

CIVIL SOCIETY FROM HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE LIMITS OF GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, the concept of "globalization" is discouraging rather than inspirational. Many thought that it entails dominance rather than a unifying force; globalization is perceived to affecting the daily lives of millions of people which goes beyond the bounds of the nation state, and the authority of national governments who are most often, unaccountable to their citizens; while the authority of nation states seems to decline, new global issues are multiplying: climate change, infectious diseases, violations of human security and human rights, terrorism, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, economic inequality; these problems cannot be isolated from each other or solved individually; which could by directed action, may be considered as ineffective in the face of such overwhelming inter-territorial issues, which made any global action too complex for fast and ready answers; it became necessary to identify one observable fact occurring today that offers not solutions per se but a process for engagement with the most pressing problems of our contemporary world: "the emergence of global civil society"; in recent years, consciousness of global civil society has reached a crescendo in attracting attention and anticipating influences; this is so because, it is becoming critical of the dangers of globalization, and people are grouping together in social movements, NGOs, and demonstrations to confront these "all involving" challenges facing humanity today. In the light of the above, this essay examines Civil Society from the Historical and Theoretical Perspectives and the Limits of Global civil Society.

Keywords : Civil, Global, Historical, Perspective, Society, Theoretical

Introduction

Civil society as a concept has existed for centuries; the ancients wrote of a *societas civilis*, meaning the rule of law and active citizen

participation in the public life of their societies; in the late eighteenth century, enlightenment authors distinguished civil society from the state, encouraging the awareness of the citizenry capable of mobilizing themselves to achieve social goals, neutralize dictatorship and oppression. The campaign to abolish the Atlantic slave trade, launched in the 1780s, is frequently cited as an example, not only of a mass movement for social change but of its application to a worldwide predicament.

A more formal and systematic role for civil society in international affairs came along with the establishment of the United Nations (UN), when a group of "consultants" from civil society organizations (CSOs) attended the founding San Francisco Conference in 1945 and participated in drafting the United Nation's Charter; that charter provided for a continuing link between the United Nations and civil society through the approval of certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Over the years this relationship strengthened; in 2003 the Secretary-General established a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, chaired by Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The Cardoso Report, issued in 2004, concluded that "civil society is now so vital to the United Nations that engaging with it is a necessity, not an option," and it offered a number of reform suggestions toward that objective.

Reflecting on these solid accomplishments, and other factors, there has been a practical sudden increase of civil society involvement in global issues. Most noticeably, the number of Civil Society Organizations committed to global concerns has grown exponentially; they have expanded their scope from aiming at specific targets like slavery or prisoners of conscience to fundamental matters of global governance. The process was tagged "globalization from below." The

speed and scope of civil society's recent growth on the international scene prompted the Centre for Global Studies (CGS) at the University of Victoria to explore the possibility of establishing some "venue" or "forum" that might synchronize the voices of global civil society in order to enhance their effectiveness, accountability, inclusiveness, and credibility in their consultation with agencies of international governance.

This shows that it is very clear that global civil society is having a significant influence on the international system; though this was not necessarily a new breakthrough, it also became evident that civil society actors could play some significant representation in the affairs of national governments. This discourse is therefore to examine historical and theoretical postulations about civil society and global civil society for a broader understanding of the discussions that would aid our comprehension of the concept.

Conceptualization of Civil Society and Global Civil Society

Briefly let's try to appreciate what civil society is, by describing exactly or relatively who is included within the description of civil society; broadly, civil society was portrayed as a sphere of social life that is public but excludes government activities (Meidinger, 2001). Michael Bratton describes civil society as social interaction between the household and the state characterized by community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication (Bratton, 1994). The term civil society is generally used to classify persons, institutions, and organizations that have the goal of advancing or expressing a common purpose through ideas, actions, and demands on governments (Cohen and Arato, 1992).

It is essentially *collective* action - in associations, across society through the public sphere - and as such, it provides an essential counterbalance to individualism; as *creative* action, civil society

provides a much-needed antidote to the cynicism that infects so much of contemporary politics; and as *values-based action*, civil society provides a balance to the otherwise-overbearing influence of state authority and the temptations and incentives of the market, even if those values are contested, as they often are; the idea of civil society remains convincing, it remains convincing because it speaks of the best in us - the collective, creative and values-driven core of the active citizen - calling on the best in us to respond in kind to create societies that are just, true and free.

The membership of civil society is quite diverse, ranging from individuals to religious and academic institutions to issue-focused groups such as not-for-profit or non-governmental organizations; in the realm of environmental governance, Non Governmental Organizations are the most well-known actors and they are: Groups of individuals organized for numerous reasons that engage human imagination and aspiration. They can be set up to advocate a particular cause, such as human rights, or to carry out programs on the ground, such as disaster relief; they can have memberships ranging from local to global. (Charnovitz, 1997: 186) .

Historical Perspective

There is a large growing literature on global civil society and related developments. The "bible" of the entire movement is surely *Global Civil Society* from the London School of Economics, edited by Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor, and published annually since 2001. Some foundational monographs have been produced in the last decade, several journals such as *Global Governance*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Journal of Civil Society*, *Journal of Human Rights*, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *Social Forces*, and *Third World Quarterly* are among those that regularly carry articles, and

there is an increasing number of edited collections devoted to exploring many aspects of the global community and collective action.

The following are the overview of the thoughts of some influential philosophers who, through the ages, pondered on how people could best meet up their individual needs while also achieving collective ends. It is believed that this happens best when people in a society treat each other in a "civil" manner; hence, from a historical perspective, the actual meaning of the concept of civil society has changed from its original, classical form. The first change occurred after the French Revolution, the second during the fall of communism in Europe.

Western antiquity

The concept of civil society in its pre-modern classical republican understanding is usually connected to the early-modern thought of Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. However, it has much older history in the sphere of political thought. Generally, civil society has been referred to as a political association governing social conflict through the imposition of rules that restrain citizens from harming one another. In the classical period, over two thousand years ago, classical philosophers were struggling with the concepts surrounding communal life in the polis, the Greek city-state; the concept was used as a synonym for the good society, and seen as indistinguishable from the state.

For instance, Socrates taught that conflicts within society should be resolved through public argument using 'dialectic', a form of rational dialogue to uncover truth. According to Socrates, public argument through 'dialectic' was imperative to ensure 'civility' in the polis and 'good life' of the people. How could people obtain the 'good life' given the inherent conflicts between their needs as individuals and the needs of their society? Socrates, according to Plato, advocated that issues

be resolved via public argument using the dialectic, a form of rational dialogue in which the arguers test propositions against other propositions in order to uncover the truth, that is, until they achieve a reasoning that cannot be refuted.

For Plato, the ideal state was a just society in which people dedicate themselves to the common good, practice civic virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation and justice, and perform the occupational role to which they were best suited. It was the duty of the 'philosopher king' to look after people in civility. Plato described a person's soul, or personality, as having three parts: an appetite, which seeks physical satisfactions; a spirit, which seeks social approval; and reason, which seeks truth.

A just person is one in whom reason, aided by a strong spirit, constrains the demands of the appetite. A just society is one in which people dedicate themselves to the common good, practice civic virtues of wisdom, courage, moderation and justice, and perform the occupational role to which they are best suited. Plato's ideal state is ruled by philosopher-kings, who make decisions based solely on the common good. For Aristotle, the best state is a polity which is ruled by the middle class, who are more likely to be moderate in their individual aspirations, and more likely to strive for equality, than either the rich or the poor; but, since a small middle class can rarely stand up to the passions of the rich or poor, it tends to become either an oligopoly (rule by the rich minority) or a democracy (rule by the poor majority).

A democracy is preferable to an oligopoly, he said, and it highlights two aspects of liberty. The first is that individuals should have the opportunity to participate in ruling through taking part in public office. Laws should be the result of public deliberation among average citizens rather than experts, since people through discourse enhance their

collective practical intelligence and ensure optimal satisfaction of all parties in the society. The second is that, subject to obeying rightly constituted laws, people should be able to live as they like, free from interference from the state where, people are to be treated equally.

Aristotle separated scientific knowledge, in which predictions about natural things are made on the basis of theory from practical intelligence, which is concerned with the morality and rationality of human action; unlike the constancy of nature, human activity is naturally unpredictable, and can only be understood through experience rather than theoretical deductions; thus, society cannot be revised through a comprehensive theory, like the ideal of Plato's Republic, but only through building upon the rational characteristics that are already part of existing experience. Aristotle thought the polis was an 'association of associations' that enables citizens to share in the virtuous task of ruling and being ruled. His *koinonia politike* as political community.

The concept of *societas civilis* is Roman and was introduced by Cicero; the political discourse in the classical period, places importance on the idea of a 'good society' in ensuring peace and order among the people. The philosophers in the classical period did not make any distinction between the state and society; rather, they held that the state represented the civil form of society and 'civility' represented the requirement of good citizenship.

Furthermore, they held that human beings are inherently rational so that they can collectively shape the nature of the society they belong to, in addition, human beings have the capacity to voluntarily gather for the common cause and maintain peace in society. By holding this view, we can say that classical political thinkers endorsed the genesis of civil society in its original sense.

Pre-modern history

The middle Ages saw major changes in the topics discussed by political philosophers; due to the unique political arrangements of feudalism, the concept of classical civil society practically disappeared from mainstream discussion. Instead conversation was dominated by problems of just war, a preoccupation that would last until the end of Renaissance. The Thirty Years' War and the subsequent Treaty of Westphalia heralded the birth of the sovereign states system. The Treaty endorsed states as territorially-based political units having sovereignty.

Consequently, the monarchs were able to exert domestic control by rendering impotent the feudal lords and to stop relying on the latter for armed troops; from then forward, monarchs could form national armies and deploy a professional bureaucracy and fiscal departments, which enabled them to maintain direct control and supreme authority over their subjects; in order to meet administrative expenditures, and control the economy.

This gave birth to absolutism; until the mid-eighteenth century, absolutism was the main feature of Europe. The absolutist concept of the state was disputed in the Enlightenment period. As a natural consequence of Renaissance, Humanism, and the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment thinkers raised fundamental questions such as "What legitimacy does heredity confer?", "Why are governments instituted?", "Why should some human beings have more basic rights than others?" and so on.

These questions led them to make certain assumptions about the nature of the human mind, the sources of political and moral authority, the reasons behind absolutism, and how to move beyond absolutism. The Enlightenment thinkers believed in the inherent goodness of the

human mind. They opposed the alliance between the state and the Church as the enemy of human progress and well-being because the coercive apparatus of the state restricted individual liberty and the Church legitimated monarchs by positing the theory of divine origin, therefore, both were deemed to be against the will of the people.

Strongly influenced by the atrocities of Thirty Years' War, the political philosophers of the time held that social relations should be ordered in a different way from natural law conditions. Some of their attempts led to the emergence of social contract theory that contested social relations existing in accordance with human nature. They held that human nature can be understood by analyzing objective realities and natural law conditions; thus they endorsed that the nature of human beings should be encompassed by the form of state and established positive laws.

Thomas Hobbes lived at the time of the English civil war of 1642 to 1651, which pitted the King and his supporters, fighting for traditional government in Church and State, against the supporters of Parliament, who sought radical changes in religion and a greater share of power at the national level. Hobbes believed that in their original 'state of nature', people regarded themselves as equal to all others and, in competing for scarce resources, lived in a society of "all against all".

Consequently, life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"; upon realizing that such a state of constant struggle for individual power limits social developments and common wealth, people would seek a new basis for society in which civic virtues are derived from natural laws, the first of which is that, all persons ought to seek peace. The second, derived from the Bible's Golden Rule, is that one should respect the rights of others in order to safeguard one's own rights.

Reflecting the growth in economic transactions in society, Hobbes stated that social relations are to be based on equality and mutual trust, and each person must "perform their covenants made", which is to say they must live up to their agreements and contracts; but since people are sometimes imperfect, a state must be created under the consent of the people to safeguard the peace and ensure contracts were upheld. In order to secure the rights of all citizens, the state must be impartial, so as not to unfairly promote the interests of one person or group over another.

Hobbes called this common power, state, Leviathan, i.e. the state or commonwealth, which he termed Leviathan (after a Biblical sea monster), once created by popular consent, would allow no threat to the general peace, including that of political dissent. All lawmaking, judicial powers and executive powers are to be exercised in a single body. This body, be it a parliament or, ideally, a monarch, is to have authority even over religious doctrines and beliefs.

Thomas Hobbes underlined the need of a powerful state to maintain civility in society. For him, human beings are motivated by self-interests (Graham 1997:23). Moreover, these self-interests are often contradictory in nature. Therefore, in state of nature, there was a condition of a war of all against all. In such a situation, life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Ibid: 25). Upon realizing the danger of anarchy, human beings became aware of the need of a mechanism to protect them. As far as Hobbes was concerned, rationality and self-interests persuaded human beings to combine in agreement, to surrender sovereignty to a common power (Kaviraj 2001:289).

John Locke had a similar concept to Hobbes about the political condition in England. John Locke, writing only a few decades later,

argued that the power of the state should be limited so as not to threaten the basic rights of the citizens. He suggested that the state should be controlled by dividing its powers into three functional components, to be carried out by two separate branches. The legislative branch is concerned with law creation, while the executive branch has responsibility for the functions of enforcing the law and conducting foreign policy.

He based his ideas on the doctrine of a God-given Natural Law, which posits that individual citizens have certain natural rights as humans that no one can take away from them, such as the preservation of life, liberty, and property. He promoted the civic virtue of toleration for the beliefs and actions of others, provided they do not impinge on people's rights. Thus, he advocated that individuals be allowed to meet together, form associations, and enter into relations of their choice. Particularly in reference to churches, he said the state had no authority to set religious doctrines.

Modern history

G.W.F. Hegel at the beginning of the nineteenth century traced the evolution of the idea of civil society within historical contexts, and affirmed its basis as a human creation and not as a metaphysical reality with prior existence in a natural order; he, visualize civil society as a separate sphere from the state, one in which people were both workers as well as consumers of other people's work. As consumers, people strive to be equal to others, yet to satisfy a need for recognition, they must consume distinctive goods; thus, needs multiply, the variety of goods grew, and different kinds of work began to thrive; people, in their division of labour, are mutually dependent on one another; they become skilled and their value increases, but this promotes technological developments that reduce production costs by replacing workers with machines.

For Hegel, social relations existed within a class structure consisting of an agricultural class, consisting of landowning farmers, a business class, consisting of workers, craftsmen, and businessmen, and a class of civil servants, who were educated, middle-class bureaucrats that were presumed to be dedicated to the welfare of all. All of these things presuppose a civil society that stood in opposition to the state, one in which a plethora of interests competed with one another, generally without consideration of the common good. To ensure that certain interests do not predominate over others, Hegel refuted Hume and Kant's separation between public reasoning and private morality, and devised the notion of the Corporation as the meeting place of both the will of the individual and the universal will of society, such will unite practical and ethical elements into a single form of reasoning.

Such corporation allows for communal life, through mutual recognition of its members' needs and contributions, and it mediates between the particular interests of its members and the universal interests of the state; the Corporation then, in its mediation role, has the duty to practice as well as teach civic virtue as a means of promoting the common good, but it is the State that is the ultimate arbiter of morality, and, as such, gives civil society its necessary moral directions. Thus, Hegel completely changed the meaning of civil society, giving rise to a modern liberal understanding of it as a form of market society as opposed to institutions of modern nation state. Unlike his predecessors, Hegel considered civil society (German: *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) as a separate realm, a "system of needs", that is, the "stage of difference which intervenes between the family and the state" ; this is to say, civil society is the realm of economic relationships as it exists in the modern industrial capitalist society, for it had emerged at the particular period of capitalism and served its interests: individual rights and private property. Hence, he used the

German term "bürgerliche Gesellschaft" to denote civil society as "civilian society" - a sphere regulated by the civil code.

This new way of thinking about civil society was followed by Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx as well. Alexis de Tocqueville was a French sociologist and politician who provided a contemporary analysis of American society from the beginning of the democratic state. He felt that Americans based their actions on two primary concepts, individualism and equality. While de Tocqueville felt that too much emphasis on individualism would lead to widespread egoism and a breakdown in civic virtue, he acknowledged that Americans had a saving grace in their promotion of equality.

It is through a feeling of being equal to others that allows people the mutual respect needed to encourage successful public participation in political life; this manifested itself in the desire for the citizenry to form groups and voluntary associations, only as part of a group can individuals realize their self-interest is best served by considering the needs of others as well.

A great deal of the success of the American political system rested on its reliance on a multitude of local governments, which allowed for more public involvement in issues related to all. He feared, however, that the American preference for material gain would cause them to lose interest in public affairs, and he was also apprehensive of the potential social rifts caused by the increasing wealth and power of the owner class over the worker class.

For Hegel, civil society manifested contradictory forces; being the realm of capitalist interests, there is a possibility of conflicts and inequalities within it (ex: mental and physical aptitude, talents and financial circumstances). He argued that these inequalities influence

the choices that members are able to make in relation to the type of work they will do.

The diverse positions in Civil Society fall into three domains: the substantial estate (agriculture), the formal estate (trade and industry), and the universal estate (civil society). A man is able to choose his estate, though his choice is limited by the aforementioned inequalities, Hegel argues that these inequalities enable all estates in Civil Society to be filled, which leads to a more efficient system on the whole.

Karl Marx followed the Hegelian way of using concept of civil society; for him, civil society was the 'base' where productive forces and social relations were taking place, whereas political society was the 'superstructure'. Karl Marx was also concerned about the growing power of the owning class; although he believed that democracy was the best type of state, he felt that Hegel incorrectly idealized the state, erroneously assuming it could set the moral tone of the society and ensure the common good among competing interests.

Marx felt that the private dimension of civil society overpowered the public aspect, which, in a market-oriented society, resulted in an overemphasis on the rights of the individual to pursue self-interest and a corresponding de-emphasis on the rights of the citizen to pursue communal interests. People, he thought, in a society are characterized primarily of a system of production and consumption, became alienated insofar as they were prohibited from developing their full talents and powers as human beings; being atomized and estranged from others, they also are less likely to cultivate civic virtues, and more likely to treat others as means, not ends.

In a capitalist market economy, in which the quest for money is encouraged, materialism and covetousness are common values. One's feeling of self-worth and identity rests less on traditional virtues, and more on one's occupation, income and possessions, wealthy owners of the means of production treat workers as a commodity, using them as machine tenders in increasingly sophisticated technologically-based systems of goods manufacture.

They expropriate the surplus value of their labour, and use this capital both to enrich themselves and to further expand and develop their business; as these enterprises grew, they became increasingly important to the national interests in a highly competitive international arena. This, said Marx, meant that the state was even more likely to protect their interests against the interests of the workers. This domination of one class over another is inevitable under capitalism and would continue until a revolution occurred, instilling a classless society in which a true civil society would flourish.

Supportive of the link between capitalism and civil society, Marx held that the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie; therefore, the state as superstructure also represents the interests of the dominant class; under capitalism, it maintains the domination of the bourgeoisie, so Marx rejected the positive role of state put forth by Hegel. Marx argued that the state cannot be a neutral problem solver. Rather, he depicted the state as the defender of the interests of the bourgeoisie. He considered the state to be the executive arm of the bourgeoisie, which would wither away once the working class took democratic control of society. The above view about civil society was criticized by Antonio Gramsci (Edwards 2004:10). Departing somehow from Marx perception, Gramsci did not consider civil society as the same thing with the socio-economic base of the state. Rather, Gramsci located civil society in the political superstructure. He viewed civil

society as the vehicle for bourgeois hegemony, when it just represents a particular class; he underlined the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital required for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism.

Rather than posing it as a problem, as in earlier Marxist conceptions, Gramsci viewed civil society as the site for problem-solving. Misunderstanding Gramsci, the New Left assigned civil society a key role in defending people against the state and the market and in asserting the democratic will to influence the state. At the same time, Neo-liberal thinkers consider civil society as a site for struggle to subvert Communist and authoritarian regimes. Thus, the term civil society occupies an important place in the political discourses of the New Left and Neo-liberals.

Post-modern history

It is commonly believed that the post-modern way of understanding civil society was first developed by political opposition in the former Soviet bloc East European countries in the 1980s. However, research shows that communist propaganda had the most important influence on the development and popularization of the idea; instead, in an effort to legitimize neoliberal transformation in 1989. According to the theory of re-structurization of welfare systems, a new way of using the concept of civil society became a neoliberal ideology legitimizing development of the third sector as a substitute for the welfare state. The recent development of the third sector is a result of this welfare systems restructuring, rather than of democratization.

From that time stems a practice within the political field of using the idea of civil society instead of political society, postmodern usage of the idea of civil society became divided into two main categories: as political society and as the third sector - apart from the superfluity of

definitions, the Washington Consensus of the 1990s, which involved conditioned loans by the World Bank and IMF to debt-laden developing states, also created pressures for states in poorer countries to shrink. This in turn led to practical changes for civil society that went on to influence the theoretical debate; primarily the new conditionality led to an even greater emphasis on "civil society" as a panacea, replacing the state's service provision and social care, Hulme and Edwards suggested that it was now seen as "the magic bullet."

By the end of the 1990s civil society was seen less as a panacea amid the growth of the anti-globalization movement and the transition of many countries to democracy; instead, civil society was increasingly called on to justify its legitimacy and democratic credentials. This led to the creation by the UN of a high level panel on civil society; however, in the 1990s with the emergence of the nongovernmental organizations and the new social movements (NSMs) on a global scale, civil society as a third sector became treated as a key topography of strategic action to construct 'an alternative social and world order.' Post-modern civil society theory has now largely returned to a more neutral stance, but with marked differences between the study of the phenomena in richer societies and writing on civil society in developing states.

The middle Ages

Saint Augustine

A century after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Saint Augustine wrote his *City of God*, in which he subordinated belief in a natural law of society based on reason, to one based on faith in God. Submission to the will of God, as elucidated by the fear-inducing institutions of Church and State, was required to lessen the pain and suffering of humans forever tainted by original sin.

This thought formed the basis of law and order during the subsequent centuries of the feudal era.

Thomas Aquinas

In the thirteenth century, based on the rediscovered writings of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas reconciled reason with faith by positing that correct human conduct can be rationally ascertained through study of the laws of nature, but only in accordance with the divine laws ordained by God. Scripture provides the moral values which guide people in their interpretations of natural law principles in their formulation of specific human laws. The Bible's admonishment to "love thy neighbour" thus provides a guideline to recognizing that people get along best when their mutual rights are respected, leading to laws that treat all citizens alike.

Martin Luther and John Calvin

Martin Luther and John Calvin founded the Protestant religion at the beginning of the Renaissance period as a protest against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, which they viewed as being corrupt. Their main contribution to the idea of civil society was not that the State should be similarly replaced, but rather that people should be free to choose their own religious commitments while demonstrating charity and service to their neighbours.

The Period of Enlightenment

At this point it is useful to digress a moment from the foregoing discussion to describe some of the changes taking place in society in the eighteenth century. It was the Age of Enlightenment, in which philosophers developed their social and political ideas under the influence of an advancing rationalism in the mathematical and physical sciences. It was also a time of social upheaval and the Industrial Revolution, in which advances in science and technology improved

manufacturing, transportation and communication. In turn, this created an expansion of national and international trade, with a concomitant elaboration of financial systems, and a rise in the fortunes and power of the merchant class. These helped fuel a growth in the population of cities, an increasing division of labour, and social inequalities, resulting in abysmal living and working conditions for the urban poor.

It was the period of the *Glorious Revolution*, marked by the struggle between the divine right of the Crown and the political rights of Parliament. This influenced Locke to forge a social contract theory of a limited state and a powerful society. In Locke's view, human beings led also an un-peaceful life in the state of nature. However, it could be maintained at the sub-optimal level in the absence of a sufficient system (Brown 2001:73). From that major concern, people gathered together to sign a contract and constituted a common public authority.

Nevertheless, Locke held that the consolidation of political power can be turned into autocracy, if it is not brought under reliable restrictions (Kaviraj 2001:291). Therefore, Locke set forth two treaties on government with reciprocal obligations. In the first treaty, people submit themselves to the common public authority. This authority has the power to enact and maintain laws. The second treaty contains the limitations of authority, i. e.; the state has no power to threaten the basic rights of human beings. As far as Locke was concerned, the basic rights of human beings are the preservation of life, liberty and property. Moreover, he held that the state must operate within the bounds of civil and natural laws.

Both Hobbes and Locke had set forth a system, in which peaceful coexistence among human beings could be ensured through social pacts or contracts. They considered civil society as a community that maintained civil life, the realm where civic virtues and rights were

derived from natural laws. However, they did not hold that civil society was a separate realm from the state. Rather, they underlined the co-existence of the state and civil society.

The systematic approaches of Hobbes and Locke (in their analysis of social relations) were largely influenced by the experiences in their period. Their attempts to explain human nature, natural laws, the social contract and the formation of government had challenged the divine right theory. In contrast to divine right, Hobbes and Locke claimed that humans can design their political order, this idea had a great impact on the thinkers in the Enlightenment period.

The Enlightenment thinkers argued that human beings are rational and can shape their destiny. Hence, no need of an absolute authority to control them. Both Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a critic of civil society, and Immanuel Kant argued that people are peace lovers and that wars are the creation of absolute regimes (Burchill 2001:33). As far as Kant was concerned, this system was effective to guard against the domination of a single interest and check the tyranny of the majority (Alagappa 2004:30).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the mid 1700s attempted to persuade people that Locke and Hobbes had placed too much importance on the rights of individuals, leading to a pursuit for individual material gain in a laissez-faire economy at the expense of the pursuit of civic virtues associated with the common good. He felt that a growing division of labour exacerbated natural inequalities and culminated in the establishment of a powerful mercantile and propertied class that dominated the rest of society.

To avoid the jeopardy of civil war, this class sought to appease the anger of the poor by instituting a new social order, a civil society that would provide equality and freedom for all. But this was just a trick, said Rousseau that allowed the wealthy to maintain inequalities of power and privilege by postulating an equal freedom to acquire such advantages. And because of the consent given by the poor to such a form of governance, they were unlikely to rebel.

Rousseau devised the idea of the social contract as a means whereby citizens would make the common good their highest priority. This is accomplished by each person subjugating their right for the individual pursuit of happiness to that of their community's right for collective well-being. The state is the arena for defining the nature of the common good, and civil liberty emerges when all people are willing to abide by the general will. Since common people are to be the law-makers, they will promulgate laws that result in moderating accumulation of individual wealth and thereby promote equality and trust.

It was the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, notably David Hume, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, that laid the philosophical premises for capitalist mercantilism.

David Hume

David Hume, in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, argued that there was no unity between Reason and Morality, and that people set their goals on the basis of Morality, but use Reason in achieving them. His three fundamental rules of conduct - the stability of possessions, their transfer by consent, and the performance of promises - are human conventions, and not based in any 'natural law'. The implications of this thought were profound, leading to the notion that people, in using their reason to follow their self-interests, eventually achieve the interests

of society as a whole. People establish and follow the laws of the land, not so as to serve some universal good, but to maximize their self-interests in an enlightened manner.

Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith

Ferguson and Smith both held that the binding principle of civil society was a private morality predicated on public recognition by one's peers, joined through bonds of moral sentiment. This philosophical stance did not preclude Adam Smith from asserting that, because an individual's identity and power rested on their perceived value within an arena of exchange, the whole of society would be better off if marketplace exchanges were unconstrained by the state.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant's main principle regarding civil society was that people should treat other people as ends in themselves rather than means to the ends of others. In other words, we must consider how others would benefit themselves from our actions, rather than how we might use them only for our own benefit, and we must ensure that whatever means we use to pursue our own self-interests does not interfere with others' rights to pursue theirs. And while Kant echoed Hume in his relegation of ethics and morals to the private sphere, he advocated a public arena of rational, critical discourse concerning the 'ends' posed by the state. In this regard, he was the first to suggest that a functional civil society should be seen as distinct from the state.

The Twentieth Century

John Rawls

John Rawls is one of the foremost political thinkers of this century. His main contribution to the concept of civil society is his theory of justice. To set a common standard viewpoint by which to judge the various means of allocating what Rawls calls *primary goods*, such as

rights, powers, opportunities, income, wealth, and the bases for self-respect, he postulates a "veil of ignorance" that assumes that one's position and situation in life is not known. This makes it likely that decisions regarding distribution of primary goods will be made on the basis of providing a decent life for those in the worst possible situations, since the decision-makers may find that, upon lifting the veil that is the position they themselves are in.

In addition to a principle of equal liberty, which includes the right of all people to vote and hold public office, freedom of speech, conscience, thought, association, the right to private property, and due process of law, he adds a second principle of equal opportunity to compete for any position in society. These principles underscore Rawls' idea of 'political liberalism', in which he differentiates between a political realm, consisting of public institutions and social structures, and a non public cultural realm, in which people interact with others in a diversity of associations according to shared moral doctrines.

No single morality arising from a non-public setting should be allowed to become the basis of justice, lest the state become a repressive regime. To ensure the values of a constitutional democracy, which Rawls feels is the best kind of government since it allows for pluralism as well as stability, a *constitutional consensus* must be achieved through equal rights, a public discourse on political matters, and a willingness to compromise.

Theoretical Perspectives

Civil society is much talked about, but rarely understood. Scholars have explored some practical and theoretical significance of civil society - and suggests some ways through the issues surrounding its use. It is impossible to have a conversation about politics or public policy in our contemporary times without someone mentioning the magic words "civil

society", so one might think that people are clear what they mean when they use this term and why it is so important; regrettably, clarity and rigor are conspicuously absent in the civil society debate, a lack of accuracy that threatens to dip this concept completely under the rising wave of criticisms and confusion.

Depending on which version one prefers, "civil society" means "basically reducing the role of politics in society by expanding free markets and individual liberty" , or it means the opposite - "the single most viable alternative to the authoritarian state and the tyrannical market" , or for those more comfortable in the middle ground of politics, it constitutes the missing link in the success of social democracy ,the supposedly-compassionate conservatism of the social sciences" - that provide the much-needed comfort without that much substance, by putting it down to civil society!

Adam Seligman, calls civil society the "new analytic key that will unlock the mysteries of the social order", Jeremy Rifkin calls it "our last, best hope", the UN and the World Bank see it as the key to 'good governance' and poverty-reducing growth, while a new report from the Washington-based Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis puts it, "the US should emphasize civil society development in order to ensure regional stability in central Asia" - forgetting, of course, that citizens groups have been a prime cause of destabilization in every society since time immemorial.

Some claim that civil society is a specific product of the nation state and capitalism; others see it as a universal expression of the collective life of individuals, at work in all countries and stages of development but expressed in different ways according to history and context. Some see it as one of three separate sectors; others as intimately interconnected or even inter-penetrated by states and markets.

Is civil society the preserve of groups predefined as democratic, modern, and 'civil', or is it home to all sorts of associations, including 'uncivil' society - like militant Islam and American militias - and traditional associations based on inherited characteristics like religion and ethnicity that are so common in Africa and Asia? Are families in or out and what about the business sector? Is civil society a bulwark against the state, an indispensable support, or dependent on government intervention for its very existence?

Is it the key to individual freedom through the guaranteed experience of pluralism or a threat to democracy through special interest politics? Is it a noun - a part of society, an adjective - a kind of society, an arena for societal deliberation, or a mixture of all three? Is it possible to build a civil society through foreign aid and intervention, or is this just another imperial fantasy? What is to be done with a concept that seems so unsure of itself that definitions are akin to nailing jelly to the wall? And in any case, do these questions really matter, except to a small band of academics who study this stuff for a living?

When an idea can mean so many things it probably means nothing, so the time has come to be rid of the term completely or, now that it has acquired a life of its own, to at least be clearer with each other about the different interpretations in play; compromise is impossible given the range of views on offer, but clarity is not, and greater clarity can be the springboard for a better conversation about the promise and potential of civil society as a basis of hope and action for the future, *and* about the pitfalls of using this term as a political slogan or a shelter for dogma and ideology.

Recognizing that civil society does indeed mean different things to different people is one of the keys to moving forward, because it moves us beyond false universally entrenched thinking; for those who

want to discard the term completely to please pause "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater," in *Civil Society* (Edwards 2004), ideas about civil society can survive and prosper in a rigorous critique as the miasma that has enveloped this term is the result of an obsession with one particular interpretation of civil society as a *part* of society - the world of voluntary associations - forgetting that there are earlier and later traditions that have just as much to offer.

It was Alexis de Tocqueville [the man mention in the preceding discussion] that started this craze on his visits across the Atlantic in the 1830s, who saw America's rich tapestry of associational life as the key to its emerging democracy. "Americans of all dispositions have an incurable tendency to form voluntary associations." Originally however, civil society, from Aristotle to Thomas Hobbes, represented a *kind* of society that was identified with certain ideals. And in modern societies, realizing these ideals - like political equality or peaceful coexistence - requires action across many different institutions, not just voluntary associations; most recently, philosophers have developed a new set of theories about civil society as the '*public sphere*' - the places where citizens argue with one-another about the great questions of the day and negotiate a constantly-evolving sense of the 'common' or 'public' interest.

Civil Society as Associational Life

According to *Civil Society* (Edwards 2004) is to deconstruct the existing, confused conversation about civil society and then reconstruct the relationships between these different schools of thought in a new, more convincing combination. The first school believes that voluntary associations act as gene carriers of the good society - microclimates, for developing values like tolerance and cooperation, and the skills required for living a democratic life.

The trouble is that real associational life is home to all sorts of different and competing values and beliefs (think pro and anti-choice groups, for example, or peaceniks and the National Resistance Army). There's another problem with this thesis too, because the values and beliefs we want to see developed are fostered in all the places where we learn and grow, and where our dispositions are shaped, which means families, schools, workplaces, colleges and universities, and political institutions large and small.

We actually spend a lot more time in these places than we do in voluntary associations, so these experiences are especially important. For the same reason, by themselves, Non Governmental Organizations and other voluntary associations can rarely secure the level of political consensus that is required to secure and enforce broad-based social reforms - there's too much difference and diversity of opinion. That's why civil society, to quote the British writer John Keane "is riddled with danger, since it gives freedom to despots and democrats alike."

Civil Society as the Good Society

The second school of thought - civil society as the good society - is very important, because it sets the contributions of voluntary associations in the proper context and guards against the tendency to privilege one part of society over the others on ideological grounds - voluntary associations over states for example, or business over both. Good neighbors can't replace good government, and nonprofits shouldn't be asked to substitute for well-functioning markets. Historically (think of the US in the 20th century and East Asia after World War II), success in achieving good society goals has always been based on social contracts negotiated between government, business and citizens.

However, if the good society requires coordinated action between different institutions all pulling in the same direction, how do societies

decide which direction in which to go, and whether it is the right one as conditions and circumstances continue to change over time? How are collective choices made, tradeoffs negotiated, and ends reconciled with means in such ways that are just and effective? For answers to these questions, we have to turn to the third school of thought and consider civil society in its role as the public sphere.

Civil Society as the Public Sphere

The concept of a 'public' - a whole polity that cares about the common good and has the capacity to deliberate about it democratically - is central to civil society thinking. The development of shared interests, a willingness to cede some territory to others, the ability to see something of oneself in those who are different and work together more effectively as a result ; all these are crucial attributes for effective governance, practical problem-solving, and the peaceful resolution of our differences.

In its role as the 'public sphere', civil society becomes the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration, and the extent to which such spaces thrive is crucial to democracy, since if only certain truths are represented, if alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression, or if one set of voices are heard more loudly than those of others, the 'public' interest inevitably suffers. When all politics are polarized, public policy problems become embedded, even frozen, in polities that cannot solve them - think of welfare reform in our society, for example. Breaking the resulting gridlock requires the creation of new publics in support of broad-based reform that was exactly what is missing in the society right now.

Alternative Ways for the 'Civil Society'

All three of these schools of thought have something to offer, but by themselves are incomplete and unconvincing. So the logical thing to do is to connect them so that the weaknesses of one set of theories are balanced by the strengths and contributions of the others. What does that mean in practice?

Civil society as the good society keeps our 'eyes on the prize' - the prize being the goals of poverty-reduction and deep democracy that require coordinated action across different sets of institutions. still, the vision of the good society says little about how such goals are going to be achieved, and associational life does seem to be an important - if incomplete - explanatory factor in most contemporary settings.

Structural definitions of civil society - the first approach described - are useful in emphasizing the gaps and weaknesses of associational life that need to be fixed if they are to be effective vehicles for change, nevertheless, the differences and particularities of associational life generate competing views about the ends and means of the good society, attached to religion, politics, ideology, race, gender and culture. Without our third set of theories - civil society as the public sphere - there would be no just and democratic way to reconcile these views and secure a political consent about the best way forward.

In turn, a healthy associational ecosystem is vital to the public sphere, since it is usually through voluntary organizations and the media that citizens carry on their conversations. Finally, the achievements of the good society are what make possible the independence and level playing field that underpin a democratic associational life - by reducing inequality, for example, and guaranteeing freedom of association, enshrined in the law.

Promoting Civil Society Advancement

Considering the issues discussed above in this way helps us to consider actionable set of questions instead of arguing in the abstract over which theory is correct. Most importantly, how do shifting patterns of associational life help or hinder the realization of good society goals, and what can we do to revitalize the public sphere if we believe it is an important transmission method between the two?

This question generates a rich agenda for public policy discussions, though a complicated one since there is no obvious consensus on the answers and the evidence is very unclear - three schools of thought. The social capital school - like Robert Putnam sees associational life in general as the driving force behind the positive social norms on which the good society is founded - things like cooperation, trust and reciprocity. So the logical policy is to encourage as much volunteering and voluntary action as possible even if some of it is used for nefarious purposes. Somewhat strange as it appears, these differences will, Putnam argues, work themselves out in the general scheme of things.

The comparative associational school - like Theda Skocpol - see particular configurations of associational life as the key to securing the public policy reforms the good society requires - the nationally-federated mass-membership, cross-class groups like Parent Teachers' Associations, labor unions, elks and other forest creatures, that have declined so much over the last 50 years and which used to provide strong bridges between citizens and government that led to reforms like the GI Bill of 1944; and the school of skeptics - like Nancy Rosenblum - don't see any reliable link between the structure of civil society and its achievements. All these positions are considered, but none is completely convincing, especially in contexts third world countries where obviously appropriate policy depends on which position one subscribes to.

There are some interventions, that would be useful across the board; what is needed to do is to strengthen the pre-conditions for a healthy civil society in all three senses by attacking all forms of inequality and discrimination, giving people the means to be active citizens, reforming policies to encourage more participation, guaranteeing the independence of associations and the structures of public communication, and building a strong foundation for institutional partnerships, alliances and coalitions; equality is the poison of civil society because it endows citizens with different levels of resources and opportunities to participate, so things like support for childcare and a living wage - which are not usually seen as civil-society building interventions, may be the most important areas for all.

Second, we need to support innovations in associational life that encourage citizen action to operate in service to the good society, rather than as a substitute for politics, market reform and the demands of democratic state building, reinventing associational life to suit the realities of a very different period in which time and energy are more limited, worn down by the demands of work and unsupported family obligations.

The Limits of Global Civil Society

From the foregoing discussion, it's easy to see how each approach builds on the others in order to offer a more compelling explanation of civil society's significance; it's much easier to construct a similar tripartite relationship at the global level too - "global civil society" as an additional layer of transnational associational activity, a new kind of global society or form of International Relations marked out respect for human rights and the peaceful resolution of differences, and as an emerging global public sphere exemplified by events like the World

Social Forum, Internet sites like open Democracy and open source technology.

Neera Chandhoke while writing said that philosophers have engaged the concept of civil society since antiquity to help them understand great issues of their day like:

The nature of the society,

The rights and responsibilities of citizens,

The practices of politics and government,

How to live together peacefully through the reconciliation of individual autonomy with collective aspirations;

Harmonizing freedom and its boundaries,

Coupling pluralism with conformity so that complex societies could function through both efficiency and justice

Thus, we need to build stronger links between policy groups, organizing groups, service deliverers and the media; we need to link associations across different interests and agendas and get progressive organizing out of its place (issues and identities); we need to encourage a more democratic relationship between grassroots constituencies and those in the nonprofit sector who claim to speak on their behalf. We need to reduce the costs and risks of citizen participation (for example, making it easier to organize at the workplace), and we need to honor and connect different forms of participation so that service doesn't become a substitute for political engagement, as is happening among many people in our society today.

It's also important to make room for surprises - like the potential political effects of self help groups like the largest category of voluntary associations in our communities and the society at large, or labour unions and civil society organizations which turn out to be among

the most progressive which have given an important stimulus to new and less hierarchical forms of transnational mobilizations.

Summary

So far, from the foregoing discussions on the historical and theoretical perspectives of civil society and global civil society, we can conclude that, global civil society has managed to give a new vocabulary to the state-centric and market oriented international order. Therefore, the notion that global civil society can institutionalize normative structures that run counter to the principles of powerful states or equally powerful corporations, which govern international transactions, should be treated with a fairness and certainty, this is for the fact that, actors in global civil society have made a difference, as actors in national civil society make a differences in their various areas of influence; yet they function as most human actors do, within the realm of the possible, not within the realm of the impossible. Ultimately, global civil society actors work within inherited structures of power that they may modify or alter but seldom transform. But this we can understand only if we locate global civil society in its constitutive context: a non state-centric system of international relations that is dominated by a certain section of humanity and within the structures of international capital that may not permit dissent and equally, do not permit any transformation of their own agendas.

Conclusion

By and large, civil society and global civil society are all together goals to aim for, means to achieve tem, and frameworks for engaging with each-other about ends and means. , the idea of civil society can explain a great deal about the course of politics and social change, and serve as a practical framework for organizing both resistance and alternative solutions to social , economic and political problems.

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