

The Idea of Civil Society: Scholarship and Debate.

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PART ONE: The Idea of Civil Society

Civil society is both a way of describing aspects of modern society and an aspiration, an ideal of what a good society should be like. Civil society is actually an old term, first introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries. It has recently been revived by a variety of thinkers to emphasize the capacity of societies to organize themselves through the active cooperation of their members. The notion of civil society is contrasted with rival theories which see social order either as the necessary outcome of economic and technological forces or as an imposition from an outside agency such as the state. At the same time, the idea of civil society also represents one version of the democratic ideal: the aspiration toward a form of social life in which individuals, by acting together, would set the patterns of social life on the basis of reasoned discussion and responsible choice.

The dissidents against Communist regimes in Eastern Europe revived the term civil society in their struggles to free their lives from control by a despotic state. They were rediscovering an idea which, under other names such as "mediating structures" or "intermediate institutions" has long had special importance in American society. It was in the United States that Alexis de Tocqueville saw the positive potential of free association of individuals in organizations between the family and the formal government, such as clubs, charities, educational and cultural organizations, for transforming self-seeking individuals into public-spirited citizens. Civil society refers to such "intermediate institutions," though there is no unanimity among those who use the term as to exactly which institutions are included. For example, some advocates of civil society include the family as a crucial social institution, a usage which finds much resonance with the more popular discussions of civil society. Among some scholars, however, the family is seen as part of the private realm and its relevance to the collective good is disregarded. Some scholars follow the East Europeans in distinguishing civil society from the state but not the market, while others emphasize the ways in which the logic of the market conflicts with goals of civil society.

The core of the concept of civil society is the recognition that *human societies are grounded in and held together by shared norms and moral understandings*. To weaken or break the bonds of trust and reciprocity among individuals and groups puts the freedom and security of everyone at serious risk. For theorists of civil society, this is the lesson of totalitarian movements which establish themselves by pulverizing social bonds. It is also, for some civil society thinkers, the danger inherent in what they perceive as our contemporary excessive reliance upon the market: the threat of turning large areas of even private life into relations of competitive exchange.

The idea of civil society, then, represents a shift in perspective on the problems of contemporary democratic life. It calls attention to the fact that effective self-governance, as well as the maintenance of individual rights and civility, depends upon social conditions which nurture active and responsible social membership. In this way the perspective of civil society does not so much resolve old questions as provide new insight into enduring but pressing perplexities.

Civil society highlights the complex and important value tensions which sustain modern freedoms, tensions which must be consciously attended to. For example, the pursuit of individual autonomy, a value at the core of the civil society tradition, often fits uneasily with the demands of social order. This fundamental tension between freedom and order gives rise to other questions, such as which institutions can best preserve the openness of freedom without threatening the necessary security of individuals and communities. Should markets bear most of this burden, or should government be used, or both, and in what mix or forms? What other institutions and patterns of social action might be necessary? How is civil society to ensure that its members develop the skills and character necessary to grasp these complex tensions and work to strike the best balances? Through what institutional means can these objectives best be pursued?

In what follows we will try to illustrate the value and importance of the civil society perspective for addressing many of the most difficult problems facing contemporary American life. In Part Two we survey the principal exponents of the idea of civil society, both individuals and organizations. From this survey we will go on in Part Three to outline the primary debates to which the civil society perspective has given rise, arguing for the value and importance of what we will term the Communitarian position. We will attempt to concretize these often somewhat abstruse debates by illustrating some of their implications for important policy issues.

PART TWO: Scholars of the Civil Society

This section provides an overview of current researchers of civil society. The names are listed alphabetically, providing position title and recent, relevant works. A quotation is included with each scholar in order to provide a “taste” of how they write and their orientation towards the civil society concept. In the aggregate, the listing of works and quotations itself provides a sense of the diversity and concerns of the field. Finally, several organizations are described. Academic organizations that are closely associated with particular scholars are noted with them. A few organizations are listed as an addendum because they are active in the civil society debate, yet non-scholarly in approach.

Before reading the list, it may be helpful to consider the following classification. Scholarship on civil society may be distinguished by individuals who (a) construct theories of civil society, (b) conduct studies of various communities or components of civil society, and (c) engage in scholarship, though grounded in theory, specifically oriented toward revitalizing civil society in practice. This is a very rough division: many of the scholars do work in more than one of these areas.

Theories of Civil Society:

Arato, Andrew
Cohen, Jean
Dahrendorf, Ralf
Elshtain, Jean Bethke
Joas, Hans
MacIntyre, Alasdair
Rawls, John
Sandel, Michael
Selznick, Philip
Spragens, Thomas
Taylor, Charles
Walzer, Michael

Studies of the Civil Society:

Bellah, Robert
Berry, Jeffrey
Fukuyama, Francis
Glendon, Mary Ann
Mansbridge, Jane
Putnam, Robert
Seligman, Adam
Wolfe, Alan
Wuthnow, Robert
Yankelovich, Daniel

The Practice of the Civil Society:

Barber, Benjamin
Boyte, Harry
Braithwaite, John
Etzioni, Amitai
Fishkin, James
Galston, William
Gutmann, Amy
Hollenbach, David
Lerner, Michael
Popenoe, David
Thiemann, Ronald
Wilson, James Q.

Arato, Andrew

is Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research. With Jean Cohen, he has written *Civil Society and Political Theory* (1992). In this volume, Arato examines the roots of civil society in European political theory, particularly the work of Arendt, Habermas, Foucault, and Luhmann, and applies it to the functioning of contemporary liberal democracies. Perhaps the most systematic and comprehensive statement on civil society, this text places the term in historical and theoretical context. Cohen and Arato write, “We understand ‘civil society’ as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication... in the long term both independent action and institutionalization are necessary for the reproduction of civil society.”

Barber, Benjamin

is Whitman Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and director of the Walt Whitman Center at Rutgers. He is the author of, among other books, *Strong Democracy* (1984), and *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995). In *Strong Democracy*, Barber argues that liberalism has undermined democratic participation and describes a political system which actively involves all citizens in self-governing. In *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Barber asks how civil society may be undermined by two forces: the tendency toward ethnic tribalism and short-term profit-maximizing capitalism. In a recent article entitled, “The Search for Civil Society” (1995), Barber writes, “Civil society is the domain that can potentially mediate between the state and private sectors and offer women and men a space for activity that is simultaneously voluntary and public; a space that unites the virtue of the private sector- liberty - with the virtue of the public sector - concern for the general good.”

The Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers is dedicated to sustaining democratic theory and extending democratic practice. It follows the ideals of Walt Whitman, who believed in a vigorous citizenry engaged in the culture and political life of the nation. It sees democracy as a mode of living, and not merely as a political form. In addition to ongoing research, the Center hosts a seminar series, inviting prominent scholars of civil society.

Bellah, Robert

is Elliot Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. He is co-author (with Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton) of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985) and *The Good Society* (1991). *Habits* is a landmark study of American character and community life, and finds contemporary society to be dominated by individualism and an impoverished moral discourse. *The Good Society* argues that the common good can only be arrived at in the context of vibrant social institutions that undergird citizenship and social responsibility. In the recent article, “Community Properly Understood: A Defense of ‘Democratic Communitarianism’” (1995), Bellah writes in answer to the question of how to define community, “Any institution, such as a university, a city, or a society, insofar as it is or seeks to be a community, needs to ask what is a good university, city,

society, and so forth. So far as it reaches agreement about the good it is supposed to realize, it becomes a community with some common values and some common goals.”

Berry, Jeffrey

is Professor of Political Science at Tufts University. He is author of, among others, *Lobbying for the People: The Political Behavior of Public Interest Groups* (1977) and *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (1993), with Kent Portney and Ken Thomson. This latter volume is the result of a decade of research on citizen and neighborhood involvement in city politics. They identify several promising urban political models that facilitate civic participation. They argue, “Neighborhood associations are creative mechanisms for tying people into their communities. Some people, of course, will be more attracted to other kinds of neighborhood or community groups - voluntary activity that is no less valuable to the well-being of the city. Nevertheless, America needs more people involved in politics and government. In a democracy, participating in the governmental process is, paradoxically, an option and a duty. Citywide systems of neighborhood associations are an attractive alternative for those choosing the option to participate in local government. These modest, voluntary neighborhood organizations are places where the grass roots of democracy may be nourished.”

Boyte, Harry

is Co-Director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and graduate faculty member in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. His recent book is *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (1996). He also recently authored, “Populist: citizenship as Public Work and Public Freedom,” in *Building a Community of Citizens* (1994), edited by Don Eberly. Boyte’s work focuses on the mechanisms for enhancing citizenship. In a recent editorial, Boyte writes, “In order to reknit a sense of commonality we need to reclaim our place as owners and architects in the work of politics. This means insisting upon a generation of politicians who do not overpromise - but who offer to work with us in solving our country’s problems. It means looking at success stories of citizen-government partnership. Most important, it means taking the risk of assuming responsibility for our fate.”

The mission of The Center for Democracy and Citizenship is to strengthen citizenship through outreach, teaching, and research. The Center has collaborated in the formation of AmeriCorps and has helped organize the American Civic Forum, a nonpartisan group calling for enhanced citizenship.

Braithwaite, John

is Professor within the Law and Philosophy Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. A criminologist, his important contributions to the civil society debate include *Crime, Shame, and Reintegration* (1989) and *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice* (1990), co-authored with political philosopher Philip Pettit. Both books consider appropriate responses to criminal offenders in a civil society. Braithwaite argues that crime control is best understood in the context of informal social control by communities than by the formal social control of

the state. In *Crime, Shame, and Reintegration*, he writes, "...the irony is that individualistic societies are given little choice but to rely on the state as the all-powerful agent of social control: the ideology of the minimal state produces a social reality of the maximum state. Because sanctioning by peers and intermediate groups like schools, churches, trade unions and industry associations cannot work in an individualist culture, the state responds (ineffectively) to perceived increases in crime the only way it can - by locking more people up, giving the police and business regulatory agencies more powers, trampling on the very civil liberties which are the stuff of individualist ideologies."

Cohen, Jean

is Professor of Political Theory at Columbia University. With Andrew Arato, she has written *Civil Society and Political Theory* (1992). See Arato for discussion of this text. She is also author of the recent article, "Interpreting the Notion of the Civil Society" in *Toward a Global Civil Society* (1995), edited by Michael Walzer. In this essay, she argues that the underlying mechanisms of civil society must be clearly distinguished from the mechanisms of the state and the market, but that it is also a mistake to assume civil society is completely independent of the market and state. She writes, "...it would be a mistake to see civil society in opposition to economy and state by definition... An antagonistic relation of civil society or its actors to economy and state arises when mediations fail, or when economic or political institutions insulate decision making and decision makers from the communication with and influence of social organizations, initiatives, and discussions."

Dahrendorf, Ralf

is the Warden of St. Antony's College at Oxford and a member of the British House of Lords. He is a former Director of the London School of Economics and author of several books including *Essays in the Theory of Society* (1968), *The New Liberty: Survival and Justice in a Changing World* (1975), *Life Chances: Approaches to Social and Political Theory* (1979), and *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (1990). Recently, he wrote an important article entitled, "A Precarious Balance: Economic Opportunity, Civil Society, and Political Liberty" (1995). In this essay, he argues that civil society is threatened by increasing economic inequalities, in part due to increasing globalization of capitalism, and by tendencies toward authoritarianism, particularly in East Asia. He writes, "...the countries of the First World are currently faced with a perverse set of choices. To remain competitive in growing world markets, they have to take measures that damage the cohesion of civil societies. If they are not prepared to take such measures, they will have to resort to restrictions on civil liberties and political participation, restrictions that will amount to a new authoritarianism... The overriding task of the First World in the decade ahead is to maximize - to the extent possible - wealth creation, social cohesion, and political freedom, realizing that the promotion of any one of these goals may only be achieved at the expense of the others."

Elshtain, Jean Bethke

is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Among her books are *Democracy on Trial* (1995), *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (1995). She co-edited with David Blankenhorn and Steven Bayme, *Rebuilding the Nest : A New Commitment to the American Family* (1990). In *Democracy on Trial*, Elshtain argues that democracy is undermined by a politics of displacement, in which self-interest overwhelms the public good, and a politics of difference, in which ethnic identification undermines common purposes. In a recent article, "Democracy and the Politics of Difference" (1994), Elshtain writes, "...democracy is for the stout of heart who know there are things worth fighting for in a world of paradox, ambiguity, and irony. This democratic way - moderation with courage, openness to compromise without sacrificing principle - is the rare but now and then attainable fruit of the democratic imagination and the democratic citizen."

Etzioni, Amitai

is University Professor at The George Washington University and Director of The Center for Communitarian Policy Studies and The Communitarian Network. He is former President of the American Sociological Association, editor of the communitarian journal, *The Responsive Community*, and author of several books including *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (1996), *The Spirit of Community* (1993), and *The Moral Dimension* (1987). He recently edited, *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities* (1995). In the *New Golden Rule*, Etzioni writes, "The communitarian paradigm, at least as advanced here, recognizes the need to nourish social attachments as part of the effort to maintain social order while ensuring that such attachments will not suppress all autonomous expressions. That is, a good society does not favor the social good over individual choices or vice versa; it favors society formations that serve the two dual social virtues in careful equilibrium. We shall see that this societal pattern, in turn, requires: (a) a reliance mainly on education, leadership, persuasion, faith, and moral dialogues, rather than the law, for sustaining virtues; (b) defining a core of values that need to be promoted - a substantive core that is richer than those that make procedures meritorious; but (c) not a pervasive ideology or the kinds of religion that leave little room for autonomy."

The Center for Communitarian Policy Studies and The Communitarian Network are dedicated to the study of communitarian issues such as community safety, the future of the family, character education, and promoting unity while fostering diversity within the community. The Center conducts policy analyses and case studies of community issues. The Network has organized several meetings for discussing communitarian issues such as the White House Conferences on Character Education, the 1996 Conference on Pro-Family Policies, and the up-coming 1997 Research Seminar on Community, Crime, and Justice in collaboration with the National Institute of Justice.

Fishkin, James

holds the Darrell K. Royal Regents Chair in Ethics and American Society at the University of Texas, where he is also the Chair of the Department of Government . He is author, among others, of *Democracy and Deliberation* (1991), *The Dialogue of Justice*

(1992), and *The Voice of the People* (1995). In *Democracy and Deliberation*, Fishkin advocates “deliberative opinion polls,” in which representative samples of citizens are brought together for several days to discuss pertinent issues at length and provided with substantial information. These deliberations can be widely publicized to inform the public of a democratic process based on informed opinion. Continuing the discussion of the deliberative poll in *Voice of the People*, he writes, “...by the conventions of survey research, one would never wish to see a [conventional representative] sample gathered together. After all, the people might talk to each other: they might discuss the issues and as a result become more informed or change their views. In that sense, they would become unrepresentative of ordinary unreflective public opinion. In my view, they would become representative of something else - representative of the public the people would become if everyone had a comparable opportunity to behave more like ideal citizens and discuss the issues face to face with other voters and with political leaders.”

Fukuyama, Francis

is Hirst Professor of Public Policy at the Institute for Public Policy, George Mason University. His books include *The End of History and the Last Man* (1989) and *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995). In *The End of History*, Fukuyama argued that the debate about the best form of government is over as a result the collapse of communism. In *Trust*, Fukuyama turned his attention to the construction of civil society within democratic capitalism. Here he argues that trust is a precondition for the civil society because it facilitates social relations beyond the family, creating a form of social capital that can be used to advance collective action and economic productivity. In *Trust*, Fukuyama writes, “If the institutions of democracy and capitalism are to work properly, they must coexist with certain premodern cultural habits that ensure their proper functioning. Law, contract, and economic rationality provide a necessary but not sufficient basis for both the stability and prosperity of postindustrial societies; they must as well be leavened with reciprocity, moral obligation, duty toward community, and trust, which are based in habit rather than rational calculation. The latter are not anachronisms in a modern society but rather the sine qua non of the latter’s success.”

Galston, William

is Professor of Public Policy in the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland. He is former Deputy Assistant to the President in the Clinton Administration, co-founder of the communitarian movement with Amitai Etzioni, and co-editor of the *Responsive Community*. His most recent book is *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (1991). Galston is a leading proponent of pro-family policies and restoring civil discourse in government. He is also Executive Director of the National Committee on Civic Renewal. In *Liberal Purposes*, Galston writes, “Moral virtue is more than individual self-restraint. It is also the display of due concern for the legitimate claims of others. Conversely, moral virtue is more than a system of rational demands we make on one another. It requires, as well, taking responsibility for oneself and cultivating one’s humanity while tempering one’s passions and desires.”

The National Commission on Civic Renewal was organized in 1996, with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts, under the co-chairs William Bennett and Senator Sam Nunn.

The Commission is based at the University of Maryland and has 23 members drawn from business, government, academe, and philanthropy. It describes its task as "bringing together people from a broad spectrum of experiences and political views to try and address the quality of our civil and civic life." To this end the Commission is establishing advisory and working groups to prepare panels and papers. A group of scholars has been convened around the theme of civil society.

Glendon, Mary Ann

is Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard University Law School. She was profiled in Bill Moyers' "World of Ideas" television series and is a co-editor of the communitarian journal, *The Responsive Community*. She recently edited *Seedbeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character and Citizenship in American Society* (1995). Her books include *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law* (1987), *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (1991), and *A Nation Under Lawyers: How the Crisis in the Legal Profession is Transforming American Society* (1995). In *Abortion and Divorce*, Glendon conducts a comparative legal analysis to illuminate how variation in laws across Western nations are indicative of cultural belief systems and how civil discourse can find a way of negotiating these enduring social issues. In *Rights Talk*, Glendon demonstrates how public discourse is constrained by a moral language of individual rights, undermining the potential for providing the common good. In a recent article, "Rights and Responsibilities Viewed from Afar: The Case of Welfare Rights" (1994), she writes, "America is especially well endowed with social resources, but we have tended to take that social wealth for granted, consuming our inherited capital at a faster rate than we are replenishing it. Like an athlete who develops the muscles in his upper body but lets his legs grow weak, we have nurtured our strong rights tradition while neglecting the social foundation upon which that tradition rests. Communitarianism can be understood as democracy's environmentalist movement, helping to heighten awareness of the political importance and endangered conditions of the seedbeds of civic virtue."

Gutmann, Amy

is Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Politics and Dean of Faculty at Princeton University. She is author, among others, of *Democratic Education* (1987) and co-author with Dennis Thompson of *Democracy and Disagreement* (1996). In *Democratic Education* and in a recent article, "Civic Education and Social Diversity" (1995), Gutmann argues that teaching civic virtues in public schools is a necessary component in a liberal democracy because only through such virtues as toleration, mutual respect, and deliberation can a democracy function successfully. In *Democracy and Disagreement*, Gutmann and Thompson write, "The conception of deliberative democracy defended here puts moral reasoning and moral disagreement back at the center of everyday politics. It reinforces and refines the practices of moral argument that prevail in ordinary political life - the ways in which citizens deal with moral disagreement in middle democracy. Its principles show citizens and their representatives how to live with moral disagreement in a morally constructive way. Deliberative democracy is more idealistic than other conceptions because it demands more than democratic politics normally delivers. It is more realistic because it expects less than

moral agreement would promise. While acknowledging that we are destined to disagree, deliberative democracy also affirms that we are capable of deciding our common destiny on mutually acceptable terms.”

Hollenbach, David

is the Margaret O’Brien Statley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College. He served as principal consultant to the national Conference of Catholic Bishops for the drafting of their 1986 Pastoral Letter, *Economic Justice for All*. He is co-editor with R. Bruce Douglass of *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy* (1994). In a recent article, “Virtue, The Common Good, and Democracy,” Hollenbach writes, “...the virtue of solidarity also has a social dimension. A virtuous community of freedom must address not only heights to which human culture can rise but also the depths of suffering into which societies can descend. There are strong currents in American life today that insulate many of the privileged parts of civil society from experience of the suffering that exists in other parts of the body politic. Though it is obvious that individuals and groups can never share the experience of all others, nevertheless encouraging commitment to the common good calls for new ways of overcoming this insularity in at least incremental ways.”

Joas, Hans

is Professor of Sociology at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Free University in Berlin. He is author most recently of *The Creativity of Action* (1996), an important contribution to contemporary social theory in its consideration of how creativity in social relations undergird democracy. In a recent article, “Communitarians in Germany,” Joas writes, “Inadequate understanding of the U.S. context in which communitarian thought has flourished also means understanding that communitarian solutions best take root under certain conditions. It is easier to be a communitarian when a culture has strong traditions of community orientation, voluntarism, and democracy, such as in the United States. The weaker these traditions are and the more state-oriented and undemocratic a cultural tradition is, the more the emphasis must be on the strong points of the Kantian and Rawlsian tradition of political liberalism. By becoming more and more international, the communitarian movement could sensitize nations to their different traditions of ‘community’ and, at the same time, produce a new universalism.”

MacIntyre, Alasdair

is McMahan/Hank Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His recent books include *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (1990), and his most well-known, *After Virtue* (1981). In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that a new moral philosophy is necessary based on the Aristotelian ideal of seeking virtue. He writes, “The virtues are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. The catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain

the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good.”

Mansbridge, Jane

is Professor of Political Science and Sociology at Northwestern University and is on the research faculty at the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. Among other books, she is editor of *Beyond Self-Interest* (1990) and author of *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1983). In a recent article, “Public Spirit in Political Systems” (1995), Mansbridge writes, “The cultural arrangements of human beings, including our political arrangements, are our primary mechanisms for promoting collective survival and prosperity in the face of individual incentives for narrow self-interest. Those cultural arrangements depend, as I have tried to show, not only on efficient arrangements for monitoring and sanctioning defection but equally critically on public spirit. We urgently need to understand more than we now do about the institutions, norms, principles, affinities, and sanctions that promote public-spirited behavior in political life, because in many instances that public-spirited behavior is precisely what makes the collective system viable.”

Popenoe, David

is Professor of Sociology and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers University. Co-Chair of the Council on Families in America, his most recent book is *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (1996). Previous books include *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (1988) and *Private Pleasure, Public Plight: American Metropolitan Development in Comparative Perspective* (1985). In a recent article, “The Roots of Declining Social Virtue: Family, Community, and the Need for a ‘Natural Communities Policy,’” Popenoe writes, “To improve the conditions for childrearing in America today, nothing may be more important than trying to protect and cultivate those natural, tribal- or village-like communities that still remain - communities which have families as their basic building blocks and in which a mix of people through free association and sets of relational networks maintain a common life. This could be called a ‘natural communities’ policy. It is a policy that, at minimum, enjoins both the market and the state from doing further damage to civil society... Just as we now require environmental and family impact statements for some pending national legislation, perhaps we should also be thinking in similar terms about the impact of public policies on functioning social communities.”

Putnam, Robert

is Dillon Professor of International Affairs and director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. His recent books include *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993) and *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (1993) and he is also author of the widely read articles, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital” (1995) and “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America” (1996). Putnam is currently writing a book elaborating on these articles. *Making Democracy Work* is an important study comparing the success

of northern Italian communities to the failures of southern communities in democratic participation. In “Bowling Alone,” Putnam writes, “The concept of ‘civil society’ has played a central role in the recent global debate about the preconditions for democracy and democratization. In the newer democracies this phrase has properly focused attention on the need to foster a vibrant civic life in soils traditionally inhospitable to self-government. In the established democracies, ironically, growing numbers of citizens are questioning the effectiveness of their public institutions at the very moment when liberal democracy has swept the battlefield, both ideologically and geopolitically. In America, at least, there is reason to suspect that this democratic disarray may be linked to a broad and continuing erosion of civic engagement that began a quarter-century ago. High on our scholarly agenda should be the question of whether a comparable erosion of social capital may be under way in other advanced democracies, perhaps in different institutional and behavioral guises. High on America’s agenda should be the question of how to reverse these adverse trends in social connectedness, thus restoring civic engagement and civic trust.”

Sandel, Michael

is Professor of Government at Harvard University. A leading communitarian political theorist, he is author of *Democracy’s Discontent* (1996), *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), and editor of *Liberalism and its Critics* (1984). His lectures have the largest audience at Harvard. In *Liberalism and the Limits*, Sandel argues that Rawl’s liberalism fails to acknowledge the depth of communal life that sustains individuals and underlies any conception of justice. In *Democracy’s Discontent*, he writes, “Although the public philosophy of the procedural republic predominates in our time, it has not extinguished the civic understanding of freedom. Around the edges of our political discourse and practice, hints of the formative project can still be glimpsed...These expressions of Americans’ persisting civic aspirations have taken two forms: one emphasizes the moral, the other the economic prerequisites of self-government. The first is the attempt, coming largely but not wholly from the right, to revive virtue, character-formation, and moral judgment as considerations in public policy and political discourse. The second involves a range of efforts, coming mostly though not entirely from the left, to contend with economic forces that disempower communities and threaten to erode the social fabric of democratic life.”

Seligman, Adam

is Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is author most recently of *Innerworldly Individualism: Charismatic Community and its Institutionalization* (1994), and *The Idea of Civil Society* (1992). In *The Idea of Civil Society*, Seligman observes that the historical traditions of civil society and civic virtue are often conflicting and contradictory, the former emphasizing a private morality while the latter a public morality. Elaborating this theme in a recent article, “The Changing Precontractual Frame of Modern Society,” he writes, “If the 19th century was a ‘long’ century, extending from the French Revolution to the First World War, the 20th century can be seen as an extremely ‘short’ one, extending from 1917-1989... These changes (since the collapse of communist states) affect the lives of us all, both as citizens of a given nation-state as well as in our positions as members of an increasingly

interconnected and interdependent world economy. As such, they have also forced many in both Europe in the North American communities to ‘rethink’ the terms of citizenship and participation in collective life that have traditionally defined modernity as a political culture...Our current conceptions of citizenship as the formalized and legally ascertained rights and duties incumbent upon individuals in their relations within a society (conceived of as a nation-state) are, to a great extent, rooted in two historically diverse traditions of political thought that we may term for brevity’s sake, those of civic culture and civil society... These two traditions, with their contradictory injunctions to virtue and civility, stand at the core of much of our current confusion over the meaning of citizenship and, in fact, of the defining terms of civil society in the modern world.”

Selznick, Philip

is Professor Emeritus of Law and Sociology in the School of Law and the Department of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. His most recent book is *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (1992), an important theoretical explication of communitarian theory. In a recent article, “Social Justice, A Communitarian Perspective” (1996), Selznick argues that the communitarian perspective attends to both individual and collective responsibilities, distinguishing it from conservatism. He writes, “I am troubled by a selective concern for personal responsibility, personal virtues, personal morality. While these themes are music to the ears of conservative writers and politicians - whose main concerns are crime, illegitimacy, and similar offenses, and who see immorality as a lower-class evil appropriately addressed by punitive measures - they pay little attention to the responsibilities of the affluent, or of business leaders. Most important, the moral responsibilities of the community as a whole are only dimly perceived and given short shrift. There is plenty of truth in the conservative critique of modern culture. Communitarians do not shrink from recognizing that truth. We have joined in calls for more responsible parenting, more discipline in schools, and safe streets and homes. But we part company with conservatives insofar as we look to collective as well as personal responsibility; and insofar as we understand that collective responsibility includes obligations of care for the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.”

Thomas Spragens

is Professor of Political Science at Duke University. He has authored several books on political theory, including *Reason and Democracy* (1990), *The Dilemma of Contemporary Political Theory: Toward a Post-Behavioral Science of Politics* (1973), and *The Politics of Motion: the World of Thomas Hobbes* (1973). Explaining his conception of a middle path between communitarianism and liberalism in his essay “Communitarian Liberalism,” he writes, “Without denigrating for a moment the importance of state and market, communitarian liberals insist upon the crucial role of local communities, families, neighborhoods, churches, educational institutions, and civic associations in creating a productive environment for human development and happiness. Good social policies, therefore, should seek to bolster the health of these civic institutions.”

Charles Taylor

is Professor of Philosophy at McGill University. He is the author of *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992), and *Philosophical Arguments* (1995), among numerous journal articles. *Sources of the Self* set a benchmark for philosophical discussions of the self, positing a “dialogical” self formed through interaction with other humans and institutions. In his essay, “Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere,” he writes, “what the public sphere does, is enable the society to come to a common mind, without the mediation of the political sphere, in a discourse of reason outside power, which nevertheless is normative for power....The public sphere cannot be seen only as a social form limiting the political but as a medium of democratic politics itself.”

Ronald Thiemann

is the Dean of Harvard Divinity School and the Director of the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life. He is the author of *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrative Promise* (1986), *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (1991), and *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (1996).

Thiemann argues in *Religion in Public Life* that the “wall of separation” between church and state ends up harming both. He defends civil society as a necessary space away from the encroachments of the market and the state: “Civic associations--including communities of faith--provide the essential public spaces within which individuals can explore alternative worlds of meaning. Without these alternative public spaces, citizens cannot develop modes of thought and behavior independent of those encouraged within the governmental and economic sectors. Those who are concerned about individual freedom today, should focus not on the realm of privacy but on the viability of civil society and on the defense of the public function of voluntary associations.”

The Center for the Study of Values in Public Life at the Harvard Divinity School is “a teaching and resource center founded to examine the values that shape public debates, policies, and institutional practices.” It sponsors seminars, lectures, and research in three program areas: civil society and the renewal of public life, environmental ethics and public policy, and values and international relations. It also publishes a quarterly journal entitled *Religion and Values in Public Life*.

Michael Walzer

is Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University and co-editor of *Dissent* magazine. He is best known for his work in *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (revised edition, 1992), one of the authoritative texts on just war theory, and *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (1983), which advances the concept of “complex equality” across the various spheres of human endeavor. In a recent article, “The Civil Society Argument,” Walzer defines civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks--formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology--that fill this space.” He later envisions it as “people freely associating and communicating with one another, forming and reforming groups of all sorts, not for the sake of any particular formation--family, tribe, nation, religion, commune, brotherhood or sisterhood, interest

group or ideological movement--but for the sake of sociability itself. For we are by nature social, before we are political or economic, beings.”

Wilson, James Q.

is James Collins Professor of Management and Public Policy at the University of California-Los Angeles. He is the author of several books on crime and public policy and has made a number of contributions to the civil society debate. Relevant works include *The Moral Sense* (1993) and *On Character* (1991). In his well-known *Atlantic Monthly* article with George Kelling, “Broken Windows,” he argued that the cues of physical disorder such as graffiti, abandoned buildings, and broken windows, are a signal of underlying social and moral disorder. Repairing physical disorder, especially through community action is a route to restored civility and reduced crime. In *The Moral Sense*, Wilson writes, “Rebuilding the basis of moral judgments requires us to take the perspective of the citizen, but the citizen has gone to great lengths to deny that he has a perspective to take. On the one hand, he is nervous or on guard when hearing someone speak of virtue or character; on the other hand, he regularly evaluates his friends and acquaintances in terms that clearly imply a standard of virtue and character. Moreover, while he may not tell another person to his face that he lacks character or virtue, he is often ready to say that it is the absence of those qualities that accounts for much of the crime, disorder, and self-indulgence he sees in the world about him.”

Alan Wolfe

is University Professor of Sociology at Boston University. He is the author of, among others, *Whose Keeper?: Social Science and Moral Obligation* (1989), an important contribution to communitarian thought and the civil society debate. He writes, “...in putting forward civil society as a moral ideal, the sociological tradition immediately faced a difficult decision. On the one hand, if civil society was viewed as an organic community with strong social ties that were in the process of being destroyed by modernity, sociologists who accepted morality ran the risk of rejecting modernity. On the other hand, if they accepted large states and complex economies as the price to be paid for modernity, they ran the risk of rejecting morality... Sociology, in conclusion, ought to be the guilty conscience of economics and politics, the one approach to moral regulation whose main message is that being modern imposes obligations on us as social beings, even as the other moral codes that contribute to our modernity tell us otherwise.”

Robert Wuthnow

is the Gerhard R. Andlinger Professor of Sociology and the Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University. He is the author of *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion* (1994), which analyzes the religious dimensions of civil society, and *Poor Richard's Principle: Recovering the American Dream Through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business and Money* (1996), which outlines the moral constraints which allow the American civil society and a free market to coexist, and editor of *Between States and Markets: the Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective* (1991), which compares the “third sector” of eight industrialized societies in order to assess the impact of voluntary organizations. In *Producing the Sacred*, Wuthnow explains the factors which make American civil society strong: “The public sphere

remains vibrant in the United States because constitutional provisions restrain the hand of government, the free enterprise system and government agencies play roles that often neutralize the power of the other, and a strong network of voluntary associations is in place that enjoys a high degree of autonomy from the for-profit sector and the political sector. Religious organizations compose a significant part of this voluntary sector.”

NON-ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the institutes described above that are particularly associated with the noted scholars (including The Walt Whitman Center, The Center for Democracy and Citizenship, The Center for Communitarian Policy Studies, The Communitarian Network, The National Commission on Civic Renewal, and The Center for the Study of Values in Public Life), there are a few non-academic, policy-oriented organizations worth noting because of their active involvement in promoting civil society.

Alliance for National Renewal

Denver

This is a coalition of more than 160 community-building organizations, organized by the National Civic League. Its goal is “to reverse the negative, cynical mood of the country and bring back the American can do spirit by re-engaging millions of citizens in community life.” Essentially, ANR provides an infrastructure for networking among local and national organizations.

Center for Civic Networking

<http://www.civic.net>

CCN is a non-profit organization “dedicated to applying the information infrastructure to the broad public good - particularly by putting information infrastructure to work within local communities to improve delivery of local government services, improve access to information that people need in order to function as informed citizens, broaden citizen participation in governance, and stimulate economic and community development.”

Civic Practices Network

Waltham, MA

CPN, located at the Heller School of Advanced Studies, Brandeis University, is a network of civic educators and practitioners whose common mission is “to tell the stories of civic innovation, share the practical wisdom, and exchange the most effective tools available.”

CPN provides case studies, training manuals, and evaluative tools as well as provide information on innovative projects.

The Foundation for Ethics and Meaning

New York, NY

is a clearinghouse for intellectuals concerned about the loss of meaning in politics. The five major parts to its mission are to counter conservative thought, to educate the public about the lack of meaning in politics, to promote a new understanding of society as a civil society, to analyze legislation and other political actions, and to foster public support for meaning in political life. The Foundation has organized a Summit on Ethics and Meaning. It also sponsors a Policy Institute and other initiatives to encourage American intellectuals to use their ideas not only within academic life, but also outside of the academy to revive public discourse. The founder and director of the center is Michael Lerner, a Rabbi and editor and publisher of *Tikkun* magazine, “the Bible of the Jewish Left.” Among his books are *Blacks and Jews: Let the Healing Begin* (1995), co-authored with Cornel West of the Harvard Divinity School, and *The Politics of Meaning* (1996).

Independent Sector

Washington, DC

Independent Sector is an 800 member coalition of nonprofits with a mission to encourage “the giving, volunteering, and not-for-profit initiative that helps all of us better serve people, communities, and causes.” IS conducts research on the nonprofit sector, seeks to encourage more volunteering, and works to improve nonprofit leadership and management. It also serves as a clearinghouse for information on nonprofit lobbying.

Institute for Civil Society

Newton, MA

According to Pam Solo, recipient of the 1989 MacArthur Award and President of the Institute, “The Institute for Civil Society is a hybrid organization - part foundation, part action-oriented think tank. Everything we do is focused on supporting breakthroughs at the local level in strengthening and rebuilding civil society. We find and support what works. We look for the problem-solvers.” Former Rep. Pat Schroeder is leading its flagship project, “New Century/New Solutions,” which is seeking to identify innovative solutions to chronic problems.

Institute for the Study of Civic Values

Philadelphia

This institute, founded by Edward Schwartz, has developed programs that use basic civic values to help citizens learn how to promote community and opportunity. They have helped to build a Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations into a vibrant city-wide coalition, involving hundreds of civic groups. The institute offers courses and technical assistance in the development of CDCs.

The Penn National Commission for Society, Culture, and Community

Philadelphia

Convened by University of Pennsylvania President Judith Rodin, the Commission’s task is to study the underlying reasons for a decline of civil society. The 48-member Commission is made up of an interdisciplinary, interprofessional network of scholars,

journalists, and business leaders who, through writings and discussions, explore the issue and offer solutions.

Public Agenda Foundation

New York, NY

The Public Agenda Foundation is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization “dedicated to improving the quality of public debate on important policy issues.” This includes extensive polling efforts and research which will help to clarify public values. This research is then extended by discussions initiated with various interest groups and specialists to aid in the policy-making process. Its founder and president is Daniel Yankelovich, who wrote the well-regarded book on values and public discourse, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (1991).

PART THREE: The Civil Society Debate

The perspective of civil society stands in sharp contrast to other schools of thought which have long dominated American debates about social policy. Civil society is the new voice in the American discussion, despite its long history as a concept. In public discussion, and even among experts, it is still struggling to make its distinctive language heard. The significance of the civil society perspective is still being worked out. Of necessity in such a still-incomplete development, the development of policy is closely tied to theoretical arguments.

By contrast, the more established theoretical approaches can, by dint of their familiarity, proceed to policy design with far less discussion of their theoretical assumptions. However, the advocates of the civil society perspective would interject, the range of problems having to do with the apparent breakdown of civil order and relationships are not being addressed well by these more familiar approaches. Theories of civil society are often formulated on the basis of comparison and critique.

Many policy recommendations of the recent past, from Three Strikes And You're Out to school vouchers to retirement savings incentives plans, are formulated on the basis of assumptions rejected by civil society theorists. In social science these assumptions underlie rival approaches often termed either Realist or Rationalist. At their core, both the Realist and the Rationalist approach sees social order as derivative of the interaction of individuals and systems of rewards or incentives. The cultural and moral norms so central to civil society thinking are literally ignored or taken as secondary features following from the workings of more fundamental, positivist concepts.

Thus, Realists assert that human societies are ordered primarily by systems of control, embodied in laws, sanctions, and finally in coercive force. These systems set up structures of incentives for compliance and disincentives for non-compliance. What we call institutions, law, government, and organizations are in fact such structures of control. Social order results from strong and well-planned systems of this kind, usually centered on government and systems of control and administration. Consider, for example, Three Strikes laws. Underlying this legislation is an assumption that criminals are strongly deterred by the threat of ever-stronger punitive sanctions enacted by the state. Coercive force, enacted by the state, is relied upon to produce desired social outcomes. Though effectively authoritarian, the philosophy may lead to either liberal or conservative policies, such government-mandated desegregation or denial of services to legal immigrants. Rather than signified by a single policy prescription, the realist philosophy is best understood as a consistent and exclusive use of state power.

Rationalists, on the other hand, conceive the individual as a source of desires or preferences. Beneath the apparent diversity of human social behavior clear and inexorable laws are at work. Individuals are really more or less efficient calculators of their own advantage, that is, more or less "rational" actors. Social order is a result of patterns of cooperation which prove to "pay off" sufficiently well over time and so come to structure individual choices into predictable, often complementary arrangements.

Grounded in economics, the same assumptions underlie "rational choice" and "public choice" theories, which typically look to the market as an ideal instrument of social coordination. The "Chicago School" of theorists, stretching from Friedrich Hayek to Gary Becker, Richard Posner, and Milton Friedman have been influential advocates of this approach. For rational choice advocates, social progress is to be sought by freeing market exchange from interfering outside forces, not only those of the state, but also of communal or religious moral norms. Charles Murray, in his well-known book, *Losing Ground*, for example, provided the argument that gained much public and political support in the welfare debate. He argued that welfare recipients were rational actors who observed the benefits of receiving welfare made employment less attractive than unemployment. Welfare was an aberration to the proper functioning of the market, and by dismantling it, the free market would provide an incentive structure that makes employment the more attractive choice.

Unlike Realists and Rationalists, who reduce social order to the functioning of the state and the market, advocates of the civil society perspective stress the importance of the normative and consensual bases of social order. Recent work has carried this theoretical argument into the realm of concrete social investigation. Two of the most influential of these studies directly contest the empirical validity of conventional Realist and Rationalist approaches. Robert Putnam, in his much-discussed study of Italian regional governments, uses statistical data along with interview material to explain the effectiveness of northern and southern regional governments in Italy. He finds that democratic institutions work well only when they are embedded in cultural and social contexts which are supportive of civic engagement. Effective democratic states need strong civil societies. Significantly, Putnam's data also supports the contention that the strength of the civil society is an important predictor of economic vitality as well. That is, markets, too, depend upon moral ties forged outside market exchange itself. In convergent fashion, though concluding with far more enthusiasm for the market than government, Francis Fukuyama argues for what he terms the "improbable" importance of culture for economic development. "Improbable," that is, from the perspective of conventional economic rationalism.

Both Putnam and Fukuyama emphasize the cardinal importance of moral and social institutions and cultural practices. Human motivation is not simply or even mostly guided by "preferences" and "incentives" structured by the instruments of the market and the state. This shift in perspective shows institutions to be more than the mere collective instruments that Realists and Rationalists conceive them to be. Rather, institutions are argued to be authoritative, socially sanctioned, patterns of behavioral expectations. These organized patterns shape individual outlooks and preferences as much as reflect them. Crucially, they shape individual's choices with reference to norms and values. Unlike the conventional policy approaches, civil society thinkers do not attempt to force these norms and values into some form of "rational" incentive structure.

The perspective of civil society allows social policy to pay attention to the cultural sources of norms. Particularly in American society, these norms have religious sources. It is important, therefore, to note the increasing voice within the civil society

discussion of theorists who study and/or advocate attention to the religious sources of the moral norms governing social interaction. Good examples are Michael Lerner and Ronald Thiemann.

Civil society, in the view of many of its theorists, needs a certain measure of autonomy from the political and economic spheres. But at the same time, civil society necessarily operates through and with both government and markets. One of the most important emerging debates concerns how civil society is to be differentiated from the other social spheres yet remain connected to them, even in one sense, superior to them both. In this connection, four contending proposals have emerged for specifying how civil society should be related to state and market. We will call these Communitarian, Social Conservative, Left-Progressive, and Liberal conceptions. These conceptions each imply a different approach to the question of how the perspective of civil society ought to influence the formulation of public policy.

The Communitarian conception of civil society's importance for nurturing effective democratic life has been well articulated by Charles Taylor. Taylor wants us to understand that Western societies are about more than the pursuit of material progress. They are also engaged in a vast collective moral project enabling individuals to choose their own purposes and take responsibility for their lives. Taylor calls this ideal authenticity. However, he insists on the importance of recognizing that choice and freedom are in fact social goods and not simply individual possessions. To be meaningful and effective for the individual, freedom requires shared standards. These common standards provide a "horizon of significance" or background against which individual choices take on meaning and become recognized by others. Expressed in language, custom, and institutions, these significant horizons are embedded in the life of civil society and provide the vital medium for individual growth and action.

Taylor goes on to argue that the difficulty of living authentically today is exacerbated by a common misunderstanding. People often confuse the value of having and exercising freedom of choice with the merit of the choice itself. For Taylor, this is an individualistic misunderstanding which truncates the meaning of freedom by ignoring the consequences of individual choices for the general welfare of society. People commonly accept this limited notion in part because they feel cut off from others in a "fragmented" social world in which different groups seem to operate according to different standards. This sense of fragmentation finally threatens individual integrity. This misunderstanding and failure to consider the collective good stems from the conflicting principles which guide the distinct but interpenetrating spheres of modern life. Thus, the market pursues efficiency, while the state, for its part, pursues other goals such as equity and inclusion. Institutions of civil society, such as education, seek other goals, yet in order to function they too must interact with the profit-orientation of the market and the laws of the state. The more this condition of fragmentation takes hold, Taylor contends, the less capacity individuals have to lead authentic lives because without sharing common norms they can have little confidence in their neighbors' trustworthiness, the larger institutions of society, or, ultimately, even in themselves.

This is Taylor's Communitarian account of the problems of social entropy and political breakdown now endemic in Western countries, including the United States. Taylor notes that American political activity, though feverish in certain sectors of the society, remains channeled almost entirely into legal conflicts over rights, on the one hand, and into organizing particular interests to force their causes into government policy, on the other. What is missing, yet most needed, is a politics which addresses the fundamental problem of fragmentation itself. The way out, for Taylor, hinges on recognizing that modern complexity can only be dealt with by citizens who share common values and purposes, who can relate to their society as a moral project, to each other as responsible for those values, and to its public institutions, including government, as agencies of this project. Taylor's civil society must in end become a society with a civic spirit if it is to fulfill its promise of freedom and moral fulfillment for all.

Taylor's Communitarian vision would shift political attention from legal struggles and issue-politics toward the formation of broad consensus on what it means to live in a good society. Its political complement is partnership between state and civil society. In this process, civil society is a fulcrum point. It is in what Taylor calls the "non-governmental public sphere" comprised of educational organizations, communications, religious communities, and the myriad of forms of association with which the United States is richly endowed, that the critical efforts at consensus-building must take place. This development is necessary because without it fragmentation--and increasing social entropy--becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consensus-building is possible, Taylor contends, because the citizens of even fragmented modern societies do share important common understandings, especially the aspiration toward authentic living for all, in virtue of their participation in common political institutions based on this aim.

Social Conservatives share a part of the Communitarian diagnosis of what is missing in today's civil society, namely moral consensus on common civic principles and standards. But Conservatives depart sharply from Taylor's Communitarian proposal about what is to be done about it. To date, Social Conservatives such as William Bennett and Francis Fukuyama have given more attention to advocacy and policy recommendation than to developing persuasive theoretical accounts of their position. The leading exception is Alasdair MacIntyre, who has produced a much-discussed, powerfully coherent defense of moral tradition as the essential bedrock for a cohesive and well-ordered society. Interestingly, however, MacIntyre's arguments do not endorse the common Social Conservative aim of imposing tradition by means of the coercive power of the state, for reasons which will become clear below.

MacIntyre contends, in ways that echo features of Taylor's argument, that personal significance depends upon commitment to morally coherent relationships, that, indeed, morality is enabling as well as constraining. Freedom is deeply dependent upon virtue. But, unlike most Communitarians, MacIntyre insists that modern societies are working out not some complex but ultimately coherent moral project of freedom but an essentially self-conflicted effort whose tensions are beyond hope of reconciliation. In this state of moral incoherence, individual integrity is threatened by the pressures toward a self-deluding opportunism which seeks strategic advantages for gratification under the

guise of moral ideals of freedom. Since there are few or no shared, impersonal standards of action, being successful in life becomes identical to whatever an individual can convince or manipulate others into accepting as success. Hence, the widespread sense of moral entropy in contemporary life. The practical effect of this cultural condition, however, is not to enhance individual's freedom and self-confidence so much as to weaken everyone's ability to find enduring meaning and satisfaction, thereby ratcheting up the restless drive for more experience and more "success."

The effect of this state of cultural entropy is social disintegration. One measure of its profundity is what MacIntyre calls the "interminability" of most modern moral-political debates, an interminability which undercuts the possibility of seeing civil society as a sphere of meaningful public life. For instance, advocates of Liberal justice claim, as articulated powerfully by John Rawls, that the national ideals of equality and freedom require that the state actively promote the opportunity for each to realize talents. Fairness requires equalizing. But in direct opposition, Conservative philosophers such as Robert Nozick insist that fairness entails treating all equally, with no state obligation to do more than preserve the rules of freedom. To do more than that would be to violate equality by giving special assistance to some at the expense of others. These debates find poignant expression in the contemporary conflict over Affirmative Action policies. For MacIntyre, these debates are interminable because they cannot appeal to any shared, impersonal principles. Instead, they proceed from premises that are deeply "incommensurable," thereby ruling out any real consensus on what the goals of the national society might mean.

MacIntyre's conclusions cast doubt on Communitarian aims, but also give little comfort to Social Conservative public policies. For MacIntyre the upshot of the interminable nature of our moral divisions explains why such a society needs to rely so heavily on market and state administration, both of which convert moral purposes into neutral "utilities" and "preferences." In other words, utilitarian management systems which eschew morality and civil society talk while simply trying to satisfy claimants with an acceptable distribution of rewards (the approach promoted by Realist and Rationalist policy advocates) are the public expression of our deep confusion about moral meaning. The Social Conservative alternative, though not articulated by MacIntyre or any other major civil society theorist, is to impose "traditional values" by governmental coercion, even on unwilling dissenters from whatever is judged the majority position. MacIntyre's analysis thus reveals a deep incoherence in such advocacy, which may be why there is such a dearth of theory behind such policy proposals.

A third branch of the civil society discussion stresses the role of civil society as the arena for expanding equality and freedom. Drawing upon the influential work of sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas, Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen emphasize civil society as the linchpin of the "public sphere." For Arato and Cohen, this is the realm of free communication not controlled by either the profit-maximizing logic of the market nor the coercive powers of the state. For them the public sphere is a peculiarly modern invention: a social space which enables authority and tradition to be critically examined and independent opinion to be ventured. Here the members of a society attempt to

understand their lives and to formulate values and strategies for action. But for Arato and Cohen the public sphere is also a place of conflict and struggle among differing currents of opinion. As proponents of what might be called a Left-Progressive vision of modern possibilities, Arato and Cohen place special emphasis upon what are called the "new social movements" concerned with ecology, gender, racial and sexual equality as the contemporary realization of the liberating potentials of democracy.

Civil society today finds itself threatened, argue Arato and Cohen, not only by Social Conservatives who intend to impose tradition by force, i.e., the legislation of morality, but also by the great power of economic and political forces. Arato and Cohen explicitly reject the Eastern European tendency to define civil society as inclusive of everything outside the state. Instead, they divide the social realm into three spheres: the civil society; political society, including not only government, as in legislatures and courts but also all organizations oriented toward the state such as political parties and interest groups; economic society, which includes both the market and business firms, unions, and organizations primarily oriented toward economic development. Market and state are coordinated by what they call, again following Habermas, the "media" of money and power. The logics of money and power both place severe restrictions upon free communication by putting the pressures of financial or political competition ahead of claims to truth, morality, or aesthetic value. Hence, the vital role of civil society as the sphere of free discussion in preventing modern societies from being altogether subordinated to the imperatives of profit or power.

In this Left-Progressive vision, civil society is chiefly valuable as the seat and source of the democratic potentials of modern societies. From civil society, citizens can and must enter the economic and political spheres in order to have their purposes economically supported and politically secured. But especially as exemplified in the "new social movements," individuals can explore new possibilities of identity and lifestyle while acting together they can advance the collective goods of equality and justice. Where socially conservative civil society advocates look to institutions such as education and community organizations to promote character and continuity in values important for their view of society, Left-Progressives see these institutions as vehicles for increasing individual and social self-reflection and innovation, as vehicles of cultural progress at least as much as conservation.

In contrast to these Communitarian, Social Conservative, and Left-Progressive views, a fourth understanding of civil society has been ably articulated by Michael Walzer. Walzer's view shares important features of the Communitarian perspective. It is also sympathetic to the Left-Progressive championing of the claims of the new social movements. More than either, however, Walzer emphasizes concerns central to the Liberal tradition. Liberalism has been the great home of modern individualism and therefore its core instinct is to be suspicious of calls for public, let alone, governmental, emphasis upon values such as responsibility and solidarity. Thus, while Walzer also views civil society as a moral project as well as a descriptive social category, he emphasizes features of civil society more consonant with Liberal values. For Walzer, civil society is the outcome of a difficult historical search for balance and tolerance.

Walzer traces the origins of the civil society idea to John Locke's pioneering defense of religious toleration.

Walzer interprets civil society as the gradual institutionalizing of a growing spirit of tolerance and forbearance among various social groups, generalizing from the unsteady progress of religious toleration since the Seventeenth Century in Europe. Walzer emphasizes that this spirit of tolerance affects and moderates the political aims of groups in democratic nations. For example, Walzer endorses the new social movements advocated by Arato and Cohen not only because of their aims but because, in comparison with Leftist movements of the past, these groups, despite the exaggerated claims of their opponents, explicitly eschew totalitarian ambitions and seek compromise within a pluralist political order of shared power. Finally, then, civil society is valuable as much for its civil as for its civic features, and perhaps more so.

On the other hand, Walzer characterizes civil society as an incomplete, even paradoxical ideal. But a necessary and humane one nevertheless if modern life is to be made tolerable for all. Against the "single-minded" pursuit of market efficiency or political power, for example, Walzer sees the values of civil society as a corrective in theory, and in practice a moderating force, lowering the stakes of all-or-nothing conflict. But there is paradox here as well. Civil society cannot supplant the state: the state is both one association among others within civil society and at the same time it is the organization which frames and structures the very conditions for civil society. Furthermore, Walzer argues that it is the very existence of the public power of the state which stimulates thinking about the general welfare in the first place. And it is only an effective coercive power like the state which can counteract those tendencies within civil society, such as market or gender or racial inequality, which would eventually undermine the freedom of civil society itself. However, Walzer also cautions against zeal. For him the last word is that modern politics is a delicate balancing act. Communal, particularly national and majoritarian, affirmations of common norms can be dangerous much of the time. The ideals of civil society, then, especially its toleration for minorities and its wariness about all overarching loyalties, are for Walzer important correctives to the Communitarian and Left-Progressive tendencies in modern politics.

CONCLUSION: The Three Major Debates

One: Civil Society Versus Realists and Rationalists

The civil society debate occurs on three fronts. First, there is the defense of the perspective of civil society against the Realists and Rationalists who see little value or purpose to civil society and discount it entirely in the realms of political theory and public policy. All the scholars in Part Two share the mission of opposing that view. In the face of widespread agreement that the American social fabric is in danger, public attention has shifted to issues of family and community breakdown, the decline of civility, and a host of other problems. The term civil society is often popularly invoked today by figures ranging from Hillary Rodham Clinton to Pat Buchanan as a way to signal the need to attend to the social and moral issues facing the nation. The rise of the

importance of the idea of civil society in scholarly debate is loosely congruent with this development. However, while a number of the scholarly contributors to the idea of civil society have also played significant roles in the more popular discussion, the scholarly discussion is nonetheless quite distinct and concerned with issues which do not always directly enter public discourse. While they resonate with political and cultural differences affecting American public life, the key differences among scholars of civil society are complex intellectual differences first of all and need to be appreciated as such.

There is, then, still much work that needs to be done to link in more illuminating ways the concept of civil society to empirical and historical investigation. We have highlighted several such efforts, such as the work of Putnam and Fukuyama. For this work to finally bear fruit in public enlightenment and guidance, however, the concept itself needs further clarification and the distinctions among different concepts and approaches need to be sharpened. The next two debates, one between Left-Progressives and Social Conservatives, and perhaps the most crucial one, between Liberals and Communitarians, are important aspects of this process of sharpening and clarifying the significance of the concept of civil society for our society today.

TWO: Left-Progressives Versus Social Conservatives

The second debate is between Left-Progressives and Social Conservatives. Here the important distinction is between a civil society dedicated to social change in pursuit of individual self-realization and social justice, or, for Social Conservatives, one dedicated to the transmission and inculcation of traditional social practices and values believed to be essential to social cohesion and survival. This contrast captures much of the antagonism more popularly known as the "culture wars." Notably, however, the public debate centers on family, children's issues, and especially the conduct and content of education. These debates typically pit educated cosmopolitan groups, often secular in nature, against more religiously-oriented populists who stress the special importance of locality and family and neighborly connectedness. Interestingly, these divisions are often cross-cut racially, with many African Americans sympathetic to Social Conservatives on matters of discipline and values, but leaning toward Left-Progressive views of state action to correct inequality. Left-Progressives, for example, typically want education to stress creativity, the questioning of authority, and self-expression along with curricula sympathetic understanding of victims of social exclusion and injustice. Social Conservatives, by contrast, often advocate curricula strong on patriotism, self-reliance, and competitive individualism, but suspicious of criticism and coupled with strong discipline in the schools.

Left-Progressives, like Liberals, tend to stress civil society as an instrument of freedom. They support a vision of social change guided by collective action, as in social movements, to remove barriers engendered by various types of social inequality: racial, gender, sexual, etc. Civil society then becomes construed as an arena for action to counter-balance those forces endemic to politics and the market, as well as those rooted in inegalitarian traditions, which make for inequality. Collective action is the means by which less powerful, newly-constituted or marginalized groups can hold the larger

society accountable to its professed ideals of freedom and equity. Social Conservatives, in sharp contrast, view civil society as a buffer against those forces which disrupt traditional practices upon which the solidarity of communities is held to depend. Some, like Alasdair MacIntyre take this stance because they see modernity as whole as a deeply flawed, even self-undermining project. On the whole, however, Social Conservatives see the state rather than the market as the source of these forces, spurred on by the cultural currents opposed to tradition, such as those represented in Left-Progressivism.

Here understanding the philosophical roots of the public debate help to clear up the apparent contradiction of self-described conservatives cheering on the relentless extension of technologies and attitudes which promote individual mobility and glorify individual choice. Much popular Social Conservatism is actually nineteenth century Liberalism, which sees economic initiative and individual achievement as the great vehicles of progress, that seeks at the same time to draw the line in the realm of domestic and private life. Social Conservatives, like Left-Progressives, wish to use the coercive powers of the state to enforce their notions of progress and virtue. While Left-Progressives wish to sanction collective responsibilities to ameliorate social injustices, as in Affirmative Action policies, Social Conservatives, less interested in collective responsibilities and willing to tolerate a good deal of inequity, stress use of these same powers to defend aspects of tradition deemed essential to maintaining a vibrant economy and a society of high-achieving and self-reliant individuals, especially in domestic sphere. Hence, their enthusiasm for bans on gay marriage, hostility to abortion and divorce, etc.

THREE: Liberals Versus Communitarians

The third debate is perhaps the most consequential of the three, given the American dedication to the traditional Liberal values, because it concerns how these values can be defended in the face of widespread disaffection from the nation's dominant institutions. Liberals and Communitarians are agreed that civil society and the values it represents and teaches is vital to democracy and needs to be defended. However, the two groups divide sharply over how best to do that and why civil society is finally worth defending. This opposition, in other words, is both strategic--a question of what needs to be emphasized now--and philosophical, what are the most important values to defend.

Liberals value civil society as the space wherein individuals can both make something of themselves and find satisfactory identities and plans for living. The expansion of choice for free individuals is the hallmark of liberal thinking, and in the realm of civil society this means tolerance for difference. Liberalism, especially in its most influential recent articulations in political philosophy and jurisprudence strives to keep law and the state firmly on the side of these aims by maintaining neutrality among competing ways of life. For this reason, Liberals tend to see institutions as primarily instruments to be used by individuals in pursuit of their own goods rather than as embodiments of some common good. Accordingly, the public realm, including the space of civil society, has no value in and of itself but, again, as a means toward the superordinate aim of expanding freedom. So while Liberal-leaning theorists of civil

society see civic values such as public spirit as valuable, they are valuable mostly as means to the end of an open, tolerant society which enables individuals to flourish in the life situations of their choice.

Communitarians, as we have seen, share the aspiration toward individual autonomy and its protection in law and institutions. However, they also see autonomy as a social development as much as an individual achievement. That is, individuals can usually develop into free and responsible persons only in a society characterized by a strong common agreement that the defense of these values are essential to what the society is about and integral to a good life. That is why Communitarians argue that the state cannot finally be neutral about the good life if the project of democracy is to succeed. Civil society, for Communitarians, is worth defending because it is the essential space in which individuals can pursue their development, including their personal goals. But what makes civil society strong and able to play this key role lies deeper than the values of self-development. A viable civil society is rooted in the shared awareness of solidarity, that part of what makes life worth living is devotion to goods which cannot be anyone's possession unless they are shared in common.

For Communitarians, solidarity is the basis of civil society because individuals will be treated with respect only if they are seen by others as somehow members of the same moral community, whether they are individually worthy or not. Furthermore, Communitarians argue, no intelligent society will count on solidarity being generated simply as a side-effect of the pursuit of freedom or toleration. Solidarity arises from the perception that individuals in fact share values and concrete goods, such as the respect for rights, in common. Having the goods in common changes the nature of goods themselves, since the goods only exist as several individuals share them. These are common goods, such as the value of being a member of a certain family, or the difference it makes in personal life to be the friend of a certain group of persons. Such common goods are both shared among family members or friends and at the same time it is these goods which make them the particular persons they are.

For Communitarians, civil society rests upon such a sense of solidarity. Solidarity is a virtue individuals need to cultivate, but as a common good and not on their own. Without solidarity the lives of the individuals who share it would be substantially less worthwhile. It is also a common good in the important sense that it is a value which they cannot obtain except by entering into and sustaining the loyalties incumbent upon members of this kind of free society. In this way, the defense of even Liberal values such as individual freedom actually rests upon non- or extra-Liberal commitments, particularly to the essentially public or civic value of solidarity understood as a common good. This, say Communitarians, is why membership in concrete communities, from the intimate sphere to the nation, which share commitments to the goods of freedom and equality is the essential basis for maintaining these values and inculcating a devotion to them in modern social life. Without the nurture of this active solidarity, fragmentation will take over, spreading alienation and distrust until there are too few individuals willing to defend the rights of threatened others. Public spirit, for Communitarians, is then more than a means to other ends. It becomes a good in itself.

As a key source of meaning and purpose, solidarity becomes in a sense the most central public value for Communitarians, the indispensable basis of freedom, equality, and justice. Without its conscious cultivation and support across the widest possible range of institutions and social spheres, civil society will not be civil. Without seeking this good in common, that is, without the effort to turn life in a more civic direction, the Communitarians argue, none of the great goods of civil society will be sustainable for long. There is need for more development and debate among adherents of the Communitarian position about the strategies for strengthening civic solidarity. Communitarians are not unified as to whether the state can or should play a supporting or in some cases a leading role in this, for example, nor how serious is the threat which the market poses to solidarity, and hence to freedom and equity. What does seem close to unanimous among Communitarian theorists of civil society, however, is that priority should be given to understanding how civic solidarities are built and maintained and then how to go about strengthening them, coupled with a realistic assessment of the forces working against and in favor of this project.

For us, it seems the civil society debate must head in one direction. Moral discourse should have a place in the formulation of public policy. Democratic politics is not a matter of money or power, but of public spirit and thoughtful consideration of what it means to be a good society. Traditional moral understandings have a significant role in public discourse, but it can neither trump new ideas nor be imposed on dissenters. Civil society engenders voluntarism in both the embrace of social commitments and in the active participation in discourse and social service. Today most of the organizations dedicated to the civil society concept focus on the idea of civility: politicians, journalists, celebrities and athletes should be role models not scoundrels, children need Miss Manners for their character education, various competing interests need to resolve their differences with a measure of composure, tolerance, and deliberation, and above all, citizens need to exercise their civic duties, especially at the ballot box. Though a good thing, we argue that civility is necessary, but not sufficient. It is important to play nice, but it is even more important to establish common purposes, and ponder how to rebuild the fundamental institutions of civil society: families, schools, voluntary organizations, and communities.