4 Withdrawal

T. H. Marshall (1964: 118–19) pointed out that in the welfare state rights grow in significance, while obligations do not. For better or worse, as noted in the preceding chapter, he concluded that a relatively passive citizenry, at least in normal times, should be expected. This fact may not be troubling to elite democratic theorists, but advocates of republicanism and com- munitarianism consider it to be a matter of concern. Coincident with the theoretical challenges to social rights (and to some extent to political rights as well) is a discourse about the need to rethink obligations. More specifi- cally, this chapter will address concerns that have been voiced in recent years about the tendency of citizens to withdraw from participating in the public sphere.

The idea of obligations raises the question of not only what those obli- gations might be, but how they are embedded in civic virtues. What is expected of the virtuous citizen? William Galston (1991: 221–4) has identi- fied four types of civic virtue, which he defines as general, social, economic, and political. General virtues refer to a basic level of loyalty to the society and a willingness to abide by its laws. Social virtues point to the capacity to live an autonomous life among others, which calls for being simultane- ously independent and open-minded in regard to those who differ from you or express ideas that differ from your own. Economic virtues include possessing a work ethic that includes not only a sense of diligence to the task at hand but also a willingness both to be adaptable to economic change and to have a capacity to delay gratification. Finally, political virtues necessitate an ability to respect the rights of other people, the knowledge necessary to evaluate the performance of political rulers, and a willingness to participate in political discourse.

With this in mind, to borrow from Angus Stewart’s (1995: 63) distinc- tion, there are two conceptions of citizenship: “state citizenship” and

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“democratic citizenship.” If the legal status attached to membership and the rights accruing thereby refers to “state citizenship,” the idea of citizens as active agents involved in the decision-making processes of a political community invokes the type of belonging that he calls “democratic citizen- ship.” This chapter turns to assessments of the proper understanding of the democratic citizen, focusing on influential accounts that have expressed concern about what is viewed as a deleterious withdrawal on the part of growing numbers of citizens from the public sphere.

Those who see withdrawal as troubling do so because their understand- ing of democracy entails a conviction that it cannot persist without citizen participation in political life. This conviction is perhaps nowhere so suc- cinctly and directly expressed as in Hanna Pitkin and Sara Shumer’s (1982: 43) following assertion:

The basic idea is simple: people can and should govern themselves. They do not need specially bred or anointed rulers, nor a special caste or class to run their affairs. Everyone has the capacity for autonomy, even quite ordinary people – the uneducated, the poor, housewives, laborers, peasants, the out- siders and castoffs of society. Each is capable not merely of self-control, of privately taking charge of his own life, but also of self-government, of sharing in the deliberate shaping of their common life. Exercising this capac- ity is prerequisite both to the freedom and full development of each, and to the freedom and justness of the community.

Although not alone, the disparate group of intellectuals associated with communitarian thought has in recent years played a singularly significant role in pressing the case that the withdrawal of citizens from civic life imperils democracy; they include the godfather of communitarianism, AmitaiEtzioni (1993) and also sociologists Robert Bellah (to be discussed below) and Philip Selznick (1992), political theorist Michael Sandel (1998), theologian Stanley Hauerwas (1981), feminist political theorist Jean BethkeElshtain (1996), and philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1984). While many others disclaim the communitarian label, they share in common with com- munitarians a view of contemporary life that suggests that the public’s general sense of obligation to the common good has declined – some think to a precipitous and troubling extent.

The literature on this topic that has been produced during the past two decades is substantial. In at least two instances scholars sharing this general sense of unease with the presumed decline in civil responsibility have pro- duced books that became bestsellers in the United States and elsewhere, with appeal far beyond an academic audience: Robert Bellah and his asso- ciates Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton’s Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American

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Life (1985) and Robert Putnam’s Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (2000). Rather than attempting a broad survey of books concerned with the withdrawal of citizens from civic life, we will confine ourselves to an examination of these two books. We offer a brief synopsis of each book in order to lay out the issues and concerns of their respective authors, as well as the way that they articulate their sense of the scope and depth of the problem along with their proposed solutions. We do so because we think that, taken together, these two books encapsulate the central arguments of those scholars named earlier, as well as others who would self-identify as republicans or communitarians and have expressed concern about a presumed decline in civic participation.

INDIVIDUALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS: TOCQUEVILLE REVISITED

Turning first to Bellah et al., it is useful to note that the phrase “habits of the heart” derives from a passage in Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America (1969 [1853]). Indeed, Habits is very much the product of a self- conscious effort to reflect on and update the insights of that classic work at the sesquicentennial of its initial publication. Both books can be read as meditations on the implications of individualism for civic engagement. Tocqueville introduced the term “individualism” in Volume II of Democ- racy, explaining that, “it is a word recently coined to express a new idea” (Tocqueville 1969: 506). In his view, the democratic ethos of America produced a culture of individualism, which served to distinguish it from the old regimes of Europe, though he also saw America as emblematic of the future of Europe. His take on individualism was decidedly ambivalent. On the one hand, as the following passage indicates, he defined it in part by distinguishing it from egoism:

Egoism is a passionate and exaggerated love of self that leads a man to think of all things in terms of himself and to prefer himself to all. Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into a circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. (Tocqueville 1969: 506)

This message may appear incongruent with another theme in Democ- racy, namely that Americans are, in contrast to their European counter- parts, great joiners. Before turning to this point, one observation is in order: individualism so construed in this formulation does not lead to a state of alienation or anomie since people turn not into solipsistic beings

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but rather they invest their energies in creating and maintaining relatively small circles of intimates. Individualism and egoism were postulated as distinct states. However, later in the volume, Tocqueville turned pessimis- tic by suggesting that while this is the case, it is also conceivable that over time individualism might attack “public virtues” as it “merges into egoism,” at which point “each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart” (Tocqueville 1969: 507–8).

Whether or not individualism ultimately fuses with egoism, as Toc- queville’s definition makes clear, it poses a problem for citizenship insofar as people turn their backs on participation in the public sphere, refusing to embrace a set of obligations that focus on the commonweal and not simply the interests of one’s circle of intimates. As such, there is an inevi- table tension between citizenship and individualism, and in an age of individualism this suggests that republican virtues are always at risk. Toc- queville identified the problem, but did not offer a particularly compelling solution. At points, he writes about the capacity to temper excessive indi- vidualism by the promotion of “self-interest rightly understood.” Unfortu- nately, he fails to offer a cogent account of what this type of self-interest would look like, or how it ought to be differentiated from the more cor- rosive form of self-interest. What is clear is that individualism is seen as a given in the modern world, and what is at stake for a republican version of citizenship is to temper it in some fashion so that it does not undermine a sense of obligation on the part of citizens.

Habits of the heart

This is the central theme that Bellah and his associates picked up on 150 years later as they offered a critical analysis of the “habits of the heart” of Americans in the latter part of the twentieth century. They present a bleak diagnosis, contending that “individualism may have grown cancer- ous – that it may be destroying those social integuments that Tocqueville saw as moderating in influence its more destructive potentialities” (Bellah et al. 1985: viii). Moreover, they suggest that their predecessor’s fear that individualism might merge with egoism may well have occurred, leaving “the individual suspended in glorious, but terrifying isolation” (Bellah et al. 1985: 6). In this claim, they echo the concern of an earlier social critic, Philip Slater, who in The Pursuit of Loneliness (1970) contended that Americans were increasingly living “alone together.” However, as shall be seen below, they disagree with Slater about the solution – indeed, by the time they wrote their book, Slater’s explicitly utopian quest for community, which he thought found its most significant expression in the communes

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created by the 1960s youth counterculture, had taken on the quality of a period piece.

The work of Bellah and colleagues is an exercise in cultural analysis and not a study in social psychology. What they seek to sketch out are the implications of the triumph of a culture of modern individualism at the expense of two older traditions in American history: the biblical and the republican. Both of these traditions, albeit in different ways, stressed the obligations that individuals had to their communities, and in this way both contributed to the notion of an engaged citizenry committed to the commonweal. Bellah and colleagues point to two types of individualism – utilitarian and expressive – that have contributed to the erosion of both biblical and republican discourses. Although they don’t make the parallel, the former type looks very much like what political philosopher C. B. Macpherson (1964) called “possessive individualism,” which he under- stood to be a product of capitalism’s competitive marketplace. The latter in turn can be seen as an expression of the emergence of a therapeutic culture. In this regard, they do note that their understanding of expressive individualism is similar to Philip Rieff’s (1966) “psychological man,” who, he contends, is a manifestation of the “triumph of the therapeutic.” Bellah and his associates (1985: 311) think Rieff is on to something, but overstated the case.

With these two modes of individualism, the authors are prepared to explain what at first glance appears to be a paradox. Individualism is ascendant while at the same time Americans remain active in the public sphere. Indeed, they contend, “Americans are more engaged in voluntary associations and civic organizations than the citizens of most other indus- trial nations” (Bellah et al. 1985: 163). Why do they remain engaged in civic life even if the rationales provided by the biblical and republican tra- ditions exert less and less influence over the culture they inhabit? In answering this question, Bellah and his colleagues remained attentive to the accounts provided by the middle-class subjects they interviewed. What they discovered was that these individuals tended to explain their participa- tion in a wide variety of community organizations in terms of what it did for them. Rather than stating that they were involved because of a sense of obligation, be it religiously or politically derived, they instead explained their civic involvements as activities that made them feel good by offering a sense of meaning and self-expression. While there is no doubt that one can discover that underpinning their activism are lingering vestiges of biblical and republican values, the authors, nonetheless, voice concern that the turn towards inwardness that they detect is a product of the combined impact of utilitarian and therapeutic individualism.

Commitments are viewed as “enhancements of the sense of individual well-being rather than as moral imperatives” (Bellah et al. 1985: 47). In

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an implicitly Durkheimian analysis, without so identifying it, they describe a state of anomie in which an externally based, socially defined moral meaning is lacking. The consequence is that the culture is increasingly devoid of a language of commitment that manages to connect individuals to communities of memory. This lack of a discourse of commitment in turn erodes the identification of individuals to institutions. Given the centrality that religious institutions have played in American civic life, it is not sur- prising that the authors pay particular attention to religious life, highlight- ing what Thomas Luckmann (1967) some decades earlier had predicted: the increasing privatization of religious life. It also illustrates the distinc- tion that sociologist of religion Wade Clark Roof (1999) has made more recently between religiosity and spirituality. While the former entails com- mitment to and involvement in religious institutions, the latter is a far more private matter. In one of the most widely cited passages from Habits, the authors illustrate this privatization when they describe the religious faith of a woman they call Sheila Larson. She describes her faith as “Sheilaism,” explaining it in the following way: “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice” (Bellah et al. 1985: 221).

Individualism is evident not only in such manifestations of privatized religion, free from institutional entanglements, but, paradoxically, in reli- gious institutions as well. This is particularly evident in the dramatic growth of evangelical Christian mega-churches such as Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago and Lakewood Church in Houston, both of which have over 10,000 people attending Sunday services (Leland 2005). The format of these media-savvy churches is to treat worship as entertainment and to advertise their “product” in terms of what it can do for individuals. There is very little emphasis placed on duties to the church or obligations to the world at large or to those in need – the poor, the ill, and the outcast. Instead, the focus is on how the church might encourage members to enter into what the Lakewood Church website calls “a victorious Christian life,” a life outlined in a New York Times bestseller authored by the Senior Pastor Joel Osteen (who in an order of succession typical of such churches, took over from his father), titled Your Best Life Now. Far from the demanding otherworldly asceticism of predecessor fundamentalist religious bodies, the Willow Creeks and Lakewoods are steeped in an individualistic therapeutic culture that is quite at odds with orthodox Protestant theology. As such, their take on Christianity could not be further removed from what the martyred Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959) had in mind in The Cost of Discipleship. Indeed, he offers an apt characterization of these churches as purveyors of “cheap grace.”

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Defining the good society

Returning to Bellah and colleagues’ thesis, the moral discourse on citizen- ship is seen as revolving around three separate conceptualizations of poli- tics. The authors distinguish “the politics of community,” “the politics of interest,” and “the politics of nation” (Bellah et al. 1985: 200–1). The first is a consensual politics grounded at the local level, with the New England town meeting of the past being a paradigmatic expression. The problem with this form of politics is that it has appeared to work best in settings characterized by relatively small-sized communities that are basically homogeneous. Bellah and colleagues express concern about the capacity of this form of politics to function effectively in a large, highly complex, and heterogeneous nation-state.

The second refers to interest group pluralism, which entails competition among groups that pursue their own self-interest in a manner akin to behavior in the economic marketplace. Some theorists might argue that, as with the presumed working of the invisible hand in the competitive marketplace, so in the political arena the common good emerges out of intergroup competition. However, one can easily point to evidence that illustrates how self-interest decidedly works against the interests of the whole of society. While definitely part of the American political process, the politics of interest points to the obvious limitation of such an approach to the construction of a shared sense of communal identity.

The third conceptualization is concerned with those times that particu- lar interests give way to the “national purpose.” It tends to arise in times of crisis, with wars and national disasters being typical triggers (the “Dunkirk spirit,” in Marshall’s formulation). It is also often a symbolic form of politics. This could clearly be seen in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, when individuals across the United States, in rather spontaneous expressions of patriotism, began to fly flags from their motor vehicles. Such a politics tends to link the individual in an unmediated manner to national political leaders – but in a manner wherein the leaders make decisions and the citizenry is primarily passive.

Unlike Rousseau’s vision of the social contract, with its emphasis on the necessity of avoiding mediating institutions in the citizen’s relationship to the state, Bellah and colleagues concur with Tocqueville’s belief that medi- ating institutions between the individual and state are essential for a demo- cratic politics to prevail. In their view, such institutions serve two vital functions: “as moderating the isolating tendencies of private ambition on the one hand and limiting the despotic proclivities of government on the other.” They go on to note that, “Vigorous citizenship depends on the existence of well-established groups and institutions, including everything from families to political parties, on the one hand, and new organizations,

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movements, and coalitions responsive to particular historical situations, on the other” (Bellah et al. 1985: 212).

It is in The Good Society (1991), the sequel to Habits of the Heart, that Bellah and associates shift from an emphasis on cultural discourse to a focus on these essential groups and institutions. Indeed, the first chapter is entitled “We Live through Institutions.” Expressing some ambivalence about the communitarian label that some placed on Habits, the authors are nonetheless clear that increased citizen participation is necessary at the local and national levels (there are hints that they also see the need for such participation at the global level). They are equally clear that a political culture that places a premium on the autonomous individual, and that valorizes the market so much that it seeks to extend its logic into all facets of social life, and/or that relies too heavily on the procedural state, serves to undermine an informed and engaged citizenry (Bellah et al. 1991: 6).

This book is an explicit exercise in public philosophy in the tradition of Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly, and John Dewey. In brief, their argument is that radical individualism, and an acquisitive market economy that privileges private property over the public good, are the main factors con- tributing to the erosion of citizen involvement. Added to this, they are also concerned about the negative effects on participation caused by a highly bureaucratic welfare state that replaces democratic decision making with administrative decision making (theirs being a leftist critique that parallels the critiques surveyed in the preceding chapter). However, they are critical of those who would roll back the welfare state in an effort to establish a minimalist state that is solely concerned with protecting the society from its enemies, external and internal – the so-called “watchdog theory of the state”. In the authors’ view, “only an institutionally strengthened politics can renew real democracy,” and it would appear that a vibrant politics necessitates something other than a minimalist state (Bellah et al. 1991: 133).

A revival of citizen involvement calls for a transformation of the public sphere. Political parties are viewed as a key component of this revival, and their strengthening is treated as vital. Parties must gain greater control over campaign financing, at the expense of individual candidates, if the impact of powerful special interests is to be successfully reduced. At the same time, parties need to create policy institutes and other vehicles for the develop- ment and articulation of carefully crafted public policy agendas. The role of the media must be transformed if genuine political debate is to be pos- sible. One specific proposal offered by the authors is to ban all political advertisements on radio and television. In this way, the ground would be paved to replace the sound-bite campaign with one characterized by sub- stantive political debate. Another proposal calls for, on the one hand,

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greater localism (federalism, in their terms), and, on the other, a greater reliance on supranational organizations in the pursuit of global economic justice, security, and the promotion of human rights. Bellah and colleagues also call for a shift in the character of public debate that focuses less on private interests and more on the public good. Finally, they note that the revival they seek cannot occur without an educated citizenry, and they charge all of the major societal institutions with the task of creating an informed citizenry as part of a larger project in moral education (Bellah et al. 1991: 142–4).

We leave aside the issue of the likelihood that the sorts of transforma- tions they call for are at this historical moment politically viable (in the USA for certain, but elsewhere as well). It is useful to note that what is seen at root to be a problem brought about by the cultural ascendance of modern individualism has a solution that is not simply in the hearts and minds of the citizenry – though this is part of the solution they envision – but also requires a social structural solution. Lacking in this analysis is a critical assessment of the structural roots of modern individualism. As with other cultural traditions in America, the authors depict individualism as being grounded in American history, but never make clear in precisely what ways it is grounded or indeed how it came to be. Since theirs is in funda- mental ways a Durkheimian-inspired cultural analysis, one might look to his understanding of the division of labor in industrial societies for an explanation. However, no explicit effort is made in this regard to link their account to Durkheim.

Moreover, both works can be seen as a type of social criticism com- monly found in the social sciences, characterized by its averseness to an explicitly Marxist analysis that would place capitalism center stage (of course, one need not be a Marxist to so locate capitalism). Like the chil- dren’s book Where’s Waldo, the exegete can expend considerable time looking for capitalism in both Habits and The Good Society. To be sure, there are traces throughout both texts. Thus, there is a section in the latter work on “The Tyranny of the Market,” in which Bellah et al. (1991: 92–3) refer approvingly to economist Robert Heilbroner’s critical analysis of the increasing commodification of everyday life.

However, missing from the discussion is any effort to consider the inher- ent tension between the “possessive individualism” engendered by the capitalist market and the citizen concerned with finding a way to harmo- nize individual desires and needs with the promotion of the common good. Also missing is any consideration of the possibility that what has occurred over time is that the peculiar mentalité of the capitalist market has spread well beyond the economic sphere to shape the way people think about the rest of society, including the polity. In such a society it is possible to con- ceive of citizens being defined, not by participation in political decision

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making, but, as noted in the preceding chapter, as consumers. This is in part what social historian Lizabeth Cohen (2003) had in mind when she wrote about the emergence of a “consumers’ republic” (recall that in the aftermath of 9/11, George W. Bush’s injunction to Americans was twofold: remain vigilant and go shopping). The social criticism of Bellah et al. ought not to be seen as repudiating this possibility. Rather, it should be viewed as a criticism that, by concentrating on the cultural, is insufficiently atten- tive to social structural – particularly economic – factors.

ENTER PUTNAM

Bellah and colleagues did not question whether or not Americans continued to be a nation of joiners a century and a half after Tocqueville’s observa- tions. They assumed, without exploring empirically, that people continued to be engaged in the realm of civil society. This assumption was questioned in 1995, when Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam published an essay with the provocative title, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.” Putnam, himself an amateur bowler in his youth, begins with the observation that although more Americans are bowling than ever before, they are increasingly “bowling alone.” To be more precise, since people tend to go bowling with friends and family, they are not literally bowling alone. What they are not doing at the rates that Americans did a half-century ago is to bowl in organized leagues. This became a metaphor for the withdrawal from active engagement in civic life. It is also precisely what Tocqueville predicted would be the consequence of modern individualism.

The decline of social capital

However, Putnam’s analysis diverges from the Tocqueville/Bellah thesis insofar as it does not identify individualism as the primary causal factor contributing to a decline in civic involvement. Instead, he seeks to offer a historically grounded social structural explanation. Rather than a cultural approach, Putnam presents an institutional analysis of varying degrees and levels of civic engagement. This approach was evident in his earlier research on democracy in modern Italy that culminated in Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Putnam 1993). In that work, Putnam concerned himself with identifying the features that distinguished the civic vibrancy of the north of Italy from the anemic commitment to public life in the south. His argument hinges on the idea of social capital. Indeed, he is, along with James Coleman (1988–9, 1994) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986), primarily responsible for introducing the idea of social

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capital into the social sciences (Portes 1998; Lin 2001; Field 2003). Put- nam’s take on social capital differs significantly from these two theorists in one fundamental way. Both Coleman and Bourdieu viewed social capital in terms of the social networks that serve as potential resources for indi- viduals – resources that can be used in particular contexts to enhance their respective positions. As such, they treated it as a parallel concept to finan- cial and human capital. Putnam differs by viewing social capital not pri- marily as a resource differentially available to individuals but, rather, as a factor that contributes to cooperation and trust, both prerequisites for civic participation. Without totally dismissing the idea of social capital as a private good, his emphasis is clearly on the public good. In short, it is seen as a crucial variable shaping different levels of community involvement (Edwards and Foley 1998).

His version of this concept suggests that it “refers to features of social organizations, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993: 167). What this meant in the north of Italy was that a historically rooted sense of mutuality between governmental institutions and the civic realm facilitated the perpetuation of a situation wherein people were enticed to take an active role in public life. Key to the civic-mindedness of this region is the strength of secondary associations such as trade unions, mutual aid societies, churches, and the like. Concurring with Mark Granovetter’s (1973) “the strength of weak ties” thesis, Putnam contends that in contrast to the strong ties of intimate interpersonal relationships, the weak (and often cross-cutting) ties involved in membership in secondary associations facilitates those things necessary for active citizen participation in civic life: trust, mutuality, and appropriate norms of reciprocity. The precondi- tions for civic-mindedness are historically rooted, dating back as far as the medieval guilds (Putnam 1993: 127–9). The same factors that contribute to civic involvement also serve to explain why the north of Italy is the most economically dynamic and modern industrial region of the nation.

Putnam’s account of the south of Italy can be instructively compared with the characterization of that region offered several decades earlier by Edward Banfield (1958). Using the term “amoral familism,” Banfield sought to provide an explanation for the lack of civic involvement in south- ern Italy. In his account, the premodern folkways of “a backward society” served to explain why attachments to the public realm were so weak. It was not a product of individualism, a distinct product of modernity, but rather the result of the overarching capacity of one particular societal institution – the family – to weaken the efficacy of all other institutions. In other words, to use Lewis Coser’s (1974) terminology, the southern Italian family was a “greedy institution” that did not permit cross-cutting or competing allegiances to other institutions. Rather, it demanded a total

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commitment to family loyalties at the expense of attachments to civic institutions. This being the case, support for governmental institutions would be weak, as would trust outside the sphere of intimates. Putnam’s assessment focuses primarily on the nature of social capital in the north of Italy and its lack in the south, but his argument can be seen as parallel- ing Banfield’s insofar as the focus is on the role of social institutions in either facilitating or inhibiting civic engagement.

The “bowling alone” thesis

When Putnam turned his attention to the United States, the concept of social capital again framed his critical analysis of what he construed to be the steady decline in community involvement during the past several decades. The lack of civic participation is treated as the product of the erosion of social networks that link people to their communities, or, in other words, to the decline in social capital. In Bowling Alone (2000) he attempted to accomplish two things. First, he sought to offer empirical evidence that civic involvement is in fact declining, and, secondly, he attempted to identify the reasons for the decline. Based on the data he supplies, it would appear that there has been a dramatic decline in com- munity participation during the last quarter of the twentieth century. This is clearly the case with political participation. Not only do fewer Americans vote today than they did in the past, but in terms of other measures of political involvement, ranging from holding office in a club or organization to signing a petition, Putman (2000: 45) reports an overall decrease over a two-decade period of 25 percent.

Turning to civic organizations, Putnam notes that many organizations – including fraternal service organizations such as the Rotary Club and the mainstream civil rights organization, the NAACP – have experienced a substantial decline in membership. While he does note that some organiza- tions, such as Greenpeace, have grown during the same time period, he contends that these organizations are different insofar as they make no time claims on their members. Instead, they are essentially mail-order member- ships where “members” do no more than pay a membership fee, allowing a professional staff to conduct the business of the organization. A more revealing measure of decline in civic participation for Putnam is the reduc- tion in the number of hours Americans commit to organizational life. He reports that whereas Americans spent 3.7 hours per month working for community organizations in 1965, by 1995 the figure was 2.3 hours per month. Moreover, during this same time period, the percentage of Americans actively participating in such organizations declined from 7 to 3 percent (Putnam 2000: 62).

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High levels of religious involvement have long served to differentiate the United States from other advanced industrial nations, particularly the nations of Western Europe. Nonetheless, here too Putnam sifts through the findings of major studies concerned with trends in institutional mem- bership and regular attendance and concludes that since the 1960s there has been an approximately 10 percent decline in church membership and a far more precipitous decline in participation in various religious activities (ranging somewhere between 25 percent and 50 percent). Like Bellah and colleagues, Putnam attributes much of this erosion to the privatization of religion (Putnam 2000: 74–6). He detects a similar pattern in philan- thropic giving and volunteer work (Putnam 2000: 116–33).

Turning to potential countervailing trends, Putnam first examines work- place connections, pondering whether the fact that Americans are working longer hours might mean that they have transferred their civic involvements to that locus. With admittedly limited evidence available, he is uncon- vinced by this prospect (Putnam 2000: 90). More significant is the growth in membership experienced by a variety of groups – both self-help such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers, and the local chapters of advocacy groups such as the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Although Putnam does not discount these trends out of hand, he dismisses the idea that they reflect anything resembling a revival of civic participation.

At some level, he appears to harbor a (remarkably romantic) view that the main street businessman member of the local Rotary Club is the ideal typical example of the truly engaged citizen. In this regard, Garry Wills (2000: 15) has described Putnam’s perspective on the past as having a “roseate Norman Rockwell glow.” Thus, Putnam faults contemporary organizations for their highly volatile memberships and their heavy reli- ance on paid professional staff, neither of which suggests to him true staying power on behalf of the rank-and-file members. Finally, he is equally suspicious of the claims made by Internet enthusiasts about the capacity of computer-mediated communication to enhance and indeed to expand the prospects of organized public life (Putnam 2000: 148–80), though given the nascent character of “digital formations” it is perhaps premature to be quite so dismissive about the varied ways in which computer networks are shaping patterns of social relations (Latham and Sassen 2005).

Putnam’s discounting of the possibility that new forms of organizational life and virtual communities might serve as a counterfoil to the declines of more traditional civic involvement is at times strained. Thus, one com- plaint about newer organizations is that their membership rolls change rather dramatically. Implicitly, he appears to be arguing, following our earlier point, that the individual who joins the local Rotary and routinely

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attends its luncheon meetings over many years serves as the model of civic virtue, rather than the person who moves from organization to organiza- tion, treating them as ad hoc locations for addressing particular issues of vital and immanent concern. Putnam never seriously entertains the possi- bility that these “main street” organizations have decreased in size in recent decades simply because they have lost their raison d’être, with remaining members increasingly engaged in Merton’s (1968) sense of ritualistic behavior, going through the motions without a clear sense of organizational ends.

Likewise, the fact that organizations rely on professional staffs does not necessarily signal a reduction in the work or a devaluation of the contribu- tions of volunteers. Amnesty International is a case in point. Although the professional staff is responsible for much organizing and certainly for the investigative work of the organization, Amnesty could not function were it not for the efforts of local chapters composed of volunteers engaged in such activities as letter writing on behalf of prisoners of conscience and educational campaigns about human rights issues.

Moreover, as Putnam himself contends, American history ought not to be viewed as a narrative about the progressive loss of community, but rather as a matter of waves. Part of the problem with his analysis of the present is that he uses the 1950s and 1960s as the benchmarks by which to judge levels of civic participation without adequately exploring the extent to which this presumed golden age of civic involvement was unique in American history.

For these reasons we think it reasonable to conclude, as Bryan Turner (2001: 199) has, that although civic engagement has declined in recent history, nonetheless, “Individual involvement in voluntary associations, clubs and leisure groups is probably more robust than the Putnam thesis about the decline of social capital would suggest.” Turner’s assessment is given additional credence by the scholars assembled by Putnam himself in Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society (2002). Thus, Robert Wuthnow (2002: 75) concludes that “there has been some decline in social capital in the United States over the past two or three decades; however, evidence does not indicate that social capital has declined drastically or to radically low levels, nor does it show that social capital of all kinds has declined.” Similar patterns, along with the expected differences associated with differing historical national experiences, can be discerned in other chapters in the book that trace the recent fate of social capital in Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Australia, and Japan (see for example Hall 2002 on Britain).

Underlying Putnam’s thesis is a straightforward, and problematic, causal argument: high levels of social capital lead to high levels of civic involve- ment, which in turn lead to a vibrant democratic polity. Carl Boggs (2001:

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285) correctly contends that, “at no point does Putnam establish any con- nection between the social and political realms that would permit such far-fetched claims about the impact of SC.” Indeed, Boggs observes that voluntary organizations have managed to coexist with authoritarian politi- cal systems, and thus ought not to be viewed uncritically as bulwarks of democracy. Moreover, he argues that by ignoring the ideological content of organizations, Putnam underestimates the significance of the darker side of social capital as manifested in street gangs, religious cults, and an array of reactionary political movements that in combination represent a chal- lenge to a pluralist democracy (Boggs 2001: 286).

As many commentators have noted, and Putnam himself realizes, our understanding of many of the issues associated with civic engagement is limited by the quality of the empirical data we have available. More prob- lematic, we think, is Putnam’s account of the causes contributing to the erosion of civic engagement. He identifies four major potential causal factors: (1) time and financial pressures; (2) suburbanization, commuting, and urban sprawl; (3) television; and (4) generational succession. Contrary to scholars such as Arlie Hochschild (1997), who have written about the “time bind” of dual-career middle-class American families who are working longer hours than in the past, Putnam does not think that this change contributes significantly to decline. Rather, he concludes that time and money pressures contribute “no more than 10 percent of the total decline” (Putnam 2000: 283). What he fails to consider is evidence that there is a bifurcation between educated professionals, who are in fact working longer hours, and those less educated members of the workforce who are not (Gerson and Jacobs 2004). What makes this particularly significant is that the more affluent and higher-educated sectors of society have historically been more involved in civic activities than other sectors have been. It is precisely these individuals who confront the time bind most intensely, a factor that Putnam ignores by not adequately considering the significance of social class.

Putnam attaches only 10 percent of the blame to the spatial factors he associates with the geography of suburban communities and the fact that commutes are often longer than they once were due to sprawl. This leaves two primary culprits: television and generational change. In his estimation, television contributes to 25 percent of the erosion, while generational change is responsible for “perhaps half of the overall decline” (Putnam 2000: 283).

Television viewing is depicted as a manifestation of the privatization of social life, a technologically induced aspect of the Tocquevellian theme concerning the tendency to restrict social relations to the sphere of social intimates. Putnam is clear that television per se is not the culprit. Thus, viewers of PBS’s NewsHour and the BBC’s World Report are utilizing

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“television’s capacity to keep people informed about events in the larger world. However, a minority of television viewers actually watch this sort of programming. In contrast, large audiences watch the formulaic enter- tainment programs – the situation comedies, dramas, and, more recently, the proliferation of “reality” programs (an example of what Baudrillard calls “hyperreality” and Debord refers to as “spectacle”) – that constitute the bread and butter of the major networks’ schedule of programs. Putnam contends that there is a correlation between watching many hours of enter- tainment television and a lack of civic engagement. However, he fails to make a convincing case that correlation speaks to cause.

Generational succession refers to the differences in civic engagement on the part of the generation that came of age during World War II, the Baby Boomer generation, and Generation-X. The first is viewed as a particularly civic-minded generation (and thus is, according to former television news- reader Tom Brokaw [1998], “the greatest generation”), while the latter two are not. Though Putnam hesitates to draw the conclusion that the crisis condition of war may have played a decisive role in shaping the public involvement of the World War II generation, such a conclusion is difficult to avoid. In this regard, it is important to remember that World War II united the nation, whereas the Vietnam War, which was the decisive world event during the formative period of Baby Boomers, divided the nation and contributed to a legitimation crisis of the state. Watergate, of course, com- pounded that crisis. Thus, the watershed historical events shaping each of these two generations were very different.

Meanwhile, Generation-X lacked a similar potentially transformative event that its members needed to respond to in ways that would impact their futures. Instead, the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War were simply external events that did not require commitment or deci- sion on the part of this generation’s members. The very name given to this generation attests to the idea that something is missing and that their col- lective identity suffers as a result. They are portrayed as being devoid of something that their parents’ and grandparents’ generations had: a defining historical moment.

While there is no doubt much to be said for Putnam’s generational suc- cession argument, there are also elements of it that lead to a rather circular conclusion, one that suggests that the reason that the World War II genera- tion was more civic-minded than the generations of its children and grand- children was because it was more civic-minded. It is worth noting that Putnam does not ask why this generation was so unsuccessful in educating its offspring for civic responsibility, or indeed if and how they attempted to do so. To the extent that Putnam hesitates to define generations in terms of specific historical events, he needs to provide an account of larger struc- tural factors that serve to distinguish these three generations.

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This he does not do, because, as David Schultz (2002: 91) puts it, “Putnam’s approach situates the individual as the ontological center of democracy.” He does not explore the differential impact of groups on democracy. Nor does he consider the role of inequality. Portes (1998: 19) is not alone in pointing out the class bias of the thesis. Linked to this failure (as with Bellah et al.), and missing from his account, is an inquiry into the potential impact of capitalism. In this regard, Putnam’s analysis, too, is part of a line of liberal social criticism concerned with the erosion of public life that, as critics argue, can be viewed as tending to conflate intermediate and causal variables (Edwards et al. 2001). It is not that Putnam dismisses the potential role played by capitalism out of hand. However, what he has to say is revealing. He writes that, “Many grand masters of nineteenth- century social theory, from Georg Simmel to Karl Marx, argued that market capitalism had created a ‘cold society,’ lacking the interpersonal warmth necessary for friendship and devaluing human ties to the status of mere commodities” (p. 282).

The problem he finds with this line of thought is that “it explains too much,” insofar as market capitalism has been a characteristic feature of the United States for two centuries, during which time civic involvement has in cyclical fashion waxed and waned (Putnam 2000: 282). He agrees that one type of what he refers to as “economic determinism” (his choice of words is revealing in that a focus on the impact of the economic system seems to be equated with a crude mechanistic version of Marxist thought) is having an impact on the erosion of social capital: multinational corpora- tions and globalization. However, he qualifies his position by writing that its impact is chiefly experienced at the level of philanthropic and civic activities, questioning why it might affect “our readiness to attend a church social, or to have friends over for poker, or even to vote for president” (Putnam 2000: 283). This statement reflects a mixing of civic involvement with an activity – playing poker with friends – that by his definition quali- fies as “bowling alone.” To use the language he employs, we remain a nation of schmoozers (people who spend many hours in informal conversation and communion). The concern is that we are presumably no longer also a nation of machers (people who make things happen) (Putnam 2000: 93).

A more fundamental problem with Putnam’s general unwillingness to consider capitalism’s potential role in the decline of civic engagement is that he views capitalism as ahistorical. Foley and Edwards (1997: 551) refer to this as “the suppression of the economic dimension of contemporary social conflict.” We would contend that, more specifically, it is a suppres- sion of a genuine consideration of the role of capitalism in the “downsizing of democracy” (Crenson and Ginsberg 2004). In a footnote to the passage referring to Simmel and Marx, Putnam cites Daniel Bell’s The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1976) but does not explore his thesis. This

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book was a sequel to Bell’s influential The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (1973), where he contended that increasingly the economy, polity, and culture operate on the basis of distinct and at times antithetical “axial principles.” For the economy, it is instrumental rationality, which requires the control by a class of managerial and technical experts. The polity simultaneously is guided by principles that promote equality and the expansion of citizen involvement. Bell’s particular focus is on culture in the sequel. His thesis is that the culture shaken from the mooring of the Protestant ethic takes on an antinomian, hedonistic character, one that Bell (1976: 54), with the youth counterculture of the 1960s clearly in mind, depicts as a transition “from the Protestant ethic to the psychedelic bazaar.” From his perspective, the conflicts and tensions inherent in a postindustrial economy derive from the different and competing sets of normative expec- tations engendered by these axial principles.

Bell is anything but an economic determinist. Indeed, despite the book’s concern with the “cultural contradictions of capitalism,” he skirts the issue of the actual role that capitalism may have played in generating these con- tradictions. Instead, his thesis has something of a functionalist flavor in which the different institutional sectors of society operate with relative autonomy. Add to this the fact that his emphasis on industrial society rather than capitalism in much of his discussion has a Durkheimian ring rather than a Marxist one (indeed, like Bellah, Bell’s socialist youth pro- gressively yielded to a more mainstream sociological theorizing). Thus, he does not contend that democratic sensibilities arise from capitalism, but rather from the political sphere itself. Likewise, the cultural arena appears to generate its own axial principle sui generis.

Despite its problematic features, Bell was attentive to significant changes in capitalist industrial society, in particular: (1) the shift from competitive small firms to corporate capitalism; (2) the transformation of laissez-faire capitalism into an increasingly planned economy in which the polity becomes the “cockpit;” and (3) the move from a goods-producing society to the information society predicated on and organized around knowledge. Simply put, Putnam glosses over these changes.

More radical interpretations of the precise nature of the historical devel- opment of capitalism are simply ignored. Yet a consideration of these interpretations might reveal the necessity of according capitalism a critical role in the changes Putnam has chronicled. One especially relevant argu- ment is the “disorganized capitalism” thesis, which, as noted earlier, was developed independently by Scott Lash and John Urry (1987), on the one hand, and Claus Offe (1984), on the other. They contend that, begin- ning in the 1960s, around the time Bell was articulating his postindustrial thesis and the time that Putnam views as the start of the decline in civic involvement, capitalism entered a third historical stage of development.

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They describe the earliest period as liberal capitalism, characterized by laissez-faire policies. The second phase, shaped by Fordist production methods (embodied in the assembly line) and the management practices associated with Frederick Winslow Taylor, was the era of organized capitalism.

They argue that this stage has given way to disorganized capitalism in what many commentators have called the post-Fordist era. Contrary to Bell’s conviction that postindustrial society would require an increasingly interventionist state, which meant both the implementation of Keynesian economic policies and the administration of a welfare state designed to insure societal stability, Lash and Urry viewed the third stage as entailing a retreat from the social contract between capital and labor that had been erected in the post-World War II era. The Reagan and Thatcher regimes signaled a new relationship between the economy and society. Their neo- liberal policies involved a frontal assault on the welfare state that was seen as crucial to the Marshallian version of social citizenship. Such policies have since spread, with varying degrees of success, to other advanced industrial nations, including those with considerably more substantive welfare states.

The result, as Alain Touraine (2001: 9) has portrayed it, is a situation in which “the market has replaced the state as the principal regulatory force” not only in the economy but also throughout the rest of society. Touraine (1971), it might be recalled, articulated a leftist version of the postindustrial thesis, one that, in contradistinction to Bell’s, focused on the new system’s capacity for domination and for restricting freedom. Rather than sectors of society operating on the basis of their own discrete axial principles, he treated the economic system as shaping the cultural logic of the entire society. Others on the left share this view, including thinkers who in other respects are quite different from one another (Haber- mas 1975; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991).

Perhaps the person who comes closest to raising issues germane to Putnam’s thesis is Richard Sennett. In The Corrosion of Character (1998) he traces the implications of white-collar work in the era of the new capi- talism, in which a premium is placed on fluid workplaces and flexible workers. This is a world where corporations competing in the global mar- ketplace are increasingly unwilling to commit to their workers over the course of their careers. No longer are corporate giants such as IBM and GM willing to invest in workers, providing them with life-long job security, generous health benefits, and comfortable pensions. Rather, the order of the day is to downsize, ship work offshore, and employ workers on a tem- porary contractual basis, often treating them as self-employed and thus not entitled to fringe benefits. Sennett questions the impact of this new economic order on human character, particularly on the possibility of

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creating and sustaining an integral self linked to the capacity to trust and to enter into relationships predicated on loyalty and shared norms of reci- procity. In a society where the previous social contract (Rubin 1995) that shaped the relationships between business and labor has been called into question, Sennett contends (2006: 83–130) that workers, both blue- and white-collar, confront the “specter of uselessness.”

Sennett, of course, is writing about a phenomenon that has in recent decades begun to change the nature of work for the professional middle class. A similar phenomenon hit the working class earlier. Note the timing here, too, for what became known as deindustrialization, which Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison (1982: 6) defined as “the widespread dis- investment in the manufacturing sector,” took root at precisely the time that Putnam suggests civic participation began its decline. As tens of thou- sands of manufacturing jobs disappeared, due to their export to Third World nations or because of automation, union membership declined precipitously.

Putnam (2000: 81) discusses the decline in union membership since the 1950s, when a third of the workforce was unionized, to the end of the twentieth century when the figure had dropped to 14.1 percent. With his penchant for quantifying the impact of various causal variables, Putnam contends that the shift from an industrial to a service economy accounts for only one-fourth of the decline, and if other structural factors are added to this, only half of the decline can be explained. He identifies the primary reason for the decline as a result of the reduction in demand for unions on the part of workers. In other words, the primary reason that there are “fewer union members is because fewer workers want to join” (Putnam 2000: 82). His explanation for this erosion of demand is that workers today are as much a product of the “cult of the individual” as are the pro- fessional and managerial classes.

This account and explanation takes the form of an assertion rather than a conclusion based on empirical evidence. Putnam fails to seriously con- sider the possibility that employers played a significant, perhaps the most significant role, in undercutting the strength and size of unions. Yet it is clear that corporate capitalism, with the support of neoliberal administra- tions (somewhat more tacit in the case of the Clinton administration), has mounted an aggressive campaign against unions. As the labor movement’s base in the manufacturing sector eroded, major corporations in retail – led by the giant Wal-Mart – have relentlessly pursued anti-unionization cam- paigns. Indeed, Wal-Mart’s notorious opposition to unions is widely known, and given that they are at present the nation’s largest employer, paying lower wages than their competitors, they are seen as leading what some have termed the “race to the bottom.” Labor unions have been forced into a defensive posture whereby they are more likely to be discussing

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concessions to employers than demands for improved wages, benefits, and working conditions (Lichtenstein 2003; Milkman and Voss 2004).

Putnam does not consider whether differences in social capital vary according to class location, and up to the present no one has offered any empirical findings that would help to determine whether working-class Americans and middle-class Americans possess different stocks of social capital that in turn contribute to differing levels of civic engagement. However, in a different but parallel national context, precisely such a conclusion has been made by Yaojun Li, Mike Savage, and Andrew Pickles (2003), in their examination of changes in levels of social capital in England and Wales between 1972 and 1999. The authors conclude that, with some fluctuations, middle-class social capital and civic engagement have remained quite constant during this period, while the working class has experienced a marked decline.

That Putnam does not consider the class-based character of capitalism can account in part for a curious feature of his work that has not escaped reviewers: for all the concern about the decline of citizenship participation, the book is curiously optimistic (Chaves 2000; Hunter 2000). His is in many respects a quintessential American moral tale, one that suggests that if ordinary Americans would simply turn off their television sets and join a metaphorical bowling league, civic life could be revived, which in turn would revitalize democracy. This leads to a concluding point that returns full circle to Marshall. The discourse on the erosion of citizen involvement is largely silent about citizenship’s role in class abatement – in its capacity to mitigate the scope and the deleterious consequences of the inequalities produced by capitalism. Ariel Armony has made this case in a cross- national study that concludes that Putnam’s thesis concerning the relation- ship between social capital and civic engagement is a “dubious link.” Summarizing his conclusion, Armony (2004: 178–9) writes that:

After showing that the civil society thesis does not explain institutional quality – specifically when we try to predict the effectiveness of the rule of law at the institutional level – I test an alternative hypothesis: economic inequality, a key structural condition, accounts for the production of social capital and in turn explains the quality of democratic institutions across nations. . . . My findings show that participation in voluntary organizations does not predict institutional quality, and social trust does emerge as a strong predictor of democratic institutions that work effectively. But, as further analysis reveals, trust is dependent upon socioeconomic conditions that work adequately for some and not for others.

This finding, of course, links the topic discussed in the preceding chapter to the topic treated here, suggesting that the erosion of democratic rights and the withdrawal of civic engagement are intimately connected.

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THE THIRD WAY AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

If Putnam is silent about the impact of the ascendancy of neoliberalism precisely during the time that he sees an erosion of a vibrant participatory democracy occurring, such is not the case with Anthony Giddens’s (1998) effort to stake out what he describes as “the third way,” which he depicts as an alternative to neoliberalism and to the socialism of the “old” Left. He seeks to locate his position beyond the binaries of the old left/right dichotomy, contending that he seeks a “renewal of social democracy” from the vantage of the “radical center,” an idea that some critics have argued amounts to an oxymoron (Mouffe 1998). Giddens has been viewed as the intellectual architect of Tony Blair’s “New Labour” platform, serving not as a policy advisor but as the creator of the conceptual edifice that under- girds Blair’s attempted transformation of the Labour Party (Boynton 1997; The Economist 1999). That Blair’s New Labour project is in many respects in tatters, in no small part due to his involvement in the war in Iraq, need not concern us here since there is evidence to suggest that from the start his administration did not entirely subscribe to what Giddens had in mind. Rather, what we are interested in exploring is Giddens’s more general response to the rise of neoliberalism.

What precisely is “the third way” and what are its implications for citi- zenship? Although citizenship per se is not an explicitly defined topic in his thesis, Giddens shares a concern that the role of citizenship has been devalued, and that the question of rights and obligations needs to be rethought. He shares with the declensionist thinkers discussed above that, “Civic decline is real and visible in many sectors of contemporary societies, not just an invention of conservative politicians” (Giddens 1998: 78).

He begins his brief on behalf of the third way with the claim that after the fall of Soviet-style communism, the option of a command versus a market economy ceased to exist. Simply put, we have moved into an era where capitalism is the only viable option (Giddens 1998: 24). The question then revolves around the fate of social democracy in a situation where it can no longer be linked to socialism – which Giddens views first and fore- most as a system in which the state plays a critical role in economic man- agement (Giddens 1998: 7). But it is not simply Soviet-style command economies that Giddens criticizes. He appears to be little enamored of the mixed economies of what was seen in an earlier time period as “the middle way,” namely the democratic socialist Scandinavian countries (Childs 1936). In this discussion, Giddens appears prepared to concede much to neoliberal economic policies. If state-owned industries are anathema in the new order, then one assumes that privatization of, for example, public transportation systems is acceptable, and perhaps even desirable, in the third way.

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In Giddens’s view (1998: 7–11), the classical model of social democracy is anachronistic. He disagrees with this model’s encouragement of a state that dominated economic life and civil society. He is not sure that the cradle-to-grave welfare state – the so-called “nanny state” in the par- lance of neoliberal critics – is the route to the future, and he is concerned about the low level of ecological consciousness that characterized this perspective. By privileging the bureaucratic state, the classical model fos- tered a situation in which citizen participation levels declined as citizens increasingly came to view themselves as instrumental consumers of social rights.

This being said, the third way is posed as a revisionist social democratic platform that is intended to challenge key features of neoliberalism (of course, Giddens has in mind the Thatcherite legacy, which constituted the most radical neoliberal agenda promoted in any of the advanced industrial nations). In his view, neoliberalism demands a minimalist state, its social welfare function replaced in many regards by a free-standing and strong civil society. At the same time, it promotes both what he refers to as “market fundamentalism” and a very traditionalist moral authoritarian- ism. It accepts inequality as inevitable and perhaps even desirable, while like its classical social democratic counterpart, exhibits a low ecological consciousness (Giddens 1998: 11–14). Its understanding of obligations tends to revolve around the notion of personal responsibility, which is the flip side of the assault on the idea of social rights.

According to Giddens, a central shortcoming of market fundamentalism is that it creates unacceptable levels of inequality. The third way, like its earlier social democratic counterpart, supports egalitarian principles. Giddens (2000b: 89) writes in a Fabian Society publication, “An emphasis on equality, it should be made clear, still presumes redistribution of wealth and income.” As such, the third way supports a limited version of meri- tocracy, one that is prepared to impose limits on the levels of inequality that meritocracy inevitably yields. However, it is not clear how he thinks redistribution ought to be achieved. In an article in the New Statesman, he exhibits a lack of enthusiasm for progressive taxation policies as a major tool for combating inequality, and in fact seems rather supportive of supply-side policies (Giddens 1999: 27).

Still, he offers the third way as an antidote to neoliberalism. In making his case, he begins by pointing to an inherent contradiction in neoliberalism that has implications for the vibrant civil society it claims to promote. Neoliberalism advances the claims of both market fundamentalism and the conservatism that it sees residing in traditional communities. As Giddens points out – something Marx was equally aware of a century and a half earlier – capitalism is the great destroyer of tradition and community. Thus, to the extent that neoliberalism facilitates the functioning of an increasingly

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unregulated market capitalism, it places at risk both traditional values and the community structures that make civil society viable.

Critics have argued that the third way does not actually constitute an alternative to neoliberalism so much as it represents a tepid middle-of-the- road approach that, while perhaps blunting the excesses of neoliberalism, is in some fundamental ways complicit with its goals of weakening the state and strengthening the dominance of the market (Faux 1999; Callinicos 2001). If the Blair and Clinton administrations come closest to a third way politics, critics would appear to have a good case in arguing that it amounts to neoliberalism “lite.” Touraine (2001: 91), for example, sees it as too centrist and focused too much on market deregulation and economic growth and too little on redistributive politics; he contends, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that he would prefer a two-and-a- half way.

However, again, our focus is on the theoretical argument and not on actual political practices that operate with differing levels of commitment to the idea. Giddens contends that the third way is actually concerned with effecting a revival of social democracy and as such constitutes in reality a new politics of the left (though at times Giddens can be confusing on this score, particularly when he writes about moving beyond old received notions of right and left). In a recent attempt to update the idea of the third way, Giddens (2003) has issued a “progressive manifesto” in which he argues that rather than being a middle way, the third way is intended to transcend both the Old Left and neoliberalism. At the same time, it is seen as advancing a progressive agenda that is rooted in the politics of the left and not the right.

The third way makes its claim to be social democratic by first addressing the significance of civil society, particularly vis-à-vis the state. It does so by contending that civil society – that institutional realm of social interac- tion based on a sense of cooperation, loyalty, trust, and civility – requires a state committed to advancing and expanding democracy, performing duties well beyond the minimalist requirements of neoliberalism. Indeed, Giddens expresses concern about a situation wherein a powerful civil society confronts a weak state, for in his view an effective state is a neces- sity – à la Marshall – in reducing the inequalities generated by a market economy and alleviating the problems they generate. He is quite clear on this point, writing, “If left to its own devices, markets produce too much inequality and too much insecurity. The task of government is to reduce these, and to provide resources that will allow individuals to cope with those that remain” (Giddens 2002: 35). Civil society cannot be expected to accomplish this task. Its purpose is different, serving first and foremost as a public sphere or forum wherein citizens can enter as equals to debate

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the major issues of the day and to participate in constructing a shared vision of community.

Thus, Giddens envisions a symbiotic relationship between the state and civil society, and likewise between the state and a market economy. A strong civil society is necessary for both democracy and a successful market economy (Giddens 2000b: 29). In effect, what he calls for is a keenly calibrated balance amongst these three sectors of society. If the Old Left’s endorsement of the welfare state privileged the state over the other two sectors, and the market fundamentalism of neoliberalism privileged the economy, Giddens is definitely not suggesting that civil society ought to trump the polity and the economy. He does not believe that the volun- tary associations of civil society alone are capable of making democracy work (Cohen 1999). Indeed, he notes that if civil society is too powerful, particularly vis-à-vis the state, it can lead to serious problems. Pointing to the example of Northern Ireland, what is of particular concern is the destructive potential of sectarian communal allegiances (Giddens 2002: 37). Rather, he argues that the three realms must operate in tandem in the promotion of a pragmatic democratic politics.

Giddens’s central thesis is twofold. First, the problem with contempo- rary liberal democracies is not, as conservatives such as Huntington, Crozier, Luhmann, and others would have it, that there is too much democ- racy, but rather that there is too little. In other words, third way politics seeks to deepen and expand democracy. He is not concerned with the democratic distemper, but with democratic anemia. This means that it is necessary not only to seek policies that make the polity more democratic, but also to penetrate into other spheres of life. He writes, for instance, of the need to democratize the family. Somewhat curiously, he does not explicitly address the need to make economic decision making more demo- cratic. However, he is clear about one thing: a vibrant civil society is neces- sary for the working of, to borrow the term from Benjamin Barber (1984), “strong democracy.” Second, the problem with inequalities of various sorts is that they lead to social exclusion, which limits the ability of some to participate fully as equals in the practice of democracy. Thus, the third way is committed to reducing levels of inequality. In contrast to the state- centered approach of Old Labour, with its advocacy of the welfare state, the politics of the radical center calls for the creation of a “social invest- ment” state, one that is intended to equip individuals with the human capital necessary to be autonomous citizens rather than dependent clients. As he put it, “In place of the welfare state we should put the social invest- ment state, operating in the context of a positive welfare society” (Giddens 1998: 117). More recently, Giddens (2003: 13) has suggested that the earlier version of the third way, which focused on the enabling state, must

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be complemented by the “ensuring state,” one that is not simply designed to prepare people to be autonomous, but is also prepared to recognize that it “has obligations of care and protection for citizens, and that some of these obligations should be provided as guarantees.”

In arguing that a third way politics seeks to link rights and obligations in a way that the older version of social democracy did not insofar as it focused primarily on rights, or neoliberalism does not due to its focus on duties, Giddens seeks to be sensitive to those factors that limit rights and impede the fulfillment of responsibilities. As Thomas Janoski (1998: 45) has pointed out, Giddens is not entirely clear about what he means by rights or how he construes the interconnection between rights and obliga- tions. However, he is clear that citizen mobilization is necessary if the sort of civil involvement called for by Bellah et al., Putnam, and others is to occur. To his credit, unlike Putnam, he sees this as a political project and not as a matter of attitude realignment. In advancing his argument, Giddens takes us full circle. Alan Ryan (1999) has noted that a parallel to Giddens’s position can be found in the ethical liberals of a century ago, such as T. H. Green and Leonard Hobhouse (Giddens 2000b: 86).

It is also the case that Giddens’s position has a distinctly republican flavor, with its emphasis on duties tied to rights. His views dovetail with those of republican political theorists such as Norberto Bobbio and Maurizio Viroli. Thus, he would likely concur with them when they write:

The ideals of republicanism are alternatives to the right’s cultural models. Whereas political movements and parties of the right invoke the idea of liberty as the absence of impediments to individual action, supporters of republicanism proclaim that true political freedom is emancipation from forms of domination or, in other words, emancipation from dependency on the arbitrary will of other individuals. (Bobbio and Viroli 2003: 2)

We would add that Giddens’s work can appropriately be viewed as a recasting of the Marshallian thesis and a fusing of that thesis with the themes of the earlier-discussed declensionists. At the same time, Giddens moves the discussion forward. He does so, first, by being cognizant of the impact of globalization (Giddens 1998: 129–53; Giddens 2000b). In this regard, writing in that decade-long interregnum between the collapse of communism and the events surrounding 9/11 and its aftermath, he describes the prospects of a newly conceived democratic state, one without enemies (a notion Carl Schmidt could not imagine). His brief discussion is tantaliz- ing but theoretically underdeveloped. Second, he sees the need to rethink the boundaries and with it received notions of inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, he insists that the third way is intent on promoting inclusionary policies. Of particular significance is what this means for women, racial

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and ethnic minorities, and immigrants – topics neglected by the figures we have so far examined. In introducing this topic, he describes with little elaboration the prospects of forging cosmopolitanism in a pluralist democ- racy. Moreover, given his contributions elsewhere to discussions of global- ization (Giddens 2000a), he opens up a dialogue about citizenship as a mode of belonging that might transcend the nation-state. It is precisely these concerns that we turn to in the following chapter.

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