

From the Foreword

... an important contribution to a debate which is going on in many countries. It leaves us with the most difficult of questions: how does one create civil societies? how do we build trust? Understanding what this is about is a good beginning, and this book will help in the process.' — **Ralf Dahrendorf**, *Life Peer and former Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford*

ISBN 0-333-77815-4



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<http://www.macpress.com>

Trust and Civil Society

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Foreword by Ralf Dahrendorf



Foreword

On trust alone a liberal order cannot be built; we need institutions. Institutions alone cannot be sustained; we need the glue of voluntary cooperation and the anchor of belief in legitimacy. In short, we need civil society to be truly free. We need an institutional setting in which trust has meaning.

This sounds abstract, and yet it is close to our everyday experience. Consider first, trust alone. 'Take my word for it', is often a pleasing offer, especially if it is made by a friend. But in social relations, especially in conflicts, it is not enough. Political leaders have sometimes used the phrase. Indira Gandhi, when faced with campaign meetings of a million people or more, would say simple things like 'I know you are poor. I do not like poverty. I will do something about it'. She tried, but she could not prevent doubt creeping into the minds of many. In Northern Ireland, Prime Minister Blair on several occasions cut through an impasse of negotiation by saying 'I give you my word'. Again, he tried; but he too found that trust is no substitute for those firmer relationships which we call institutions.

On the other hand, just setting up institutions is never enough. It is almost too easy – as we have seen in Eastern Europe since 1989 – to create parliaments, arrange elections, and thus set up the prerequisites of democracy. Many, including Western advisers, have had a magic belief that once the institutions are there, what we call democracy, in the full sense of the word, will follow. It did not, except in a few cases where such institutions could be built on indigenous traditions. Elsewhere, people would use the paraphernalia of democracy for their own devious purposes; potential dictators to amass power, corrupt individuals to channel money into their overseas bank accounts. Weimar Germany should have been a lesson; a democracy in which people do not believe, will not last. Institutions need values which are strongly held to be sustained.

It is worth mentioning that these values cannot be replaced by economic success. It is a myth to believe that growing wealth can

be a substitute for trust. (Indeed, sustainable wealth itself cannot be based simply on greed, or even self-interest; the market too needs trust, if only to give contracts credence.) If a burst of growth accompanies the establishment of liberal institutions, this may help; but the bubble can also burst as it did in the Czech Republic when Prime Minister Klaus's 'economic miracle' was revealed to be an apparition rather than a reality.

Thus democracy is fine, and so is the market economy, but the liberal order needs more. The term 'civil society' has a long tradition. For John Locke, there was barely a difference between government and civil society; his treatises deal with 'civil government'. The fathers of the US constitution a century later understood the difference. They, notably James Madison, hoped that civil society would protect people from encroachments, not just by an abstract government but even from one representing the majority. Elsewhere, notably in continental Europe, civil society has often been the refuge of those exposed to the arbitrariness of rulers. Perhaps the most desirable condition is one in which the associations of civil society supplement the institutions of governance without being either dependent on them or hostile towards them. The creative choice of non-governmental associations provides a network of trust which limits the damage which government and the state can do.

Association is the key word. People are *socii*, fellows pursuing common purposes without a constraining centre. Unfortunately there are no pleasing words to describe the most significant and effective set of associations, those of the 'third' or 'voluntary sector'. 'Sector' itself sounds organized and mechanical and in some ways untrustworthy. 'Charity' on the other hand is too closely tied to the paternalism of a bygone age. Civil society then, is the world of associations in which we rely on each other and pursue freely chosen goals together. It is the world of trust.

This volume explores many facets of this world. It is an important contribution to a debate which is going on in many countries. It leaves us with the most difficult of questions: how does one create civil societies? How do we build trust? Those of us who are concerned with helping the spread of the liberal order have often been faced with this question. Our answers are unsatisfactory. They are to some extent institutional; technical assistance for setting up

a voluntary sector certainly makes sense. But the deeper issue remains. Those who have been through the hell of totalitarianism or even the purgatory of authoritarian rule will not easily trust anyone and will be suspicious even of associations with lofty purposes. Perhaps, understanding what it is about is a good beginning, and this book will help in the process.

Ralf Dahrendorf

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Introduction

Leslie C. Hems and Fran Tonkiss

Questions of trust and civil society have received intense critical attention over the last decade or more, not only from academic observers but from practitioners in key areas – the voluntary sector, faith associations, public policy and welfare – where these ideas have become increasingly prevalent. Indeed the ‘rate of growth’ of such critical attention most probably stems from creative interaction between academics and practitioners, exposing not only the significance but also the complexity of ideas of trust and of civil society. The purpose of this introduction is first to amplify the significance of these ideas; and secondly to provide some insight into their complexity. As part of this task it is usual for introductory chapters to essay some definitions. An important part of debates over trust and civil society, however, centres on questions of definition (see, for example, Seligman, 1992: p. ix; Hall, 1995: p. 2; Salamon and Anheier, 1997b: p. 60; O’Connell, 1999: p. 9). Rather than imposing an approved form of words at the outset, the following discussion explores how these dual concepts have emerged in certain social and critical contexts. This is in keeping with the wider aims of the book. The contributors are concerned not to settle the terms of a larger debate, but to offer critical analyses of the ways these often abstract ideas play out within specific social settings: in relation to cities and citizenship; voluntary organizations; faith associations; economic relations; welfare and the state; environmental issues; charity and altruism.

The 'revival' of civil society

How have ideas of trust and civil society – one a term more usually associated with private relationships, the other a theme of early modern political thought – come to be of such interest in the analysis of late modern societies? The revival of ideas of civil society partly has been a response to recent 'crises' in state forms and modes of political power: neo-liberalism and welfare restructuring in liberal democracies; the collapse of Communist structures in Central and Eastern Europe; democratic transitions in Latin America and Southern Africa; and more general anxieties concerning the role of nation-states in a global context. This re-enacts the classical split between civil society and the state – a move evident in Gellner's rendering of 'the simplest, immediate and intuitively obvious definition' of civil society as, 'that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society' (Gellner, 1995: p. 32).

In this conception, civil society is defined by way of its separation from the state. A more substantive definition of civil society, however, might be based upon those vague but 'diverse non-governmental institutions' to which Gellner refers. In this context, civil society is given shape not only in distinction to the state, but in terms of its positive features.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, much of the literature on civil society was generated in response to events in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The initial focus here was on the agents of change, especially those internal agents that were oppositional or subversive in origin (for example, social movements such as Solidarity in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia). Subsequently, the focus shifted to the pathways taken by CEE countries as they left systems of central planning and vertical command, and began to construct – with varying degrees of success – democratic structures and market economies. For different commentators, 'civil society' described, often without rigorous definition, both a key means of transition, and a desired – even utopian – end state.

Ralf Dahrendorf, with impressive powers of foresight, described the task facing these economies and societies in transition:

The clock of transition runs at three different paces. 'The hour of the lawyer' is the shortest; legal changes may be enacted in months. 'The hour of the economist' is longer; dismantling command economies and establishing functioning markets must take years. But the longest is 'the hour of the citizen'; transforming ingrained habits, mental attitudes, cultural codes, value systems, and pervasive discourses. This may take decades and presents the greatest challenge (Dahrendorf, 1990, quoted in translation in Sztompka, 1998b).

Dahrendorf identifies three core components of the process of post-Communist transition: changes to the legal and political framework; the shift to a market economy; and the role of citizens. Such an analysis is not limited to the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe. In a wider context, it might also describe international efforts to design common regulatory and political structures, the pursuit of 'global' market integration, and doctrines of universal human rights and forms of citizenship. Dominant conceptions of the strengths of developed societies (the rule of law, political democracy, market economies and the rights of citizens) have provided the blueprint not only for economic reforms but for 'civil society programmes' that promulgate these models in developing societies. A considerable amount of international effort therefore has been directed at formulating legal frameworks, democratic electoral systems, sustainable business environments and citizen participation in development contexts (USAID, 1999).

The development of 'civil societies', however, is not something *simply to be applied, but needs to be enacted by social agents*. A key emphasis within recent accounts of civil society lies with the catalytic role of social movements and voluntary associations in an emergent 'public sphere' (Perez-Diaz, 1995; cf. Habermas, 1989; Tocqueville, 1969). International development programmes now frequently include specific initiatives for strengthening the infrastructure of civil society by promoting associational forms. This instrumental means of understanding civil society involves a degree of distortion. 'Civil society' in its original sense refers to a certain

kind of human association – in the shadow of the law, and in the interests of both individual liberty and collective good (see Tonkiss, 1998). More recently, the term has been used to mark out a formal ‘civil society sector’ (see the discussion in Salamon and Anheier, 1997b) – providing a further synonym for what is variously called the voluntary, non-profit, independent or third sector. This represents a narrowing of the category of civil society to refer to a more or less coherent sphere of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charities, voluntary associations, social movements and the like.

If this is to emphasize ‘bottom-up’ structures, however, the reality of development and transition tends to be more complex and less organic. The transition process in many countries has prompted international intervention in response to both enduring and emergent problems. In certain CEE countries the social rights citizens held under communism have been eroded in the shift to a market economy, producing pronounced patterns of inequality and severe poverty – a term hardly conceptualized under the Communist system (Atal, 1999). This has necessitated international aid (as distinct from development) funding, whether from government sources or from the multitude of international charities operating in this field. While the main focus of foreign governments and international agencies has been on development, there are also examples where programmes have targeted poverty directly – for instance, the economic crisis in Bulgaria in 1997 prompted the European Union to distribute income support to families living in poverty. In other instances, foreign governments – typically operating through some supranational government body such as the United Nations (UN) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – have intervened in response to civil war and the atrocities of ‘ethnic cleansing’ that too often have accompanied political and economic transition.

The common and somewhat simplified model of transition outlined earlier – law, democracy, markets and citizens – has been considered appropriate to developing countries in almost all regions. Different societies, therefore – many with no tradition of political or economic liberalism – have been faced with the task of engendering a form of liberal civil society as part of a larger development ‘package’. In some contexts, this loose category points to a focus on formulating new social systems after periods of dictatorship or government by an oppressive regime (as in Central and

Eastern Europe or Latin America). Elsewhere it relates to formulating higher societal goals than was possible within the fragmented social and political systems that frequently were part of the legacy of colonialism (as in some African nations).

Prevalent perspectives on civil society in relation to transition and development suggest that notions of civil society are closely associated with processes of change, and specifically, in moral terms, change to achieve benign social goals. If this 'purpose' is ascribed to civil society, the concept also can be applied to already 'developed' societies. Increasingly, it would seem, a range of social issues and problems – from family breakup and urban deprivation, to substance abuse and gun violence – are viewed as expressions of a deep-rooted disorder in late modern societies. For some commentators in the United States in particular, 'civil society' is seen as a balancing force when things get excessive – providing a means of regulating individual and collective behaviour without extending the powers of the state (see O'Connell, 1999). Such an approach is based on an idea of civil society as limiting the reach of government. In a more active version, the language of civil society frames government programmes for cross-sectoral and partnership solutions to a range of social and economic issues. A prominent example here is the centre-left project of a 'third way' or 'new politics' of social democracy in the United Kingdom and (to a lesser extent) other parts of Western Europe (see Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998). Notions of civil society, that is, are used both to mark the limits of government, and as part of government strategies. In this context it is perhaps unsurprising to note the establishment and rapid growth of an international association, CIVICUS, whose goal is to promote civil society – evidence, at least, that it is not only states that are concerned to foster civil society (see Darcy de Oliveira and Tandon, 1994).

Questions of trust

Concepts of trust also have been the focus of much critical interest over the last decade. Seligman (1997) suggests that the language of 'trust' has come to provide an alternative way of thinking about relations in civil society – relations, that is, which are freely entered, which are not compelled either by the state or by ties of

family or kinship. An important catalyst for this interest in trust was provided by two publications, one by Robert Putnam (1993a) on *Making Democracy Work*, and the other by Francis Fukuyama (1996) on *Trust*. The interest aroused by these books lay in their identification of a key determinant of effective governance and comparative economic performance – social capital. Social capital, as defined by Putnam, refers to ‘features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’ (Putnam, 1993a: p. 167). Social trust in this sense is not simply a value in itself, but denotes a wider facility for co-operative behaviour. Following Putnam and Fukuyama, numerous studies have linked trust and social capital to a broad set of benefits; including improved economic performance, better educational outcomes, lower crime, more effective government and the promotion of civic participation (for reviews, see Halpern, 1998; Woolcock, 1998; see also Tonkiss, below). In parallel, the communitarian arguments that developed considerable support in the late 1980s and 1990s also noted the significant role of social trust in fostering a ‘spirit of community’ (Etzioni, 1993).

Several national and international surveys¹ use trust as a barometer of public opinion regarding core institutions and public individuals. Levels of media and political interest in such opinion polling have intensified as consistent patterns of declining trust have emerged in different national contexts. There are clear conceptual problems here in using a deeply qualitative concept, such as trust, as the basis for rather blunt attitude statements. It is not at all obvious, for instance, that ‘trust’ will mean the same thing in relation to governments, to schoolteachers and to neighbours. There are also significant methodological problems – among them the lack of strong behavioural indicators of trends in social trust, and problems in establishing causality (see Putnam, 1995b; Fukuyama, 1999). Putnam works to open up the data on trust by linking these to patterns of membership in a range of associations. He argues for a strong correlation of ‘trusting’ with ‘joining’ across various social groups in the United States; even noting evidence to suggest that joining may be prior to trusting (see Putnam, 1995a; 1995b). Putnam’s thesis, however, has been subject to intense criticism; both in terms of its method of ‘counting’ associations, and as a

larger diagnosis of civic decline (see Ladd, 1996; Norris, 1996; Anheier and Kendall, 1998).

More conceptual approaches to trust have sought to delineate this idea from related notions such as faith, confidence, risk and loyalty (see Seligman, 1997; Gambetta, 1988; Giddens, 1994). For Seligman, trust is understood as 'an unconditional principle of generalized exchange unique to modern forms of social organization' (Seligman, 1997: p. 171). Trust is a distinctly modern concept in referring to relations between autonomous individuals: in his contribution to the present volume, Seligman links trust to exchanges where 'negotiation is (in the first instance) mediated by neither law, nor tradition, or religious obligations – solely by civil recognition of one another as individuals, curbing our desires (or not) in recognition of the other's preferences' (p. 15). Seligman argues that trust relationships are of a 'horizontal' nature different from such 'vertical' relationships as faith in a religious context, or obligation in a familial context (1997: p. 45). Trust between individuals translates into more general social trust, Putnam suggests, through emergent norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (see Putnam, 1993a). Seligman is less sanguine. For him, trust becomes problematic in the shift from relations between individuals, to institutional and collective exchanges. In institutional settings, 'trust' tends to slide into relations of a more clearly 'contractual' nature, where legal instrument, regulatory authority or role expectation work to govern people's actions (see Tonkiss and Passey, 1999). In collective contexts, meanwhile, questions of difference and group interest often complicate assumptions that people will share 'norms of reciprocity' which guard against mistrust (see Seligman, 1997, and below).

Conceptualizing trust and civil society

The contributors to this volume do not address civil society as a unified social 'space'. Nor do they subscribe to a narrowly sectoral definition confined to the activities of those institutions positioned 'between' state and market. Rather, ideas of civil society provide a register – at times a powerful one – for thinking about forms of association; about the encounter between individual and mutual interests; the respective limits of freedom and obligation; the

conditions for collective action; the ways in which issues of selfhood and society are articulated in a public sphere. The authors engage with these themes on different levels, providing a critical framework within which to explore complex questions of trust and civil society. The first of these levels centres on the individual, and on relations between individuals.

In this context, Seligman views civil society as a concept embedded in early modern notions and conditions; translating only more or less well into contemporary settings. He suggests that, 'both trust and civil society rest on a very particular conception of the individual, an idea of the private person, imbued with moral agency and autonomy whose *civil* interaction is mediated or negotiated by something we call trust' (see p. 13 below).

Seligman takes notions of trust and civil society to refer pre-eminently to relations between individuals, and to the forms in which individual identities find public expression. In the opening chapter, he contrasts individualist and collectivist versions of civil society, discussing the real and imagined cities of Los Angeles and Jerusalem as ideal-type instances of these different forms.

Seligman's treatment of civil society is concerned in part with the way that individual interests might be reconciled with a collective good (see also Seligman, 1992). Such a perspective also is evident in Halfpenny's discussion of rational choice approaches that 'aim to model the structure of interdependencies between actors in order to demonstrate how their individual choices, freely made, jointly determine their collective outcomes' (pp. 138–9). These rather different perspectives each bear on a tension between the freedoms of the liberal individual and their relations to others in a larger civil sphere. Perspectives on civic engagement frequently centre on values of association, participation and connectedness; as well as on the practical potential of collective action (see Cohen and Rogers, 1995; Putnam, 1995b; Gutman, 1998; Giddens, 1998). A primary means through which people 'participate' in civic action, however, is through charitable giving. Halfpenny explores changing ideas of charity and altruism, arguing that trust offers only a limited means of understanding these relations, which none the less can be read in terms of larger theories of social order and individual agency.

The family provides a second frame within which to consider issues of trust and civil society. Civil society has been understood

as an arena distinct from the 'public' realm of the state and the 'private' realm of the family. As such, it is held to involve different social bonds from those that are typical of these other spheres. In other accounts, however, 'the family is a basic institution of civil society' (Giddens, 1998: p. 89); and in Margaret Thatcher's famous construction, it displaces a notion of society altogether. In his contribution here, Powell indicates the tension between the 'private' family, and its construction as a public problem within welfare discourses and programmes. Within the communitarian rhetoric of recent liberal government, self-governing families represent the virtuous basis of civic life. At the same time, an image of the ungovernable family has been at the centre of policies for public order and welfare reform in a number of advanced liberal democracies.

The third construct is religion. Although religious organizations are at times seen to stand outside civil society (see Alexander, 1998), they provide an institutional presence able to sustain forms of civic association in different national and faith contexts. Rather than being organized only and fundamentally around vertical structures of authority, religious bodies and movements potentially promote horizontal relations in an extended civic sphere. Such an argument is pursued by Herbert, who critically reviews Seligman's work on the relation of trust to faith. Herbert suggests that theories of trust and civil society remain tied to liberal values of secularism and pluralism; organizations that do not fit with such a framework, none the less can be effective civic actors in such areas as education, advocacy, community-building, empowerment and economic development.

Forms of voluntary association provide the fourth context of analysis. Voluntary organizations often are taken as exemplary of trust-based relations within civil society – they also provide a focus for government discourses of partnership, and of strategies for shifting various welfare services from the state. In this context, an increasingly formalized voluntary sector is subject to growing competition, tightening regulation, and more fragile claims on social trust – these institutional dilemmas represent, as Seligman remarks, the 'Achilles' heel' of voluntary association. Passey and Tonkiss argue that the resources of trust commanded by voluntary organizations are closely tied to their formal independence and their distinctive ethos. This is complicated, however, by changing

forms of governance wherein the boundaries with both state and market become harder to mark. In this light, the promotion of voluntary bodies as service providers and civic 'partners' has the effect of extending both the regulatory and the rhetorical reach of government.

Recent government programmes that put into question the boundaries between state and civil society, mirror the logic by which social movements have sought to redefine the limits of the political. Macnaghten's chapter is concerned with environmental politics as a key domain of civic engagement; a domain where civil actors contest and negotiate with government and business, and within which versions of public space are produced and struggled over. Environmental movements have been critical agents within informal politics in recent decades, challenging not only the distribution and consumption of physical resources, but also forms of state and corporate control over information (see Melucci, 1989). Questions of trust, in Macnaghten's account, are politicized in terms of public access to meaningful information about environmental risks. This provides a context for thinking in an extended way about trust as a means of mediating risk; and how this tension is played out through relations between individuals, collective movements, government and corporations.

The relation between state and civil society is the fifth level of analysis. This distinction has been crucial to ideas of civil society since the early modern period, and it casts its long shadow over contemporary debates, including those examined here. Powell considers how the state/civil society couplet has been conceived within recent political changes – in respect of neo-liberalism and welfare retrenchments in advanced capitalist democracies; and in relation to processes of socio-economic transition, especially post-Communist transition. He argues that the revival of interest in civil society has gone with a crisis of welfare state structures and of welfarist ideals. In a similar way, Passey and Tonkiss analyse how the promotion of voluntary action and provision within civil society can work as an extension of the state by alternative means.

The final frame of analysis is the economy. Tonkiss considers the different ways in which economic relations have been understood within theories of civil society – from the basis of civic association in classical liberal perspectives, to a clearly demarcated and potentially