

Civil Society

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Date: Fri, 15 Mar 1996 18:01:40 GMT+2

From: Leonid Oknjanski <LFO930@stud.aubg.bg>

Recently, I've been reading Vaclav Havel's "Power of the Powerless" with its clearly Althusserian notion of autototality and thinking about the development of the concept of 'civil society.' Could you advise me on some reading on 'civil society', its development and definitions? Besides, am I correct in thinking that nowadays civil society is 'bigger' than the state, occupies a larger part in individual's life than the state? Yours, L.F.Oknjanski.

Deny spirits and you are an atheist.

Cristopher Hill, "World Turned Upside Down"

name: Leonid F'edorovich Oknjanski e-address: lfo930@stud.aubg.bg

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Date: Sat, 16 Mar 1996 17:01:57 -0600 (CST) From: GILDRIER@LYNX.APSU.EDU

On Professor Oknjanski's question about "civil society," one of the best recent books is Marvin Becker- Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century- (Bloomington, IN., 1994). On the US, one of the more interesting ideological studies is J. David Greenstone - The Lincoln Persuasion: Remaking American Liberalism- (Princeton, 1993) R.P. Gildrie Austin Peay State University gildrier@apsu01.apsu.edu

Date: Sun, 17 Mar 1996 21:26:39 EST

From: appel <CZAP@MUSICA.MCGILL.CA>

Professor Oknjanski of the American University of Bulgaria asked for references concerning the concept of civil society. One of the best recent treatments of this concept and its history in Western social and political thought is John Keane, ed., CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE, London: Verso, 1988.

The recent work of Jurgen Habermas might also be of use as well; he treats the problem of the "colonization of the life-world" by bureaucracies dedicated to technological efficacy.

Fredrick Appel
Dept. of Political Science
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Date: Mon, 18 Mar 1996 10:46:39 -0500

From: William McCuaig <wmccuaig@credit.erin.utoronto.ca>

On Fri, 15 Mar 1996 Leonid Oknjanski <LFO930@stud.aubg.bg> wrote: >

> Recently, I've been reading Vaclav Havel's "Power of the Powerless"
> with its clearly Althusserian notion of autototality and thinking
> about the development of the concept of 'civil society.' Could you
> advise me on some reading on 'civil society', its development and
> definitions?

William McCuaig notes:

ideas and bibliography on this might be almost endless. The phrase *societas civilis* is Leonardo Bruni's latin translation of the Greek *HE KOINONIA POLITIKE*, and to the Greeks, the Romans, and the Renaissance humanists, the phrase means exactly the opposite of what we mean when we say "civil society." To them it implies the fusion of individual lives into a polis, or commune. It was the idea of a fusion of this sort that inspired the later reveries of Rousseau and Schiller.

But the sense of the phrase *societas civilis* / civil society migrated, as so often happens. I think it might have been the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers who first used it to refer to the network of human relationships apart from the state, indeed opposed to the state.

The only concrete bibliography I am in a position to offer at the moment concerns German thinkers, especially Hegel, though the last thing I would pose as is an expert in German thought.

Manfred Riedel, "Gesellschaft, Burgerliche", in *GESCHICHTLICHE GRUNDBEGRIFFE* vol 2 (1975), pp. 719-800.

Z. A. Pelczynski, *THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY. STUDIES IN HEGEL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY* (Cambridge, 1984).

Date: Tue, 19 Mar 96 15:50:46 EST

From: Erik Tsao <ETSAO@CMS.CC.WAYNE.EDU>

Another book which might be of interest is Toby Miller's *The Well-Tempered Subject*. The book examines how film and television policy construct the "citizen". He doesn't specifically deal with "civil society" but he does treat a lot of the theorists who are important for this concept (Hobbes and Locke, for example).

Date: Tue, 19 Mar 1996 15:57:20 CST
From: MIKE KUGLER <KUGLER@nwciova.edu>

Some places to begin on civil society: Manfred Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution* (original in German); Habermas has written a great deal on it (much with the aid of Riedel's work); Ernest Gellner's recent book; But there's no real substitute for reading Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and the other Scots on the topic, and of course Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. A recent book that looks good is Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society*. A ton has been written on this recently, and a journal search would yield a number of articles.

Michael Kugler
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Date: 27 Mar 96 16:01:24 PST
From: William Peck <William.Peck@directory.Reed.EDU>

LK Oknjanski wrote:

Could you advise me on some reading on 'civil society', its development and definitions? Besides, am I correct in thinking that nowadays civil society is 'bigger' than the state, occupies a larger part in individual's life than the state?

end of quoted material ---

I have been getting an education reading responses to this query. But perhaps one should go gradually backward in the history of the term in order to respond especially to an Eastern European nowadays. Isn't it the case that this now-popular phrase comes first - "proximate (historical) cause" - from Hegel, and Marx's reactions to same? And isn't the reason that Easterners are interested now because for a long time they suffered under regimes that swallowed civil society in the state?

Bill Peck
Reed C (Portland OR)

Date: Thu, 28 Mar 1996 23:02:50 -0500 (EST) From: { <asilver@epas.utoronto.ca>

On 27 Mar 96 William Peck wrote:

- > Isn't it the case that this now-popular phrase comes first - "proximate
- > (historical) cause" - from Hegel, and Marx's reactions to same? And
- > isn't the reason that Easterners are interested now because for a long
- > time they suffered under regimes that swallowed civil society in the state?

In 1865, Louis-Francois Lafleche, the acting bishop of Trois-Rivieres (Quebec) wrote *Quelques considerations sur les rapports de la societe civile avec la religion et la famille* (Thoughts on the Relation between Civil Society and Religion and the Family). Lafleche, who had never read Hegel, I'm certain, spoke of civil society as the society which is governed by a king or a president -- as opposed to the family, governed by a father, and the Church, governed by the pope. It would appear that the history and use of the expression civil society are not as specific or as limited as you suggest. Is there a mediaevalist on the list who can tell us whether Thomas Aquinas used the expression?

Date: Fri, 29 Mar 1996 10:23:34 EST
From: appel <CZAP@MUSICA.MCGILL.CA>

Willam Peck of Reed College suggests that we go back to Hegel and Marx for an understanding of the historical origins of the concept of civil society in Western thought. I couldn't agree more; these figures are absolutely central, although I would suggest that there is a very lively defense of the idea of an autonomous civil society in an even earlier - 17th cen. - philosopher: John Locke (see his *Two Treatises of Government*).

As far as Marx is concerned, one of the key texts for appreciating his rather problematic understanding of civil society is "On the Jewish Question". For a fine critique of Marx's reduction of civil society to market relations, see Jean L. Cohen, *Class and Civil Society: the Limits of Marxian Critical Theory*, Amherst: U. of Mass. Press, 1982.

Fredrick Appel
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Date: Wed, 22 May 1996 12:53:36 METDST
From: [Margaret Somers](#)

Note from David Bailey, editor: Margaret Somers is here referring to an earlier discussion on the nature of Civil Society. I am eager to hear from all participants in this discussion about their own

work, and if any want to provide a summary of relevant findings, I believe the discussion would be greatly advanced.

At the risk of being self-serving, may I recommend:

Margaret R. Somers, "Narrating and Naturalizing Civil Society and Citizenship: The Place of Political Culture and the Public Sphere." *SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY* 13 (3) (November) 1995:221-265.

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