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CIVIL SOCIETY

"Civil society" is a rich and widely used concept. In English alone, there are thousands of books and tens of thousands of scholarly articles published in which the phrase "civil society" appears in the title. Many of these are studies of the contribution of civic associations to democratic politics in individual countries.

Scholars have conceived of civil society in a great range of ways, even more so social activists and development professionals. There is broad agreement about many of the general contours of civil society, but some conceptualizations conflict with or contradict others. The most significant differences in conceptualizations of civil society relate to the market and to the state. Some define "civil society" to include the state. Some define it in opposition to the state. Others define it by distinguishing it from both the market and the state. And others still see the market and the state as having a role in civil society.

A sphere of activity carved out from an absolutist state is a concept with particular relevance for resistance to the absolutist monarchic states of Europe. If private associations are strong enough to provide some protection to individuals, families, and other groups, then a sphere has been carved out from the state, even if these are associations of landlords or church elders. But in other intellectual traditions and conceptualizations of civil society, the state is

not anathema but essential to civil society—for example, in the protection of private property. Private property and the mechanisms needed for its protection are basic to civil society. Jean-Jacques Rousseau summarizes this nicely. "The first person," he writes in *A Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, "who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is *mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society" (p. 76).

In its original formulation civil society was embedded in market relations, and market relations were facilitated by a liberal state. Civil society is a conceptual innovation of the Scottish Enlightenment (1740-1790). The concept has specific origins in the thought of moral philosophers of the third quarter of eighteenth-century Scotland who taught that the commercial relations of the marketplace allowed a system of needs to be as well a system for social harmony. The commerce observed then was personal and craft based. The human propensity to show off could be satisfied by talent in commerce. The key innovation was that society was not at threat by "the market" but made good (better at least) because of the market.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume, James Steuart, Adam Ferguson, and others began to regard the market not so much as a socially destructive force but as a constituent element of society. Civil society was a kind of commercial society. The conduct of business, for profit, was theorized to be an innocent occupation. Commerce was considered capable of pacifying political ambition and of thus promoting social virtue. "To what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world?" Smith asks in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. "To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" (1759, pp. 98-99).

The Scottish Enlightenment conception of civil society in its emphasis on manners and values in commercial society is not identical to the Roman conception of *civilis societas*. The two conceptions share the notion that individuals may make and live as equals under laws that they themselves make

(citizens). Scottish Enlightenment thought, however, considered commercial society, which classical societies did not experience, to be uniquely capable of promoting the manners of a civil society. Thus, Ferguson remarked that the Greeks and the Romans could not have used the concept of "barbarian" as was being used in late eighteenth-century Europe, as a people without "commercial arts" (1767, p. 194). While some do trace civil society to ancient Greece and Rome, it is arguable that civil society is unrelated to *civilis societas*.

Since the 1970s, civil society has been used in ways that reflect its new popular appeal as an emancipative ideal. The concept has helped to frame and describe democratic struggles under many authoritarian regimes and many different types of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Specific lineages of the concept of civil society—those of John Locke, Thomas Paine, Alexis de Tocqueville, and G. W. F. Hegel—gain special relevance under specific political regime types. This can be related to Antonio Gramsci's notion, developed in his *Prison Notebooks*, that civil society is a structure of legitimation that allows a regime to exercise less physical coercion while maintaining the existing pattern of recruitment into management of the state.

Scholarship on democratization, popular movements, human rights, and community development in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America has found the concept of "civil society" tremendously productive. Beyond academic scholarship, a priority of thousands of nongovernmental development organizations throughout the world, and a pillar of the multibillion-dollar international development profession, is to strengthen civil society. Most of the aid profession's conceptions of civil society trace their intellectual origins to Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* emphasizes the importance of independent associations to social life and democracy. But strengthening the rule of law and courts is also often at the center of a civil society-promotion initiative, a part that derives more from a Hegelian tradition than that of de Tocqueville.

As a result of its recent popularity, the concept has become detached somewhat from its roots. Often, "civil society" is used as a social-scientific-sounding substitute for "society." Sometimes, civil society is characterized as a society in which people are civil. While explicit definition and consistent use of a concept cannot be incorrect, some conceptualizations are not helpful to analysis. Even if used consistently as defined, a concept that is highly normative, culturally composed, and temporally specific can be difficult for many in those traditions, places, and times to recognize. It is not merely that some definitions ignore the concept's rich ancestry. The danger in the ad hoc use of concepts with such ancestry is that they can harbor concealed assumptions and valuations that can emerge as apparent findings.

Commercial society as it was known in the middle of the eighteenth century in urban Scotland might be found in some places today. More global and more impersonal processes of production, distribution, and sale have transformed many places. Working in a financial company or in a retail store does not produce the same density of social relations or the same opportunities for showing off one's talents as does running a bake shop or brewery. The market understood as an impersonal force (the "invisible hand" to which Adam Smith only once referred) has been substituted in many contemporary renditions of civil society for the face-to-face, social market of commercial eighteenth-century Scotland.

Hegel regarded the market, or "the system of needs," as well as laws and courts, the police, and corporations as the pillars, or "moments," of civil society and civil society as the ethical foundation of the state. Hegel's civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), like Karl Marx's, literally designates that commercial vital segment of a population that is afforded residence within the walls of a fortified town. John Locke's pre-Scottish-Enlightenment, contract-based conception of civil society is often contrasted with Hegel's post-Scottish-Enlightenment conception. For Locke, civil society was equivalent to political society. For Hegel, political

society and the state make possible the development of civil society. Gramsci's innovation was to see how civil society, as a structure of public conceptions about the running of society, can serve to provide the hegemony to complement the state's coercive capacity.

In much contemporary use, civil society is antithetic to the state. Democracy and human-rights activists prize civil society for its independence, autonomy, and separation from the state. While state and civil society are not identical, the state makes possible, protects, and often even creates civil society. Important functions of the modern state are to protect private property and to produce patterns of expectation and behavior that promote a public order that specific governments cannot easily change. In this way, by promoting a political, economic, and social environment in which independent associations form and operate, the state helps to create civil society.

International relations scholarship has used the concepts of "global" civil society, "international" civil society, and "transnational" civil society. For some, civil society refers not merely to a specific kind of society (a social formation) but also to "a project, a process, and a space." Some international relations scholarship advances the notion that transnational or international nongovernmental organizations can represent world public opinion and thus constitute a global civil society. Global civil society is said to be a new phenomenon permitted by new transnational associations and forms of communication. In response, others point out that global associations were well known at the heights of European imperialism.

Contemporary studies of civil society tend to emphasize the work of nongovernmental organizations, often conceiving of civil society as equivalent to the voluntary sector and the nonprofit sector. Although volunteer service is involved in similar ways in labor and religious organizations, which are as significant as other nongovernmental organizations, these tend to be neglected in studies of civil society.

Government and nongovernment aid organizations direct billions of US dollars to build civil society overseas. Civil society promotion is one of the top program emphases of many government aid agencies, including the US Agency for International Development. Critics of international (i.e., foreign, especially US) civil society promotion ask whose civil society is being promoted and whether it includes, for example, landless peasants as well as urban professionals. Critics also note that the promotion of private welfare associations satisfies neoliberal logic, including that of privatization (and cancellation) of essential public services by government.

Civil society is often said to be a foundation for democracy. The rule of law, including protection of private property, combined with the right to assemble, gives individuals some protection from the coercive tendencies of the state. Periodic elections are not sufficient to ensure democracy. A democracy requires a robust civil society because states, even those whose managers are elected, tend to curtail rights and control society. A civil society provides an occasion, limited and imperfect, for democratic deliberation and decision-making.

[See also Democracy; Gramsci, Antonio; Nongovernmental Organizations; Social Capital; and State.]

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Christopher Candland

CLASS AND POLITICS

The concept of "class" has had an erratic career in the contemporary analysis of politics. There was a time, not so long ago, when class played at best a marginal role in explanations of political phenomena. In the 1950s and early 1960s the dominant approach to politics was pluralism. Political outcomes in democratic societies were viewed as resulting from the interplay of many crosscutting forces interacting in an environment of bargaining, voting, coalition building, and consensus formation. While some of the organized interest groups may have been based in constituencies with a particular class character—most notably, unions and business associations—such organizations were given no special analytical status by virtue of this.

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, with the renaissance of the Marxist tradition in the social sciences, class suddenly moved to the core of many analyses of the state and politics. Much discussion occurred over such things as the "class character" of state apparatuses and the importance of instrumental manipulation of state institutions by powerful class-based actors. Even among scholars whose theoretical perspective was not built around class, class was taken seriously and accorded an importance in the analysis of politics rarely found in the previous period.

While class analysis never became the dominant paradigm for the analysis of politics, it was a theoretical force to be reckoned with in the 1970s. Ironically, perhaps, in the course of the 1980s, as US national politics took on a particularly blatant class character, the academic popularity of class analysis as a framework for understanding politics steadily declined. The center of gravity of critical work on the state shifted toward a variety of theoretical perspectives which explicitly distanced themselves from a preoccupation with class, in particular "state-centered" approaches to politics that emphasize the causal importance of the institutional properties of the state and the interests of state managers and cultural theories that place discourses and symbolic

systems at the center of political analysis. While the class analysis of politics has by no means retreated to the marginal status it was accorded in the 1950s, it is no longer the center of debate the way it was in the 1970s and 1980s.

This is, therefore, a good time to take stock of the theoretical accomplishments and unresolved issues of the class analysis of politics. As a prologue to the discussion, we will briefly look at the concept of class itself. This will be followed by an examination of three different kinds of mechanisms through which class can have an impact on politics. Using terminology adapted from the work of Robert Alford and Roger Friedland, we will refer to these as the "situational," "institutional," and "systemic political" effects of class. We will then briefly examine the problem of variability in the patterns of class effects on politics. The essay will conclude with a discussion of the problem of explanatory primacy of class relative to other causal processes.

The Concept of Class. The word "class" has been used to designate a variety of quite distinct theoretical concepts. In particular, it is important to distinguish between what are sometimes called "gradational" and "relational" class concepts. As has often been noted, for many "class" is simply a way of talking about strata within the income distribution. The frequent reference in contemporary US politics to "middle-class taxpayers" is equivalent to "middle-income taxpayers." Classes are simply rungs on a ladder of inequalities. For others, particularly analysts working in the Marxist and Weberian theoretical traditions, the concept of "class" is not meant to designate a distributional outcome as such but rather the nature of the underlying social relations which generate such outcomes. To speak of a person's class position is thus to identify that person's relationship to specific kinds of mechanisms that generate inequalities of income and power. In a relational class concept, capitalists and workers do not differ simply in the amount of income they acquire but also in the mechanism through which they acquire that income.

It is possible to deploy both gradational and relational concepts of class in the analysis of politics.

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