

シビル・ソサエティ
新しい日米知的交流の課題

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THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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“Civil society” is a term whose roots in western civilization go back the era of classical Greek culture, although the term gained something like its current meanings essentially in the late eighteenth century. But today the revival of interest in civil society as an analytical concept and a practical program of social reconstruction is attributable to the end of the Cold War, the death pangs of communism, and the beginnings of the global transition from authoritarianism to democracy and the free market economy.

I want to stress that the transition is not just from state socialism to democracy, but from right wing authoritarianism as well. Thus, on the one hand we in the industrial world are concerned to aid the transition to democracy and the free market in the post-socialist nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (but also in China and Viet Nam), while on the other we support the same process in Latin America and East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, and the other newly industrializing nations of the region).

Western Europe, North America and Japan have all signed on to a movement to encourage the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, but we have not been clear or consistent in designating our objectives. What is the goal? We generally speak in terms of a transition to democracy and the free market, although at some times and in some places we specify either “democracy” or “the free market.” On the whole the implication is that the two terms are synonymous. But reflective analysts will recognize that democracy and the free market are not necessarily dependent upon one another. Free markets are obviously possible in rather authoritarian regimes, as the examples of Singapore and Malaysia, or South Korea and Taiwan (in earlier decades) demonstrate. Perhaps it is harder to imagine democracy without free markets, but the history of the welfare state in Western Europe shows that (at least for long periods of time) democracy is compatible with something far short of the conditions of free markets.

The assumption has been, I think, that we should give priority to free market development, on

the theory that democracy will follow free markets. This is, to state the problem in slightly different terms, to argue that if one institutes perestroika, that glasnost will follow. The Russians under Gorbachev famously tried the opposite strategy with disastrous results, while the Chinese are putting perestroika first with (thus far) impressive results. The same has been true in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. But we do not yet know to what extent glasnost will emerge in these countries.

And this is where the idea of civil society has gained such currency in our international discussions of political and economic reform. As we have asked ourselves how to assist countries in their transition, we have frequently identified civil society as a concept useful in developing strategies of assistance. The concept has been useful in two ways. On the one hand it identifies the problem to be solved, since civil society is usually defined as the space between the state and the free market, a space that was obviously lacking in communist regimes in which (at least in theory) the state occupied the entire sphere of social endeavor, and there was no market sphere. But with the failure of state socialism, the question was whether there needed to be something other than two domains of social activity, the state and the market? The answer was yes, that a buffer zone called civil society was indeed necessary both for the emergence of democracy and the successful operation of the market. Associational, voluntary and non-market individual activity - churches, fraternal organizations, and the likes occupy the civil society space, thus considered. This space until recently has been called the Third (or, in the United States, the Independent) Sector.

The second way in which civil society was useful to the post-communist reformers was in defining the process by which democratization could be brought about. For the very nature of associational and voluntary life, especially its facilitation of voluntary activity of all kinds, is thought to create (or reinforce) the social values that are productive of democratic behaviors. Civil society organizations (neither state nor market) facilitate socially productive activities through voluntary efforts, and bring individuals together in pursuit of common goals. Such behaviors are not obviously produced by the self-interest-maximizing pressures of the economic market, nor are they facilitated by interactions with the state. So "civil society" provided a paradigm for transitional nations to conceptualize strategies for encouraging democracy, and served as a template for foreign and international founders to organize their philanthropic and aid programs. This describes how we have gotten to the present point in time, a decade after the end of the Cold War. It seems a good moment to reflect on how much progress we have made in the transition to democracy and to evaluate the adequacy of the concepts upon which our strategies have been based.

But of course the concept of civil society is not employed exclusively in thinking about transitional regimes. It has become one of the most attractive approaches to evaluating the level of democracy in the industrial world as well. Robert Putnam of Harvard has been the most important figure in this movement. Ironically, Putnam, who is now the most vigorous analyst of

civil in the United States, came to his insights in the course of a two decades long study of governmental performance in Italy (in Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, Princeton U. Press, 1993). Putnam was trying to determine why new regional government were more successful in some parts of Italy than in others, and though a brilliant empirical analysis of Italian social and political behavior, he came to the conclusion that high levels of capacity for self-government were directly correlated with long historical traditions of associational activity. It was because of the habit of joining organizations aimed at public purposes that individuals developed the civic consciousness and trust in one another, that facilitated the establishment of democratic forms of governance. In other words, the existence of a vigorous and viable civil society was a prerequisite for democracy. Putnam explained this process by hypothesizing "social capital" as the mechanism through which civil society was created and maintained: "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." (Putnam, p.167) Social capital thus created can be expended in the production of democratic values and behaviors.

More recently, Putnam has turned his attention to the study of social capital and civil society in the United States. His first attempt was an article called "Bowling Alone: Americas Declining Social Capital" (Journal of Democracy, 1995, pp. 65-78 8) in which he observed that levels of associational activity in the U.S. have declined over the course of the twentieth century - using the example of the decline of bowling leagues, in which substantial numbers of individuals organized their sporting lives communally, rather than exercising by themselves in front of a television set. Putnam is now systematically assessing the mechanism through which communal activity creates social capital, and the reasons why levels of social capital rise and fall. "Social capital" is thus an operational concept that enables us to understand the workings of civil society, and to develop strategies to strengthen it. If one accepts Putnams analysis (and he has many critics), one can use the term "civil society" with some precision..

But it is important to note that "civil society," when used as Putnam (and state planners) use the term, is a universal concept. It assumes that there are constants in social organization and behavior, and that the same socio-political forces will produce similar effects in any society. We know, of course, that not all societies are alike-that there are important differences between the First and Third Worlds, and among nations within each of those categories. One could argue that while Italy and the United States share many "western" institutions and values, they are significantly different societies. How would one compare cultural and political forces in Japan and the United States? But the search for constants is a characteristic of social science thinking, although it is subject to the constraint of comparative empirical analysis. The difficulty is that we are only just beginning the process of comparison (in my judgment the most important agenda item in the program of research on civil society) and the jury is still out on the universality of the concept.

At this point it will be useful to acknowledge that the concept "civil society" as we now understand the term in the West had its origins in the eighteenth century and was the product of

Enlightenment thinking. (See Adam Seligman, The Idea of Civil Society, Princeton University press, 1992) The remote origins of the idea are to be found in Greek natural law conceptions, which hypothesized that human society was bound and governed by a moral standard of extra-human character, so that there was an ethical standard to which all members of society had to repair as a matter of internal consent rather than imposition by state power. The concept of human nature was later given religious content during the European Middle Ages, when "natural law" transformed into the law of God. Such concepts worked very effectively to govern society and hold it together so long as society was hierarchical in character, and individuals accepted their ascribed status as part of the natural (or constituted) order. But, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the emergence of capitalism and the other forces of modernity (such as science) destroyed organic medieval society, older conceptions of civil society no longer served to provide an explanation of the individuals relation to the larger society.

In the early modern period, that is, the problem for social integration was to locate the individual in relation to both society and the market-at a time when older conceptions of hierarchy and status had lost their meaning. It was the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially Adam Smith, who provided the apparatus. We tend to remember Smith for his liberal individualism and for his rationalization of the maximization of economic self-interest, but we forget that Smith understood self-interest not as selfishness but rather in relation to the larger society. In The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Smith explained the psychological need of individuals for social recognition, and thus their tendency to formulate their conceptions of self-interest in the larger context of the feelings of their neighbors. For Smith, civil society was therefore bound together by an ethical web that transformed individualism into socially productive activity-this was his understanding of the "Invisible Hand." Such a social idea was closely related to contemporary notions of republicanism (exemplified by Thomas Jefferson in America) in which virtue was defined as the capacity (and obligation) of the individual to place the interest of the community above his individual above his personal self-interest.

It was only later that versions of liberalism harsher than Smiths, laissez faire liberalism, redefined virtue as noting more than self-interest maximization. The nineteenth century introduced the world of radical individualism that has characterized modern life. This has been a world in which the principal political dynamic was the contest of the market against the state, and in which "the private" has been starkly contrasted with "the public." It has been a world, at least in the West, in which individual rights-based arguments have increasingly dominated political debate and in which citizenship has been conceived of as a bundle of political rights. The space occupied by the state has of course grown steadily from the late nineteenth century into the third of this century, although the market has proven more than capable of holding its own, but at the same time there has been a resurgence of associational and cooperative activity in society. This activity is private in the sense that it is not sponsored by the state, but it is also non-market (in the U.S. we would say non-profit) activity.

The question that has emerged at the end of this century, to circle back to the argument at the beginning of this essay, is therefore, whether the late nineteenth and early twentieth century western model of society as composed of democracy, the market and a weak state provides a sufficient basis for social cohesion? Quite apart from the challenge of creating democracy in the transitional countries, we are now asking the question whether the state and the market have not put such pressure on the Third Sector (non-state, non-market), that we have lost something essential to the quality of life in a free market democracy? One way to think about this question is to ask whether the associations which form the core of the Third Sector, or civil society, have not become interest groups, representing their members to the state (or to the market), and thus no longer generating the trust or mutuality which ought to characterize civil society? If that is true, then the simple advocacy of more Third Sector activity, a phenomenon which has characterized the philanthropy of the industrial world toward the developing world, will not necessarily produce the social behaviors we expect of civil society. Indeed, we have to ask the hard question of whether the Third Sector is indeed synonymous with "civil society?"

The bottom line, I think, is that we can no longer count on the Invisible Hand to generate the behaviors of civil society. Ironically, after all, Adam Smith's commitment to a socially reinforcing individualism found its most compelling expression in the idea of socialism-and socialism is at best an experiment in idealism that has thus far failed. We either need psychological surrogates for the other-directed individualism Smith imagined, or social mechanisms to produce a society in which people trust one another and work willingly for the achievement of common goals. There seems to be little reason to expect spontaneous psychological transformation of individuals in modern liberal society, and so most of us have placed our hope in the creation and reinforcement of institutions which will encourage people to work together voluntarily in the service of the commonweal. The question is whether the establishment and support of the Third Sector create a truly civil society?

This brings us back to the question of the nature and role of civil society in modern life. I have already said that I do not think that civil society can adequately be understood as a place on a map-a space between the realm of the state and the realm of the market. Such a conception implies that civil society is simply a buffer zone between two contending forces, but civil society is not strong enough to take on either the state or the market in hand to hand combat. On the contrary, civil society must be thought of as a process and a state of mind-a social process that generates trust and mutual understanding, and mediates market and state pressures.

The difficulty, however, is in generalizing about civil society. Thus far, I believe, the evidence shows that civil society is not a universal process. Where it exists, it is the product of local cultures-or perhaps it is a more general phenomenon shaped decisively by local forces. In either case, if policy makers (including philanthropists) desire to create or reinforce civil society, they must carefully consider what shape civil society takes in particular cultures. There is, thus far, little evidence that an elementary program of support for voluntary and associational (Third Sector)

activities will in itself produce civil society. The challenge to those who would strengthen civil society is like the challenge to those who would strengthen democracy by advocating free and fair elections. Genuinely free elections are evidence that democratic culture exists, rather than institutions that produce democratic behavior where there has been none. I think the same thing can be said of the institutions of the Third Sector.

“Civil society” can be a concept that helps us to understand the character of true democracy. But it is a concept that has changed radically over time, and that even today has many different meanings. To put “civil society” to use as a concept for planning a philanthropic program will require the creation of a polyvalent definition of civil society, and a firm understandings of the local cultures in which it is to be applied.