerativity? How does regenerativity actually work?

¹¹ Part II, Critique of the New Sexualities. This is available upon request.

¹² Again, given constraints this is not included here but has been developed elsewhere.

¹³ This cannot be fully developed here but see A.F. Robertson, *Beyond the Family: The Social Organization of Human Reproduction* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press,

regenerative engine of a society. Without robust regenerativity a society wanes and succumbs to the inevitable ravages of breakdown and perishing. On the other hand the regenerative order, as a unit of analysis, is a tool to better identify, parse and evaluate the impact of broader social forces upon this order. As for the Biblical record, the regenerative order will enable us to integrate our understanding of the family/household with deep Biblical moral content as well as with accurate Biblical historical content on the family. The family/household of 13th century B.C Israel in the Judean highlands of the southern Levant is different than that of 1st century Jewish families or our 21st century family/households in North America.¹⁴ Yet they all comprise the regenerative order for each respective society. Finally, it will also give us tools to assess the relative vitality, health, morality, and condition of any given socio-cultural order of life as well as alternatives that are being proffered in the name of progress, social change or social conservatism.

The Regenerative Order: Philosophically Defined and Delineated

The regenerative order (R/O), as both a unit of analysis and an ontological reality, is to be understood in this way:

The regenerative order is a socio-cultural, multi-dimensional constellation of culture specific relations, practices, and beliefs by which the living socio-cultural order is newly peopled, by which new persons, throughout childhood,¹⁵ are developed and groomed as the next generation, and thereby the means by which the human order is regeneratively perpetuated into the future; one person at a time. It is *the only* natural living order of human life that accomplishes this process of

1991) for a very good start in this direction of thinking. Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham have also used the term regeneration in their “Introduction: Age, Regeneration, and the Intimate Politics of Globalization,” In *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy*, ed. Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (Indianapolis, IN, Indiana University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ See for example Daniel, I. Block, “Marriage and Family In Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003); also Carol, Meyers, “The Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo Purdue, et. al. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

¹⁵ The regenerative order then takes fully understanding childhood and natality seriously. As Leena Alanen puts the matter, “...without theorizing childhood there can be no adequate account of the social.” “Theorizing Childhood: Editorial” *Childhood*, Vol. 21, no. 1, 2014; 3-6. This would be true for both motherhood and fatherhood as well.

conceiving, birthing, nurturing and projecting new human life into the future. It is thereby utterly unique.

The regenerative order is driven by a *regenerative aspiration*. The regenerative aspiration is keyed to and turns on the ritual and sanction of the institution of marriage. Marriage is a culturally characterized, institutionalized and legitimized, speech-act-ritual that sanctions and binds persons in an affinal relation across their respective Lifeworlds (LW) in the context of a particular socio-cultural world. The relation of marriage is typically deemed a high moral spiritual act of mutuality and commitment that morally grounds the R/O. The R/O is a real and ontologically basic engendered, hetero-normative order, a real but culturally characterized order, but it must also be bound to some higher normative moral order of Reality.¹⁶ It is birthed out of a co-creative and unique interplay of definite sameness and difference. It is co-creative because strictly individual regenerativity is not possible. Regenerativity *must be* socially co-creative. Definite sameness is built out of the uniquely human (the human kind). Definite difference is built out of the distinctively male and female (the dimorphic engendering kind).¹⁷ Marriage as it relates to the regenerative aspiration, as key to the R/O, requires engendered, dimorphic complementarity; as well, it requires the distinction and separation of people who are the same (kin, consanguines) and the union of people who are different (non-kin,

¹⁶ This is the sense in which I am using normative order; in a larger, morally charged sense.

¹⁷ Melanie Blackless, et. al. "How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis." *American Journal of Human Biology*, Vol. 12, (2000): 151-166. This article reviews the data on the extent to which human beings are sexually dimorphic. All classes of persons that may involve some form of gonadal sexual abnormality are at most around 2% of the population. Sexual dimorphism is thus established in multiple ways. First, statistical normality, second, genetic and physiological normality, third, these are then classed as genetic and physiological "natural" kinds, as well as physical "gender" normality, and finally, dimorphic, hetero-normativity as a regenerative and socio-cultural moral category. Note that all of this exists independent of "gender" as a strictly socio-cultural constructed category. This is not to deny the culturally constructive role of gender formation only that the cultural is one set of shaping and grooming factors. See also Richard J. Udry, "Biological Limits of Gender Construction." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 3, (June, 2000): 443-457. This article reviews a long term study on endocrinological variation and gender variation limits from fetal characteristics to adulthood in a sample study. Udry, while upholding cultural gender construction nevertheless concludes that "...biology sets limits to the macro-construction of gender and also sets individual limits to the effects of gender socialization" (p. 454).

potential affines).¹⁸ This basic yet complex co-creative interplay of kin and gender sameness and difference is the essential basis for the *regenerative co-creativity* that characterizes the R/O. Definite and genuine novelty, in the form of new human life, is birthed and emerges from this co-creative regenerative union and interplay of definite and particular sameness and difference of persons.

In any particular culture the R/O is relationally structured, engendered, and distinctively defines family/kin. As well, it spatially and temporally defines the regenerative household. Optimal regenerative processes require that these two things, family and household (F/H), be integrated or tightly connected in any particular culture.¹⁹ Although the R/O is concretely realized in particular families and households it nevertheless transcends any single family and household. As well, though concretely realized in and mediated through actual engendered persons, the R/O is nevertheless always a trans-individual and trans-generational order stretched across multiple events (times) and places (spaces), multiple individuals, and multiple generations. As such, the R/O is an ontologically real, unified process and unifying order.²⁰ Because it spans multiple generations and is continuously reproduced it is an institutional order. Because it is the only natural means through which human life is newly co-created (regenerativity) and the primary means of human development and grooming across the life-cycle (generativity)²¹ it functions as the primary socio-cultural ecological order of humanity.²² It

¹⁸ This of course broaches the entire area of the incest taboo. A much studied area in anthropological studies.

¹⁹ The household has to be taken as a separate but related area of study in the regenerative order. For a good overview see David I. Kertzer, "Household History and Sociological Theory." In *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 17, (1991): 155-179.

²⁰ The regenerative order can then serve as a framework for comparison of various family/household structures, forms, or functions across cultures as well as differing historical periods. It is designed to serve as a comparative framework.

²¹ It should be noted that "generativity" as I am using the term is to be distinguished from *regenerativity*. Generativity means caring for the next generation and is not necessarily parent and child related. However, we argue that it is optimal in the regenerative order for regenerativity and generativity to be joined; parents nurturing the next generation of their own children. See Dan, P. McAdams, and Regina L. Logan, "What is Generativity," in *The Generative Society*, ed. de St. Aubin, Dan P. McAdams and Tae-Chang Kim, (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2004).

²² For the ecological emphasis see the work edited by Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, 2005).

is the means by which new persons are nurtured and groomed into the orbit of a culture specific order of human life thereby regeneratively extending this culture; one person at a time. It defines and structures the human regenerative niche. Because the R/O is naturally fitted to our humanity in a multitude of causally complex, specific and interacting ways it is a complex-universal *natural kind* order.²³ Because the R/O is

²³ The notion of a “natural kind order” and a “socio-cultural kind order” is much discussed and quite philosophically technical. In the literature there is an important distinction between a natural kind order and a human kind order. I use the term socio-cultural kind order to mean the same thing as human kind order. My terminology is very deliberate in this regard.

A natural kind order in the context of the physical sciences, rather than the human sciences, has been at the heart of most of the debates involving this issue. How is “kind” to be understood? How is “natural” to be understood in relation to kind and what are the criteria by which natural kinds are to be identified and established? The key is whether the “kind” category picks out something that actually exists in the real world and how this relates to conceptual and semantic systems in the sciences such as chemistry, biology, physics, and so on. The positive thesis is that kinds are *discovered* rather than merely *invented*. It is therefore typically allied with various versions of scientific realism as well as various versions of essentialism; though not always. A good overview of the debates and its history is provided by Helen Beebe and Nigel Sabbarton-Leary in their introduction to *The Semantics and Metaphysics of Natural Kinds* (New York: Routledge, 2010) as well as the introductory essay to the series of discussions by Matthew H. Slater and Andrea Borghini in their edited volume entitled *Carving Nature at its Joint: Natural Kinds in Metaphysics and Science* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2011). The essay by Andrew Sayer, “Essentialism, Social Constructionism, and Beyond” found in *Sociological Review*, Vol, 45, Issue 3, 1997:453-487, is a good overview discussion of some of the central issues involved in the debates.

Although the matter cannot be fully developed in this paper I am advocating that a natural kind is a complex universal that is built on a design plan fitted to our properly basic humanness. Specifically, I am advocating the position that the R/O is a complex, universal human order. As an institution it is not something that we simply invent or construct. This entails a realist social ontology that involves a moderate essentialism but takes full account of the humanly creative and constructive character of socio-cultural reality. (See Andrew Sayer for a critical realist version of moderate essentialism in his *Realism and Social Science*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 2000). The regenerative capacities that we possess as persons are creatively built into our basic humanness (involving a realist and essentialist personal human ontology) and span and connect the individual person who is always situated within a wider array of contextualizing socio-cultural relations and institutions. The institution of the R/O always possesses both universal and particular features. The notion of a complex universal advocated here is similar to that developed in the recent and useful discussion by Katherine Hawley and Alexander Bird. “What are Natural Kinds?” *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 25, no. 1 (December, 2011): 205-221. However, the extension of this insight into the areas of the ontology of the human person and the ontology of the socio-cultural Lifeworld is much more difficult than the issue of the basic properties of physical entities and their scientific

also a humanly constructed order, that takes particular socio-cultural form, it is also a causally creative *socio-cultural kind* or *human-kind* order. The R/O is therefore a causally specific, complex, universal, *socio-cultural and natural kind order*. Because it is the *regenerative engine* of any and every living culture it thereby stands at the core and base of every culture by

elaboration. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that the extension can be rigorously developed and fully worked out. Recent discussion of human universals in the field of anthropology can be found in the work of Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). For the ontology of the human person the work of J.P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae is well developed in *Body and Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), see particularly their summary on pages 202-213. As well see the gender essentialist work of Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For a recent philosophical defense of soft essentialism see Michael Devitt, “Resurrecting Biological Essentialism,” *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 75 (July, 2008):344-382. The human kind order is characterized by certain capacities, powers, or dispositions; a “kind” category must take this into account (see for example the volume edited by Anna Marmodoro *The Metaphysics of Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2011). See also the extensive and very useful critique of positions that deny basic and essential sexuality in Carrie Hull. *The Ontology of Sex: A Critical Inquiry into the Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Categories* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Kindle Edition.

As for social ontology it is typically aligned with a constructionist or conventionalist metaphysic and understanding of the socio-cultural world (See Andy Lock and Tom Strong for a very good overview, *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The work of John Searle argues for a version of realist social ontology, see his *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) though Searle refines his terminology and attempts to sharpen his ideas in his later work *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For Searle social institutions are still basically conventionalist given his much discussed dictum that a social institution is centrally an “X counts as Y in context C” phenomenon. As well, see Ian Hacking’s thoughtful work on these issues is important, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). One might elaborate and defend a modified proposition of the form “X counts as Y in context C given E (that is, E = essentialist properties and powers of the human person and the R/O).

It should also be noted, though not developed in this paper, that I draw heavily from the theory of institutions that emphasizes a realist and functionalist perspective that focuses on selection pressures that drive the emergence, evolution, and transformation of broad based human socio-cultural institutions found in Jonathon Turner’s work *Human Institutions: A Theory of Societal Evolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003). I would agree with Turner that particular socio-cultural forms of the R/O are strongly subject to selection pressures of societal evolution. Any given culture may not survive or may more or less flourish as it attempts to successfully adapt, change, and regenerate itself in the face of relentless exigency and change and human mortality.

being extruded²⁴ into all other wider and more encompassing socio-cultural institutions. As such the R/O is foundational. It is part of the very dynamic fabric of human existence by which new human life is regeneratively projected into the future across generations through time. It connects with very deep elements of every aspect of our humanness and the various aspects of all higher level socio-cultural institutions. It is therefore neither arbitrary nor discardable. It is utterly unique. It is essential.

The purpose of the R/O is to support and express the good of human flourishing in a specifically regenerative way.²⁵ As a living order

²⁴ No other institutional order (I/O) is creative or socio-culturally co-creative in the same ways as the R/O. Virtually all other I/Os are dependent upon the R/O for any and all regenerative potential and work. They are regeneratively inert. Any regenerative potential, power or creativity that they might possess or deploy is always necessarily provided via the R/O. The R/O therefore stands at the base of all such potential and work for all such wider I/Os. Again, at first glance this appears to be obvious, trivial, and philosophically uninteresting but it is not. It is philosophically opaque, stunningly complex and difficult to pick out and describe and therefore deeply fascinating. Given that all other I/Os are regeneratively inert. They possess no inherent regenerative potential and powers whatsoever. This means that there is a definite and identifiable *direction of flow* of regenerative potential, power and creativity. Regenerativity moves in one direction only; from the R/O out to all other I/Os. I will call this the *singular regenerative direction of flow*. This is partly what I intend to capture when I say that the R/O is extruded into all other I/Os. This is a most crucial link, a critical coupling of the R/O to all other I/Os. I will call this array of critical connections the *nexus of regenerative linkage*, or the *nexus of regenerative coupling*, between the R/O and the various other I/Os. This nexus is intersectional and multidimensional. One key aspect then of the relationship between the R/O and all other I/Os is a causal dependence of this particular kind. It is an utterly unique kind of dependence. This “singular regenerative direction of flow,” interfaces at the nexus of regenerative linkage and moves along various distinctive regenerative channels and dimensions in the flow of regenerative creativity. Again, this flow is very concrete. It is no mere abstraction. All of these processes are realized via the socio-cultural action of individual persons in the institutional contexts of the Lifeworld. All such real regenerative action is practical and characterized by the common everydayness of the Lifeworld. It is fundamentally about the practical activity of bringing new persons into the world and grooming them as the next generation, one person at a time.

²⁵ Regenerativity confers a strange sort of uniqueness on just about everything that is closely clustered to it. Fatherhood and motherhood are the only relations that are directly, inherently, regeneratively unique. However, for example, *sex, male/female relations* are not regeneratively unique but once we connect them to regenerativity we understand that they make a unique contribution to the regenerative order that is made in no other way. *Marriage* is not regeneratively unique but once we connect it to the regenerative order we understand that it makes a unique contribution to how this order works; it constitutes a bond, a commitment that creates a unified and singular space and relation for nurturance and care of children; a space of creative relation and transformation for the next generation. *Children* are

not regeneratively unique. One can adopt a child. However, once we link children to the regenerative order the relations generated within the regenerative process are understood as unique and irreplaceable. *Generativity*, care for others, care for the next generation, is not regeneratively unique, but once we connect generativity to the regenerative order it takes on a unique form and character. We are shaping the next generation and this generation is uniquely connected to us. The *household* is not regeneratively unique but once it is linked to generativity it becomes a unique micro-domestic entity and contributes to the wider socio-cultural order in uniquely regenerative ways. *Morality* and normativity are not regeneratively unique but once we begin to think through practical morality in terms of our forebears, our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren, fatherhood, motherhood, we then typically rethink the world in light of our children and thereby change the way that we think about what is good, right, true and beneficial. Within the regenerative order, love, duty, aspiration, and gratitude are uniquely and normatively fused. *Self-transformation* can be accomplished in any number of ways; it is not a regeneratively unique process. But once it is linked to the regenerative order, the self-transformation that occurs over a generation of parenting into old age is a distinctive and unique process that changes people in ways that only this process can change people. And this process of change is different for men as for women. Male and female, husband and wife appear to change in different ways; but we change together over the life course in different ways. Parenting is a mode of *being-responsible-for* that is participative and therefore deeply self-transformative. If one is to be responsible then one cannot be indifferent, or closed, or unengaged in this process. One *should not* shirk this moral responsibility involved in parenting. By its very nature this is an intergenerational relation stretched out over time with a view to the future of *my* children, *my* grandchildren and great grandchildren. All of these relationships are participatively unique and irreplaceable. This unique relationship of parent/child requires a unique outlook, a unique mode of thinking about the dirty details of the day to day, concrete questions of right and wrong, a unique mode of being-in-the-world, a unique mode of being-for-others. *Love* is not regeneratively unique. However, in the regenerative order, as lived in the regenerative undertaking, love takes on entirely new meanings; it is connected to the whole of life and action in new ways. It is not a single episodic “moment” of relational encounter, as any parent knows; it requires a continuous series of acts that are demanding and must be done throughout the life of the child. Parenting requires a definite form of durable and tenacious commitment. The *pedagogical process* of teaching children, when connected to generativity, is also a unique form of generativity. This “other” person, the child, is mysterious; always a unique person in their own right, unique in disposition, character, and tendency. In the child there is no fixed and final image of the other but a person who is continuously changing, learning, growing, and uniquely developing within the larger regenerative order. In the generative process we must therefore learn *of* them to be able to effectively guide them toward maturation. In this process we learn entirely new things about life and forms of human togetherness; even of ourselves. Along the way there is always uncertainty but never indecision. All situations necessitate decisions. To teach a child is to prepare that child to fully take his or her place in the next generation. In this way regenerative commitment fuses ones actions, in the here and now, by the very nature of the relation, with a more durable, lasting, and future oriented outlook and sense of time; an aspiration. This is why the regenerative order is to be characterized by relatively lasting and durable commitments,

the R/O is *the regenerative engine* of any and every socio-cultural order. This universal, primary and institutionally unique human ecological order encompasses and ranges²⁶ from *a)* the socio-cultural character of previous kin-generations, to *b)* deep (informationally structured and initiated) biological forms, functions, and powers of humanness, rooted in the ground plan of the body, through *c)* culturally formed dimorphic sexuality and gendering, involving *d)* the individual (synchronic) life-courses of multiple kin-persons across generations (diachronic), on to *e)* the next kin-generation in an ongoing action-structure, institutional process of socio-cultural regeneration. The R/O integrates these five elements into a single, unified, order and process of human regeneration that is actively extruded into all facets of a society by regeneratively peopling these macro institutional orders. It is therefore a profound history shaping force that we must actively understand. Significantly transforming any one of these five primary elements influences all other elements and thereby transforms the character and functionality of the order as a whole and its institutional impact upon the larger society. At certain levels it is law-like. At other levels it is free and open to human creativity, conventionality and intentionality. In the R/O both of these structures and dynamics (law-likeness and creativity) are always simultaneously present and dynamically interactive. Though culturally conceived in various ways, socially structured in diverse forms, and dynamically elaborated in a wide array of differing practices, in any and every culture the R/O is always taken to mean what it actually is: the distinctively regenerative order by which new life is birthed, groomed, and projected into the future. As such it will always be linked both to real genealogy (kin and non-kin relations) and the idiom of genealogy (kinning) because genealogy is fundamentally about regenerative connection between persons and things. As such it will also be linked to the fundamental and cosmic beliefs of any given culture, e.g. metaphysics, morality, normativity, religion, aspiration. In this sense we might therefore understand that the R/O is a kind of continuous and ongoing mundane miracle.²⁷

bonds and relations over time. As a unique form of togetherness it stamps time, space, and connection in human experience in utterly unique ways.

²⁶ This defines the regenerative order as a *unit of analysis*.

²⁷ I have developed an interactive PDF graphic to help visualize and illustrate the multi-dimensional character of socio-cultural life. The graphic can be accessed here: <http://epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=295>. Layers can be turned on and off to the

The Regenerative Order

Test Case #1 - The New Kinship Studies

The reason why we have selected the new kinship studies for our first test case in this study is this; if our thesis of the regenerative order can stand up against the sophisticated ethnographic anthropological evidence and argument of such an eminent cultural anthropologist as Marshall Sahlins then it can stand up against just about anything else.²⁸ The appeal to family diversity and marriage diversity²⁹ among differing cultures and throughout differing periods of time is a staple and predictable argument in current cultural debates that involve the regenerative order. Kinship studies in anthropology represent a small but important slice of this wider array of issues. We will therefore take the strongest possible argument to test our thinking in this area. Sahlins represents this argument in the cultural sphere of anthropology.

Kinship studies have typically been the province of cultural anthropology.³⁰ Marshall Sahlins, an eminent anthropologist, in his recent book

left. The R/O consists of layers C,D,E, and F; also termed “The Familial.” To learn more about the graphic, please e-mail me at stratman601@gmail.com

²⁸ To know anthropology is to know Sahlins. He is one of the most respected, living, cultural anthropologists of all time. Although most people do not know anthropology or the anthropological field, the discipline has fed very strongly into the cultural shifts in our own culture throughout the 20th century. Cultural anthropology since the early 20th century, has given us so many ethnographic accounts of a wide variety of non-western family/household forms such as polyandry, polygyny, alternate kin structures, various marriage forms, alternate sexualities, and so on, that the current debates in the western world do not even begin to compare with this wide variety of forms and practices documented in the ethnographic literature. Our “diversity” count in American culture, in all these areas, does not even come close to this variety. In his argument Sahlins is taking all this into account although his focus here is on “kinship” - that special study that has a long and venerable history in anthropology. The logic of our argument works this way: if we can handle this wide variety, albeit in summary form, as presented in the ethnographic literature of anthropology that Sahlins presents, then dealing with the strictly western varieties and forms that stand at the center of our current debates will not be that difficult a task. Theory of the R/O is designed to take this kind of anthropological variety into account and deal with it head on. If we can handle this variety then we can handle our current lesser sorts quite ably.

²⁹ I do not deal with cultural marriage diversity in this paper. It must be handled separately though it is related to any cultural understanding of kinship and affinal ties.

³⁰ For an interesting historical and critical account of the history of kinship studies in cultural anthropology see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Levis Henry Morgan and the Invention of Kinship* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987). For more recent assessments see Michael G. Peletz, “Kinship Studies in Late Twentieth-Century Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24 (1995): 343-372; see also, Jean-Hugues Déchaux and Amy

entitled *What Kinship Is...And is Not* argues that kinship is culture and not biology and that cultural kinship is practiced as a distinctive kind of “mutuality of being” between persons and has only incidental connection to physical procreation.³¹ Note the typical fragmentation of the regenerative order in his thesis. His argument resembles a social constructionist argument but according to him it is not a social constructionist argument. Sahlins’ tries to make this point throughout his book. Kinship relations in a culture are quite important as these relate to the regenerative order because these are the basis upon which both incest and marriageability are established within a culture. We develop these matters in our next test case on neo-sexualities.³² Both of these are central to the regenerative order of any society as anthropologists have historically recognized. The four issues - kin, marriage, incest, regenerativity - are always interrelated.

Sahlins’ gives numerous examples to illustrate his point that kinship is culture and not biology.³³ One has to read through his many examples to gain the full force and sense of his arguments. Let us grant that his argument is convincing although it can be rightly judged philosophically inadequate on some important points. We will grant that the ethnographic evidence from many cultures illustrates numerous instances wherein kinship ties and relations

Jacobs, “Review: Kinship Studies: Neoclassicism and New Wave: A Critical Review,” *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 49 (2008), Supplement: An Annual English Selection: 215-243. For the more complex questions regarding new technologies, forms of family and household and understandings of kinship see Maurice Godelier. *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, trans. by Nora Scott, (New York: Verso, 2011), Kindle Edition; also *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered*, ed. Sandra Bamford and James Leach, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), Kindle Edition; *Technologies of Procreation: Kinship in the Age of Assisted Conception*, ed. Jeannette Edwards, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1998), Kindle Edition; also Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), Kindle Edition. For arguments of the types that Sahlins’ employs related to the “postnuclear” family see *The Ethics of Kinship: Ethnographic Inquiries*, ed. James D. Faubian, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001). The classic anthropological study that turned the debates is that of David M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1984).

³¹ Sahlins, Marshall. *What Kinship Is – And Is Not* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 28-29, Kindle Edition.

³² This is not included in this paper but worked out elsewhere as a separate area of critique.

³³ Sahlins denies he is “proving” his points by his numerous examples. *Ibid.*, p. 1. The classic anthropological studies on American kinship come from David Schneider who denied kinship a realist status in American culture. See his David, M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). Also his *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

have little or nothing to do with biological procreation or relations determined by physical procreation.³⁴ After arguing that kinship is culture, Sahlins' develops his second thesis that kinship is not biology. I will quote him at length because it is his own summary of the first half of his book and a good statement of his thesis in the last half of his book. The quote is dense and must be read carefully.

This chapter is an argument against all such “biological” understandings of kinship: not only because they are encompassed in meaningful determinations of “mutuality of being”; or because postnatal, “made” kinship often enough takes priority over relations of procreation; or because the latter are culturally variable, sometimes to the point that they are of no particular interest to the people concerned; but also importantly because the relations of birth are reflexes of the greater kinship order and are incorporated within that order. If, in regard to the last, children are conceived, say, from the “blood” of the mother and the “sperm” of the father, these are not mere physiological substances of reproduction but meaningful social endowments of ancestral and affinal identities and potencies. For they link the child to others with whom the parents are known to share such substances. It follows that what is reproduced in the birth is a system of kinship relations and categories in which the child is given a specific position and positional value. It likewise follows that kinship is a thoroughly symbolic-cum-cultural phenomenon....³⁵

In short, kinship is “culture” and not “biology” as is indicated by the fact that it frequently has little or nothing to do with biological connections in a host of ethnographic cases. According to Sahlins kinship isn't even a socially constructed interpretation laid over the biological as social constructionists would maintain. How then does Sahlins explain the utterly unique connection of kinship by which people in all cultures identify themselves and differentiate themselves from others? Kinship according to Sahlins is culture that manifests a distinctive “mutuality of being” among persons. For Sahlins this is *the central*

³⁴ Even in American culture this is true, especially in the ways that we use the terms “aunt” and “uncle.”

³⁵ Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – And Is Not*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 65, Kindle Edition.

term and philosophical idea that bears the entire weight of his argument. It encapsulates his central idea. Mutuality of being is *substance-like, ontological-like, mystical-like, or monistic-like* - yet never in a universal sense that applies to all cultures but only in a limited and relative socio-cultural sense of particular ethno/folk conceptions.³⁶ In fact Sahlins reverses the order and states that birth itself is a “metaphor” for kinship instead of kinship being established by birth.³⁷ Kinship is a prior socio-cultural order into which the birth of a child is integrated and not something that is established by one’s birth. As he puts the matter, shared being, an intersubjective quality of relation, connection, and being to other persons, is completely independent of bodily connections and is manifest in many more ways than singular relations of birth.³⁸ Furthermore, folk cultural conceptions of physical connectedness and the events of conception and birth vary widely in many details across various and sundry cultures. There is no single reductive biological account of human relations, conception, and birth among the world’s many smaller and larger cultures. Conceptions of conception vary widely across cultures. We should note that the Biblical record as well is obviously not written in the idiom of modern genetics.

Even among anthropologists Sahlins notes the following:

In the long anthropological tradition that birth relations as locally conceived comprise the biogenetic bases of kinship, rarely if ever have scholars who so argue attempted to account for these culturally specific notions of procreation.³⁹

He concludes with one final and important qualification and generalization.

There is, however, one relevant generalization that seems to hold across the several ethnographic references that have been considered here. Either the greater kinship order is already present in persons at birth, as by ancestral means of reproduction; or else

³⁶ Sahlins seems to be reaching for this notion of “human kind” as elaborated in the discussions of this matter in the metaphysics of the social sciences. See for instance Muhammad, Ali Khalidi, Ali for a non-essentialist elaboration of this position in his *Natural Categories and Human Kinds: Classification in the Natural and Social Sciences* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013), Kindle Version. The history of the debate in this work is quite useful.

³⁷ Ibid., page 72.

³⁸ Ibid., page 67.

³⁹ Ibid., page 73.

kinship relations are largely established in life, as by actual participation in the existence of others.⁴⁰

The one is “genealogical” the other is “participatory”⁴¹ and both are forms of kinship as “mutuality of being.”

My first point of criticism of Sahlins thesis is this. This last qualification means that the massive wedge he drives between the physical and the socio-cultural cannot be firmly maintained.⁴² The physical and the regenerative are still *always* connected in a culture in one of two ways; genealogical or participatory. It is therefore not a question of *whether* the biological and the cultural are related in a specific cultural account it is rather a question of *how* they are actually related. Given our thesis, I argue that they necessarily will be related because the regenerative order, manifest in all human cultures as a complex “natural kind order” and “socio-cultural kind” order, is integrated together as a unitive and complex universal order of human life. This will be reflected in all such socio-cultural accounts. The only question is *how* they are therefore conceived in a particular culture, in any particular ethno/folk conception of physicality and kin systems of meaning and connection. Sahlins can offer no basic reason as to *why* they are always so related. His explanation fails to explain this most crucial point requiring explanation.

Another important point of interest is this. Among the numerous cultures of the world, primitive, modern, and everything in between, the Biblical model of kinship in Ancient Israel is rather unique when compared with the many cultures of the world. I would argue that the Biblical/historical model of kinship is far more than simply a model of birth and parentage. It is

⁴⁰ Ibid., page 86. Sahlins concludes “...kinship is notably built into the relations of procreation in societies predominantly composed of unilineal descent groups; but where cognation or kindred networks prevail, the active participation of people in each other’s existence is a more likely means of kin relationships.” Ibid., page 86.

⁴¹ “Participatory” is for Sahlins a technical term that is based on the nature of culture as “participation” in the sense developed by Levy-Bruhl (See Levy-Bruhl’s *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, trans. Peter Riviere (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1975). Though not included within this paper I agree that all of socio-cultural life is participative and so the regenerative order as well is a participative institution (if interested see page 62 of the authors LBTS dissertation proposal).

⁴² Sahlins can be criticized as well for a sorely inadequate account of the biological on all counts. He gives no adequate treatment of the biological and the physical as such. Furthermore, he makes ethno/folk biology’s equivalent to the science of the biological. Surely bio-genetics is in some sense an advance over various and sundry ethno/folk conceptions of conception.

vastly wider and more connective as well as more meaningful than this.⁴³ It is one model of the regenerative order as we previously developed this idea. While it is true that the history of the family/household in cultural Israel is only one instantiation of this encompassing and unifying regenerative order, we typically take it for granted that the ways in which kinship is understood in the Biblical record are humanly universal. As well we also take it for granted that our American system of kinship is universal. Sahlins clearly shows that this is not the case. However, I would argue that the regenerative order as theologically developed in the foundational texts of Scripture is universal and the regenerative order as we have theoretically elaborated it is humanly universal. The many examples that Sahlins brings to the table are simply differing socio-cultural “forms” or “kinds” of the single, utterly unique and foundational regenerative order. To actually refute Sahlins we would have to undertake a full examination of all his data that he interprets in terms of his philosophical notion of “mutuality of being” and reexamine it in light of our own notion of the regenerative order. I believe this can be done. I would like the reader to take note of the fact that the Ancient Israeli family/household is simply one of many differing ways that kinship structures might be interpreted and practiced in a culture. It is one culture specific and historical instance of the regenerative order.

My second point is this. In the numerous examples that Sahlins cites I believe it can be shown that the key to kinship is not simply “mutuality of being” as important as this idea might be in human life. The problem with Sahlins’ notion of kinship as “mutuality of being” is this: *he can offer no firm reason why kinship relations should be deemed uniquely different than all other relations of human mutuality*. Yet, this is the crux of the issue. Kinship *as* unique among all other forms of mutuality of being is still left unexplained. Kinship is only one particular kind of mutuality. There are many different varieties of mutuality in human relations among people other than kinship. What then makes kinship itself unique among the many kinds of mutuality? Sahlins never adequately answers this question. His class of relation “mutuality of being” is far too broad and generalized to make the kinship category the unique category of relation that it is in either of his genealogical or participatory categories. “Mutuality of

⁴³ See Robert, R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). For a contextual analysis of this in wider ancient near eastern culture see David, J. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and The Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

being” therefore does not account for how the kinship category works in the various cultures that Sahlins cites to make his point.

Kinship is not distinctive because of mutuality. The *one characteristic* that makes kinship different is not basic human mutuality. The key to the unique and distinctive character of kinship is a *particular kind of mutuality of being* that itself is embedded within the larger and more encompassing regenerative order. It is the fact that kin participate together connectively in the bond of *the regenerative order* that gives the mutuality of being regarded as kinship its utterly unique character. The regenerative order is the utterly singular order that extends and regenerates human life. It is the utterly unique order that infuses and energizes human flourishing. It is the order that gives the mutuality of kinship its utterly unique and irreplaceable character. It is the utterly unique order into which each and every birth is situated and understood. Kinship is unlike any other human relation because it is embedded within an order that is unlike any other human order – the regenerative order. If as Sahlins argues birth is a metaphor for kinship (rather than kinship following from birth) then I further argue that kinship is what it is because it is part of the larger and more encompassing, complex, universal, regenerative order. Kinship recapitulates the regenerative order just as birth recapitulates kinship. The regenerative order as a complex socio-cultural kind and natural kind is a unity that encompasses the fractured thesis of Sahlins account of biology, culture, and kinship. This order must in some basic sense always be linked to bringing new persons into the world - in whatever ways the folk/ethno biology might interpret this process in various cultures. While it is true that the regenerative order is variously conceived across numerous cultures it nevertheless always involves the mundane miracle of new and creative human life - from the previous generation, to deep biology, through the grooming processes of the life cycle and on to the next generation; in whatever ways this order is culturally structured, practiced and interpreted. As is true of *all socio-cultural action* it is both structured and participative and therefore contingently transformative. It is this profound mundane miracle of the whole sweep of new and creative human life, the interplay of definite sameness and difference - between persons and generations that gives kinship its distinctive relational magic; its aspirational and unique character. Kinship is what it is because of its regenerative uniqueness. Kinship is what it is because of the way that it is uniquely part of the regenerative order.

Conclusion

The need for new theoretical thinking in the areas of family/household is evident. Theory of the regenerative order is an attempt to provide this need for actually theorizing in a unified and systematic way the family/household and its many related elements. Critique of the new kinship studies is only one example of how our elaborated notion of the regenerative order might be critically deployed in the many current cultural and policy debates. It can also be utilized to theoretically ground a wide array of empirical studies to clarify a whole different set of empirical questions regarding regenerativity itself. Clarifying the nature and dynamics of regenerative processes and the relationship between these processes and the wider contexts of institutional life can be fleshed out by means of an interactive agency-structure approach that is multi-dimensional in character. The theory of the regenerative order is a smaller but crucial part of this larger project of socio-cultural theory that the author has undertaken. If the R/O exists as we have identified it, then no theory of human nature, no philosophy of humanity, no theory of society or culture, no theory of institutions, no theory of human development, no understanding of the family, no elaboration of gender and sexuality, no empirical assessment of any of these things can ignore the R/O and claim to be anything near a complete or accurate account of these various facets of human life. It is philosophically basic as well as basic to all practical living. It should be philosophically central to any discussion of our humanness in its wondrous variety and complexity.

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