

PL525: Analysing Political Culture

Composite Lectures

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Lecture One: Introduction: The Problems of Civil Society

1 Civil Society: An Introduction

- Civil society is that network of free associations where private individuals come together outside the intimate sphere of the family, but in a form of social life not controlled by the state. As a participant in the group, each person is acting as a private individual, not fulfilling an obligatory role. The common purpose of the group ought to be of broadly political significance.
- Civil society is thus expressive of “associational life”. It is a category that has come to be of increasing interest to political philosophers, political scientists and sociologists.
- The main impetus to research on civil society was the end of the Cold War. The nineteen eighties saw a movement towards democratisation in the former Eastern Europe, with parallel developments elsewhere, such as in South America. It seemed to some theorists that whether or not transitions to democracy succeeded seemed to vary with the extent to which the society concerned had a flourishing associational life.
- Attention turned from the formal structures and institutions of democracy, such as a voting process, independently funded political parties, independent legislature

and the capacity for judicial supervision of the political process to the social preconditions of a liberal democratic culture. It seemed that in a transition from an illiberal to a liberal society, civil society played an important role.

- Intense focus on civil society has thrown up a host of issues: what is it, and does the term now cover too many phenomena to be of theoretical and practical use. The discussion has become part of a wider debate about social capital. The latter is that identifiable property of society, studied by sociologists, that correlates with higher standards of governance, economic prosperity and quality of life. It measures the extent to which people feel “connected” with others in their social environment.

2 Civil Society and Processes of Democratisation

- The idea is that if a society has a network of free associations independently of the state, then its citizens can give rise to a democratic culture that is supportive of both democracy and liberalism. A liberal society requires more than institutions and structures but certain kinds of citizens with virtues characteristic of liberal democratic societies. Those virtues are learnt in and practised in civil society.
- This course will examine various aspects of these claims: the relationship between civil society and process of democratization, civil society as a place where trust is

learnt and citizenship developed, the relation between civil society and liberalism and between civil society, citizen activism and democracy. We will also consider the sceptics about the notion, both theoretical and practical.

- **3 Civil and Uncivil Societies: Compare and Contrast**

- What exactly is civil society? What does an association have to be to count as part of civil society? This raises complex issues. The first point to be made is that civil society is a contrastive term. We have a better sense of what uncivil societies are like. One leading kind of uncivil society is the absolutist or totalitarian state. The state seeks to control every aspect of social life to the best of its technological ability. In the former Soviet Union, a sports team or a chess club required a member of the Party to supervise its activities and in East Germany a colleague or member of the family might be a government spy on your activities even in the home. No part of your life, not even your life in society, is free from state interference and information gathering.

- Another kind of uncivil society is a society lacking in civility, where there is a breakdown in impersonal trust, a rise in political factionalism and a rise in fanaticism. These are cases where citizens lose their sense of the legitimacy of the political process or of the social order itself.

- Civil societies are made up of private citizens who come together to realise certain collective ends, but bound by certain virtues. These are the virtues of co-operation tempered by civility: an acceptance of fair terms of association and the liberal virtues of toleration and mutual respect. One group of theorists appeal to civil society as the “schoolhouse” of citizen virtue: the place where individuals learn to co-operate with strangers, that is, non-family members.

4 Liberal Civil Society

- This raises the difficult question of the relation between civil society and liberalism. Can civil society explain liberalism if it presupposes it? Ernst Gellner points out that there are many countries in the world where a young woman has much to fear from coercive control from a kinship group, such as an extended network of uncles. That is an association outside the family narrowly conceived, but it is not liberal and is experienced in particular cases as an intolerant and illiberal, indeed, coercive form of life. Our response is that it is the wrong kind of free association outside the family but not in the state: it is a coercive, illiberal association. But then we seem to be saying that it is not liberal. So we are tacitly assuming that we are interested in liberal civil societies. That now looks like too tight a circle: civil society explains many aspects of liberalism, but it is liberalism that makes civil society possible.

- Yet liberalism itself, as a political view, is subject to the charge that it has difficulties motivating its citizens. It seems to need the category of civil society to explain how it is that it can presuppose certain virtues of tolerance and mutual restraint on the part of its citizens. Liberalism seems to need civil society as much as civil society needs liberalism.
- Another borderline area is the relation between civil society and the economy. Associations in civil society express the liberal freedoms of privacy and free association, but radical critics argue that this normative ideal legitimises simply market relations. Early modern “political economy” certainly sees emergent capitalism and civil society as valuable aspects of the same social order, but it is unclear what their relationship actually is.
- A compromise view argues that interdependence need not be a damaging circularity. In particular, at the level of practice, the quality of life for citizens in a liberal democratic society can be improved by a high level of social capital. Thus liberalism ought to make the sustaining of civil society part of its political policies, under the general constraint that a liberal society is always under. It cannot promote any particular person’s view of the good life, but if it can identify those parts of our collective life that make liberalism itself possible, it can promote those without making them legally compulsory. Examples: making voting legally compulsory, making civics lessons part of the national curriculum,

offering tax incentives to charities and other free associations, requiring private clubs not to respect equality legislation, etc.

Lecture Two: Liberalism, Communitarianism and Civil Society

1 What is Liberalism?

- Liberalism, the dominant political theory of the modern west, is primarily concerned with the liberty of the individual. Its primary aim is to secure the freedom of the individual against the power of the state. Some list of “basic liberties” is secured first and considerations such as fair distribution come in later and are not allowed to override the basic liberties. At the centre of liberalism is fairness, in that a liberal state does not promote private ideals of the good life. The basis of coercive law is the prevention of harm or incitements to harm; legislation is then used to support widely supported views of the good life and preconditions of liberalism itself. Do the latter include citizenship and civil society?
- From the outset, liberalism has been accused of sanctioning not merely the freedom of the individual, but economic selfishness in the free market, and an atomised conception of individual identity. “Individualism” is attacked as a camouflage for economic self-enrichment at the expense of others and as leading to an atomised world in which the social nature of individuals is downplayed or ignored.

- Rawls is one of the leading contemporary defenders of liberalism. In his view, we can get insight into our political commitments by reflecting on what we would, first personally, choose on the basis of prudence in a carefully specified choice situation. Does this account suggest any model of the self or of personal identity? Rawls's critics suggested that it did. The foremost amongst these critics was Michael Sandel. Sandel claimed he could find the assumption that society was made up of isolated, atomized individuals within Rawlsian liberalism itself.

2 The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism

- In Rawls's choice situation, a group of individuals who do not know their own identity in the final outcome choose principles of justice to govern their lives together. (But they do not choose them "under that description". Their motive is prudence). The idea is that prudent choice by an individual who does not know who she will be in the outcome chosen models just choice by a social group who have full knowledge of their own identities and the possible outcomes.
- Sandel claimed that this account of people in the choice situation represented Rawls's theory of persons and typified atomistic liberal views of the self as "prior to its ends". The modern self has degenerated to a point of "pure choice". In fact, says Sandel, selves are primarily social selves, picked out by their social relations. There is an inconsistency, Sandel argued, between the kind of solidarity between

people that would be needed to support Rawls's demanding theory of justice and his atomised view of people. Rawls's actual views about distribution are demanding: we have to think of our talents, for example, are not "ours" in the sense that we own them and hence own what we get by using them. Our talents are part of a collective trust that we all draw upon; fair distribution is separate from talent. A fair distribution only permits inequality if it benefits the worst off people in society.

- This was a central claim in a multi-faceted critique of liberalism that also argued that liberalism was focused exclusively on principles of right, and could give no account of the good. But there are values like shared community and shared culture that are goods. Second, liberalism distorts goods like this when it does recognise them: they are goods held in common, not goods for individuals. Third, liberal societies that do not recognise the good cannot engage with the motivation of citizens and this is empirically a recognisable problem in Western democracies.

3 The Liberal Response

- Rawls claimed, and claims, that Sandel was merely confused. His theory of justice describes a choice situation that abstracts away from certain features of people for the purposes of choice. It is not a theory of what they essentially are. Rawls's thought experiment asks people to think of themselves in an abstract

way, which is to think of yourself without some of your properties. That does mean that the you-without-those-properties is what you essentially are, or people essentially are.

- Other liberals have sought to close the gap between the two sides by developing forms of liberalism that are more clearly focused on autonomy and the provision of “choice worthy environments”. Joseph Raz, for example, argues that we can identify the components of a good life very abstractly, such that all good lives share a basic pattern. The state is not unfair, then, in promoting that pattern, centrally autonomous choice and the values to choose from. So libraries, art galleries and health care are free; watching football is not subsidized by the State but left to the market.
- Michael Walzer has helpfully pointed out that the liberal self is neither a-social, nor social, but “post-social”. Hegelians are right to say that most of our identity and obligations are inherited not chosen. Not all our relations are akin to a voluntary contract. But people value “exit conditions”: the ability to break any such connection or obligation. All true, but not relevant to Rawls?

4 **Invoking Civil Society**

- Liberals emphasise individuals and their liberty. Communitarians emphasise the role of the social in the formation of identity and in making certain goods available to a person. Liberals may have to answer difficult questions about, for example, minority cultures and languages. Communitarians have to explain which communities are acceptable to them and which are not, given that some communities are illiberal. How do they do this without being a complement to liberalism, not a rival to it?
- If this looks exactly like the problems facing civil society theorists, it is the same problem. How is the individual related to the social, such that individual liberty is compatible with the existence of social ties? In what way does sociability give rise to a legitimate conception of a good life?
- The civil society argument tries to go beyond this vague formulation to a positive proposal: that civil society is the sphere in which people exercise the on-going obligations of citizenship. It is a presupposition that these associational groups are freely chosen and entered into. However, within them people co-operate with each other in a way that gives rise to social solidarity. But this is not the solidarity of the kinship group, the tribe or the closed community, but a liberal solidarity of

co-citizenship where people come together to form common ends and to pursue them.

- A concern throughout the discussion between liberals and communitarians is the limits of state action. If the state promotes certain kinds of life, dissuades you from others and criminalizes some, does it overstep the bounds of its legitimacy? All agree that it is unfair if, for example, a public tax was used to supply champagne to investment bankers free of charge, but not if it is used to supply free healthcare to a person who could not otherwise afford it. Which side of the line is the promotion of civil society? It is like a “public good”, like street lighting, we all benefit from it. High levels of democratic participation and social capital are demonstrable social goods. Arguably a liberal state does not act unfairly in promoting social capital in general and free association in particular.
- The state has overstepped the line if it makes joining a free association compulsory: it is not then free. But liberals are used to that paradox: the answer is that a state can encourage social capital without making it compulsory.

5 How Does Civil Society Mediate Between Liberalism and Community?

- Both communitarianism and defenders of civil society have to accept that these are developments within liberalism, not an alternative to liberalism. We are, in both cases, talking about pre-conditions of liberalism that it does not recognise and take into account. So Sandel's argument about the communitarian self is going to have to be abandoned. But we still need a liberal account of how selves relate to each other. And we still have Taylor's empirical argument that liberalism cannot explain how it motivates citizens, especially in competition with the "politics of identity". When you look around the modern world, people are motivated by gay rights, Palestinian nationalism and environmentalism but they don't go on marches to protest that they are liberals. (An old joke, but still a good one: the American poet Robert Frost defined a "liberal" as a person who could not take her own side in an argument.) Can civil society help with this problem of motivation? With what do liberal citizens identify?
- The key issue is citizenship. Rawls has increasingly turned his attention to legitimacy, and how to legitimate his theory of justice in a pluralist society. He has suggested that when it comes to constitutional fundamentals, the duty of citizenship is to endorse the blueprint of your society in terms of part of the truth, not the whole truth, of what you believe about the good life. But this self-restraint is based on citizenship. A liberal citizen respects and is respected by her fellow

citizens, such that you do not force your views on other citizens solely on the basis that they are yours.

- Taylor argues that what is required is a revival of the civic republican tradition of active citizenship. Participation in politics, even giving that phrase a very wide definition, is itself part of the good life. This participation is going to require devolved spheres of political association characteristic of civil society. Liberals hope that appealing to civil society will, in turn, explain how a liberal society produces citizens with the liberal virtues of mutual respect, toleration and self-criticism.
- Others, such as Walzer, have emphasised the developmental role of civil society as providing the sphere in which the duties and obligations of citizenship are learned. Civil society is literally an educational place, the adult successor to school. Just as you learned to play nicely, so in civil society you participate, in the broadest sense, with other citizens in the bringing about of political ends.

Lecture Three: Trust, Citizenship and Voluntary Association

1 Trust and the Terms of Social Association

- Civil Society mediates between the individual and the social and between society and the state. There are two aspects to this problem: the social “microphysics” of how the individual is related to the social, a problem that centres on trust. The other aspect is how the individual relates to the state and the key concept there is citizenship. We will look at both of these relationships during this course.
- Conceptions of civil society hinge on different conceptions of the relation between the individual and the social. We will see that Cohen and Arato, prominent theorists of the democratic potential of new social movements, take civil society to be a vehicle for a radical critique of society because they have a highly moralized view of how people are mutually related in such movements. They turn out to be related in non-instrumental, non-objectifying, symmetrical and reciprocal ways: the Green party as an updated Kantian kingdom of ends that combines mutual solidarity with altruism.
- This moralized Kantianism is very different from how the classical liberal tradition in the early modern period conceived of social relations in civil society: there, it was viewed as expressive of “self-interest rightly understood”. Possessive

individualism is tempered by engagement with social life as expressive of a person's enlightened self-interest.

2 Self Interest and Society: A Classical Liberal Model

- The ‘classical’ model is based on the social contract tradition: the basis of this tradition is the prisoners’ dilemma. Two prisoners, who cannot trust each other, are separated and told that the other is confessing to a crime jointly committed. Motivated solely by one’s prudential interests, how ought each (symmetrically) to respond? The rational course of action is to confess but that yields the second to worst outcome. Co-operation would have yielded the second to best outcome. Conclusion: morality coincides with enlightened self-interest.
- As a model of political society, this contractarian bargaining solution has been beset by the problem of the free rider, whose motive to break such agreements is identical to those who are motivated to keep them. Such bargaining solutions seem inherently unstable and prone to internal collapse. Structurally, bargaining solutions supply a collective but not a distributive reason for action: it gives us all a reason to sign the social contract but does not give the same reason to each of us. One line of solution points to repeated game playing and our desire for a reputation for fair dealing. But now we have an ethical and political solution, not a contractarian solution alone, as you have to assume the motivations of fairness.

3 Two Models of Trust: Externalist and Ethical

- A revised liberal model, then, focuses on the role of trust between “post-social” selves who value both individual autonomy and fair dealing. They want to stand in trusting relations to each other and the real threat of the free rider is of undermining impersonal trust. Trust can be viewed solely as a remedy for a cognitive lack: it is a device for dealing with lack of knowledge and uncomputable complexity. This approach takes trust to extend the social contract approach and views it purely externally and strategically. It is a compensatory mechanism for the fact that we cannot fully predict or control others. In the reading for this week Russell Hardin represents this hard nosed view that trust is a compensatory mechanism for lack of knowledge. Since I cannot reliably predict what you will do as I lack knowledge, I trust you instead.
- This “externalist” model takes an external, sociological and explanatory account of the social role of trust as basic to the concept: judgements of trust emerge as prudential estimates of the trustworthiness of others. They are based on judgements as to the probability of certain kinds of action and of certain kinds of response. Trusting relations are cognitive relations: responses to beliefs about the actions of others.
- Take a simple case of not trusting yourself, such as putting your alarm clock out of reach. Hardin emphasizes that social trust depends on similar external social

devices: insurance, the law of contract, etc. An externalized third party “backs up” the relationship that you are going to enter into with sanctions and compensations.

- Non-cognitive accounts emphasise that a shared basis of sentiment is the foundation of trust: impersonal trust has a non-cognitive basis in attitude or emotion. Trust is not based on credulity but it is based on more than belief. It performs an ethical role and in virtue of that fact plays a social role that cannot be explained solely in strategic terms. The basic idea is that trust is tied to a basic ethical commitment to commit yourself in a joint agreement: you agree to trust and the subject agrees to be trusted, as it were. (there is an interesting question as to the nature of self-trust).
- A key question dividing the two sides is this: does it make sense to decide to trust? On the cognitive account, not really: this is not a decision, but a rationally grounded belief that is predictive in nature. It is a probability estimate about what you are likely to do if I trust you. On the ethical view we can make sense of deciding to trust, as it is to enter into a commitment binding on both parties. I commit myself to trusting you and you commit yourself to acting in a trustworthy way. On the ethical view we can even imagine a person doing this when the balance of evidence does not support it: a couple with a track record of

4 Trust Within Civil Society

- Civil society is a domain of association that is not an expression of the relation in which you stand to your entire fellow “world citizens” nor is it the domain of association in which you stand to others in the “intimate sphere” of the family. The family is a “primitive scene” in which people learn to trust (or not) partly because of the dependency of children on their parents. Civil society is, rather, the domain of impersonal trust. Is this bond constituted non-cognitively or cognitively?
- If trust comes in degrees, then the kinds of associations built up in civil society may be means of extending trust from relations of trust based in intimacy to forms of trust structured by common aims and objects whose realization requires co-operation. It mediates between intimate trust and completely impersonal trust, where completely impersonal trust is the kind of minimal faith that your fellow citizens will not attack you on sight. A common project is a place where people learn trust and the co-operative virtues. In particular, they develop the virtues of citizens. But they do so by furthering the aims of an association that is neither narrowly self-interested, nor a fully cosmopolitan altruism.

5 Trust and the Marketplace

- Unlike “classical” liberalism, associations in civil society need not be seen as bearing any strong analogy to market relations. Markets are not accurately described by simple game theory either. They are regulated and subject to legal, political and ethical norms. But we also contextualise our ethical expectations: in commercial situations “ruthless” behaviour may be tolerated ethically if it remains legal. But this is a contextual relativisation of ethical standards (compare: if you accept a wedding invitation, you cannot then turn up and laugh at the proceedings.) Early modern theory, however, did take “self-interest properly understood” to be the essential nature of social and market relations, but there is no gain to be had from confusing them.
- The virtues of social association, then, are co-operation towards mutual ends, mediated by reciprocal trust relative to the terms of that association. There is an interesting connection here with the idea of liberal democratic citizenship.

Lecture Four: Civil Society and Concepts of Democracy

1 A Liberal Democratic Model

- The optimistic liberal model sees the political process in the following way: legitimacy derives from “the people”, but the legitimacy is transmitted to the political process in three ways. Certain fundamental rights and liberties are placed beyond electoral politics in a constitutional framework. General policies are implemented by representative democratic institutions. However, the entire process is supported by an active, associational network of citizens in civil society. The ultimate legitimacy of the state depends on “we, the people” but the legitimacy of our representative democratic system depends also on participation, widely and weakly construed.
- Civil society is here an educational resource that gives people the knowledge and skills to be active citizens. It encourages motivations that are neither purely self-interested nor fully altruistic, but co-operative and trusting relations between citizens brought together to pursue common ends. These ends may be directly political, or indirectly encourage virtues that are the basis of liberal citizenship.
- These ends can be directly political or indirectly political in that they encourage liberal attitudes of toleration, restraint and civility. This network of associations in

civil society put pressure on the current agenda of political options considered by, and “delivered” by representative institutions. They are not narrow, factional special interests paid for via the market place, like special interest groups or PR firms. Civil society institutions can represent the public good and aim to shape the current political agenda to changing social attitudes and sense of what, politically, are the most salient issues. In this way the democratic process of deliberation on and delivery of political option is complemented by civil society that renews the set of options.

- Once again, civil society is appealed to as a compromise between a radically participatory view of democracy, in which every citizen takes an active and direct role in democratic decision making, and an elite theory which, as a matter of fact or of prescription, sees such participation as restricted to competitive elites.

2 The Elite Model of Democracy

- In this way the civil society model contrasts with the elite model of democracy. The elite model can either be presented as an explanatory model of how democracies do work, or more provocatively as a normative model of how they ought to work.

- As an explanatory model, the elite theory points out that rulers and administrators tend to be drawn from a narrow class of the population, both in terms of educational attainment and/or professional qualification. This narrow class, the political class, makes up the group whose members in turn take up positions of power and responsibility. This commonality in the elites contrasts with the key fact that they compete with each other for political power.
- More provocatively, the elite theorists argue that democracy is not, in fact, best served by a radical and participative form of democracy. It is normatively better if elites are left to get on with the business of government. The population as a whole generates a range of different interests and those interests are agglomerated by parties. Political parties, however, are basically motivated to strike a deal with the maximally electorally rewarding combination of interest groups. Between elections, “the people” are better viewed as passive clients of the political process than active in a participative sense.
- Part of the argument for the elite theory is pragmatic: we are dealing with mass societies and a complex functional problem. Is it so complex that, for example, day-to-day administration has itself been split off into the separate governmental feature of bureaucracy. However the challenging part of the view is its normative claim that too much democratic participation is bad for democracy.

- The key analogy for an elite theorist such as Schumpeter is the marketplace. Just as markets are “blind” steering mechanisms that bring about certain forms of social co-ordination, so the idea is that we should see the democratic process on a model of elites as competing suppliers and voters as consumers.

3 Critique of the Elite Theory

- The elite theory makes some realistic and valuable points: patterns of influence are unevenly distributed in society and sometimes the political class takes a lead in shaping public opinion as well as vice versa. Schumpeter argued, in particular, that only elite theory can explain political leadership.
- The downside of the view is that the legitimacy of the elite depends on competition and on electoral success. But this will, through time, naturally gravitate towards the interests of the “average voter”. From the “supplier” end, electorates can face political parties tacitly operating a “cartel” in that they limit, artificially, the range of choices on offer. (Empirically, however, elites tend to be more “moderate” than elements of the non-elite). Furthermore, while elites are good communicators with the mass, the mass has difficulty communicating with the elite.
- There are no resources within the elite model for radically re-shaping the agenda of interests, or of putting new interests on the agenda at all. The electorate is a passive repository of interests and the only meaningful communication is the act of voting.
- The strength of Schumpeter’s analogy would be if the electoral process was as efficient a transmitter of information about political preferences as markets are

efficient transmitters of economic preferences. However, while markets seem to be excellent means of transmitting information, democratic politics seems very poor and Putnam's empirical case studies show how little the mass knows about the views of the elites and vice versa.

- There is an asymmetry here: the elites can use mass media to communicate with the electorate, but individual voters have no direct access to elites. Civil society associations function to compensate for this poor communication. One voter cannot change the political agenda but organized groups stand a better chance of doing so.

Lecture Five: Civil Society and Processes of Democratisation

- One of the major reasons for contemporary interest in civil society is its role in explaining processes of democratisation. The concept came to prominence in explaining the surprising features of the “Velvet Revolution” in Eastern Europe. That process was viewed as a “revolution from below”, which resulted in the rapid and largely peaceful collapse of communist regimes in the face of pressure from free associations. Those free associations were assigned a role in the rebuilding of democratic regimes by both participants in, and theorists of, the processes of revolution and regime building. Political philosophers then tried to extend the concept to processes of democratisation in other geographical regions, notably Latin America.
- In some ways this use of the concept of civil society is not surprising as it recapitulates the historical development of the concept within the Western European tradition which already has mature democracies. In early modern Europe, the power of the Roman empire declined leaving the Roman Catholic church with a historical choice. The church in the West, fearful of the power of a secular emperor, encouraged the plural states of the early modern period and played them off against each other. Within the states of early modern Europe, state builders, such as monarchs, faced a microcosm of this wider situation. In

their attempts to centralise they were faced with established rights and interests, such as “estates”. They, too, followed a “divide and conquer strategy”. The result is a multipolar and pluralistic political environment where the power of the nation state is inherently limited.

1 The Historical Development of Civil Society in Western Europe

- The result in Western Europe was a “multi-polar” world of competing interests. Within states, monarchs played off feudal nobles and the church against, for example, “free towns”. Negotiated compromise became the path to state building, with the entire process underpinned by shared Christian norms. Strikingly, nations of Eastern Europe exhibited a different pattern of development, with “fast track” absolutist states centralising rapidly and with no shared consent or balance of interests. Historically this is the basis for the strength of civil society in Western European democracies and their weakness elsewhere.
- The experience of religious war, the development of toleration and freedom of conscience both within and between states led to a Western European set of political traditions centrally opposed to unification in any form.
- At the level of culture and ideology, key developments in the West were the rise of a public sphere: a literate public of sociologically private individuals who come together to discuss matters of common concern and to act (indirectly) as a check on state power. This development depended on both technological change and the emergence of market capitalism. “Lateral” communication and market

development occurred in tandem. In culture, there were new demands for consumption, the individualism of the modern novel, and the ideas of “fashion” and “refinement”. People could, through imagination and experience, take on a multiplicity of “roles”.

- The point seized upon by radical political critics of civil society is undoubtedly true: that it developed alongside early market capitalism. The state needed itself to raise revenue and its source of capital is taxation. The need for taxation paradoxically encourages demands for a recognition of the rights of citizenship. Theorists at the time and since have discussed the close relationship between “commerce” and “liberty”. Commercial relations require a degree of freedom from state control, but they also require legal regulation. They require a degree of reputation and interpersonal trust, while falling short of the strong networks of trust between family members. In short, commercial relations seemed to offer a model for relations between citizens: neither friends nor strangers, people with commercial “interests” can interact in the “right” way, treating society as a contract for mutual advantage. Enlightened self-interest and political obligation coincide. This conjunction of ideas is certainly found in early theorists of civil society, such as Adam Ferguson.

2 Thematising the “Velvet Revolution”

- The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of free, democratic and liberal societies in Western Europe provides a set of case studies for the role of civil society in bringing about successful transitions to democracy or its failure.
- Wesolowski’s description of the chaotic transition to democracy in Poland illustrates several key aspects of such developments: their geographical and historical specificity; the way in which they re-capitulate Western debates over the nature of liberalism versus community and problematic role of transition to a multi-party democracy.
- The role of political parties is crucial. A stable party system emerges from convergent constellations of interests. It is characteristic of transitions to democracy that there are a multiplicity of parties representing narrow, factional or ethnic or “special’ interests. They have not “agglomerated” through time into groups of interests, that promote certain primary interests over others that are less central.

3 Parallel Developments

- In both the Polish case and the Latin American cases cited by Oxhorn, the concern is that parties function to serve elite special interests, and are not representatively democratic. The democratic potential of institutions in civil society is not transmitted to the party structure, or that structure works actively to marginalize civil society. “Corporatism” are those sets of arrangements by which the state intervenes particularly in economic civil society. While it can take a positive form of worker representation, Oxhorn charts how repressive regimes in Latin America use corporatist arrangements to control working class demands.
- In Latin America, the dominant historical determinant of contemporary democratisation is the extreme polarisation of wealth and power that is a result of imperialism. Empires centralise, for their own convenience, and national independence handed over these centralised structures to the new ruling elites. Such countries also play international “catch up” in terms of their economy, with processes of industrialisation excluding the majority of the population. The ruling elites “buy off” those who gain from modernisation and subvert the democratic potential of mass movements or of civil society. Such regimes tend to be authoritarian, clientelist and populist. Inherited structures of inequality make civil society ineffective as the basis for democratic reform.

4 “Coerced Marginalisation”

- Oxhorn charts how economic stagnation led to military intervention in those states that had followed clientelist and populist policies, leading to even greater economic inequality as radical, “neo-liberal” economic reforms were introduced. But such coercion paradoxically led to the rise of “self-limiting” popular organisations. The needs met by the “controlled inclusion” model have to be met, and organisations came into being to address this need. Through their small size, lack of money and local bases, such organisations have tended to be internally egalitarian and democratic.
- Oxhorn points to the paradox that in the transition to democracy, civil society loses out. Is this passing on a “baton” from self-limiting civil society to a party system? Or is democratisation a casualty in the process of transition? The problem lies with the nature of the parties involved: with a heritage of populism, not liberalism, and a tainted past in the strategy of controlled inclusion, such parties need to adopt the internally democratic structures of popular movements and free themselves of economic control by ruling elites.

5 A Tentative Conclusion

- The role of civil society in these case studies of democratization is to provide a basis for democratic politics by offering a transition to

party political structures. Political parties evolve, mature and originate in civil society but move beyond it. Does civil society thereby “lose out”? One line of explanation points to parties evolving from a basis in civil society but coming to replace civil society structures. Another line of explanation claims that civil society is of its nature “self-limiting” and does not aim to replace political parties.

- Civil society thereby plays a dual role. In an emerging democracy it supplies a stable basis of liberal and consensual politics and the basis for an emergent party structure. In a stable and mature democracy its role changes: it is a permanent part of a political culture that aims to act as a check on the democratic process, supply a basis for legitimacy via continuing political involvement and independently act as a valuable form of social capital.

Lecture Six: Civil Society, New Social Movements and Marxism

Introduction

- Liberalism presupposes a network of free associations in society, made up of private individuals, who come together to promote matters of common concern. The existence of such groups/institutions is a counterweight to the power of the state. The state has no general business interfering in the internal organisation or purposes of such groups/institutions other than the formal requirements of law.
- If a liberal society has substantial goals of equality, as opposed to securing the basic liberties, this may extend its interest in legally regulating such groups/institutions. They may, for example, be legally required to be internally democratic or egalitarian.
- The on-going role of such groups/institutions in a society that is not predominantly “statist” or authoritarian is more indirect. They contribute to the democratic process first of all by teaching people how to be citizens, offering skills and attitudes required for liberal democratic citizenship.
- Second, such groups/institutions bear an indirect relationship to the democratic process. Their role is to act as a check on the political process, particularly those groups/institutions that form part of the public sphere. They also act positively to shape the political agenda and to put new issues up for public discussion. However, they are “self-limiting” in that they do not, in turn, seek to become part of the state itself or an organised political party.

1 A Liberal Model of the Relation between Civil Society and Democracy

- Via its indirect relation to the democratic process civil society acts as a counterbalance to the problems caused by an elite conception of democracy, in which political elites seek to align different constellations of interests. Such a view represents the electorate as “passive” and cannot explain the role of civil society in promoting new interests and acting as a medium of communication between the mass and the competing elites.
- Proponents of civil society see it as offering a compromise between radically participatory models of democracy, in which citizens must be actively engaged in the democratic process, and the elite model. The radically participatory model is difficult to reconcile with the demands of a mass society; it may be incompatible with liberalism to make participation itself part of the definition of a good life (liberalism may not be in the business of saying anything about the good life). However, the total passivity of citizens in the elite model, which reduces them to passive consumers of the political process, is neither explanatorily plausible nor normatively desirable.
- A particular focus of attention has been the emergence of new social movements, such as feminism, environmentalism and, most recently, anti-capitalism. They are

part of civil society, yet they also have mass membership (in the first two cases, not in the third, which is currently a loose collection of organizations with a loosely shared agenda). They have been particularly influential in changing existing political agendas and placing new issues in the public domain. They have led to new political parties or a re-orientation in existing parties. They have also offered hope to Neo-Marxist theorists of civil society, notably Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato.

2 **Neo-Marxism and New Social Movements**

- Neo-Marxism (sometimes also called “post-Marxism”) is a development out of the classical Marxist critique of the capitalist state, modes of production and modes of social organisation. That classical critique viewed civil society as a delusion. Apparently a form of social life that supported both liberty and commercial relations, Marx argued (“On the Jewish Question”) that it was a mask for exploitative capitalist social relations and individual selfishness.
- The historical failure of Marxism both as an explanatory set of categories and as a normative ideal lead to revisionism within the theory. A leading contemporary revisionist of such ideas is the German political theorist Jürgen Habermas, the inspiration behind the work on civil society of Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato. This view detaches the category of civil society from Marx’s negative category of “bourgeois society” and further abandons the search for a total revolutionary change in social and political life.
- The kind of group or institution that Cohen and Arato are interested in both reveals their debt to Habermas and the distinctive features of their position. They are interested in groups held together by the unconstrained force of good reasons, reciprocity, and non-manipulative relations. This allegedly contrasts with social relations determined by money and power. (It also places them in a classical

tradition of republicanism going back to Rousseau). In looking around the contemporary world for a replacement for the failed proletariat, Cohen and Arato find their utopian model of ideal social relations in contemporary new social movements.

3 The Neo-Marxist Critique of Liberal Politics

- A major departure from the classical Marxist critique is the acceptance of the “blind” steering mechanisms of the market and administration in their proper place, subordinate to the “lifeworld”, which is made up of those social relations in which people treat each other as ends and not as means and by means of rational argument. Thus Cohen and Arato are not in the business of subordinating market relations to political or lifeworld relations. They accept the former, but want them restricted to their proper place (as do liberals like Walzer and Rawls).
- Meadwell argues that by means of compensation for this acceptance of capitalist market relations, Cohen and Arato shift to a critique of liberal democratic politics motivated by republicanism. The way in which “interests” are represented in a liberal democracy they assign to a “systems” perspective wholly subverted by power and money. Their civil society exists in an uncontaminated space outside the economy, and existing liberal politics is placed in the space of exploitative instrumental relations.

- The worry is that this overall picture is caricatured and one sided. It is worth noting that the kind of republicanism to which Cohen and Arato are attracted is the holistic, anti-liberal view of Rousseau, not the individualistic version of theorists such as Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel (in his later work) and Richard Dagger.

4 **Neo-Marxism and Republicanism**

- Meadwell argues that from the point of view of its normative critique of liberal democracy, there is not much substantial difference between the Neo-Marxist argument and republicanism in the version descended from Rousseau.
- It is worth recalling that there are two distinct forms of republicanism. The Rousseau-ian strand of republicanism is a paradigm of a total change in social relations, and has a potentially anti-democratic account of the positive liberty of the “general will” in which the individual is subordinated to the collective will of a reciprocal group. The Machiavellian tradition, on the contrary, sees political motivation as calling solely for reliable beneficence. Cohen and Arato are clearly indebted to the former tradition. New social movements are the contemporary equivalent of the general will, in the only social space in which non-exploitative social relations are possible.
- Cohen and Arato’s positive hope is that if new social movements are of the right kind, with a strong collective identity, they have the integrity to become a mediating, but self-limiting, social actor between the “lifeworld” and the political “system”. This is in spite of the fact that as they have described these two features, it is difficult to see how such reconciliation is possible. The trouble with setting up an exclusive and exhaustive dichotomy is that it is then hard to find a “third term” mediating between them.

5 Problems with the Cohen and Arato Argument

- Each New Social Movement is a fragment of a collective, solidaristic identity. So for that reason they do more than overlap; they basically fuse. But this is a utopian vision with no conflict between such movements. This internal unanimity depoliticises civil society as there is no need to manage internal conflict. Traditionally, civil society was invoked to explain unanimity within difference, unity across diversity. But Cohen and Arato do not need this function as their institutions within civil society are internally unanimous. This does seem highly idealized. In the real world, institutions in civil society may be more or less hierarchical and more or less in tension with each other or actually in conflict.
- All the problems of the Rousseauian idea of the general will, and an ideal identity of interests, cannot be brushed aside by generating them from a theory of communication. Cohen and Arato's use of New Social Movements is not a novel political development, but an old version of illiberalism that rests on a caricature of liberal political processes and misuses the concept of civil society. Civil society exists to mediate conflict, not presuppose its total elimination. Perhaps Kant's kingdom of ends should be left in its proper place as a utopian ideal of moral relations, but not an ideal for the kind of social relations found in free associations in civil society.

Lecture Seven: Republicanism, Participation and Civil Society

1 The Preconditions of Liberal Culture

- The aim of this lecture is try and pull together some of the different strands of the arguments so far. It is also, I must confess, driven by my own interest in this topic (as will be clear from my paper in the pack).
- A liberal political theory seems to have two parts: a set of basic rights and a set of norms governing fair distribution. But the communitarian seemed to have identified something of a gap here. Are these two components enough? They seem to suggest, but not be open about, some underlying values. This view is not just about justice, although that is an important part of a liberal view. There also seems to be certain commitments about goodness underpinning this austere liberal package.
- I think the most helpful way to look at liberalism is as trying to solve certain kinds of practical political problem. We can be precise: let's theorise our own Western European societies first, plus the USA and Canada (although already some key differences emerge, such as large scale immigration and the role of aboriginal peoples). Liberalism will lead to societies with widely differing accounts of the good life. However, we all have to live by the common framework of law. A

liberal view emphasizes shared values in motivating a view of liberal legislation as based on shared values plus mutual restraint about evaluative issues that divide us.

- Can liberalism go further? It is no violation of its legitimacy to encourage those conditions that make itself possible. It looks as if being a liberal citizen is an achievement. How is it achieved? Our kinds of societies seem to depend on political involvement, but an account of a good life that makes political involvement a necessary part of any life well lived, as traditional republicans argued, seems to go too far. It is just another view we can all disagree on.
- This is the problem that contemporary interest in civil society evolves from: liberal democratic societies trace their legitimacy to “we, the people” but in their actual day to day politics the elite theory of democracy looks uncomfortably close to the truth. Yet we also value freedom from politics – one of the values of a liberal society is that it gives individuals a sphere of private discretion within which, for example, you don’t have to worry about politics. (You can spend all your time going on demos, watching documentaries and lobbying parliament if you want – but you don’t have to.)
- Civil society fits into accounts of liberal societies that emphasis the “division of powers” and the way in which the institutions of such a society are functionally defined and arranged. The aim of civil society is to mediate between the mass and

the political elite, to communicate issues from the mass to the elite and to supply a channel for political concern that is not, as it were, openly politics. However, civil society is “self-limiting”: it is not supposed to be a replacement for government. It is not a radically participatory democracy that happens, as it were, not to be in government.

2 Liberal Republicanism

- We have focused a great deal on liberalism, defined by its content: a list of basic freedoms and principles of fair distribution. But underpinning liberalism is a certain kind of social ethos. Some contemporary liberal political philosophers, such as Stephen Macedo and William Galston, openly claim that liberal societies require citizens to be a certain kind of person. If you are not self-critical, experimental, open minded and tolerant – live elsewhere.
- Less confrontationally, Charles Taylor argues that liberal citizens are increasingly marked by apathy, the “soft despotism” that leave politics to someone else while the individual focuses on private enjoyments. This slowly de-legitimises the political process and liberal societies are marked by a motivational deficit.
- Taylor’s answer is that we need to revive republicanism, but not the republicanism of Rousseau in its original form. We need, however, to make

citizens see that political participation is itself part of everyone's good life. If you simply do not care about politics your life is less good than if you do.

- The liberal republican (such as my good self) thinks that Taylor is importantly right, but that his remedy is too strong. If we claim that participation is part of the good life, we have simply prioritized one way of living together over another that takes us back to square one. But think about option values. It is unlikely that you currently plan to visit a National Park. But do you agree that they are a good thing? If you do, you are probably valuing them as an option value. You value the choice of going there, but you don't immediately plan to do so. The liberal republican argues that the preconditions of a liberal culture have a similar status. You do not directly promote them by participating yourself. But valuing them imposes a non-negligible cost: you have to value the option of participating even if you do not do so.

3 With What are Liberal Citizens Identified?

- All very well, Taylor might reply, but we have now lost the point to being a civic republican at all – the solution to the motivation problem. People have to be motivated to make sacrifices for the good of their city-state and their fellow citizens. If they do not participate in collective self-determination, they will not be so motivated.

- This is an empirical argument. But the liberal republican who thinks that Taylor's approach is part of the problem, not the solution, because it offers a contested account of what constitutes the good life (by making participation an essential part of it) will offer two further grounds for the kind of liberal republicanism favoured by Pettit/Skinner and by my good self. Those two grounds are: (1) an objection to common evils of social life and (2) common culture, particularly focused on how that particular political society came into existence by an 'act of founding' or a transition to liberalism.
- Citizens may be motivated not by a shared vision of the good, but by a shared sense of the possible evils of social/political life: intolerance, fanaticism and factionalism. As we have seen one way of understanding the value of civil society is by contrasting it with the various forms of uncivil society: societies with tribalism, factionalism or fanaticism.
- Citizens may feel a shared identity because they are bound together by a shared and yet contingent history. This may involve a shared history of common evils, as in Larmore's quote from the French historian Ernest Renan that no French person should forget the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. It was a pivotal point in the history of France as it represented a high point of intolerance and fanaticism grounded on religion: the massacre of Protestants (Huguenots) by Catholics (1572). If a society can emerge from the religious civil wars of the seventeenth

century with a new tradition of religious toleration and a shared history of resolving fundamental social conflicts, then that is a “founding event” for liberalism in that society just as the signing of the Magna Carta was in Britain. Shared contingent histories can be the basis of identifications with a liberal culture. (Contemporary Dutch citizens, for example, believe that contemporary terrorists who attack free speech in the Netherlands are betraying a distinctively Dutch tradition of toleration dating from at least the seventeenth century.)

Week Eight: Civil Society and the Problem of Citizenship

1 The Issue of Citizenship

- Liberalism prioritises the freedom of the individual and freeing individuals from state control. However, the empirical fact is that it is difficult for a state to realise aims held in common if its citizens are unreliable and irresponsible. Giving people wide scope for their private freedoms can lead to ungovernability. It is a simple fact that liberals give citizens a wide scope of personal responsibility, but if everyone of working age drank, ate and took drugs to excess and turned up late to work every day mildly stoned the Exchequer would soon go bankrupt. (Exception: smoking. Killing yourself before collecting your pension is probably of net financial benefit to your country although it is an unlikely patriotic duty.) Recent example of the National Health Service refusing treatment to “irresponsible” citizens is a nice example.
- The key issues, then, are responsibility and citizenship. What makes people responsible citizens? What form of political life encourages this responsibility and what role does civil society play? Recent democratic politics in the USA and UK have seen a rejection of traditional socialist emphasis on helping the worst off through a welfare system: critics on both the left and the right argue that this approach turns a durable “underclass” of poor and unhealthy people into passive clients of the state and does nothing to increase their ability to be responsible or

give them any opportunity to exercise responsibility. This does not help people lift themselves out of poverty but encourages a dependency culture that perpetuates it. (Critics of this view object that this approach simply adds moral reproach to welfare payments.)

- The “New Right” says: the market, or civil society as a microcosm of market relations. A systematic set of checks and balances hedges about people’s self-interest and forces them to be “responsible” by forcing them into self-reliance. Much political theory of the nineteen eighties, but even more practical politics then and since, has offered an explanation in these terms. Welfare states produce passive clients and fail to end cycles of poverty or the deprivation of the underclass, because they turn poor people into passive recipients of resources who are deprived of the opportunity to be responsible.
- One line of response says: this is a confused critique economically, but it is on to something politically. The answer is not “workfare” schemes but an enhanced sense of democratic participation on the part of citizens. Thus even left wing parties try to combine the delivery of welfare with an emphasis on making its recipients part of the wider democratic culture of which they are a part.

2 The Virtues of a Liberal Citizen

- At this point the issue of citizenship intersects with how one understands liberalism. Liberalism, too, places heavy demands on citizens. They have to take responsibility and not be excessively demanding on the state. They also need to display tolerance and restraint. The very legitimacy of the state depends on citizens not demanding that legislation for all of us depend exclusively on his or her conception of the good life.
- This is crucial in the case of legitimacy. To put legislation forward, in the liberal states, such that everyone could potentially agree with it, involves people making judgements and giving reasons such that others could not reasonably reject those grounds. So it seems that you need to hold back, and justify legislation to others on the basis of less than you fully believe. You are under a *duty of civility* to others in your society.
- This seems to be a problem if you want to prioritise responsible citizenship by emphasising the tradition of civic republicanism. That view seems to take the form of a demand that participation in political life is itself a part of the good life. But is that not, now, itself an inevitably controversial claim? If we have to avoid controversial claims about the good life, isn't this one too?
- Walzer tries to solve the problem here by appealing to civil society. His "critical associationism" says that people learn how to be good citizens in their

associational lives by participating in civil society. But this is, empirically, optimistic: many parts of civil society are uncivil. Some parts of associational life are themselves outside the demands of the political and deliberately so (e.g. churches do not have to be internally democratic).

- Liberal civil society theorists such as Galston and Macedo place great emphasis on schooling as a means of developing civic virtue. But this leads on to problems over the extent to which the school system makes liberalism the “default setting” for the attitudes of children: is this going to make for a social world hostile to traditional forms of life?
- We are back with the circular relation of civil society and liberalism. It is not civil society that makes for good citizens, but liberal civil society. Assuming a general commitment to fairness and justice, characteristic of liberalism, something like Walzer’s view can be true. Critical associationism holds that the “setting of settings”, civil society, is where people practice and reinforce their virtues. But that just shows that liberalism and civil society are two sides of the same coin, rather than one acting as the explanation of the other.

3 Citizenship as Legal Status versus Citizenship as a Normative Ideal

- Kymlicka and Norman point out that there is a lot of confusion over two accounts of citizenship. In one respect it marks of legal status: you either are, or are not, legally a citizen of a particular society. Independently, some theorists of citizenship are discussing a normative ideal of how a citizen ought to behave. These issues can be connected, but they are distinct. For example, community membership is treated by most political communities as a valuable thing and entry to a political community is controlled. The form of that control might take the form of admitting people to (legal) citizenship or not.
- The normative account of citizenship builds into its account a set of prescriptions as to how citizens ought to behave. In summary, the republican emphasis on the importance of participation needs to be qualified in a liberal republican account of democratic citizenship. The role of civil society, in either case, is to explain how such a role could have been learnt.

Lecture Nine: Two Kinds of Scepticism About Civil Society

1 Theoretical Scepticism

- The theoretical sceptic about civil society has several concerns. The first is vagueness: too many things are called civil society and too many theorists, politicians and journalists bandy the term around. That is because it is generally a term of praise and even dictators in the developing world assure us all that their society has a flourishing civil society. It has become all things to all people.
- The second main concern about civil society is the relation between appealing to civil society and its support for either democracy or liberalism. The risk, which has emerged throughout this course, is circularity. Critics object that the kind of civil society appealed to is always the desirable kind: a blind eye is turned to parochialism, “not in my back yard” syndrome, corruption and uncivil societies. Nationalism and ethnic strife led to the collapse of some societies formerly under the control of the Soviet Union, but don’t such societies clearly have civil societies, but of the wrong kind? By “wrong” is meant illiberal, exclusionary, discriminatory or racist.
- The two problems, then, are that the term lacks precision, which allows its woolly and unfocused use when what we should be doing is describing and promoting liberalism. The positive aspects of civil society can be traced to the underlying liberalism of the society in which these associations form. Conversely, civil society has become a weapon with which new critics of liberalism, such as Rousseau-ian republicans and Neo-Marxists, recycle discredited criticisms of

liberalism in order to discredit liberal democracies “from within” by appealing to a positive aspect of liberal societies.

- A more jaundiced, or realistic, view of liberalism emphasises that like any political theory, it brings benefits and costs and there is no means of reconciling all of these tensions into a conflict free view. Free association produces admirable groups like charities and self-help associations; it also produces private clubs of racists and snobs who get together to enjoy each others company and enjoy not being in the company of those they despise. There is no ideal social order that allows one kind of free association but bans the other. A central liberal freedom is the freedom not to participate in free associations.

2 Practical Scepticism

- By a practical sceptic about civil society I mean, simply, a person who claims that while it may be of great value to liberal democratic society we are appealing to a phenomenon that is largely obsolete. The idealized image of civil society does not match a contemporary reality that is changing and changing in ways that are hostile to the continued survival of civil society. Free associations are in decline for several reasons:
- Social change over the last fifty years has led to significant reductions in the more demanding forms of free association. The participation of women in the

workplace, rising divorce rates and a plurality of different kinds of household, the suburbanization of working populations, the rise of television and other forms of mass entertainment and generational change have all led to a decline in those forms of social association that are most demanding and hence most valuable.

- Some forms of free association are enduring and not undergoing decline, but then that is because they are mass based, professionalized organizations like Amnesty, Greenpeace and Oxfam that simply ask for donations of money and less often ask for your time. But for that reason they do not ask for, nor promote, the skills of an engaged democratic citizen (it does not take much to write a cheque).
- Corporatism is the seepage of state influence into free associations. It has a bad reputation because of its connection with “client” based politics, where corrupt elites channel money and power to a network of associated groups. In its more benign forms, the state relates to free associations by setting up a buffer zone of organizations that look like civil society institutions but are indirectly controlled by the State. The quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization (or quango) is one way in which the State “steers” civil society, but indirectly. The existence of this kind of institution also puts pressure on the core model of civil society and in particular there is concern precisely over the democratic control of quangos. This is not a minor problem – the UK has 5 500 such quangos or public bodies.

- Put all these pressures together and there is nothing left for the civil society theorist to appeal to. Between being squeezed by the interventionist state, the pressures of the commercialization of leisure as a commodity and social change the remnants of civil society are too weak to sustain the renewal of democratic culture.

3 Responding to the Theoretical Sceptic

- There are lots of serviceable vague concepts – like “bald”. It is nice to find an underlying essence, but taxonomic sciences do not ask for them and we can theorist things (like medical syndromes) that are a complex of co-occurring properties. Civil society will be useful category if it has helped us explain certain changes and explains features that make societies more successful (see for empirical data, Arend Lijphart’s *Patterns of Democracy*). If there is a core sense to the concept, it will survive its use by propagandists.
- Declining social capital forms part of patterns of social change: we cannot have everything we want. Increasing equality of opportunity for women has increased their participation in the workforce. That this causes costs elsewhere does not make this social change undesirable; there simply trade offs where gains are balanced by losses.

- We have freely admitted throughout the course that liberalism and free associations are inter-dependent. Not all circles are vicious circles. Aspects of the liberal state make civil societies possible: the rule of law protects free association, and without free association there is no civil society. But civil society also contributes, alongside the education system, to the reproduction and success of a liberal state. If a State fails, (such as the former Yugoslavia) then civil society is not strong enough in itself to prevent nationalistic and ethnic conflict. It does not follow that a flourishing civil society does not make viable states more democratic and reinforces liberal virtues on the part of its citizens.

4 Responding to the Practical Sceptic

- These issues go beyond philosophy: a society that sets itself to reverse the loss of social capital can certainly try to compensate for identifiable factors that cause it. For example, Paris has strong “Quartiers” that are the basis of local life because people tend to live in apartments, not houses, and residential areas and businesses co-exist side by side in one neighbourhood. Compare a town where no-one lives in the town centre and after 7 o’clock the streets are deserted because all the local businesses and offices are closed. The people who work in them have commuted to a suburb ten miles away. In which location are people likely to feel more connected to their neighbours, commute less far, and therefore have time for social participation? Which of these groups is more likely to participate in a civil

society association? If we have permitted these kinds of social changes, now that we can see the damage to social capital we can try to reverse them.

- In a liberal society the state cannot coercively make many things happen without contradiction. Equally, patterns of social action can be changed or re-directed but only on a voluntary basis. If a state takes a policy based decision to promote “family life”, for example, it is not clear why a liberal state cannot, via education and taxation, promote free associations by means of incentives and disincentives if there is demonstrable social value in doing so. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* gives countless examples where encouraging social capital is a more effective remedy for social problems and inequalities than directly using money to address a problem.