Introduction: Cities and Civil Society[1]

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Sanctuaries of Freedom

Among the sadly neglected themes within recent research on civil societies is their intimate connection with urban life. Its absence from the literature on civil society is odd, if only because classical and early modern images of civil society (*societas civilis*) are tightly dependent in a linguistic sense upon a family of terms associated with cities. Such old-fashioned words as *civitas* (the inhabitant of a city), *civis* (a citizen of a town, as in *civis Romanus*), *civilis* (befitting a citizen, or becoming a citizen) and *civilitas* (politeness or civility) today live a vibrant life within all European languages of civil society. The interdependence of cities and civil societies is, however, not just a linguistic phenomenon, as important as that is in shaping the way we think about the institutions and norms of civil society. The patterns of interdependence between cities and civil society run wider and deeper − towards a history of institutional practices that have shaped and transformed the ways we experience and judge fields of power, whether in the spheres of governmental or non-governmental institutions.

Historically speaking, the influence of European cities was out of all proportion to their numbers of inhabitants. Around the year 1500 − census data are unreliable and far from comprehensive − only one tenth of Europe's population lived in towns, most of which were small by today's standards. There were only three or four cities with populations of more than 100,000 − Naples was the largest − and only about 500 cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants, most of them shadowed constantly by death caused by harvest crises or epidemic diseases. Yet despite their limited numbers and small populations, cities functioned as places for the articulation of particular and collective desires, for invention, commerce, creative experimentation and emancipation from cramping ties − in fields as diverse as architecture and theatre, fairs and markets, and the production and consumption of new commodities. Whatever freedoms cities enjoyed were usually licensed by political rulers who granted them charters in return for (monetary) benefits, including taxes. Cities were often granted permission to protect themselves by walls punctuated by gates and watchtowers; some cities even had elaborate systems of fortifications, with bastions and outer works. Cities were

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[1] In John Keane (Editor), 2006, *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives*, Oxford/New York, Berghahn Books

strongholds, and that – ironically – enabled them to become sanctuaries of freedom from arbitrary exercises of power (Weber 1978: chap. 17). The city states of the ancient world spawned the invention of democracy, the self-government of equals. The towns and cities of medieval and early modern Europe, hemmed in by a much 'denser' and more complex framework of estates and political and spiritual power – sometimes to the point where cities functioned as appendages of courts or cathedrals – were, in contrast, the birthplace of civil societies. The great urban revival that began in the eleventh century, and that was symbolized by towns like Bruges, Genoa, Nuremberg and London, nurtured new spaces of non-governmental freedom and pluralism, on a scale and in ways never before experienced.

How exactly did this happen? The short answer is that the first sparks of civil society in Europe resulted from a combustible mixture of urban life, conciliar government, Protestant sects and market trade and commerce. The first chemical reactions were evident in urban spaces like Magdeburg and Nuremberg (whose local government opened the city gates to Calvinist merchants and artisans from the Netherlands, and even offered tax breaks to attract them). It was in such towns, around 3,000 of them in the German-speaking lands alone, that something like a counter-power to the established order was created (Collinson 2004: chaps 5, 6). These towns resembled levers used to turn the old Christian feudal world upside down, initially by raising basic questions about who was entitled to get what, when and how on earth. The inversions that took place – another irony – were helped along by the old and (for the most part) conservative conciliar structures of urban politics. European cities were initially not havens of open government. They rather resembled self-supporting oligarchies. Cities were typically governed by single councils that were equipped with combined executive, legislative and judicial powers; cities like Venice and Strasburg, which had complex systems of interlocking councils, were rare. City mayors sometimes rotated in and out of office, but council members generally served for life. Occasionally, councillors were elected and sometimes a certain number of seats were reserved for particular constituencies, such as guilds and neighbourhoods. But in most cases, when a seat on a council became vacant through death or retirement, the existing councillors themselves decided the replacement. Research on the social composition of these urban councils also shows that the end result was usually the same: council members were typically among the wealthiest members of the city.

The pattern of conciliar government was set from the time of the rebirth of towns during the eleventh century, but the growing influence of market wealth rather than pedigree changed the composition of the councils. Whereas late medieval councils were typically

composed of merchants and wealthy craftsmen, by 1550 rentiers and lawyers came to occupy council seats. In some Protestant cities, so too did the clergy, who sat with council members on consistories that defined and enforced policies about marriage arrangements and personal conduct. Virtually all councils were male preserves; city women could inherit and sometimes own property and engage in certain forms of economic enterprise, but they were normally excluded both from decision making in the guilds and from membership in any of the governing councils. The net effect of all these factors ensured that the urban councils of early modern Europe were highly conservative institutions. But that did not make them invulnerable to inside and outside pressures, especially when state rulers tried to poke their noses into municipal government, for instance by installing their own people or extracting new taxes (Mackeney 1989). During the Middle Ages, urban leaders had struggled to assert their autonomy from kings and princes. But, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the growing fiscal and military resources of rulers tempted them to assert or reassert their authority over local urban bodies. A few cities, such as Venice, Geneva and the free cities of the Holy Roman Empire, vigorously resisted. Elsewhere urban oligarchs often saw the advantages of cooperation with princely governments, sometimes to the point where the two groups were fused into a single urban oligarchy of households run by wealthy and well-educated men.

Sometimes, things did not run smoothly for oligarchs. Since city governments never had a professional police at their disposal, instead employing a few constables or beadles, they often depended upon the cooperation of civic militias and neighbourhood watches organized by citizens. The existence of an armed citizenry that expected to be treated decently, with respect, functioned as a major constraint on the exercise of arbitrary power. Most magistrates and councillors feared an armed crowd of citizens in the marketplace, and they knew that they could govern effectively only by heeding the interests of the rest of the citizen householders. Striking a balance proved difficult. There were times when excessive taxes or unwelcome policies caused uprisings. Council members were given a serious fright; or they were actually thrown out in the name of the right of resistance to arbitrary government. For that resistance, the citizens of some cities sometimes paid heavily, as illustrated by the fate of the 10,000 Huguenots slaughtered in the August 1572 Massacre of St Bartholomew. Other believers were luckier and more successful, and it is to them – especially the Dutch and English revolutionaries clustered in towns like Amsterdam and London – that we owe some basic constitutional principles that would later feed the wellsprings of civil society. The right to resist tyranny, the abolition of monarchy, constitutional conventions,

written constitutions, popular election, limited terms of office: such principles of government are virtually unthinkable without noting their roots in early modern urban life.

But the early European towns spawned something else: traditions of *civil liberty*. In the struggles and counter-struggles that clawed at the heart of the towns of Reformation Europe, the faithful on both sides at first clung with all their might to the canon that the ruler determines the religion of his state (*cuius regio, eius religio*). In this way, ironically, the friends and enemies of Reformation helped to discredit political abuses of religion. They saw the possibility that religion and despotism could hold hands, that faith and force could be confused, with evil effects. Out of this recognition sprang the efforts of Philipp Melanchthon and other sixteenth-century Protestant thinkers to rescue and defend the ideal of a *societas civilis* (Colas 1992). This ideal was only a few steps away from the realization that cities could function as templates of religious compromise among confessionally divided communities. There were religious dissenters who went even further. Prominent figures like George Buchanan (tutor to James VI) and John Milton (a great champion of liberty of the press) came to identify with the project of limiting the scope of governmental power. Freedom of the printing press from government control was often high on the agenda; cities were the pacesetters for the diffusion of print culture throughout Europe – such that, by the end of the eighteenth century, at least in north-western Europe and Germany, the great majority of men and women in cities were able to read and write. They spotted the importance of nurturing non-governmental spaces – families, schools, church congregations, scientific and literary clubs – protected by good laws. From the time of the American Revolution, these spaces would be called *civil society* – an old term branded with a meaning that was entirely different from that of the classical term *societas civilis* (a well-governed political community) that it superseded (Keane 1988). This new form of urban society was a religious – not a secular – invention designed to promote the active toleration of different faiths, and to check governments prone to popish cruelty.

Yet European towns spawned more than new religious interactions and new forms of government charged with civilizing potential. They were simultaneously places where new forms of market exchange blossomed (Mundy and Riesenberg 1958; Braudel 1981: chap. 8). Towns nurtured socio-economic interactions in strange combinations of proximity and distance, new money-driven networks and encounters among many different actors, within specific times and places. They carved up old forms of *communitas* into a thousand pieces by activating new modes of money-fuelled mobility, long-distance trade and other forms of market-driven social interaction, the combined effect of which was to link together the quite

different Europes of (say) the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Baltic regions. From the outset – this point is obvious when the historical evidence is carefully examined – the local development of towns and their civil societies within the wider framework of territorial states and empires also contained the seeds of their own interpenetration through space and time. Within the European region, even the most local civil societies were more than local. The rebirth of towns marked the beginning of the continent's rise to world eminence – and its contribution to the laying of the material foundations of what later came to be called a global civil society (Keane 2003).

Although the distribution of these European towns was highly uneven, with the weakest patterns of urbanization in Russia and the strongest in the Low Countries, they were typically linked to each other in networks, or archipelagos stretching across vast distances (de Vries 1984; Hohenberg and Lees 1985). In opposition to feudal lords and princes, cities had a self-interest in mutual cooperation. Barcelona was a good example: during the thirteenth century, it cultivated long-distance networks that stretched through the western Mediterranean, with settlements in Sicily, Sardinia and the Balearics and consulates in Oran, Tunis and Bougie (Blockmans 1997: 139–49). Wherever these urban archipelagos thrived, they functioned like magnets that attracted strangers fascinated by their well-lit complexity, higher wages and real or imagined freedom. Cities attracted outlaws, who swore oaths, *coniurationes* ('swearing together') confirming that they would commit themselves to mutual social support within a hostile political order. The escape of many from serfdom added to the feeling that cities were unusual clumps of people engaged in many different tasks, living in houses close together, often joined wall to wall with buildings like churches, chapels, city halls, granaries, warehouses, hospitals and almshouses. Their architectural pluralism did not automatically make them havens of social pluralism, freedom and equality. They contained visible social elites, normally comprising merchants and some professionals, notably lawyers; large cities, such as Nuremberg and Venice, even had a higher stratum of patrician families, whose members were no longer active in trade but lived off their investments and thought of themselves as aristocrats. Yet the towns that sprang up in Europe resembled some new kind of tension-producing engine. They seemed to recharge life by adding motion to its elements.

Town-dwellers seemed to be perpetually on the move. They travelled regularly to and fro among built-up areas and regularly spent only part of their lives there: during harvest-times, for instance, artisans and others typically abandoned their trades and houses for work in fields elsewhere. The constant rumble of wheeled carriages, the weekly or daily markets and the numerous trades added to the sense of motion through space: town-dwellers encountered

water-carriers, floor polishers, sawyers, porters and chair-carriers, pedlars, rabbit-skin merchants, wig-makers, barbers, cobblers, domestic servants and a floating population of paupers and thieves and unskilled labourers, who lived in small rented quarters and supported themselves by performing the menial tasks – carrying, digging, transporting and animal tending - that abounded in a pre-mechanized society. All these occupations, together with ethnic and religious minorities, rubbed shoulders with members of the upper middle classes: merchants, some of them very rich, masters, mercenaries, engineers, ships' captains, doctors, professors, painters, architects, all of whom knew what it meant to travel through time and space.

The winding, twisting layout of towns added to their appearance of geographical and social dynamism. Medieval and early Europe was one of only two civilizations – the other was Islam – that fashioned large towns with an irregular maze of streets (Hodgson 1974, vol. 2: 105–31). What was probably different about the medieval and early modern European towns was their unparalleled civil and political freedom from the well-armed political authorities of the emerging territorial states and empires. Local merchants, traders, craft guilds, manufacturers, and bankers, many of whom were Protestants, formed the backbone of a long-distance money economy endowed with the power to dictate the terms and conditions on which state and local governments ruled. Seen in this way, urban markets were the cuckoo's egg laid in the little nests of the medieval towns. These nests were woven from a complex plurality of non-governmental institutions, such as households, religious sects and guilds. Self-organized guilds were especially important sources of the new freedoms. Although they sometimes had religious purposes, and despite the obvious fact that their major aim was to control the production and exchange of commodities, for instance by regulating the process through which apprentices became journeymen and journeymen became masters, and by preventing the manufacture of goods by non-member craftsmen and merchants in the surrounding countryside or within the city itself, the guilds in fact achieved much more than protecting their members' livelihoods. Like other non-governmental 'societies' rooted in market structures, the guilds nurtured something new: unfettered and unbounded social space within which the absolutist state could be checked, criticized and generally held at arm's length from citizens who no longer considered themselves the property of others.

The Metropolis

The birth of urbane civil societies in the modern European sense did not simply lay the foundations for 'strongly connected national civil societies living in a system of many states' (Peterson 1992: 388). Historically speaking, the institutions of civil society were never exclusively 'national' or constituted by their exclusive relationship to the territorial state. Civil societies, both past and present, have always been structured and linked by tangled webs of common and overlapping threads, operating at a distance, across borders. Cities and their civil societies have horizon-stretching effects, as the Berlin-born scholar Georg Simmel (1858–1918) spotted with great clarity more than a century ago. His influential writings on the 'microscopic-molecular' processes of modern urban life were guided by analytical methods that were among the first civil society-centred approaches in the human sciences. Simmel structured his observations with various conceptual rules: the obligation upon researchers to reject mindless empiricism and openly to admit their linguistic habit of selecting and interpreting certain historically specific phenomena from the world of infinite flux ('cognitive representations of things are not poured into us like nuts into a sack', he once remarked (Simmel 1965: 290; translation altered); his emphasis on the restless, self-directing qualities of social actors, whose powers to shape civil society ensure that its institutions are restless, open, fractured and conflict-ridden; and his adamant rejection of false hopes that one day, in spite of everything, conflict-producing, conflict-resolving civil societies could be overcome in some higher-order political totality that would secure and protect a single-minded version of the common good.

In all but name, Simmel's approach to analysing modern urban life supposed its close links with civil society. 'We are continually circulating over a number of different planes,' he wrote. 'Each presents the world totality according to a different formula; but at any given time our life carries with it only a fragment from each' (Simmel 1918: 37). Modern cities were for him dynamic bundles of stimuli that have profound effects upon the internal and external lives of their inhabitants. The large metropolis – he clearly had his native Berlin in mind – is above all a school of social difference. It comprises 'a highly diversified plurality of achievements' (Simmel 1903: 336). With every crossing of the street, every glance at strangers whom one may never again see and every transaction in the marketplace of emotional, occupational and business life, city living stimulates awareness of the deep contrast between the slower-paced rhythms of small town and rural existence. Cities stimulate the desire to be different – to make oneself noticeable in the presence of others. Strange 'eccentricities' and 'metropolitan extravagances' are the result, Simmel claimed. They reinforce the shared sense that life is structured by the differences between future expectations, present experiences and those that

have preceded them. Urban life also stimulates consumer needs, which is unsurprising considering that cities are the seat of the many-sided money economy, in which sellers are compelled to whet 'new and unique needs' of consumers. Within the urban market economy, the spirit of 'calculating exactness' flourishes. So too does a matter-of-fact attitude towards people and things, a certain 'hardness' of the emotions, a mutual reserve and indifference matched by a deep dependence upon the pocket watch and the grandfather clock. 'If all the watches in Berlin suddenly went wrong in different ways, even only as much as an hour,' noted Simmel, 'its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time.' But city life – Simmel here dissents from Marx's economic reductionism – is more than commodified punctuality, calculability and exactness. While appearing to cultivate dissociation, cities stimulate a vast mosaic of dynamic social interactions. Cities comprise colourful, constantly moving kaleidoscopes of social action structured by institutions (*Gebilde*) that are continually altered by the choices, judgements, desires and actions of their inhabitants. 'The relationships and concerns of the typical metropolitan resident are so manifold and complex that, especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities intertwine with one another into a many-membered organism.'

Simmel emphasized that the multiple relationships and activities of the urban organism extended well beyond a metropolis like Berlin. The civil relations of the large city are not coterminous with its geographical boundaries. Cities are more than the simple sum of their territorially based and defined social relations. They rather comprise complex webs of civil society institutions that are joined together in complex chains of interdependence that operate and have effects far and wide. Cities and their civil societies stretch the horizons of their inhabitants. Their lives are 'extended in a wave-like motion over a broader national or international area'. Simmel put his finger on the 'cosmopolitanism' of all cities: in the European case, the birth of local civil societies within local urban areas heralded the dawn of what has been called universal history, marked by the constant reciprocal interaction between local and far-distant events (Aron 1978). Universal history so understood is *not* the clichéd story of the one-way spreading of a bundle of 'Western' urban ideals to the rest of the world, whose contribution is a non-history of non-contributions, or what has been called a 'history of absences' (Mamdani 1996). It is universal in a more complex and messier sense: the local and the beyond are interrelated recursively, through power-ridden processes of entangled pasts and presents. So, for instance, it can be said that the eighteenth-century vision of cosmopolitanism defended by Vattel, Kant and others was a child of local civil societies; it

can also be said that that very cosmopolitanism was the privilege of those whose lives were already anchored in the non-governmental activities of local civil societies. The other-regarding, outward-looking openness of these local urban civil societies – their glimpse of themselves as part of a wider, complex world, their capacity to see space and time not as part of the bare bones of the world, but as constructions – constantly tempted them to engage and to transform that world. Their stocks of social and political skills, their capacities for commercial enterprise, technical innovation, freedom of communication, for self-government, learning languages and saving souls in independently minded churches: all these qualities fed the developing worldliness associated with civil societies, as well as laying the foundations for both their Europeanization – the formation of a European civil society – and, later, their globalization.

Hegel's Berlin

It is, of course, easy to get carried away with the positively appealing effects of modern urban life. Simmel himself cast doubt upon one-eyed, progressivist views of the city. He was an ironist who supposed that modern city-based civil societies were neither governed by universal world-historical processes nor susceptible of a single interpretative scheme that supposed, for instance, that civil life could be analysed – its true meaning grasped – through dialectical conceptions of the social totality or through universally applicable categories. As a style of thinking about civil society, Simmel's approach remains admirable and important, even if time has rendered many of his observations less relevant. Simmel recognized that modern urban life produces flux, indeterminacy, uncertainty and conflict. He noted the 'tragic' quality of cities: their tendency to produce self-destructive dynamics. He concluded, with an air of troubled resignation, that modern cities and civil societies spawn formlessness: feelings of indifference and worthlessness, even outbreaks of aggression. That conclusion rather understates the *political* problems attending civil societies as we have come to know them, for the historical fact is that in modern times the face of urban life has been inscribed with the experience of power struggles, humiliation and powerlessness. Cities have indeed functioned as havens of self-government, market freedom and religious equality and solidarity. But they have also been spaces of injustice and destruction: sites of bitter social conflict, uncivilized aggression towards others, scenes of bizarre cruelty and blood-curdling violence.

Founded during the early thirteenth century AD by traders from the Rhine, the modern city of Berlin stands out as a symbol of these two radically different faces of modern urban life. Its civil society was born of a tortuous history. Once a partner in the Hanseatic League of free-trading European cities, which included Hamburg and London (1359), it was conquered by Friedrich of Hohenzollern and drawn into the Holy Roman Empire (1411). That prompted an uprising of its citizens (in the so-called Berlin Indignation of 1447–48) and, during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), it suffered occupation and population decline caused by military intervention, pestilence and the collapse of its trading links. Under the Prussian rule that followed, Berlin again suffered war and repeated occupation by outside troops; but from the end of the seventeenth century, when one-fifth of its population spoke French (thanks to the presence of large numbers of Huguenot refugees), its reputation as a great cosmopolitan city of trade and industry and culture was also consolidated (Gerteis 1986). Following the Napoleonic invasions (1806–12) and the subsequent reforms of the Prussian state, the town that was founded originally on a swamp had become the fourth largest city in Europe. With a population of around 400,000 in 1840, it had a vibrant civil society that was an instrument of God-fearing bourgeois circles (*Bürgertum*) that lived a new conception of social relations. Merchants, bankers and industrialists, together with doctors, professors, lawyers and other members of the educated, professional strata (*Bildungsbürgertum*), valued hard work and achievement and thought that material success in the market – not feudal privilege based on birth – should determine the distribution of wealth, status and power. These circles favoured the protection of property rights and public freedoms (above all, *habeas corpus* and liberty of the press) through constitutional government and parliamentary representation. They championed agrarian reforms, commercial expansion and vigorous industrial growth; and they supposed perforce that 'society' should enjoy power over the inferior natural world. The middle classes also thought in terms of the division between private and public life, as well as defending a particular version of family life as the space marked by a strictly defined hierarchy of differences between the sexes, a household economy of emotions in which children should be inducted into bourgeois personal norms like individual self-discipline, cleanliness and educated manners (Kocka 1997).

This lived vision of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* did not usually regard itself as limited by time and space. It saw itself as universally significant, as a model of social and political order that *all* groups could and should eventually adopt. Something of this universalizing spirit of civil society was captured in G.W.F. Hegel's path-breaking *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hegel 1821). First presented as university lectures in the city of Berlin, Hegel's

reflections on civil society were the most advanced of their time. They argued for an original thesis: 'The creation of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) is the achievement of the modern world.' With Berlin in mind, he noted that civil society was not a natural condition of freedom but a *historically produced* sphere of ethical life anchored between the simple world of the patriarchal household and the complex governing institutions of the modern state. Civil society is the grazing ground of the middle class of male property-owning citizens (*Bürgerstand*). It includes the market economy, social classes, corporations and institutions concerned with the administration of 'welfare' (*Polizei)* and civil law. Civil society is a mosaic of private individuals, classes, groups and institutions whose multiple transactions are regulated by civil law and, as such, are not directly dependent upon the political state itself.

Hegel emphasized that civil society in this sense is not a pre-given and invariable substratum of 'natural life'. It is rather the outcome of a long and complex process of historical transformation, which he associated with the rise of the modern West. Civil society de-natures the human condition; it reminds its participants that they are part of a historical experiment. The 'system of needs' it nurtures represents a decisive break with the natural environment. The modern bourgeois economy, for instance, is a dynamic system of commodity production by means of commodities. It greatly increases the level of specialization and mechanization of human labour. Nature is thereby transformed into an instrument for the satisfaction of human needs, which multiply and diversify and can therefore no longer be understood as 'natural'.

Hegel's critique of naturalistic conceptions of civil society had important theoretical consequences. He was so impressed by its restless dynamism and 'de-naturing' of human needs that he was led to explore the proposition that there is no necessary identity or harmony among the various elements of civil society. Harmony nourished by unadulterated love is an essential characteristic of the patriarchal family, Hegel claimed. Described by him in glowing patriarchal terms as the 'first ethical root of the state', the family is an immediate, unreflecting unity whose members (especially women, who are guided by intuition and feeling and therefore destined for love and marriage) understand themselves as 'accidents' and not as competitive individuals bound together by contract. In civil society, things are otherwise. Its multiple forms of interaction are often incommensurable, fragile and subject to serious conflict; its manifold elements (its 'societies') do not merge spontaneously and harmoniously, as if governed by the invisible hands of benevolent Nature. Modern civil society rather resembles a restless battlefield where private (male) interest meets private (male) interest. It unfolds and develops in a blind, arbitrary, quasi-spontaneous manner. This means not only

that it cannot overcome its own particularities; according to Hegel, civil society also tends to cripple and destroy its own pluralism.

The subdivision of civil society into classes (or *Stände*) is a principal reason why it is gripped by an inner restlessness – and why the exuberant development of one part of civil society often impedes or oppresses its other parts. Hegel recognized a variety of classes or class fragments – civil servants, landowners, peasantry, intellectuals, lawyers, doctors and clergymen – but he located the moving principle of civil society primarily in the *Bürgerstand*. He argued that this class of burghers (in which he included workers) is defined, paradoxically, by its selfish individualism. The burgher class certainly depends upon the corporations – municipal, trade, educational, religious, professional and other state-authorized forms of collective associations – which function as its 'second home', as a shelter that protects it from the vicissitudes of life in civil society and familiarizes it with a higher level of ethical (or public-spirited) form of life. The selfish actions of the burgher class and those of its unintended child, the 'rabble of paupers', are further restrained by the civil 'administration of justice' and by the various regulations and moral improvements secured by the 'policing' agencies of civil society. Nevertheless, the burgher class tends to struggle against the restrictions imposed by the corporations, civil administration and police. It tries to turn them into means of furthering its particular interests through commercial transactions. The burgher is less a public-spirited *citoyen* than a self-serving *bourgeois* who prefers to keep others at arm's length. He is an apolitical man who likes to stand on his own two feet. He is impatient with traditional privileges, shows little genuine interest in public affairs and is concerned only with his self-enrichment through the exercise of his private property. He views his freedom as abstract – as the freedom to act within the bounds of externally enforced laws that safeguard his property and enforce contracts. In this way – here Hegel would exert a decisive influence on Marx – modern civil society becomes a complex system of transacting individuals whose livelihoods, legal status and happiness are mutually interwoven. But it is precisely this universal selfishness – here Hegel rejected all assertions about the natural sociability of the human species – which turns civil society into a blind and unstable field of economic competition among private non-citizens.

A Universal State?

Hegel was understandably suspicious of those who expressed unbridled enthusiasm for civil society. In practice, just as he predicted, the bourgeois version of civil society was to meet stiff resistance, from within and from all sides. From below and outside, the rise of Berlin as the workshop of continental Europe and the corresponding formation of a self-conscious industrial working class caused trouble for private property-centred understandings of civil society. In the Berlin scene, the power of organized labour was manifested in the beaten-up revolution of 1848–49 and in the formation of independent workers' parties in the 1860s – early by European standards – and in direct challenges to middle-class institutions in the form of socialist cooperatives, strike action and the rejection of 'bourgeois' freedoms in the name of democratic and Marxian communist principles. Banned for nearly two decades, the Social Democratic Party won more than 70 per cent of the adult male vote in Berlin in the 1912 German election. Four years later, the party took a stand against war and refused to pass Berlin's budget. In *Rotes Berlin* and elsewhere in the country, civil society meanwhile also came under siege from within. Although on balance an open and tolerant city that was politically out of step with some other parts of Germany, Berlin's spirit of civility was diluted by the poisonous gases of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, unemployment, militaristic nationalism and ugly outbreaks of violence, early symbols of which were the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and the right-wing putsch (March 1920) staged in Berlin by Wolfgang Kapp. Meanwhile, by the last years of the nineteenth century, support for the project of civil society began to crumble within those parts of the middle class nervously convinced of the *Kaiserreich* strategy of maintaining an alliance between the old elites, the nobility, the state bureaucracy and the military – a governing strategy that Hegel himself had first sketched and recommended earlier that century.

Hegel was restrained in his enthusiasm for civil society because he viewed it as a self-crippling entity in constant need of state supervision and control. He noted its darker sides: for instance, its subdivision into classes (or *Stände)* and the corresponding selfishness of the middle classes and their humiliation of a 'rabble of paupers'. Such problems, he thought, demonstrate that modern civil society is incapable of overcoming its own particularity and resolving its own fundamental conflicts. Civil society cannot remain 'civil' unless it is ordered politically, subjected to 'the higher surveillance of the state'. Only a supreme public authority – Hegel had in mind a type of constitutional state managed by the monarchy, the civil service and the Estates – could in his view effectively remedy its injustices and synthesize its particular interests into a universal political community of freedom. From this perspective, Hegel criticized modern natural law theory for confusing civil society and the

state, for supposing the latter to be a mere partnership of its subjects and thus for challenging the 'absolutely divine principle of the state, together with its majesty and absolute authority'. The ideal state is not a radical negation of a natural condition in perpetual war (Hobbes, Spinoza), an instrument for conserving and completing natural society (Locke, Pufendorf) or a simple mechanism for administering a naturally given, automatically self-governing civil society (Georg Forster). Hegel rather conceived the state as a new moment that contains, preserves and synthesizes the conflicting elements of civil society into a higher ethical entity.

The state represents society in its unity. Under its tutelary powers, civil society is *aufgehoben*: it is at the same time preserved and overcome as a necessary but subordinate aspect of a more complex and higher community that is organized politically. According to Hegel, if the state demands from civil society only what is necessary for itself, and if it limits itself to guaranteeing this necessary minimum, then beyond this limit the state can and should permit considerable scope for the freedom of male individuals and groups acting within civil society. This means, on the one hand, that the state should not be considered as a central superintendent that directs the life of all other institutions (a type of state which Hegel identified in oriental despotism and in the Prussian state of Frederick the Great and his successor, Friedrich Wilhelm II). On the other hand, Hegel urged that the public authority could not take the form of an administrative body that rarely interferes with the conduct of civil society. He proposed that both points of view must and can be satisfied politically: the freedom of the members of civil society can be guaranteed and synthesized with the state's articulation and defence of the universal interest.

Although Hegel consequently recommended against dissolving the separation of civil society from the state, he was quite clear that the degree to which civil society is differentiated from the state could not be fixed through hard and fast general rules. From his perspective, the practical relationship of state and society can be determined only by weighing up, from the standpoint of political reason, the advantages and disadvantages of restricting the independence, abstract freedom and competitive pluralism of civil society in favour of universal state prerogatives. Hegel supposed two conditions under which state intervention (in his words, the state's 'purging of privileges and wrongs') is legitimate. First, the state may intervene in order to remedy injustices or inequalities within civil society – for instance, the domination of one or more classes by another, the pauperization of whole groups or the establishment of local oligarchies (within a region or municipality, for example). Secondly, he thought (especially in his later writings, such as *Über die englische Reformbill* (1831) that the supreme public power is justified in intervening directly in the affairs of civil society to

protect and further the universal interest of the population – which of course the state itself defines! The activity of the corporations was for him an important case in point: although they require autonomy to facilitate their members' development of *Sittlichkeit*, it is precisely because of their (potential) 'public' character that they require subjection to the 'higher surveillance' of the state, lest they degenerate into its rivals. Thus, while Hegel defended the need for 'particularity … to develop and expand in all directions' within civil society, he insisted at the same time that the universal state has 'the right to prove itself as the ground and necessary form of particularity, as well as the power which stands over it as its final purpose'.

Considered together, these two conditions constitute a very broad licence indeed for state regulation of social life. The fear of despotism that had motivated, say, Montesquieu's reflections on power is in Hegel's writings drastically weakened in favour of a deep trust in state regulation (Keane 1998: 46–47). Despotism was seen by Hegel as a preoccupation of earlier times, which is why, in his work, the perennial problem of how, and under which conditions, male citizens can question, reconsider and resist state power falsely claiming to be universal – the problem of political power sharing and active public monitoring of power – fell into obscurity. Simply stated, if the requirements of the public good set limits upon the autonomy of civil society, and if the state itself – a monarchic one at that – is ultimately responsible for determining these requirements, how can its interventions possibly be identified and prevented as illegitimate?

Hegel's failure to deal adequately with this quintessentially modern problem of (democratic) checks and balances on the universal state – his assumption that the monarchic state is in the last instance sovereign *vis-à-vis* all relationships within the family and civil society – weakened, even contradicted, his claims on behalf of an independent civil society that guarantees the 'living freedom' of individuals and groups. From the perspective of Hegel's metaphysics, indeed, the ideal of the universal state is understood as 'absolutely rational'. It is the highest and concluding moment of a process of historical development in which reason actively works itself into the existing world. The universal state is the concrete human embodiment of the ethical Idea. It is mind (*Geist*) developing from a stage of immediate, undifferentiated unity (the family), through that of explicit difference and particularity (civil society), to the concrete unity and synthesis of the particular in the state. Given that the process of human history is in this sense 'the movement of God in the world', the universal state conceived by Hegel must be regarded as a secular deity. It is a body whose claims upon its male citizens and female and other subjects are always for their benefit and, ultimately, unquestionable and irresistible.

After Hegel

Through nasty twists of unreasonable cunning, the city of Berlin was later nearly destroyed by such presumptions about the supremacy of political power. Neither Hegel nor Simmel – two of the greatest Berlin-based theorists of civil society - could possibly have imagined the political originality and destructiveness of what happened. Touched by the deadening hand of several forms of state power, the twentieth century was unkind to Berlin and its civil society. The lives of Berliners were racked by the first all-European war (1914–18), which left 20 million Europeans dead; and by the humiliation inflicted by the military defeat of Germany and the outbreak and failure of a communist revolution (November 1918). The daily lives of Berliners were then badly damaged by random violence and civil war (1919–20) and the unemployment and hyperinflation that together conspired to destroy the Weimar constitutional state and its struggling civil society. The subsequent seizure of power by a criminal fascist regime and the Stalinist occupation and encirclement of half the city left permanent scars on the bodies and souls of its inhabitants. Two totalitarian forms of the so-called universal state proceeded to rip the guts out of the city – leaving its demoralized inhabitants shattered, disgraced and divided for nearly half a century.

The scale and depth of destruction inflicted on the city by state power remains almost unimaginable to our eyes. During the Second World War, its population was reduced from 4.3 million to 2.8 million inhabitants. A mountain of rubble (an estimated 80 million cubic metres) was left behind by the utter destruction of one-fifth of total dwelling space and heavy damage to the remaining half. As fascism died and the red flag of victory was hoisted over the city, more than 100,000 women were gang-raped by Soviet soldiers. An estimated 10,000 victims and some of their families committed suicide. It was a Hobbesian city governed by the rule of each for themselves. In the version portrayed in Roberto Rossellini's classic neo-realist film, *Germania, Anno Zero* (1947), Berlin looked to some outsiders like a sterile non-city of shocked, indifferent zombies. Law-abiding citizens were meanwhile turned into looters of shops and storerooms. As markets gave way to plunder and bartering, it was each and every civilian for themselves: a stick of dry sausage for a loaf of bread, a torch battery for a bottle of schnapps.

When looking back on these events, the sad conclusion is obvious: Berlin is a piteous city. Berliners have lived like guinea pigs through both the rapid growth and the violent

destruction of the institutions of civil society, several times over. In today's Berlin, the ghosts of these experiments have been left behind in abundance, like Hitler's buried and unmarked bunker or the line of bricks in the road that marks the route of the Berlin Wall through Potsdamerplatz. Yet – despite everything – Berlin is today rebuilding itself. It is becoming a great European city with a vibrant civil society protected by parliamentary government and the rule of law. Thanks to the geopolitical and socio-economic successes of the Federal Republic, Berliners now enjoy a vibrant civil society, which nevertheless has strong, shared memories of every imaginable trajectory of the contradictory experiences that we now call 'modern' (Kocka 1979; Wehler 2001). It is probable that Simmel would have been left speechless by the strange brew of triumphs and tragedies. The lives of Berliners have been shaped by religious struggles and by the growth of industrial and consumer markets linked to worldwide trade. They have witnessed the projection of rural idylls and intense ecological awareness; after 1800, Berlin was even known as the 'City of Romanticism', thanks to the writings of aristocratic-bourgeois rebels such as Tieck, Kleist and Arnim. Berlin established itself as the home of the *flâneur*, as a great metropolis with enough street life, galleries, museums, opera houses, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, bars and cafes – an invention of the nobility, perfected by middle-class taste – to last anybody a whole lifetime. It has been a city blighted by pauperization and by the rapid growth, following the industrialization of the 1860s, of a distinctive and no-nonsense proletarian culture. It is the city that witnessed the aestheticization of politics and violence in the laboratories of fascism – a development captured in Alexander Döblin's great novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz.* It has experienced the death of fascism, by force of arms. It is a city that has been defined by grand architecture in styles ranging from Schinkel's neoclassicism and art nouveau through to the handsome, tree-lined Unter den Linden and the present-day commercial glitz symbolized by the glass temples of Potsdamerplatz. Berlin is a city in which high bourgeois politeness and proletarian good humour have simultaneously flourished, at various times. It is a city that has spawned terrible incivility; witnessed organized rape and cold-blooded murder by uniformed troops; and suffered under total war that virtually destroyed the local civil society and left the city in chaos.

Part of the strange appeal of today's Berlin to its citizens and strangers alike lies in its contradictoriness. A sickly song from the post-'1945 years repeats the cliché that Berlin is still Berlin, but the truth is that the city is changing itself faster than any other European city, and in ways that ensure that Berlin is never quite at one with itself. The city that was once physically wrecked by war and scarred by partition now feels like a place where 1989 is mere

history and pre-1939 just archaeology, or almost so. The Reichstag building, topped by Norman Foster's glass dome, sports not only the words 'To the German People' but also, behind glass panels, samples of the angry and obscene graffiti scrawled by invading Red Army soldiers. Just around the corner stands a cluster of private banks, including Frank Gehry's DG Bank building, together with the pastiche bourgeois atmosphere of the city's most expensive hotel, the copper-roofed Adlon. Proof positive of the power of private capital in shaping the local civil society is further evident in the rejuvenated Friedrichstrasse, stuffed with arcades and galleries and designer shops that mask the fact that Berlin has the lowest per capita income of any major city in Germany. Meanwhile, opposite Berlin's central park, the Tiergarten, stands not only the Brandenburg Gate, a historical symbol of public freedom and joy, but also a new memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. Not far away is Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, whose complex but visceral narrative of signs and spaces, including the Stair of Continuity, which in essence leads nowhere, defies simple expectations of victimhood, which seems right and proper for a city with the fastest-growing Jewish community in Europe.

The push-pull spirit of contradictoriness of Berlin's civil society – an invigorating, in-the-face civil society with many different faces - makes its presence felt in *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives*. Drawing upon a great volume of scholarship that is directly or indirectly traceable to Hegel and Simmel, its contributors treat the subject of civil society with a sophisticated sense of nuance that comes from both historical wisdom and the experience of living in a city that has seen it all. *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives* certainly bears the birth-marks of the city. It presents, for the first time in English, a sample of the best, recently written essays on the subject of contemporary civil societies produced by scholars who were born in Berlin or currently live in Berlin, or who have had a long-standing relationship with the city. Their contributions are bound together by a strong preoccupation with contemporary civil societies, their structural problems and their uncertain future. Guided by the symbolic connection between cities and the rise and decline of civil societies under modern conditions, the book aims to introduce readers to the kind of innovative work that is currently being done in the city of Berlin. Some of the contributors are well-established scholars who enjoy a wide reputation outside Germany; others are young scholars whose work is locally celebrated and likely to become known elsewhere in the coming years. The contributions have a path-breaking feel about them: for the first time in the history of modern civil society discussions, a *city* is represented intellectually as worthy of attention by others. Individual contributions cross-refer to each other – some of them were written by scholars who work together closely

– and in their own particular ways all of them strain to situate and to bind their concerns and to present them as exemplars of the outstanding scholarship that is earning contemporary Berlin a – deserved – reputation as a vibrant and exciting city.

The book is deliberately varied in style, discipline and content – in this it mirrors the dynamism and heterogeneity of Berlin itself – but it might be described as a paean to G.W.F. Hegel. It is bound together by a single concern: to keep alive and to nurture the discourse of what was once called *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and is now called *Zivilgesellschaft* – an old eighteenth-century word that was re-minted in the oppositional scene of West Berlin in the early 1970s. Jürgen Kocka's opening reflections on the changing historical meanings and uses of the category of civil society usefully introduce a range of key propositions in need of further research. He points out that in the Federal Republic of Germany, whose current Chancellor has even spoken of the importance of civil society, the term enjoys considerable popularity, as it does elsewhere around the world. With the wisdom befitting a distinguished social historian, Kocka cautions against simple-minded definitions of the term. He points to the great temporal and spatial variations of its meaning, and he notes the wide variety of social agents who have spoken its language and defended its institutions. In Poland, during the nineteenth century, there was a close connection between civil society and parts of the gentry. In France and Britain, the conjoining of the gentry and middle classes ensured that civil society institutions enjoyed broader social foundations. In Russia, prior to the First World War, civil society institutions were far weaker, due to the political isolation of the urban middle classes, in whose petit bourgeois strata the norms of civil society nevertheless enjoyed support, especially in local urban politics. Meanwhile, in Germany, Kocka points out that from the end of the eighteenth century the project of nurturing a civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft* or *Bürgergesellschaft*) was firmly in the hands of the *Bürgertum,* made up of industrialists, bankers, academically educated civil servants, professors, teachers, lawyers and journalists. Parts of this social class subsequently turned their back on civil society, although today, Kocka emphasizes, the social patterns of identification with civil society have broadened to the point where civil society institutions and norms enjoy something of a post-class popularity.

Such popularity makes it incumbent upon social scientists and others to exercise care when wielding the term for either normative or analytical-descriptive purposes. In Kocka's hands, the concept of civil society refers to a historically specific mode of social action that is structured by a cluster of interdependent rules, including individual independence and collective   social   self-organization,   the   suspicion   of   state   spoon-feeding   and

'governmentality', the open and non-violent recognition of plurality, difference, conflict and compromise, and actors' public preoccupation with various and conflicting opinions of the 'common good'. Kocka emphasizes that social action marked by these rules is never fully actualized, that civil society stands for something like 'a comprehensive project' with utopian qualities. The fact and vision of a civil society stand in opposition to unbridled capitalism, to an all-permeating state control, to violence, even to the mentality ingrained in Lenin's remark that trust is good, but control is better.

Kocka is aware that, when civil society is seen in this way 'boundary' questions arise. The relationships between civil society and households and markets, for instance, become contingent and contestable. Calling for further comparative research, Kocka offers the example of the tension between markets and civil societies. Cross-national historical comparisons show that during the early modern period there were many parallels between the two sets of institutions. The successful emergence of market economies was conditional upon the trust and social capital produced by civil societies, while (conversely) the market de-concentration of capital investment, production and exchange proved vital for the formation and nurturing of civil society institutions. Kocka admits that there are forms of capitalism and capitalist ventures – today's global finance capitalism, for instance – that are parasitic upon the tissues of civil society, and even threatening of its health and strength. But that is not to say that civil society and the market are contradictory opposites. It is better to say that their relationship is complex and ambivalent, as present-day controversies about 'corporate citizenship' show. 'Not every form of patronage by wealthy individuals should be celebrated as civil society engagement,' says Kocka. 'But conversely, it would be just as false to dismiss every case of "corporate citizenship" as a mere manifestation of purely individual interests veiled in ideology.'

Susanne-Sophia Spiliotis takes up this point. She raises theoretically interesting and politically important questions about the function of shared wealth and shared memories in civil societies. Within these societies, she points out, stocks of memories are continually fixed and unfixed, on a more or less openly contested basis. In a complex and power-ridden world containing an infinite number of items potentially to be remembered, the trouble is not only that these social memories are always selective; it is, rather, that within civil societies there is constantly the danger that awareness of present-day or recent injustices will fade into the mists of time and so be forgotten by all but a few who are burdened by the pains of memory. So-called 'facts' do not survive because they are 'facts'; whether or not details of events that happened are themselves remembered is entirely contingent upon active efforts by

governments, journalists, historians and other civic actors to keep alive memories of these events.

Spiliotis notes the growing role of historical themes in recent public life, but she points out that for the most part the political process of coming to terms with past injustices – what she calls 'justice in time' – has been heavily guided, sometimes controlled by states. The examples are familiar to our world: official state-led apologies for deeds done or not done; government-organized truth and reconciliation commissions; and compensation packages for the victims of state policies. Spiliotis contends that the 1999 German Business Foundation Initiative for the compensation of former forced and slave labourers during the Nazi regime is an important recent exception to this trend. The Initiative breaks the rule that corporations only admit of their wrongs when dragged before state courts. It provides – Spiliotis claims – a pacesetting example of the tendency of some business corporations to see themselves as publicly responsible actors *within* civil society. Launched by companies such as Siemens, DaimlerChrysler, Commerzbank, Bayer and Robert Bosch, the Initiative eventually attracted support from only a small minority of private German companies. Its material and symbolic significance has nevertheless been important, Spiliotis emphasizes. Compensation payments have been made to more than 1.5 million former forced and slave labourers. A so-called Future Fund has also been established in support of projects whose aim is to nurture human rights, global understanding and democracy. Overall, the Initiative has drawn attention to hard questions about corporate responsibility for past injustices – thereby helping to lay the foundations for a 'corporate civil society' in which companies abide by the best normative rules of *civility* backed by social freedom and equality.

Paul Nolte expresses – sympathetically – doubts about the viability of corporate definitions of civil society. Drawing especially upon nineteenth- and twentieth-century German historical experiences, he points to the tense relationship between the originally 'bourgeois' institutions of civil society and the normative ideal of social equality. Symptomatic of this tension is the long modern history of claims that either recognize or assert that a functioning civil society requires a measure of social inequality. One version of this is the Marxian condemnation of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as fundamentally a class-divided society that produces class domination. In the Scottish Enlightenment, Adam Smith and others had earlier noted the same problem: market societies can only become 'civil societies' if and when they cultivate norms of politeness and moral improvement through policies of charity and welfare towards the poor. The experience of fascism negatively confirmed the same tension: the political effort to eliminate class-based inequality, along with

the 'Other' defined in racial, religious and other grounds – the quest for a *Volksgemeinschaft* - in practice resulted in the violent destruction of civil society.

Nolte tries to break new ground, at first by contextualizing the modern history of social inequality. He is particularly concerned with the manner in which the widespread 'nervousness' produced by the class inequalities and conflicts of the Weimar Republic enabled Nazism to attract support by promising that that society would be 'levelled' and 'pacified', and with how the hollowing out and destruction of civil society was consolidated by the Party-dominated state of East Germany and repaired only slowly, and with great difficulty, through several crises, in the Federal Republic. Nolte points out that the recent renaissance of civil society has been accompanied by new forms of social inequality defined by new class structures, structural unemployment, 'underclass' poverty and the cultural segregation of southern European, Turkish and other immigrants. That is why, according to Nolte, Germany is today on the cusp of a new debate on the social foundations of civil society. There is much talk of the importance of 'civic spirit' and 'social capital' – and of poverty, exclusion and social inequality. It is against this backdrop that Nolte poses some difficult questions. Can social inequality within a civil society be reduced without destroying its best civil society qualities? Can the concept of social inequality combine the principles of recognition and redistribution by reaching beyond matters of class to include other inequalities based (for instance) on gender difference and ethnic, cultural and religious differentiation? If individualization is an indispensable prerequisite of civil society, then how can it be channelled towards the cultivation of 'trust', 'justice', 'responsibility' and other civil society virtues? And in intellectual and policy terms – Hegel's question – what does it mean to overcome egoism, hedonistic consumerism and the ethos of '*Ich-AG*'(roughly, 'Me Inc.') by developing social bonding forces or 'ligatures'?

During a period of intense restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state in Germany, Herfried Münkler also considers whether civil society institutions can play a vital strategic and normative role. He warns against instrumental or opportunistic uses of the language of civil society by politicians and other policymakers; and – against wishful thinkers – he doubts whether policies geared to strengthening civil society somehow automatically produce social and political tranquillity. The contemporary significance of civil society lies elsewhere: it promises (in theory) that positive effects can result from the recognition that state institutions cannot and should not fully control and integrate the political order. From a neo-republican perspective, Münkler views the subject of civil society as up for grabs, politically speaking. 'The political crisis within the Left and the semantic success of civil society are two sides of

the same coin.' While drawing attention to the political dangers linked to the overuse and abuse of the term, he proposes that a politics of civil society can draw attention to the fact that market mechanisms produce social dysfunctions, and that the best antidote to both these social dysfunctions and governmental sclerosis is the 'willingness of citizens to display social solidarity and political engagement'. Münkler is interested in the 'active' or 'competent' citizen, in the politically aware actor endowed with a capacity for making political judgements in the company of others – or what the classical republican tradition called the 'good citizen'. He asks difficult questions about the social and legal preconditions of citizenship. He agrees with those who insist that citizenship cannot be viewed as a 'natural' or ontologically given substratum of a political community. When civic engagement is considered as a political resource, he also agrees with those who say that it is fragile and potentially narcissistic; civic action can indeed lapse into single-issue or 'not in my backyard' concerns. Yet he goes on to challenge the well-known theory of Ernst Wolfgang Böckenforde that civic spirit resembles a stock of food that is easily consumed by the organs of government, but is not easily replenished (Böckenforde 1976: 112ff.). Münkler sees that civic spirit can be nurtured for the good of all citizens of a political community. He insists that serious efforts to trim down state power without at the same time reducing social security cannot succeed unless citizens are encouraged, perhaps even required, to busy themselves in civic affairs, within the social spaces of civil society. Whether or not its cultivation should be a citizen's *duty* – in the form of a compulsory social year for both young men and women, for instance – is a question he raises, without answering. He instead takes the example of locally based, social welfare initiatives that are controlled neither by state power nor by the profit-centred rules of market competition. So long as they are protected by welfare state arrangements and market economy solutions, such initiatives can transform 'administered solidarity' and 'legal regulations' into 'real, experienced solidarity'. They can generate 'a common good orientation and civic spirit', which in turn can serve to complement the representative mechanisms of political democracy with new sites of participation – thus acting as a brake on the well-known dangers of populism, a constant companion of democratic orders.

Münkler's concern for the nurturing of civic spirit for the good of all citizens of a political community inevitably raises questions about the wellsprings of such 'community spirit'. Concentrating on the German case, Hans Joas and Frank Adloff cast doubt on those pessimistic 'communitarian' critics who lament the decline of community and community spirit. Joas and Adloff begin by reciting the findings of surveys of German citizens'

involvement in civil associations such as clubs and societies, religious communities and informal networks, self-help groups and social movements. The aggregate figures show no overall decrease of 'social capital'; somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 informal and private-law organizations currently exist in German today. Yet, when the figures are analysed more carefully, a different picture emerges. Participation in civil associations is strongly correlated with higher income, religious commitment, formal educational qualifications and mid-life (the years between 30 and 59). One consequence is that participation 'holes' have opened up in zones of high unemployment and among people with low income and low education. It also seems likely that non-governmental advocate groups are no longer membership organizations that are locally entrenched (as was true historically, say, for the labour movement or the Catholic church). Times have changed. These groups are increasingly led by professionals and highly educated experts, who pay more attention to media coverage than to the cultivation of active membership.

Such trends prompt the suspicion, for the case of Germany, that the civil and citizens' society (*Bürgergesellschaft*) is a middle-class affair. Joas and Adloff resist this conclusion. Drawing on the concept of 'social milieu' first used by Émile Durkheim, they are concerned to map the dynamic formation of everyday social nests within which social actors weave together and make sense of their lives, using the many branches and sticks of intersecting and overlapping social traditions. They note all sorts of contemporary trends in the everyday life of German citizens: the de-proletarianization of labour due to such trends as the doubling of the real wages of West German workers during the years between 1950 and 1965; the abolition of traditional Prussian conservatism by the Sovietization of its power base in the East Elbian estates; the widening access of young people to university life; the decline of church attendance and the intensification of religiosity in some circles; the rapid regrowth of Jewish communities; and the growth of new social milieux associated with the new social movements and the Green Party. From these observations, Joas and Adloff extract the conclusion that while traditional social milieux have undergone considerable disintegration, the trend is by no means a one-way street. The forces of trade union membership, church attendance and involvement in political parties have indeed waned. But Christian communities, conservative traditions and working-class organizations remain very much alive. New immigrant communities – based on language, ethnicity and religion – have mushroomed on German soil. There are signs as well of the spread of self-reflexive, self-determining behaviour, especially among the young. Considered together, these trends not only raise questions about how surviving social milieux can be stabilized and bridges built

among them. They prompt a much more difficult but politically vital question: under conditions of growing social diversity, how can value commitments to particular social milieux become more self-reflexive and more modest – more respectful of their own and each other's particularity – without losing their intensity?

This question poses another, darker query: if civil societies comprise a kaleidoscope of different and potentially irritable social milieux, then how can they retain their civility? The topic of civility is at the centre of the contribution of Sven Reichardt, who explores in fresh ways, by means of fresh questions, the complex historical relationships between violence and civil societies, past and present. He casts doubt upon excessively normative and positive appraisals of life in civil societies as we have so far known them. He does so by pointing to their historical affinities with violence, understood as any act of unwanted interference with the bodies of others such that it causes them mental and/or bodily harm. Civil societies generate different and sometimes opposed life plans, and therefore a multiplicity of conflicts. Reichardt also shows that violence has been stripped of its violent appearance: victims can be defined and denigrated as 'rude' or 'barbaric'; violence itself can be camouflaged using terms such as 'education', 'reform' or 'improvement'; and violence can be judged a necessary, if unpleasant, means for the nurturing and protection of political democracy and a free and equal civil society. Seen together in this way, civil societies have so far failed to live up to their promise of non-violence. Reichardt argues that it is therefore important not to exoticize and trivialize violence as some kind of prehistoric relic, say, from the days before 'civilized' democracy took root. He cites Claus Offe's interpretation of the twentieth century's barbarity as 'post-civilized barbarity' (Offe 1996), and goes on to define several problem areas of research that need further attention.

Most familiar is the problematic historical relationship between civil societies and the modern territorial state's monopoly of the means of violence. Although 'sovereign' states are supposed to be the precondition of peaceful order in civil society, it turns out that the relationship is fraught. Reichardt shows that the history of public lynching in the United States shows what can happen when the state does not exercise a monopoly of the means of violence. But the inverse relationship has also applied: as the experience of military dictatorships in Latin America and totalitarianism in Europe has shown, territorial states have a bad record in the defence of civil societies. Drawing on the path-breaking work of Ute Frevert (2001), Reichardt illustrates the point with reference to conscription in the German *Kaiserreich*. In line with the principle of (male) equality in arms, conscription injected civil society with militaristic virtues, such as the willingness to use lethal weapons, to obey the

principles of violent command, to overcome the fear of death. The ideal of peaceful civic engagement was distorted and thrown off balance by a form of 'social militarism' that came equipped with a gun and a penis. War has exacerbated these tensions between civil societies and their states. There are recorded cases where the mass mobilization dictated by total war proved to be the catalyst of the democratization of civil society, for instance, through the extension of the franchise, the strengthening of civil rights and social insurance innovations. But war has equally dealt death blows to civil societies – quite literally, as in the 1918–45 period, when worldwide only a handful of functioning civil societies and political democracies survived. Reichardt also shows that the extension of hard-won democratic rights to organize and to agitate was not always synonymous with 'civil disobedience' and peaceful self-organization. Sometimes – as happened in quite a number of civil societies after the First World War – democratization turned out to be a precondition of violent mass movements and the rise of authoritarian populist politics. Democracy enabled the self-brutalization of civil society by spawning the growth – as happened in Italy and Weimar Germany – to a politics of *vivere pericolosamente*, which saw itself as pitted against the 'ponderous reformism' and bureaucratic boredom of parliamentary government. Something of the same tension is evident in the apparent flourishing of terrorist violence in democratic civil societies. Reichardt asks whether there is empirical evidence that guaranteed basic rights to freedom provide fertile soil for terrorist acts, and whether it could be that the peacefulness of violence-sensitive civil societies makes them equally sensitive to media coverage of terrorist threats and actions, which have a strongly 'communicative' function, in that they serve as warnings from the terrorists to the whole civil society that its peaceful routines can easily be disrupted.

On balance, Reichardt's historically informed reflections on violence and civil society draw some paradoxical conclusions: violence is not merely the normative antithesis of civility and civil society. There have been times when violence has served as a functional pre-requisite, sometimes unintended, of the emergence of civil societies: as when violent protests kick-started the defence and/or elaboration of civil freedoms; when the call to arms reinforces the promise of political participation and social self-organization; or when civil society institutions are renewed by the experience of violent catastrophes, as was the case in the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Claus Offe considers the intriguing possibility that the deep winter of European violence may have helped prepare the way for a recent springtime of civil society institutions that have begun to spread across state borders, to form something like a *European* civil society. His consideration of whether a European civil society is thinkable and possible is as

path-breaking as it is controversial. Offe points out one unique feature of the civilization that is called Europe: that its history is marked simultaneously by the worst political crimes and the most elaborate standards for institutionally condemning those crimes. Among the key mechanisms of self-critical scrutiny is the institutional division between society and state; through time this division has been designed to guarantee that states earn their entitlement and privilege to govern their citizens and guarantee their social security and social entitlements by exercising such political powers as the right to extract taxation, to educate the young and to wield the (threat of) violence of the police and army.

Offe is especially interested in dysfunctional cases or 'disarticulations' of the state-society relationship. Historical examples include the collapse of regimes (such as the Soviet Union) that have eroded the foundations of their social support; cases, like the former Yugoslavia, where deep social divisions based on ethno-national, linguistic or historical cleavages wreck the governing ability of state institutions; and regimes that are paralysed when their geographical scope becomes too great because of (say) political takeovers and military conquests. The current long-term experiment in European integration is potentially an example of this last-mentioned case, or so Offe claims. Watched by important parts of the world, Europeans are attempting to do something never before achieved in Europe: to apply to itself 'the logic of the circular creation of state and society that shaped the modern history of European countries'.

Offe's contribution here brings into play the problem-spotting perspective for which his work has justly become famous during the past three decades. He does not investigate the growing evidence that a number of interconnected *non-governmental* processes – such as the Europeanization of telecommunications, markets, sports competitions and city life – seem to be nurturing the growth of cross-border social relations. He instead emphasizes the lack of 'stateness' of the emerging European polity, in particular the deep tensions between its member states and its supranational political and legal institutions. The cluster of institutions known as the European Union is so far not well equipped to make, enforce and adjudicate the types of political rule exercised by territorial states. In contrast to earlier times, in which (for instance) the leaders of the Italian *risorgimento* boasted that after making Italy they would proceed to make Italians, the European Union is incapable of acting as if it were a state capable of making Europeans. Until now, says Offe, '"Brussels" lacks the capacities that have played a critical role in the formation of the societies of nation states, namely the capacity to impose military conscription and action, to impose educational standards and curricular powers, and to directly extract taxes from (what only then would be) a "European people".'

Meanwhile, the prospects for developing a European-wide 'society' are correspondingly dim, Offe claims. There is no European idiom and no European-wide public sphere sustained by Europe-wide communication media and audiences. If societies can be partly understood as products of state-sponsored civility, then the European project faces an uphill struggle to ward off the incivilities that are likely to result from tensions produced by such factors as job losses, uneven prosperity and structural unemployment. Most of all, the grip of nationhood upon the various peoples of the region is strong. States in Europe have helped create their own societies – their own *demos* – by imposing not only strictly defined territorial borders. They have also imposed their own judicial, economic, religious, pedagogic and other rules upon pre-existing patchwork quilts of local and regional cultures and political units, such as cities, kingdoms and principalities. Within the European project, in contrast, no formula currently exists for removing the sting from conflicting senses of nationhood by alternative or hybrid identities. Hence the inference: for the time being, the vision of a 'European society' remains utopian.

If that is so, then what are the chances of the successful formation of civil society relations that stretch beyond the borders of Europe, perhaps to the four corners of the planet? Dieter Rucht answers: the new phase of globalization of markets presently championed by neoliberal governments has generated a backlash of social protest organized on a global scale. Rucht points out that, while this process did not begin with the 'Battle for Seattle' in December 1999 – over a decade earlier, on the streets of West Berlin, 80,000 people had demonstrated against the policies of the World Bank and the IMF – the events in Seattle gave a big boost to the rebirth of civic actions that tend to grow into social movements, on a global scale. Not only did the protests bring the meeting to an undignified halt after more than 50,000 demonstrators mounted blockades and publicly criticized transnational corporations, 'corporate censorship' and global consumerism in the streets. Not only, in addition, did the protests raise more specific global concerns, like the protection of rainforests, job losses, the need for cheaper AIDS drugs, bans on genetically modified food and concerns about the destruction of biodiversity, symbolized by dying turtles trapped in commercial shrimp nets. The ultimate achievement of the Seattle protests symbolized something bigger: it signalled the birth of a (misnamed) 'anti-globalization movement'.

Rucht emphasizes that these movements should not be thought of as (coalescing into) one big, world movement. There is in fact a wide variety of such movements, whose activists specialize in publicizing their experiences and applying their campaigning skills in particular policy areas as diverse as sexual politics, trade rules, religiosity, corporate power, post-war

reconstruction, clean water, education and human rights. The targets of these movements are equally variable: they take aim at a whole spectrum of opponents and potential allies, from local institutions that have global effects to global institutions that have local effects. The spectrum of political loyalties within these movements is also very broad, ranging from deep-green ecologists to Christian pacifists, social democrats, Muslim activists, Buddhist meditators and anarcho-syndicalists. Their participants, contrary to some prevailing stereotypes, are not all rich, middle-class, Northern kids. Calculated by numbers alone, activists from the South tend to be in the ascendancy. The inner architecture of these movements is also complex and marked by a variable geometry. Most of their sympathizers and supporters are part-time. Full-time activists and professional workers are in a definite minority within the movements, which have no globally recognized spokesperson or leader or secretariat, and for that reason do not speak in one voice, with one point of view.

Rucht points out that *simulated* unity momentarily appears during organized public protests: for instance, in the Intercontinental Caravan 99, a tour through North America and Europe by nearly 400 activists, from Nepal, India, Mexico, Bangladesh and Brazil, campaigning on behalf of fishermen and farmers threatened by the aggressive marketing of pesticides, genetically modified seeds and neoliberal policies. The same unity was evident in the successful alliance between the Uganda Debt Network and the Jubilee 2000 debt relief campaign, and in the remarkably self-disciplined and peaceful gathering of 500,000 protesters in Barcelona during a European Union summit in the spring of 2002. Such unity is *exceptional* and *mobilized*: it always rests upon months or even years of hard planning, preparatory meetings, seminars and teachings. And in every case it draws upon movements that have strongly decentralized, constantly evolving, kaleidoscopic structures. The global movements comprise a clutter of intersecting forms: face-to-face encounters, spider-web-like networks, pyramid-shaped organizations, hub-and-spoke structures, bridges and organizational chains, charismatic personalities. Action takes place at multiple levels – from the micro-local through to the macro-global – and sometimes movement organizations create vertical alliances for the purpose of communication and synchronization. The well-known nodal organizations of these movements - the Global Action Project, Earthwatch, WEED (World Economy, Ecology and Development), Jubilee 2000 – display a remarkable awareness of the need for striking a balance between common and particular concerns by means of a variety of decentralized, non-hierarchical and yet coordinated initiatives. Using advanced means of communication – such as the reliance upon the Internet by the Mexican Zapatistas in their global campaign for human rights – these nodal organizations are typically in touch,

on a horizontal and spreadeagled basis, with many other initiatives and groups, which are themselves in touch with other initiatives, groups and individuals. Sometimes, as in the global campaign against landmines, conscious efforts to build a 'network of networks' prove to be a vital condition of campaigning success. Because these acephalous social movements are marked by hyper-complexity, some organizations concentrate on the task of heightening the movements' self-conscious commitments to networked and coordinated pluralism. They specialize in spreading the medium, not just the message – by encouraging others to embrace the techniques of participatory research, sophisticated policy analysis and continuous organizational learning. Rucht points out that the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) similarly understands itself as a global platform for pluralism in support of the taxation of stock market transactions. And at the front line of action, some networked, semi-professional groups, like the Wombles and the Ruckus Society, operate facilities for training groups and individuals in the arts of non-violent direct action and civil disobedience.

Although these various self-organizing efforts do not (and cannot) overcome the heterogeneity of the movements, Rucht argues that it is important to see that they have more in common than their variable architecture. These movements are marked by a cross-border mentality. It is highly misleading to dub them 'anti-globalization movements', if only because each assumes the form of links and chains of non-governmental solidarity and contestation spanning vast spaces stretching to the four corners of the earth. Their participants, most of whom are part-time sympathizers and not full-time activists, do not see their concerns as restricted within a strictly bounded community or locality. They are convinced that toxic chemicals, human rights, debt relief and compassion for those whose dignity has been violated know no borders. For them the world is one world. So they nurture their identities and publicize their concerns in what has been called 'translocalities', as if they were global citizens. They think of themselves as building cross-border cooperation in a variety of ways among a variety of potential supporters around a variety of shared goals, including efforts to apply the emergency brake (as in anti-nuclear protest and debt relief) and to effect positive social changes in the lives of women and men, regardless of where they are living on the face of the earth. In the name of inclusive forms of globalization, movement activists take advantage of global communication networks. They share technical and strategic information, coordinate parallel activities and plan joint actions, often by putting direct pressure on governmental institutions and corporate actors – and by risking tear gas, baton charges, bullets and criminal proceedings – under the halogen lamps of media publicity. In this way,

Rucht concludes, the social movements pose a brand new question: can the ideals of civil society and democracy, once thought to be a utopian dream incapable of realization at the nation-state level, be extended to global institutions?

In the penultimate contribution, Shalini Randeria deals with the fundamental objection that the present-day language of civil society speaks with a Western accent. As we have seen, the development of long-distance social relations, of the kind fostered by towns and cities in Europe, had the effect of spreading the norms and institutions that would later be named civil society in the modern sense. Yet even a cursory glance at the historical record shows that this diffusion of the institutions and language of civil society everywhere encountered resistance – sometimes (as in parts of the East African mainland, during the Christian missions of the 1840s (Curtin 2000: chap. 7) armed hostility, followed by a fight to the death. Such resistance has led some critics to conclude that 'civil society' is not just a geographically specific concept with pseudo-universal pretensions; they are convinced as well that it has a strong elective affinity with 'the West', and even potentially plays the role of an agent of Western power and influence in the world.

Might talk of a civil society, even a *global* civil society, be a wooden horse of European domination? Are there indeed good reasons 'to send back the concept of civil society to where … it properly belongs – the provincialism of European social philosophy' (Chatterjee 1990)? Given the *prima facie* evidence, the suspicion that the language of civil society is mixed up in the nasty businesses of hubris and blood has to be taken seriously, and Randeria is certainly aware that any contemporary use of the phrase needs to be highly sensitive to what is conceptually and politically at stake. Sensitivity presupposes and requires clean hands. For one of the bitter truths lurking within the contemporary popularity of the language of civil society is the fact that European talk of civil society originally presupposed and required the disempowerment or outright crushing of others elsewhere in the world. Hence the commonplace contrast drawn by early modern advocates of civil society between 'civil society' and 'the Asiatic' region, in which, or so it was said, civil societies had manifestly failed to appear. 'Among the Hindus, according to the Asiatic model,' wrote James Mill with India in mind, 'the government was monarchical, and, with the usual exception of religion and its ministers, absolute. No idea of any system of rule, different from the will of a single person, appears to have entered the minds of them or their legislators'(Mill 1817, vol. 1: 122). Marx and Engels, who were otherwise no friends of modern civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), similarly observed that in the East the 'first basic condition of bourgeois acquisition is lacking: the security of the person and the property of the trader' (Marx and

Engels 1953: 40). And, along parallel lines, Tocqueville noted that, whereas in America the spirit of Christianity enabled the growth of a civil society and democratic institutions, the Muslim faith and manners had heaped materialism and fatalism onto its believers. The chronic decadence of Islam meant that 'the great violence of conquest' initially carried out by Europeans in countries like Algeria would need to be supplemented by 'smaller violences'. He considered that 'there have been few religions in the world as deadly to men as that of Mohammed', and he was sure that it was 'the principal cause of the decadence so visible today in the Muslim world'. Civil society was impossible in Muslim societies. Their pacification required a two-tier political order: a ruling group based on the principles of Christian civilization, and a ruled group of natives who would continue to live by the laws of the Koran (Tocqueville 1951: 69; Jardin 1988: 318).

According to Randeria, the friends of civil society must today be willing to ask tough questions of such views. They should also note a strange irony: an originally European way of life, some of whose members set out brutally to colonize the world in the name of a civil society, helped lay the foundations for its own universal appeal and, with that, strengthened civil resistance to colonizing forms of power and prejudice originally traceable to the European region. Proof positive of this trend, she argues, is the reception by scholars and activists alike of the idea and ideal of civil society in the Indian subcontinent. In recent years, this reception has been driven by renewed interest in indigenous traditions of civility, widespread disappointment with the post-colonial state, market reforms and the defence of civil and political rights against religious nationalism and authoritarian state policies.

Randeria points out that three different versions of the case for civil society vie for attention. The *traditionalist* approach criticizes state violence and calls for 'humane governance' based upon strengthened indigenous traditions of mutual aid and conflict resolution. Others reject this traditionalist approach as nostalgia for traditions that harbour inequality and individual unfreedom – and produce instability within modern institutions. These *modernist* critics prefer instead to reach a different understanding of civil society as a distinctively modern sphere of voluntary associations, some of them of colonial origin, that stand as buffer zones between the individual and governmental institutions. Constitutional democracy in India is seen to require a *modern* civil society: a plurality of secular and inclusive institutions that enjoy considerable autonomy from state power.

Some who are otherwise sympathetic to this modernist approach doubt its implied teleology: they point out that such 'civil-social' institutions are in short supply, that they are confined to well-to-do strata, and that this lack of modern civil associations in a society

dominated by caste and religious ties is the key indicator of the post-colonial condition. Randeria questions this interpretation of post-colonialism in order to develop a third – *anthropological* – approach. It seeks to cut through the pre-colonial/post-colonial dualism by pointing to the ways in which castes and religious communities deserve to be included in any descriptive-analytical account of civil society. Randeria denies that castes and religious communities are (or were ever) describable as traditional 'organic bonds of kinship', as standard accounts of the tradition/modernity divide have supposed. She points out that the social groupings within pre-colonial India, castes included, were typically multiple, flexible and fluid, rather than rigid and exclusive in outlook. The Gujarati community of Mole-Salam Garasia Rajputs, which until recently assigned a Hindu and Muslim name to each one of its members, is an example of this dynamic heterogeneity, which evidently survived colonial conquest: in the 1911 census, nearly a quarter of a million Indians still described themselves as 'Mohammedan Hindus'.

Randeria acknowledges that colonial administration, which sought to map and control Indian society, was responsible for the refashioning of territorially defined castes into enumerated communities through bureaucratic definition: for the purposes of census classification and counting, employment in the colonial administration and the allocation of seats in representative bodies, colonial administrators twisted social identities like religion and caste (*samaj*, or society, in Gujarati) into political categories. Social ties that had been multiple, fluid and dynamic – 'fuzzy' – tended to become monolithic, enumerated and homogeneous. Randeria notes that these bureaucratic classifications had profound political and social effects, so that by the early decades of the twentieth century, caste organizations and communal parties were mobilizing to define and protect their interests on an India-wide basis. Yet she goes on to point out – against politically loaded, nationalist claims on behalf of a homogeneous Hindu majority - that, despite their ascriptive qualities, most lower castes, including the so-called 'untouchable castes', continue to be largely self-governing local collectivities. They enjoy a measure of self-conscious jurisdiction and authority over their members – a power that is often jealously guarded against state intrusions. Castes are far from being kinship groups with unalterable customs and procedures. Their assemblies (the *panchayat*), comprising all the adult members of a local caste unit (*paraganu*), are sites of deliberations about rules and the contestation of norms that are vital for maintaining the patterns of solidarity and belonging – and for resisting unwanted state intervention in such matters as the rules of marriage, divorce and remarriage, the exchange of food, and care arrangements for children.

Randeria points out that the European language of civil society first travelled to India during the nineteenth century. With the founding of the colonial state, the civil sphere – often not named as such – took the form of spaces of social life either untouched by colonial rulers or established through the resistance to their power by colonial subjects themselves. Randeria shows that the subsequent debates about civil society in India have come to interact with different European images of civil society, so highlighting not only their travelling potential but also the ways in which 'foreign' or 'imported' languages both resonate within local contexts and are often (heavily) refashioned as a result. They then become subject to 're-export', back to the context from which they originally came, in consequence of which the language of civil society is both *pluralized* and *globalized*. The impressive cooperation between the coalition called Narmada Bachao Andolan (formed in 1988) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) – like Oxfam and the Environment Defence Fund – in campaigns in support of the right of people *not* to be displaced by dam construction in western India illustrates what Randeria has in mind. The profound theoretical implication of her point should not be missed: *multiple*, *multi-dimensional* and *entangled* languages of civil society now contribute to the definition of the world in which we live. Contrary to other scholars, including Ernest Gellner (1994), Randeria's conclusion is that civil society is not a uniquely Western achievement.

In returning to the theme of Europe, Ralf Dahrendorf has the final word in this volume. Concentrating on the small handful of European intellectuals whose work can be said to be basic for the late twentieth-century revival of interest in civil society, he poses some disturbing questions: why did so many public intellectuals allow themselves to be seduced by totalitarianism? Why did they regard figures like Lenin, Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler as promising symbols of a new paradise on earth? And why were others – Norbert Bobbio, for instance – prepared, under pressure and for the purpose of furthering their careers, to do deals with totalitarians?

Dahrendorf tackles these questions in an unusual way, by examining the personal and intellectual trajectory of a small handful of 'dissident' intellectuals – figures such as Raymond Aron, Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin – who actively refused the temptations of totalitarian power. Dahrendorf notes that, despite various important differences of intellectual trajectory, these latter-day 'Erasmus intellectuals' shared at least four virtues. These virtues have a definite affinity with the project of creating and nurturing a civil society protected by open, publicly accountable government.

One such virtue was the propensity for playing the role of what Raymond Aron once called the 'engaged observer'. The Erasmians tried hard to be objective in Max Weber's sense. They openly declared their normative commitments in order better to describe, analyse and judge ideas, events and institutions, always with a strong measure of distance and with due regard to clashes between means and ends, between strategies and goals and among goals themselves. The engaged observers refused to be silenced: they spoke out and they wrote, and spoke out and wrote again, but they refused on principle to identify themselves with particular movements or organizations or to join political organizations. They followed the stricture of Erasmus of Rotterdam: 'I love freedom and I will not and cannot serve any party.' In this sense, the Erasmians were not characters suspended on a string of quiescent scepticism. Their opposition to totalitarianism was based on a second virtue: what Dahrendorf calls (deliberately using an oxymoron) 'the passion of reason'. The Erasmus intellectuals tried hard to combine their principled self-distancing from power with an unswerving, quietly passionate commitment to cool-headed disputation, counter-intuitive conjectures and an openness to intellectual disagreement and dissent.

The Erasmian friends of civil society were prepared to pay the price for their commitment to passionate reason and distanced observation, Dahrendorf observes. That they were willing and able to do so stemmed from their two other virtues. According to Dahrendorf, the friends of civil society displayed courage in isolation: the courage to stand up and be counted for the cause of freedom, even when it was clear that such courage would result in their solitary confinement in a life of marginal or miserable existence. The Erasmian friends of civil society not only risked irrelevance. Here a fourth virtue came into play: the intellectual opponents of totalitarianism also put their hands up for the principle of living with problems, dilemmas and contradictions. They were not just pluralists, philosophically and politically speaking. They cherished the civil coexistence of the incompatible, which is why, Dahrendorf concludes, their strong spirit of irony, combined with their commitments to objectivity, passionate reason and courage in isolation, remains publicly relevant in today's world – a world prone to longings to belong, to the lure of fundamentalist dogmas, like the worship of 'free markets' or the belief that one particular God is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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