

Civil/Political

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What sociologists commonly think of as 'society' has frequently been defined in contrast to another realm called the 'state'. The former is understood as a domain of *civil* activity – activity that is essentially private and freely chosen – while the latter is conceived as a *political* realm, concerned with public affairs and formal processes of government. Such a distinction between civil society and the **state** preoccupied the major theorists of modern society as new political structures emerged in Western Europe and North America after the mid seventeenth century. This chapter outlines the ways that the civil and the political have been conceptualized within modern social thought, and examines how a distinction between them has shaped such related conceptions as citizenship, power and rights.

The civil/political dichotomy raises questions about the precise limits and form of the relations, affiliations, structures and institutions which are grouped together under the rubric of 'society'. This term is often used to refer to the totality of interactions and institutions which individuals engage in on a collective basis. Theorists of civil society, however, wish to separate out those activities and associations in which people engage as 'free' or 'private' individuals, from those which concern their 'public' role as members of a political community. We might think about this as a split between a civil realm within which we govern ourselves, and a political realm in which we are governed by the state.

A separation between political and civil domains may be analysed in both a historical and a critical way. The first part of this discussion provides an overview of key approaches to this field dating from the mid seventeenth to the mid nineteenth century. As modern societies developed

democratic political structures a number of theorists sought to delimit the proper role which the state should play in the lives of its citizens. They asked questions about the limits of political authority, and about the rights and liberties which were due to free citizens. While certain of these ideas may appear rather abstract or rooted in the political events of their time, theories of civil society helped mark out the space in which sociologists would later map the formation of society. In this sense, the assumption that it is possible to distinguish political from civil life, or that the state stands apart from and in contrast to society, has shaped sociological understandings of the social.

The later part of the discussion examines these assumptions in relation to more contemporary debates about **citizenship** and the nature of political power. There are two broad lines of argument to consider here, which problematize both sides of the core dichotomy. Firstly, these debates put into question the way in which 'politics' is defined. The civil/political split may itself be seen as highly *political*, as it consigns an extended range of social relations and institutions (including the family, the workplace, the market and the church) to a 'private' realm of activity. Secondly, it is argued, the formal equality of citizenship may disguise deep inequalities within civil society. Such inequalities may prevent certain people from exercising their political rights in a free or informed way. Recent debates have sought to extend the definition of the citizen beyond formal legal and political rights, to consider how questions of citizenship might address power relations within civil society, whether these are economic in character or based on social divisions and differences.

These arguments bring a critical perspective to bear on conventional theories of civil society and the state. In particular, they reveal that the latter offer only a limited model of political agency, based on the person of the male citizen. However, such arguments also seek to move beyond critique, to think about social membership and political action in ways which transcend a simple civil/political split.

THEORIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Like many objects of sociological analysis, 'civil society' does not have an agreed definition. One of the difficulties in understanding a distinction between the civil and the political derives from the quite different ways in which various thinkers have understood 'civil society'. Common meanings may act as a guide here. At certain times civil matters are defined in contrast to religious ones, as in civil marriage ceremonies. At others, the 'civil' is contrasted to the military, as in civil defence or the term 'civilian'. The 'civil service' refers to those public departments which carry out the policies of elected governments, but are not themselves political in

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character. 'Civil law' is concerned with private rights, rather than with criminal or public offences. Perhaps most commonly, to be 'civil' means to be polite, agreeable, reasonable, *civilized*.

Broadly speaking, accounts of civil society have focused on two key realms, the economy and the household. However, the term extends to the range of associations and institutions which operate beyond the structures of the state – religious groups, the press, welfare and voluntary associations, schools, guilds, unions, campaigning organizations and so on. However defined, different theories of civil society have sought to delineate its relation to the formal political realm of the state. In the following sections, I consider classical approaches to civil society under three headings. Firstly, I examine those early thinkers who saw civil society in terms of a political community of male individuals. This group includes Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. The second group comprises a diverse group of liberal theorists who made a more clear distinction between civil society as a realm of free association, and the state as a realm of public regulation. This group includes Paine, Ferguson and Tocqueville. Thirdly, I turn to the critique of civil society offered in the early work of Karl Marx. Marx understands civil society as a specific social form which emerges at a certain moment of historical development. In Marx's account civil society is both constituted by, and serves the interests of, bourgeois economic relations.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Civil society appeared as a domain of enquiry in a period during which political structures in Europe and North America were rapidly reformed. Processes of democratization and the development of constitutional governments raised serious questions about the role and powers of the state in relation to its subjects. Whereas the absolutist state of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries had concentrated authority in the hands of the sovereign (as exemplified by the absolutist monarchs of France in this period), changing state forms involved a more mutual relation between rulers and ruled based on new models of representation and citizenship.

The emergence of the modern constitutional and democratic state in Europe involved a questioning of the limits of political rule over free individuals. In what manner, and to what extent, may political authorities intervene in the workings of civil society and in the private activities of citizens? Constitutional forms, such as those established during the English Revolution (1640–88), placed clear limits on the scope and functions of state power. Central to constitutionalism is the principle that the state exists in order to protect and preserve the rights of its citizens, without infringing on the individual's freedom to act in their own interests.

Early conceptions of civil society in the liberal political philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see this in terms of a political community which is distinct from a state of nature. The civil and the political are at this stage viewed in terms of a formal unity, rather than a structure of opposition. For thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, civil society refers to the contractual and formal arrangements by which adult men organize themselves as a community, subject to certain laws and restraints and in receipt of certain rights and securities. Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan* (1651) is that the state of nature which exists prior to the formation of human societies is one of fundamental and continual conflict: each person is in 'war' with all others for survival and power. The function of society is to place constraints on these 'natural passions' by organizing such fierce individual wills into a formal and general will. Each person gives up their rights and their freedoms to a sovereign political power, which offers its subjects protection, security and common defence. Civil society in this account is identical to the state and its system of laws.

Both Locke and Rousseau differ from Hobbes's model of civil society in that they locate political power with the body of men, rather than with the formal entity of the state. Locke, in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), sought to set constitutional limits on state power in a way which marked it off from the community of citizens. Whereas Hobbes invested authority with the state, Locke recognized the sovereignty of the people as a political community. Locke's work provides one of the central arguments for a set of constitutional 'checks and balances' which renders state power accountable and mediates relations between the state and civil society. Ultimate power rests with the people and the state rules only with their continuing consent. In Locke's account constitutional government rules in trust for and as the representative of the sovereign people, who may reclaim this power for themselves if the government fails properly to represent their interests.

Rousseau's work sustains a more clear distinction between the state and civil society. Like Hobbes, he sees civil society as emergent from a state of nature; unlike Hobbes he sees this natural state as one of essentially free and equal persons. The entrance into society may be conceived of as a 'social contract' between free individuals, where each gives up their individual wills in favour of the common will. For Rousseau, however, sovereignty remains indivisibly with the people. The state should be merely a formal expression of the popular will. Where state power extends its legitimate reach and 'enslaves' the free members of civil society, the latter must take power back for themselves. Rousseau's ideas, developed in *The Social Contract* (1762), were an important influence on revolutionary thinking in France and helped to shape the crucial notion of the 'citizen' as the member of the sovereign political community. This suspicion of state power as infringing on the sovereign rights of citizens is developed in the work of the second group of theorists under consideration here, who sought to demarcate the limits of state action at the boundaries of civil society.

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CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE: LIBERAL MODELS

One of the key thinkers to strictly mark off the state from society was Thomas Paine. In his *Rights of Man* (1791–2), Paine warns of the dangers of the political state, which should be an instrument of civil society, assuming a form of despotism over it. Paine views the state as a ‘necessary evil’ which exists to preserve social peace, but argues that its actions should be limited as far as possible. The best system is one where groups in civil society govern themselves, free from unnecessary intervention by the state. Paine was a radical and republican figure, whose critique of the constitutional monarchy in Britain made his ideas popular in North America and France.

Paine is sharply opposed to the Hobbesian idea that the political state represents a peaceful and civilized response to social conflict between individuals and groups, arguing that modern European societies were *uncivilized* to the extent that they concentrated power and privilege with the political apparatus of the state. Moreover, state tyranny underpinned injustice within the patriarchal household (for example, through property and inheritance laws), and within wider civil society, through unfair taxation and the defence of the rich. The state, in this account, becomes the *source* of social conflict, rather than its cure. A fierce advocate of the American Revolution, Paine argued that citizens must oppose state power wherever this threatens their civil liberties. All people were fundamentally equal, with equal rights and liberties. The proper form of the state was a minimal political body which governed on the basis of popular consent, and was grounded in certain fundamental civil rights such as freedom of speech, conscience and association.

Paine’s ideas were based on a clear distinction between civil society and the state which was not evident in the work of Hobbes or Locke. These earlier thinkers saw the political community and civil society as being inseparable: the state, that is, was the formal expression of relations in civil society. For Paine, these realms were sharply delineated and mutually opposed. Human societies in Paine’s view were naturally given to co-operation, free association and harmony, and only the most limited form of the state was required to govern this system. The state in this model becomes a simple administrative instrument in service to the spontaneous, natural and harmonious associations within civil society.

Such an emphasis on the forms of association which make up civil society is also evident in the work of the Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson. Rather than focusing on the limits of state power, Ferguson examines the anatomy of civil society as an autonomous and complex realm. Ferguson differs crucially from earlier thinkers in arguing that civil society is not distinct from a state of nature. Human society is itself a *natural* arrangement. In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) Ferguson dismisses the competing versions of the state of nature as a condition of either

perpetual enmity (Hobbes) or essential equality (Rousseau), by remarking that people 'are to one another mutual objects both of fear and of love' (Section I, III). And these relations are always social. 'Society,' Ferguson writes, 'appears as old as the individual' (Section I, I); if a pre-social state of nature existed, 'it is a time of which we have no record, and in relation to which our opinions can serve no purpose, and are supported by no evidence' (Section I, I). Ferguson uses this argument as the basis for a study of civil societies throughout history and in different cultures, a project which can be viewed as one of the earliest exercises in comparative sociology.

Following Montesquieu's statement that 'Man is born in society and there he remains', Ferguson goes on, in a manner which appeals rather strikingly to modern social thinking, that 'Of all the terms that we employ in treating of human affairs, those of *natural* and *unnatural* are the least determinate in their meaning' (Section I, I, emphasis in original). To live in society is itself the natural state of human individuals. Furthermore, Ferguson does not view civil society as a set of formal relations and obligations which set constraints on human passions. Rather, civil society is the setting within which people's essential moral and social character can be positively realized:

the experience of society brings every passion of the human mind upon its side. Its triumphs and prosperities, its calamities and distresses, bring a variety and a force of emotion, which can only have place in the company of our fellow-creatures. It is here that a man is made to forget his weakness, his cares of safety, and his subsistence; and to act from those passions which make him discover his force.

In depicting the political functions of the state Ferguson uses a language of 'liberties' rather than one of 'constraints'. Free nations, he writes, serve to protect the interests of their citizens and this security is considered a principal civil right (Part III, Section VI). In this context, liberties and rights are understood in a particular way. Ferguson recognizes that the concept of liberty and the proper means of securing it are subject to different interpretations. 'Liberty', that is, is seen as an essentially social concept, rather than simply a natural condition. Natural liberty consists in the freedom to act in any way one chooses, so long as this does not encroach on the freedom of others. Systems of law are developed in order to protect people from such infringements within a social framework. Specifically, the law exists to protect the citizen's property, life and liberty from the actions of others.

In addition to *civil* liberties relating to one's property, person and individual freedom, the state enshrines certain *political* rights. These promise the citizen a political and legal status and a share in the government of their society. Ferguson offers a pluralist model of civil society comprising diverse

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and often antagonistic interest groups. The more that 'every order of the people' has been included in the political and legal process, the more 'fortunate' is the nation. In a society made up of various classes and orders, of numerous parties and associations, each group must defend its own claims within the political realm. In this context, the system of law may rightly be thought of as a 'treaty' between different interests, which secures social peace by taking into account and settling their competing claims. Ferguson argues that justice resides not merely in the system of laws, but in the popular powers which lie behind it and on whose support the law depends. The protection of property and the person, as well as the political rights of representation, should not be left simply to the rule of law, but must be secured and strengthened by active participation in public life – by 'the vigour and jealousy of a free people' (Part III, Section VI).

Such arguments about pluralist political democracy are developed by the later thinker Alexis de Tocqueville. In *Democracy in America* (1835/40) Tocqueville makes an interesting move in examining the forms of despotism which can emerge within democratically elected governments. Tocqueville argues that political power must be dispersed and limited in important ways. Governments must be subject to regular elections. Executive and judiciary powers (that is, the government and the legal system) must be clearly separated, so that the system of justice operates independently from the interests of the government of the day. Tocqueville requires an active and mature form of citizenship: formal political representation is not enough. Like Ferguson, Tocqueville calls for the participation of the citizen *within* the institutions of the state – for example in the jury system, where citizens' judgements of their peers are guided by a notion of how they themselves would wish to be judged. Whereas Ferguson takes his examples from Roman and English law, Tocqueville refers to the jury system in the United States. Tocqueville is interesting, furthermore, in anticipating the bureaucratic modern society which was to preoccupy Weber's social theory. The extension of the regulatory powers of public institutions into the domains of policing, health, education and business produces a kind of administrative 'torpor' in civil society. His argument is for more vigorous and self-governing civil associations and the preservation and extension of this realm of freedom from state intervention.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE: MARX'S MODEL

Classical views of civil society tend to be marked by a deep naturalism. While all of the thinkers that have been discussed so far were profoundly influenced by the concrete political circumstances in which they wrote – the English Revolution (Hobbes and Locke), the *ancien régime* in France

(Rousseau), the American and French Republics (Paine, Tocqueville) – their responses to these social contexts were framed in terms of a ‘natural condition’ of human social life, which was by definition timeless. If many societies *currently* took the form of a despotic state system, to take the example of Paine’s argument, this was in conflict with the natural harmony of civil society. While these thinkers varied in the way they defined civil society and the mechanisms through which it should be secured, they commonly grounded their different conceptions in ideas about the natural and therefore universal condition of ‘man’. The single exception to this rule is Adam Ferguson – strikingly modern in dismissing the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ in relation to human societies.

A quite different argument appears in the works of the German philosophers Hegel and Marx. Hegel argues in the *Philosophy of Right* (1821), and Marx follows his lead, that civil society is a construct that appears at a specific stage of historical development. It represents a distinctly modern sphere, which is located between the domains of the household and the state. Civil society in Hegel’s account comprises the economy, civil law, organized social classes, welfare associations, religious institutions and so on. For Hegel, the role of the modern state is to unify and transcend the conflicts of private interest within civil society and in this way realize a true political community. The crucial difference between Hegel’s theory and that of Hobbes, for example, lies in the idea that the universal state represents a specifically *modern* moment in historical development and, what is more, a perfection of social forms through the triumph of reason in political affairs.

Marx follows Hegel in conceiving civil society as a historical construct which emerged in modern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such a move opens up a valuable political space for Marx, in shifting civil society from the realm of natural order to one in which it might be historically analysed and contested. Marx was extremely critical of the distinction between state and civil society, on the grounds that it supposed a split between a limited political community and a private and selfish realm of individual conduct. Marx’s theory of civil society is developed through a rigorous critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Marx wished to dissolve the distinction between political community and civil society not in order to realize a universal form of the state, but so as to demolish both conceptions entirely.

Marx develops these ideas in a series of early writings in which he was still deeply engaged with contemporary German debates and philosophy, in particular in his work of 1843: the critique of Hegel and the journal article, ‘On the Jewish Question’, where he intervenes in a debate over the Christian state in Germany (Marx 1977). In these pieces, Marx argues that modern bourgeois society is distinctive in effecting a separation of political and civil life which was absent in feudal society. Under feudalism, for example, the domains of work and household did not constitute some sort

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of private sphere of activity, but were fully integrated into a political structure of estates and corporations. The interests of any person were tied into those of the associations to which they belonged (Tester 1992).

Bourgeois civil society appears in the modern context as a sphere of private interests and rights. At the centre of this conception is the notion of the individual as one who possesses certain political rights and who otherwise acts freely in an economic sphere which is organized by private interests. This division of the political state from civil society is less an enduring or universal structure, and more a product of a historical process of class struggle in which the bourgeois class gains ascendancy over a feudal order. Rather than representing a system of natural liberty where men can go freely about their private business unfettered by the activities of the state, bourgeois civil society is marked by deep class divisions. For Marx, civil society is shaped by unequal relations of production: its sole freedoms are the bourgeois freedoms to buy and sell, its only rights the bourgeois rights of private property.

This account of civil society as a class order based on production, rather than a natural order based on human freedom, leads Marx to produce a rather different theory of the state from earlier liberal theorists. Whereas the state had been seen as a desirable force for order or a necessary evil, Marx sees the modern state as a system of political and legal mechanisms which are designed to protect the economic interests of the bourgeois class. Instead of representing a set of constraints on people's private interests and impulses, Marx argues that the capitalist state serves to secure and promote the interests of capital. The nature of the state is to be grasped in terms of the material conditions which are present in civil society, not in a study of the law or in discourses of political philosophy.

This model of the state is quite different from that of Hobbes or Locke and departs radically from that of Hegel in rejecting the idea that the state is a separate and an independent entity from civil society, let alone a rational and universal form that perfects a fragmented and conflictual private sphere. For Marx civil society is based on the system of private property, and the state functions as the political form of bourgeois authority in order to preserve property rights. In this view, other institutions and collectivities within civil society – such as families, guilds, churches and associations of various kinds – are simply reducible to (or diversions from) the logic of capitalist social relations.

'Civil society' in this conception is largely equated to the sphere of private economic activity undertaken by atomistic individuals. In seeking to preserve this realm from state intervention, argues Marx, theorists and advocates of civil society serve only to preserve the economic arrangements through which the bourgeoisie assumes domination over the proletariat. The distribution of wealth in capitalist society is fundamentally unjust; consequently, a properly free society would require a new division of property. The existence of the state as an independent entity grants certain

individuals the formal equality of citizenship, while disguising the unequal (and ultimately more meaningful) economic relations within civil society.

The grounding of Marx's theory of state and civil society in class relations made him very sceptical of democratic reform. Campaigns of universal suffrage – claiming the rights of all adult men (and, later, adult women) to vote – the struggles for a free press, or the right to join a trade union, were seen by Marx as ultimately rather cosmetic reforms in capitalist society. A democratic state was not enough: real democratization had to occur at the level of civil society through the negation of unequal class relations. Indeed, the democratic reform of the state might only serve, through an illusory language of 'citizenship', to disguise the fundamentally unequal material relations in society.

Marx's contribution to debates about state and civil society is an extremely important one. In particular, the shift to a perspective which sees civil society as a historical form rather than a universal condition opens up room for rigorous sociological analysis as well as political critique. However, Marx's perspective may be criticized on the grounds that it reduces relations in civil society to economic ones. In arguing that civil society is structured by relations of production, Marx underplays the importance of other associations and institutions, social movements and corporations which are not political in a formal sense and are not wholly circumscribed by economic forms. Examples of these might include pressure groups and campaigns, clubs and institutions, a free press, reform movements, charities and voluntary associations. The structure of civil society, that is, can be seen as rather more complex than that offered by a simple model of class.

NEW DEFINITIONS, CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

The range of classical ideas on civil society and state power which have been considered in this discussion constitute and problematize a civil/political dichotomy in various ways. There are nonetheless some common grounds for critique. The discussion in this final section takes up two broad lines of argument. Firstly, it is argued that the customary model of state and civil society simplifies the manner in which political power is organized in modern liberal societies. Secondly, I examine the different sorts of 'rights' which citizenship may involve, and how these might affect people's access to equal civil and political status.

Mapping power and defining politics

A simple split between civil society as a private sphere of activity, and the state as a public sphere of regulation, produces a rather limited

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understanding of what constitutes 'politics'. It does this in two ways. It tends to simplify, firstly, the complex organization of state power and to neglect the networks of regulation which are established 'below' the level of the state. Secondly, it overlooks the *political* nature of many relations and associations within civil society, both as sites of repression and as sites of resistance.

If civil society has been generally conceived as a complex and diverse realm of interaction and organization, the state as its 'other' has too often appeared as a monolithic structure. Sovereign in its authority, drowsy with bureaucracy, the state in such a conception represents the central site of political power in society. However, this depiction gives too little weight to the complexities of state power, and to the way it links up with private forms of regulation. The modern state is not simply a massive 'leviathan' but is made up of a plethora of actors and institutions. Networks of public power extend through the fields of welfare, education and health, as well as through the military, the law and government. State power may be experienced at certain moments as benign, for example in the protection of individual rights under the law or the provision of welfare; and at others as quite brutal, as in the suppression of dissent or the harsh treatment of 'aliens'.

The limits of the state, which in an era of privatization are increasingly hard to define, do not in any case represent the limits of power. Within civil society, networks of employers, doctors, accountants, lawyers, teachers, planners, psychiatrists and other 'experts' trace diverse patterns of regulation and control. While the influence of such figures is frequently organized within a legal framework, and in this way underpinned by the authority of the state, they do not represent 'political' or even public agents in any formal sense. If I rent my house from a private landlord, the terms of our economic arrangement are governed by a bundle of legislation. The rather powerful position my landlord occupies in relation to me as a tenant derives from a mesh of economic and legal relations which are neither public nor wholly private, neither civil nor clearly political in character.

Such questions as to where power resides are linked to another set of questions about how 'politics' should be defined. A number of critics have argued that the political/civil distinction is based on a false claim that the private or social realm is somehow non-political. One of the most important lines of argument here involves a feminist assertion that activities in the 'private' realm of the family and gender relations are profoundly political in character (see Bock and James 1992). Such an observation has led to changes at the level of the state – for example, through the development of equal opportunities legislation, the provision of public nursery education, or (as in the early 1990s in the UK) the criminalization of rape within marriage. Within classical conceptions of the civil and the political, this form of state intervention into the private realm of the family was both barely thinkable and largely unwelcome.

A recognition that the spaces of civil society may also be sites of political power joins up with an argument that the boundaries of the state, and formal democratic processes, do not determine the field of political struggle. New social movements based on protest, demonstration and direct action in part reject the procedures and effectiveness of representative government for bringing about social change. For example, environmental movements may have as their aim changes in government policy – through the closure of nuclear power stations, controls on car emissions, or the scrapping of public road-building programmes – but may seek to influence policy through direct action and campaigning. The space of political action is not confined to the ballot-box and the parliamentary chamber, but is to be found in the streets, in public squares, on billboards, along (and over) perimeter fences.

The 'rights' of citizenship

One of the most important criticisms to be levelled at classical theories of civil society concerns the definition of a 'citizen'. Civil society has traditionally been understood, and in quite specific ways, as a community of *men*. An observation that the language of sovereignty and citizenship has either explicitly or through processes of exclusion left women out (see Lloyd 1984) opens onto a wider set of questions about the limits of political rights and **civil liberties**. How should these be defined and who do they include? While women were formerly excluded from citizenship, can it be said that all men enjoyed common rights as citizens? If citizenship has been a partial and often exclusive form of social membership, how might it be extended and deepened? How might we understand ourselves as citizens today?

Debates about citizenship have in recent years assumed an important place in political life, not least because of the efforts of post-communist states to develop and articulate the institutions and liberties of civil society such as political parties, a free press and freedom of conscience (see Keane 1988a; 1988b). In the context of Britain, whose political arrangements provided the setting for the philosophies of Hobbes and Locke, the lack of a written constitution and the endurance of monarchy raise questions as to whether a British person can be considered a citizen in a modern and mature sense, or whether they simply remain the subject of a sovereign power (Hall 1995).

The division between civil society and the state is in part mediated by distinct but interlinked civil liberties and political rights (a distinction especially evident in the works of Paine and Ferguson). Civil liberties (or *civil rights*) concern the rights of the individual in a free society: these are commonly taken to include freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of movement and association, freedom to own and possess property, and justice before the law. *Political rights*, on the other hand,

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concern the individual's participation within public life. In modern democracies these include the right to join a political party and to stand for public office, as well as the primary right to vote. These rights form the basis of the citizen's reciprocal relation with the state. In return for the establishment and the protection of their rights, the citizen is obliged to obey the law, to pay taxes to the state, and at times to undertake jury duty or military service.

These civil and political rights, enshrined within the constitutional state, establish the formal equality of citizens. What is more, they mark the boundaries of a shared political community which excludes various categories of person. While the legal status of the citizen is highly meaningful to someone under threat of deportation, it is necessary to question the limits of meaningful citizenship in everyday life. The influential work of Marshall (1950) argued that the necessary conditions for active and equal citizenship extended beyond civil and political rights to *social rights*. His definition of such social rights was broad, but included as a minimum a degree of economic security and welfare, education and a share in a common culture. These rights might be secured through social policy measures. Marshall held that a chief good of the postwar welfare state in Britain was the provision of the social rights which were necessary for people to enjoy the full political rights of citizenship. The state education system produced knowledgeable and informed individuals, while public housing, welfare and health provisions allowed people to participate fully in society as independent actors. In such an account, political measures are employed so that people are enabled to realize their rights as independent citizens. It is evident that a debate on the nature of political citizenship cannot exclude an account of those conditions which prevent different groups and individuals from exercising their rights in an active or equal manner. Marx made this point in relation to economic inequality, but the constraints on meaningful citizenship are not confined to this realm.

Such a conception of social rights opens up the debate on citizenship to take into account the questions which early modern philosophies of civil society tended to exclude. A whole set of material conditions may prevent a person from actively exercising their political rights as citizens. Different people, furthermore, are empowered as citizens in ways which are shaped by their material circumstance, by their mental and physical health, by their age, and by the gender and race relations in which they are placed. For example, differential rights of citizenship are especially clear in the case of lesbian women and gay men, who in many liberal democracies do not possess the same legal status as do heterosexual people (see Evans 1993). The arena of rights is a highly contested one. Do the rights of the citizen extend to the right to a job? If I have a job, do I have the right to strike? Should all women have the right to receive an abortion? At what point does the racist's right to freedom of expression impinge on the rights of the black citizen?

CONCLUSION

These sorts of question appear at the interface between the civil and the political. Social theorists have become quite used to critically examining the dualisms around which sociology and related disciplines have been organized. Such ways of carving up the world have generally had to work quite hard to maintain the divisions which they institute, and to categorize people accordingly. However, the civil/political dichotomy has always been a rather self-conscious one, uncertain of the (divided) ground on which it stands. Liberal forms of government have involved continual deliberation over the proper limits of political authority and the claims of individual freedoms and civil liberties. This boundary between the civil and the political continues to be contested and mutable. Rather than dissolving it altogether, it is possible to use this line of division as the basis for redrawing the map of the political, particularly in terms of politicizing the private realms of economy and society and rethinking the rights of the citizen.

KEY CONCEPTS

CIVIL Sociologists are not always clear about the distinctions they draw between economic, social and political relations. As ideas about the changing relationship between the state, the economy and wider society change so also do views about the civil society. Traditionally the social, symbolic and normative aspects of everyday life constitute the civil society while the rest falls under political economy.

POLITICAL The political realm is that which brings social relations into focus but specifically in terms of their direction, control, management and adjustment to the demands of the state. The social is rarely, if at all, ever apolitical but the politics are not always those mediated by state and party.

State States have varied through history but the modern state is a collection of institutions including the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, central and local administration, the police and the armed forces. The state acts as the institutional system of political domination and can exercise the legitimate use of power.

Citizenship Citizenship describes membership of a state with the concomitant rights and responsibilities. Citizens are not natural but definitely cultural and peculiarly culturally specific. Citizenship speaks of the intense relationship that

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exists between the individual and the central administration of power within his or her society.

Civil liberties These are rights that are bestowed upon citizens who are fully membershiped into the state through taxation, franchise and lawful obedience. There are also rights that are contingent upon responsibilities. They vary from state to state: see for example, freedom of speech.