

# **On the Principles of Social Gravity**

How Human Systems Work,  
From the Family to the United Nations

**Tobore Tobore**

Revised Hardback Edition

**Critical Perspectives on Social Science**



**VERNON PRESS**

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[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)

*In the Americas:*  
Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street,  
Suite 1200, Wilmington,  
Delaware 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*  
Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Critical Perspectives on Social Science

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017948825

ISBN: 978-1-62273-396-5

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# Preface

Everywhere I go, I see the same problems; From marriages, health care systems, to the economy, everything seems to fail. I have never stopped wondering why.

I remember my first exposure to the political system of Nigeria, when I was a little boy, because of the riots and mass strikes that engulfed my hometown of Warri in 1989. Soon after, a coup d'état brought in the military junta of General Sani Abacha. The end of military rule changed little, as corruption and nepotism still dominated the political system. As much as I detested the political system in Nigeria, I learned firsthand from my travels around the world that political systems are about the same everywhere.

In 1997, my dad, my little brother and I fled our house to escape the ethnic war that was engulfing Warri. We had driven only a mile before we met the first roadblock mounted by armed militias who demanded to know our tribe. My little brother and I were too scared to speak. My dad, unsure whether the militias were from our tribe, shouted, "Urhobo! Urhobo!" Luckily the militias were Urhobo, and they allowed our car to pass. We made it through several other militia roadblocks and finally arrived safely at our house on the outskirts of town. Even today, the ethnic divisions that caused the crisis in Warri still exist and can easily erupt at any time. Across Nigeria, where I spent most of my childhood, ethnic and religious conflicts are common. From conflict between Ile-Ife and Modakeke in the southwest to religious conflicts in the north of the country, many people have lost their lives and property.

During my medical studies in Russia, my classmates were mostly from Sri-Lanka where there was an ongoing civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the government. The tensions between the Tamils and Sinhalese members of my group reminded me of the same problems I experienced in Nigeria. A few weeks after my arrival in Russia, I was the victim of a xenophobic attack that almost cost me my life. I have received unwelcome treatment in many other parts of the world I have lived in and visited and observed racial and ethnic divisions in America. These experiences have taught me that human hostility towards the "other" is not unique to Nigeria, Russia, Sri-Lanka or America; it is the same everywhere.

Over the years, I have met young people with crushing student debt and meager salaries, inadequate to repay their loans. This touched me deeply. Over the course of my travels, I have seen the dramatic effects of different types of immigration policy. My travels around the world have also given me a

unique insight into the strengths and weaknesses of different healthcare systems. I have seen people die in Nigeria because of their inability to come up with a mere \$150 to pay for an operation. I have seen the positive and negative effects of free healthcare in the United Kingdom, Russia, and Malaysia. In America, I have seen sick people delay medical treatment because of the cost of care.

In Nigeria, the criminal justice is broken. Police and military officers act with impunity. The rich can buy their way while the poor languish behind bars for the same crime. In the United States, I see the same problems with the justice system.

From these experiences and much more, I started to see certain patterns in the way human or social systems work. I realized that just like everything in the universe, some fundamental principles governed all such systems, and these principles determine their success or failure, from the family to the United Nations. My purpose in writing this book is to explain these principles and provide a fresh way for people to look at the different systems we have created. My application of these principles to select systems in America is intended to demonstrate their effect and show that human systems can only thrive if we adhere to them.

## Chapter 1

# Introduction to Social Gravity

The family, healthcare system, Social Security, schools, the military, community, nation-state, criminal justice system, and the United Nations all have one common denominator; they are institutions created of and for human beings. So, although they may look very different because of their tremendous range in size and purpose, the factors that influence their success and failure are the same. These systems can all be categorized as human or social systems.

In the United States, many social systems appear broken. The political, economic, higher education, criminal justice, and higher education, healthcare systems all seem to be showing signs of strain.

On the political front, politicians from both sides of the aisle seeking office shout the same slogans of change and promise of reforms, only to maintain the status quo once elected. The Citizens United ruling, released in January 2010, which eliminated the corporate and union ban on making independent expenditures and financing electioneering communications, only helped reinforce the idea that the political system is rigged in favor of the rich and powerful (Liptak, 2010). The rise of populist politicians in the 2016 election cycle, like candidate Senator Bernie Sanders and the electoral victory of Donald Trump, is a testament to the deep sense of frustration many Americans feel towards Washington's elites and the entire political system.

On the economic front, ordinary Americans are struggling with stagnant wages and debts. The middle class is shrinking, and inequality is on the rise (Pew Research Center, 2016). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in the United States, the average income of the richest 10% is almost 20 times as large as for the poorest 10% while the OECD average is 9.6. The United States is now the most unequal of all Western nations, with significantly less social mobility than Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland (Förster and Levy 2004). Globalization and trade agreements have changed the job market perhaps forever, with mixed results. The Occupy movement that began on September 17, 2011, is evidence that the current economic paradigm is not working well for everyone.

In the higher education sector, many college graduates are drowning in massive debt with no idea how they can repay their loans. The total outstanding student loan debt in the US is well above \$1.4 trillion, and over 44 million

Americans hold student loans (Student Loan Hero, 2017). According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, one in four student loan borrowers is either in delinquency or default on their student loans. For many college graduates, the future appears difficult, and the decision to go college increasingly looks like a mistake.

The criminal justice system is facing its own problems. According to the center of prison studies, the US has less than 5% of the world population, but about 25% of the world's prisoners. Mandatory minimum sentencing laws have caused the prison population to balloon (James, 2016). The recent deaths of unarmed citizens at the hands of law enforcement officers, as well as the killing of law enforcement officers, is evidence of considerable distrust and legitimacy issues in the system. Also, the rise of protest movements, like Black Lives Matter and other activist groups due to criminal justice concerns, is a sign that the system isn't working optimally for all Americans.

In the healthcare sector, there are serious issues of affordability and universal access. The US spends more on healthcare than most developed countries, yet affordable quality care remains elusive for many Americans. Health spending accounted for 17.8% of the nation's economy in 2015: that's \$3.2 trillion, or an average of nearly \$10,000 per person (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2017). This is the highest in the world. A survey conducted by The New York Times and the Kaiser Family Foundation found that many Americans face financial hardship from medical bills and having health insurance does not buffer against this hardship (Sanger-Katz, 2016). The Affordable Care Act (ACA), or Obamacare as it is popularly called, was supposed to reduce costs and give more Americans access to healthcare services. Although it succeeded in covering more Americans, it is showing signs of buckling under its own weight. Premiums and deductibles have skyrocketed for most healthcare plans, and many insurance companies are pulling out of its exchanges. A Kaiser Family Foundation analysis estimated that 31% of US counties would have only one insurer in 2017 (Cox and Semanskee, 2016). The future of the ACA looks increasingly uncertain, and quality care for all Americans remains a distant dream.

On the international stage, the threat of a major escalation or war looms. The United Nations (UN), the organization entrusted with managing global affairs, is failing to live up to its duties. Russia's annexation of Crimea, the inability of the UN to resolve the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and the failure of the UN to act decisively to stop the loss of lives in Syria have clearly revealed the organization is stuck in the past, unable to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Over time, social systems have a natural tendency to move towards greater disorder, decay, and breakdown. This explains the disorder and decay with



social systems in America. This tendency to increased disorder and decay has been described as social entropy (Klaus 1986; Bailey, 1990).

Entropy is always present in a social system. It could be low or high. In a state of high entropy, a social system is characterized by such vices as fraud, waste, inefficiency, corruption, dissatisfaction, crime, financial distress, ethnic and racial tensions, moral breakdown, conflict, discrimination, and all those factors that hamper its ability to thrive. On the other hand, in a state of low social entropy, the system is free of most of the vices or problems that could hamper its success. It might exhibit small or insignificant levels of decay or stress, but overall it functions and operates well.

Every member of a social system can be described as a contributor to the system. The contribution of a contributor to the system entails their input in the system, their burden, competence, expertise, skill, or qualification. There are two types of contributors: primary and secondary contributors. Primary contributors are those at the foundation of the system without which the system cannot exist, and secondary contributors (or third parties) are those who augment the system. For example, considering the healthcare system, primary contributors would be patients and healthcare professionals, and secondary contributors would be private insurance companies.

Also, every social system is characterized by both positive and negative traits. Positive traits such as honesty, integrity, moral uprightness, responsibility, selflessness, judicious spending, literacy, good health, and wealth are beneficial to the system and contribute to lower entropy. Negative traits are deleterious to the system and increase entropy, pushing the system towards failure; examples include quarrelsomeness, dishonesty, violence, drug use, reckless spending, irresponsible behavior, prejudice, selfishness, greed, corruption, poverty, sickness, and illiteracy.

Furthermore, every contributor in a social system has an entropic energy associated with the type of traits they carry. Contributors with negative traits have high entropic energy while those positive traits have low entropic energy. The actions, behavior, and condition of people with high entropic energy tend to drive the system towards greater entropy compared to those with low entropic energy. In the healthcare system, for example, the old and sick and those contributors who engage in fraudulent and illegal activities are considered high entropic. They put more strain on the system's resources than the rest of the population. If a healthcare system becomes dominated by such people, its long-term sustainability is threatened. In a neighborhood or community, criminals are high entropic people because their actions and behavior are detrimental to the proper working of the system. In a workplace or family, a quarrelsome and abusive person is high entropic to the system.

Entropy in social systems is driven by;

1. The dynamism of things and human interests;
  - A. From the climate to people's interest, things tend to change over time. People's interests, goals, ambition, dreams, plans, taste, etc. tends to change over time, and this constant change has an entropic effect on all social systems.
  - B. Random unforeseen and unexpected circumstances often outside the control and by no fault of any contributor of the system e.g. accidents, natural disasters, death of an important contributor, economic downturn, misfortune, etc.
2. Human Imperfection.
  - A. Human negative traits which continuously creates challenges for the system.
  - B. Human errors and mistakes in dealing with these challenges.

No social system is devoid of entropy because of the dynamism of things/human interests and human imperfection, and this is why entropy in a social system is never at a point of zero. The best it can be is low.

Change is a fact of life, and it presents a constant challenge for all social systems. Social systems that can compete, overcome the effects of change or spearhead it continue to thrive while those unable to respond to it effectively or overcome the challenge it poses, fail. As the interest, goals, and ambitions of a contributor change, they move on to join other systems that satisfy their interest or goals. For example, people in elementary school, move onto high school and then to college. People move from job to job, move in search of greener pastures, to escape persecution or war, etc. This constant change creates a huge challenge for all social systems.

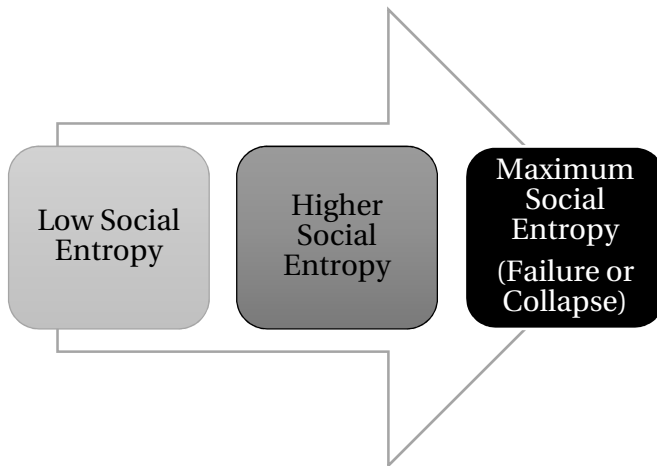
Also, random unplanned and unforeseen events outside the control of the system arise from time to time, and this has an entropic effect on all social systems. Events such as food scarcity because of drought, epidemic or pandemic, accidents, natural disasters, etc. increases entropy and threaten the existence of social systems.

Human imperfection also poses a significant problem. Contributors are usually born low entropic and tend to acquire negative traits over time. This essentially means that contributors tend to move from low to high entropic states over time. This tendency is influenced by;

1. A person's environment and the company they keep.
2. Negative events and experiences in the course of their lives.
3. Human nature, the need to survive and the pursuit of status.

A person's environment and the company they keep influences their tendency to acquire negative traits. Being in an environment with people with negative traits increases a person's likelihood of acquiring negative traits over time. Negative events in life can influence people adversely causing them to acquire negative traits. Also, due to human nature, people get old and sick over time. In addition, because of the need to survive, and the pursuit of status and glory, people sometimes act at the expense of the system in pursuit of their interest or at the expense of a competing system or group in favor of their own.

Therefore, for any social system to thrive, it must counteract this force of human entropy by adhering to certain vital principles or rules. These principles act as the force of social gravity or anti-entropy that pushes back on entropy, allowing the system to thrive. A social system that fails to adhere to these principles marches faster towards its demise. Even if it does adhere to these principles, emerging challenges and human imperfection presents a constant battle between the forces of social entropy and social gravity. The point where entropy is highest is called the point of maximum entropy: characterized by persistent and severe dysfunction such as anarchy, conflict, anomie, severe financial distress, stagnation, massive corruption, irreconcilable differences, dearth of communication for a long period of time, etc. Once a system reaches this point, it can be described as failed or collapsed and it is irreversible. Only systemic reforms that overcome the causes of the dysfunction can return it to a state of low entropy, and the reformed system is considered a new system.



**Figure 1-1: Entropy tends to increase in a social system, pushing it towards failure or collapse.**

As entropy starts to increase in the system, which of course is a sign the forces of social gravity have been overpowered, it can only be returned to a state of low entropy by restructuring it to adhere to the violated principles. This process is called **De-entropification**.

Below are the nine principles that counteract the force of entropy and act as the forces of social gravity in every social system:

1. the principle of general homogeneity;
2. power or authority of any contributor in the system should never exceed their contribution;
3. benefits of any contributor in the system should never exceed their contribution;
4. all contributors must act within the established rules or laws, and everyone must be equal before them (The rule of law);
5. the law or rules in the system must be clear, simple, and consistent
6. deterrents, or negative consequences, must always be equal to the severity of wrongdoing;
7. negative consequences or punishment in all forms must be confined or limited to the wrongdoer, and not applied to the group;
8. primary contributors must communicate with one another directly and frequently; and
9. secondary contributors (third parties and middlemen) should be avoided if possible.

### **1. The Principle of General Homogeneity.**

General homogeneity encompasses all forms of homogeneity. Homogeneity is one of the most important counteracting forces of social entropy and can be best described as an attractive force that binds contributors together. Homogeneity strengthens the system through the bonds of social capital, social trust and solidarity (Alesina & La Ferrara 2000; Charles & Kline 2006; Knack & Keefer, 1997). Furthermore, it increases group cohesion, loyalty, and overall performance (Costa & Kahn 2003).

There are two dimensions of homogeneity, and one or both apply to all social systems. These two dimensions are commonality (or similarities), and equality. Commonality or similarities imply that contributors share characteristics which allow them to be able to co-exist harmoniously or without problems or conflict. The greater the shared characteristics or similarities between contributors in a social system, the lower the social entropy tends to be in the

system. Conversely, in social systems characterized by lower levels of commonality or similarities, there is a greater tendency toward higher social entropy.

Equality, the second dimension of homogeneity, simply means that all contributors in the system enjoy equal rights, access to services, and opportunities. Greater levels of equality result in lower social entropy, and greater levels of inequality lead to higher social entropy.

Commonality, or similarities, goes arm in arm with equality of rights and opportunities in any social system. High levels of commonality or shared characteristics are associated with a greater degree of equality of rights and access to services and opportunities, and the reverse is true. Minorities often face discrimination in social systems.

Furthermore, a social system is either in a state of positive or negative homogeneity. Positive homogeneity enhances cohesion, social trust, social capital and reduces entropy in the system. Negative homogeneity is associated with heterogeneity or diversity which lowers group cohesion (Cohen & Bailey 1997; Webber & Donahue 2001). Also, diversity is associated with lower social trust and social capital (Eisenberg 2007; Newton & Delhey 2005; Coffe and Geys 2006; Anderson & Paskeviciute 2006; Poterba 1997; Vigdor 2004; Alesina, Baqir and Easterly, 1999; Leigh 2006; Glaeser & Alesina 2004; Pennant 2005; Jordahl & Gustavsson 2008; Soroka, Helliwell & Johnston, 2007; Charles & Kline 2006).

The table below lists the traits and characteristics of both states of homogeneity.

**Figure 1-2: Differences Between Positive and Negative Homogeneity.**

Positive Homogeneity	Negative Homogeneity
Always characterized by positive traits.	Always characterized by negative traits.
Often characterized by contributors who are similar in many respects. (Identity, culture, language, race, ethnicity, wealth, interest, intelligence, skill, income, socio-economics, religion, etc.)	Often characterized by significant dissimilarities or heterogeneity between contributors.
Most or all contributors enjoy equal rights and opportunities. In other words, discrimination and inequality is low or absent.	Significant disparities in rights and access to services and opportunities. In other words, discrimination and inequality are significant.

In larger social systems like a community or nation-state, there tends to be a division of the system into a positive and a negative homogenous group. The positive homogenous group is dominated by low entropic contributors or

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