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Civil Society

1750–1914

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann



CIVIL SOCIETY

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Editors' Preface

The main purpose of this new series of studies is to make available to teacher and student alike developments in a field of history that has become increasingly specialized with the sheer volume of new research and literature now produced. These studies are designed to present the 'state of the debate' on important themes and episodes in European history since the sixteenth century, presented in a clear and critical way by someone who is closely concerned with the debate in question.

The studies are not intended to be read as extended bibliographical essays, though each will contain a detailed guide to further reading which will lead students and the general reader quickly to key publications. Each book carries its own interpretation and conclusions, while locating the discussion firmly in the centre of the current issues as historians see them. It is intended that the series will introduce students to historical approaches which are in some cases very new and which, in the normal course of things, would take many years to filter down into the textbooks and school histories. We hope it will demonstrate some of the excitement historians, like scientists, feel as they work away in the vanguard of their subject. The series has an important contribution to make in publicizing what it is that historians are doing and in making history more open and accessible. It is vital for history to communicate if it is to survive.

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Introduction: Democracy and Civil Society

Like many liberal-minded young gentlemen of the time, Hervé de Tocqueville sympathized with the Revolution that was brewing in 1789. When the first regiments of émigrés formed in Brussels, however, he was automatically drafted, and later he returned to Paris to join Louis XVI's constitutional guard. On the morning of 10 August 1792, he set off with the section of the National Guard from his quarter to defend the Tuileries. 'But *en route*', as his biographer André Jardin describes, 'numbers of proletarians mingled with the bourgeois contingents and caused the feeling toward Louis XVI to alter' [13: p. 5]. Tocqueville felt obliged to flee Paris to escape the furore of revolution. The following year he lived quite happily in the French countryside – despite the Reign of Terror in Paris. He got married to Louise Le Peletier de Rosambo, granddaughter of Malesherbes, the famous enlightened reformer and defender of the King before the Convention. But the family idyll at the Malesherbes estate, where the newly wed couple took residence, came to a sudden and brutal end on 17 December 1793. Two workers, members of the local revolutionary committee, arrived at Malesherbes and, in the name of the General Security Committee of the Convention, arrested the whole family and escorted them to Paris. Then things started happening quickly. On 20 April 1794 Monsieur de Rosambo, Louise's father, was executed; the next day, Malesherbes himself followed. Hervé de Tocqueville and his wife waited in prison for their turn. A tearful Louise hummed songs to herself for the beheaded King and lost forever her emotional stability; Hervé woke one morning to find that his hair had gone completely white at

age 22. Miraculously, though, the 9 Thermidor – Robespierre’s fall from power and the end of Terror – saved them from the guillotine.

Almost four decades later, their son Alexis de Tocqueville, born in 1805, went together with his friend Gustave de Beaumont on a passage to North America. Like his father, who was appointed prefect of Maine-et-Loire by the restoration government, Alexis worked for the administration. The initial idea for the journey was to study the American system of penal incarceration. Eventually, however, Tocqueville would find himself on a very different endeavour: a journey into modern democracy, on which he would study the advantages and dangers it entailed for the political fate of his own country.

It is ironic that this travelogue of a French aristocrat and representative of ‘old Europe’ became one of the canonical texts of American democracy. Even today, American politicians and social scientists rely on *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840, to support their arguments. One aspect of Tocqueville’s political theory has received particular attention: his conviction that voluntary associations are the bedrock of American democracy [21; 22]. In fact, Tocqueville’s belief in an intrinsic connection between civic activism and democracy is still the central point of reference for most contemporary theories of civil society.

Tocqueville marvelled at the way Americans – in contrast, he thought, to continental Europeans – participated in countless associations and thereby breathed life into their democracy. Instead of appealing to a state authority to solve their problems, Americans founded an association, taking their lives into their own hands and working for the common good. For these reasons, freedom of association, even more than freedom of the press, was, for Tocqueville, one of the most important political rights. It is the practical advantage an active citizenry brings to a polity – in addition to the freedom of commerce and the press and the right to property and free elections – that contemporary political theorists attribute to ‘civil society’.

But Tocqueville was interested in more than the associations’ purely practical significance. Tocqueville continued the tradition in classical political theory that investigates the impact a form of government has on its citizens and their virtue and measures the quality of the government accordingly. His primary concern was not

just the political constitution of a polity, but rather the ‘constitution of the souls’ the polity produces. In other words, he was concerned with the social and moral basis of politics and, hence, of democratic governance.

Tocqueville considered human feelings and the process of their formation more significant for politics than rationally thought-out rights and interests. He was convinced that ‘states were not defined by their laws, but rather from their origins by the feelings, thought processes, ideas, and hearts and minds of their inhabitants’ [letter dated 26 October 1853, cited in 11: p. 395] As an ‘aristocratic liberal’, Tocqueville shared scepticism about the coming democratic age with his contemporaries John Stuart Mill and Jacob Burckhardt [14]. He considered himself, in the words of Wilhelm Hennis, an ‘historian of the soul’, an analyst of the order and disorder of human souls in the age of democracy [11: p. 402]. The decisive question for Tocqueville was how to avoid, particularly in a democracy, the impoverishment of citizens’ souls that would lead to despotism. The Terror of the French Revolution was never far from his thoughts.

Tocqueville saw an answer to this danger in voluntary associations. According to Tocqueville, only in sociable interaction could people develop their ideas and enlarge their hearts. This interaction, which was subordinated to strict rules in corporate societies, had to be brought to life voluntarily in a democracy – something only associations could bring about. Tocqueville believed that the most significant associations in this regard are those that remain purely sociable and exist to improve their members’ mores and manners and to enrich their emotional lives. Such associations are much more significant than those that promoted explicitly political or commercial purposes. Only those associations that are – at least at first glance – non-political and above special interests can free their members from selfishness and create new bonds in modern, egalitarian societies. These are precisely the bonds (*liens*) that play such an important role in Tocqueville’s political thought. ‘Among the laws that rule human societies’, writes Tocqueville, ‘there is one that seems more precise and clearer than all others. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them in the same ratio as equality of conditions increases’ [23: p. 492]. Conversely, he thought, if the bonds between individuals loosen, democracy’s political foundation will erode. The less citizens practise the art of association, the greater

the toll on their civility and the greater likelihood that equality will degenerate into despotism.

In an apocalyptic vision, Tocqueville describes a democratic society no longer supported by citizens' sociability:

I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who resolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others: his children and his particular friends form the whole human species for him; as for dwelling with his fellow citizens, he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone, and if a family still remains for him, one can at least say that he no longer has a native country. Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood.

[23: p. 663]

As strange as this political belief may seem today, it was quite familiar to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'practitioners of civil society' (Isabel V. Hull) on both sides of the Atlantic. This is the central finding that is emerging from the recent historical scholarship on European civil society before 1914. The high (and widespread) esteem of voluntary associations was not just an American phenomenon, and neither was Tocqueville's preoccupation with the subject something peculiar to him. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practitioners of civil society on both sides of the Atlantic never doubted the intimate connection between sociability, civic virtue, and politics. The emphasis on sociability and civic virtue was part and parcel of an entangled history of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European and transatlantic world.

Following the American historian Philip Nord, we can discern four phases between the Enlightenment and World War I in the transnational spread and entanglement of civil societies: the

heyday of enlightened sociability, culminating in the French Revolution of 1789 (Chapter 1); a second phase, between the 1820s and the Revolutions of 1848/49, considered by historians as the 'golden era' of voluntary associations (Chapter 2); a third phase, in the 1860s and 1870s, that is characterized by liberalization, nationalization, and, hence, democratization of associational life (Chapter 3); and, finally, the period between 1890 and 1910, in which associative sociability dramatically surged and the expansion, density, and differentiation of European civil societies reached its high point, but also the first signs of crisis (Chapter 4) [20: pp. xiii–xxxiii]: The conclusion presents a short epilogue on the history of civil society in the 'new thirty years war' (Raymond Aron) since 1914 and a summary of the main arguments.

Each one of these phases clearly had distinct features and paradoxical outcomes, both of which will be illuminated in detail in what follows. However, it is important to keep in mind that sociability and the connected moral and political ideas of civil society transcend any one decade or society of the nineteenth century. In this they very much resembled other tendencies of that century like, for example, the popularization of the sciences, the impulse for moral improvement by social reform, or the rise of nationalism, all of which were based in voluntary associations.

This transnational perspective on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civic activism has for too long been obscured by historiographical traditions that remained within the confines of the nation-state paradigm. Civil society and sociability served as examples for the superiority of American democracy (and implicitly of Britain's political culture) over the political culture of the authoritarian and state-centred continental European societies. This line of reasoning, too, has its roots in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. The lack of an associational culture, particularly in France, was for him a sign of the absence of civic sources in European societies. Tocqueville's view of American society was that of a French aristocrat engaged in analysing the dangers that democracy, which he thought would inevitably come, held for the old European social order. This vantage point prevented Tocqueville from perceiving the degree to which voluntary associations were already transforming the old regimes on the European continent at the very time he was writing *Democracy in America*. As a Parisian aristocrat, the sociability of local civil society in the French provinces,

where voluntary associations were highly popular, was not part of his experience, nor even conceivable. Because Tocqueville was so preoccupied with the state, he could not fathom the essential characteristic of voluntary associations: that they are rooted in local society. ‘Gentlemen’s clubs, choral groups, learned societies and other associations were all predominantly provincial’, as Carol E. Harrison has shown. ‘In the case of associative sociability, Paris was not the best vantage point for the observation of French society’ [10: pp. 41–2]. The fact that freedom of association was often restricted shows how uneasy the state felt about the sociable ambitions of its citizens, but it does not reveal the true extent of urban sociability. Maurice Agulhon’s observation that throughout the nineteenth century a sociable civil society coexisted with a hostile state holds true not only for France [1]. Ironically, there is much better documentation for the activities of the voluntary associations in Europe than in the United States, thanks to dossiers kept by authorities suspicious of associations.

The preoccupation with the role of the state in European societies prevented Tocqueville (and, with lasting effects on the political theory of ‘civil society’, his contemporaries Hegel and Marx) from grasping the impact voluntary association had not only on American society but on continental European as well. This might be one reason why there are, to this day, no comparative studies on this issue. Moreover, most scholarship on voluntary associations written in the 1960s and 1970s is informed by social and not political or intellectual history. Associations were studied as sites of class formation, in particular of the middle class, or, in Marxist parlance, the ‘bourgeoisie’. Eighteenth-, and to a greater degree, nineteenth-century associational life was interpreted as a means by which the ‘middle class’ appropriated and exercised power. Now, however, thanks to numerous research projects on the associational culture of the middle class of North America and Western Europe, and more recently on that of Central Europe and Russia, we have a much more empirical image of civil society in those countries. Still, the tenacious assumption that there is a close connection between the middle class, liberalism, and voluntary associations has obscured the fact that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century societies, which did not have a strong middle class, could nevertheless possess a lively associative sociability and, hence, a civil society. By focusing more on the actual practices and ideas of

the eighteenth and nineteenth century and less on presentist political assumptions, we also gain a deeper understanding of the *longue durée* of early modern political discourse and its transnational scope. Ideas and practices like sociability are not bound to a specific class and its interests. Sociability was popular within the educated elites of Eastern Europe, where there was no strong middle class, as well as among the lower classes of Western Europe.

The following account is the first attempt to reconstruct the entangled history (*histoire croisée*) of civil society in the United States, Great Britain, France, the German states, including the Habsburg Monarchy, and Russia [on the concept of a *histoire croisée* see 25]. Its central argument is based on the premise that ‘civil society’ must be understood as a category with its own history, both conceptually and in practice. I am interested in the entanglements between nations, not the differences that were of obsessive interest for nationalists in the last two centuries; in the contingent outcome of this process, and not the construction of a ‘normal’ Western path to modernity. Instead, I will illuminate the astonishing history of entanglements and variations of ideas and practices, which originated in several countries and regions simultaneously, and had similar intellectual and cultural origins as well as quite different political effects.

Such an attempt to reconstruct the history of civil society in its transnational entanglements must limit its scope:

1. There is an abundance of research on the United States and Britain and their associational cultures with the implicit argument about the ‘civil’ nature of these societies. To ignore this scholarship by constructing an ingeniously European history seems absurd. Tocqueville and his European contemporaries had America and England in mind when they discussed the nature of civil society. Since the 1970s historians of France and Germany have rejected the traditional argument that French and German societies lacked an associational culture and, hence, a civil society. And since the 1990s, the historiography on the Habsburg and Russian Empires has discovered an astonishingly similar history of civic activism and traditions of civil society in states that were not democracies. Precisely because this research is rather new and tentative, this book will place a special emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe. Still,

a work of synthesis cannot correct completely an unbalanced state of research. Historical scholarship becomes thinner as we move from West to East, and there is no single synthesis of the history of civic associations for any one of these societies, not even the United States. Furthermore, there are very few monographs on the transnational transfer of ideas, practices, and practitioners of civil society in the two centuries before World War I.

By focusing less on canonical authors and their vision of civil society and by abandoning the idea that civil society is based on the formation of the middle class, we can discern civic sources outside Western Europe and North America. The surge of interest in contemporary political thought on democratic renewal is producing a growing literature that discusses the nature of civil society in former colonial societies [see, for example, 6; 15]. It is important to note that the tradition of European imperialism (for example, of civic associations with colonial ambitions) is part and parcel of the kind of entangled history suggested in this book [26].

However, historical scholarship on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe has, for the last two decades, been more concerned with revising notions that are rooted in the Cold War and presuppose a fundamental difference between East and West, in particular with respect to the absence of civic traditions in Central and Eastern Europe [see, for example, 7; 5; 2; and on the roots of a stereotypical image of Eastern Europe in Enlightenment discourse, 27]. It is this distorted image that this book attempts to correct, without romanticizing the workings of civil society in the past as was common in the Central and Eastern European political debates on the subject in the 1980s and 1990s.

2. What ‘civil society’ encompasses is contested in contemporary political theory. Here I focus on associative sociability, the one element that most political theorists agree is essential for civil society and which, as we have seen in the discussion of Tocqueville, was at the heart of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political discourse. However, not all forms of sociability can be compared on a transnational level over two centuries.

Following Tocqueville’s distinction between *les associations politiques et industrielles* and *les associations intellectuelles et morales*, only the latter will be discussed in detail. The history of political associations belongs to the history of the emergence of parties

as political agents, and the history of commercial and industrial associations to the history of global-market society – both subjects that deserve their own textbooks. In what follows, then, the term ‘association’ will designate associations that pursue sociability and ‘civic’ imperatives. Similar to today’s nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which form what might be called global civil society, these associations are defined as non-state, nonprofit, nonviolent, and non-ecclesiastical [12; 16]. This does not mean, though, that they were not inspired by state, commerce, war, and religion. Further defining characteristics are the adoption of formal rules (entrance, statutes, elections, etc.), the equality of members, the self-proclamation of goals (in most cases for moral improvement), and their voluntary nature. As has been noted by social historians, voluntary entry (and exit) and equality set associations apart from early modern corporations, where members and their rights were decided solely by birth and/or rank [19: p. 174]. Informal sociability in aristocratic salons and bourgeois families, English coffeehouses and Russian tea-rooms, and in national celebrations and cosmopolitan spas also form part of this history but can be touched on only in passing.

3. Finally, this book places special emphasis on the historical tension between civil society and democratic practice. Civic activism has been the subject of historical research on the emergence of class, gender, and ethnic conflicts and the contested rise of the public sphere [for the ‘public sphere’ see 8; 3; 4; and as a recent example for the usefulness of the concept, 18]. Because they were intrinsically connected to voluntary associations, these conflicts will be discussed in what follows. As associational culture expanded, however, these conflicts accelerated and came to define the decisive political problem of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civil societies: participation and exclusion. Civic activism was intrinsically connected to democratic practices *and* elitist presumptions.

Tocqueville and his liberal contemporaries were concerned most of all with the workings and dangers of democracy. In fact, ‘civil society’ in our present understanding was not a common concept in the various European and Anglophone political cultures [17; 9] of Tocqueville’s time. For most educated elites, self-government meant, first and foremost, government of the self, that is, social and moral self-fashioning and restraint, to be

learned and experienced in social interaction with other respectable men – in contrast to the ‘tyranny of the majority’. Conversely, the idea and practice of sociability became immensely popular in the course of the century with the ‘majority’, that is, those excluded from these elite circles, thereby gaining new political meanings. To put it pointedly, one could say that nineteenth-century men (and, increasingly, women) had their first democratic and civic (but not necessarily ‘middle-class’) experiences predominantly in voluntary associations, with all their statutes, elections, offices, committees, speeches, rituals, rules, minutes, and courts. In a time when most continental European states were constitutional monarchies and not republics, associations served – from the 1830s at the latest – as schools of democracy.

To place the tension between democracy and civil society at the centre of this history offers the chance to discuss historical problems that are usually compartmentalized by historians. For nineteenth-century political discourse, ‘democracy’ and the ‘nation-state’ were, in contrast to present discussions of civil society, intrinsically linked. One could not be achieved without the other. Nationalism was organized in voluntary associations that claimed democratic participation in local or national politics. The politics of national, social, or confessional belonging contributed to the dynamism of associational life in the second half of the nineteenth century. Any attempt to historicize the connection between democratic practice and civic association needs to take the nationalism of the time into account: it is neither ‘civilized’ nor ‘barbaric’, ‘modern’ nor ‘backward’, but bound to the history of civil society.

Placing the tension between ‘democracy’ and ‘civil society’ at the conceptual centre of this book will help to illuminate the paradoxes of civil society between the Enlightenment and the Great War: the varying forms of exclusion, which were matched by demands for participation that induced new associations and political movements; the limits of liberalism, which considered ‘democracy’ dangerous and believed society was better served by a virtuous elite who speaks in the name of those without wealth and education; and the rise of nationalism, which promised more participation and eroded social exclusivity and traditional loyalties but could, at the same time, erect new, insurmountable political divisions [24].

I Sociable Society: Enlightened Sociability from Boston to St Petersburg

In his diary, the eighteenth-century Russian civil servant Aleksei Il'in devoted considerable space to his Moscow and St Petersburg sociable pursuits in the mid-1770s. Like many young gentlemen of his day, Il'in attended numerous assemblies, concerts, masquerades, and music clubs; he went strolling in Moscow's Golovinskii Park in search of chivalrous encounters with young females, was introduced by his brother Petr to the exclusive English Club, accepted multiple dinner invitations every week, read and discussed the latest journals with close friends, and visited a wide variety of Masonic lodges in both cities. His social life, similar to that of the educated European elite of his time, exemplified what historians aptly call the 'sociable century' [60: p. 115].

In the mid-eighteenth century a plethora of new forms of sociability – beyond the traditional bonds of family, state, court, and the established church – arose in the cities of the European-controlled world. In contrast to those older forms, voluntary entry was the most important criterion for the new clubs, Masonic lodges, and reading, charitable, and learning societies. Socially open in theory, the new institutions gave themselves formal rules, rituals, and constitutions, assumed the equality of their members, and formulated common goals, in most cases in the realm of moral improvement. Members were to learn to govern themselves, their interests, and passions, and to shape, both morally and politically, all of society on their example – pleasure and politics were intrinsically connected. Though many of the old elites belonged to these sociable circles, the demand for self-fashioning

and enlightenment implicitly called the political order of the old regime into question. Moreover, sociability brought together local and foreign educated elites and often transcended confessional boundaries, especially, but not exclusively, within Christianity.

This fundamental characteristic of eighteenth-century sociability to transcend traditional boundaries made it into a political issue. To be sure, enlightened sociability had its precursors in the guilds, academies, and Protestant sects of the Middle Ages, and as the example of the lodges shows, these new forms of sociability often imitated their forerunners' rituals and symbols. The religious associations shaped by the Catholic Reformation (*confréries*) and the penitent confraternities (*pénitents*) common in southern France likewise already manifested association-like features [28; for early modern associational forms in Germany, 45] However, enlightened sociability promised something new: a voluntary assembly of individuals that transcended state, estate, and confession and hoped to improve all of humanity. Thus the seemingly unpolitical social and moral ideas and practices of eighteenth-century sociability are often interpreted as opposed to the political order of the *ancien régime*.

Cosmopolitan Visions: Freemasonry and the Enlightenment

At the centre of this debate on the political impact of enlightened sociability, conducted basically since the French Revolution, stood Freemasonry. Not only was Freemasonry numerically the largest, but it was also the first secular civic association to achieve success on a European-wide scale [46: p. 252]. Freemasonry formed a kind of 'moral International' (Reinhart Koselleck) that spanned the globe from Boston to St Petersburg and from Copenhagen to Naples and encouraged the exchange of Enlightenment ideas, opinions, practitioners, and practices. Recent studies, however, paint a fundamentally different picture of the lodges than that presented in the well-known and influential studies of Reinhart Koselleck and François Furet [50; 42]. The differences are especially noticeable in the interpretation of Masonic secrecy, a practice that appears bizarre to us today. Koselleck and Furet, following conservative political thinkers like Carl Schmitt and Augustin Cochin, considered the Enlightenment morality of the Freemasons

an emancipatory ideology of the powerless Third Estate, the new 'bourgeoisie' that assembled in the lodges to conspire against the state. Thus the Masonic cult of secrecy, for it was in the protected space that secrecy afforded them, the argument goes, that bourgeois Freemasons could claim a moral authority that ultimately questioned the political legitimacy of the *ancien régime*. However, recent studies of Russian and Western European Freemasonry contend that Koselleck's and Furet's interpretation does not account for the Freemasons' own self-understanding and social practices and, moreover, cannot explain the lodges' popularity in the English-speaking world [47; 59; 60; 30; 35; and, for an excellent summary, 46: pp. 252–72]. In continental Europe the lodges attracted *both* the aspiring middle strata and the enlightened nobles, who together distinguished themselves from the 'common people'. The mystery-shrouded lodges thus did not serve as meeting places for an enlightened counter-elite that rejected the monarchical state. Rather, they were 'places of social compromise' (Daniel Roche) [see, for example, 61; 62; 41; 51].

A society that counted among its members civil servants and members of European dynasties could hardly have been a conspiracy. On the contrary: discussing who was a Freemason and the goals of Masonic ritual and decorum was one of the era's favourite pastimes. Aleksei Il'in recorded multiple incidents in his diary of non-Freemasons and their wives, without him having previously informed them of his involvement with the Freemasons, enthusiastically questioning him on the subject of his Masonic membership. Why, then, did the lodges place so much emphasis on secrecy? Secrecy was not intended to mask political ambition or conspiracy, but to create artificially a veiled social space in which virtue, the key concept for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Freemasons, could thrive. This explains also the popularity of Masonic lodges and secret societies in general in the United States after the 1840s – a fact that Tocqueville overlooked since he understood, like Koselleck and Furet, secret societies to be a consequence of the tension between state and society in continental Europe.

Freemasonry had its roots in the political culture of late seventeenth-century England and Scotland, in a time following civil war and revolution. Anxiety over religious and political strife provoked the new 'civic' language and code of behaviour. Therefore, the lodges aimed to be neutral sociable spaces free of political

and religious conflict [47: chs 1 and 2]. To this end they invented constitutions, rituals, and rules of behaviour; by practising individual virtue, sociability, and charity, they claimed to promote the common good. Virtue, merit, and harmony were to take the place of passion, rank, and discord. As contemporaries of the British lodges noted, both the lodges' ideas and social practices were similar to those of other clubs and associations of the time, excepting the cult of secrecy [37; 53: pp. 98–102; 32: ch. 10; 33: pp. 98–113]. The lodges, clubs, and associations were a phenomenon of England's rapidly growing cities, with London the undisputed centre, and they easily combined men's new desire for leisure activities (at that time one met exclusively in taverns and coffee houses and not yet in a club building) with the impulse to social and moral reform. The latter intensified in the 1780s as the 'civilizing' activities of the new religious, reform, and philanthropic societies no longer concentrated solely on the improvement of their own members but on that of the 'common people'. In this area, too, the lodges and their charitable endeavours set the standard.

Continental European Freemasonry retained the characteristics inherited from its roots in English and Scottish political culture. British rules, rituals, and rhetoric were translated into the new and quite different political setting of continental Europe. Although this resulted in subtle changes and adaptations, Freemasonry's moral and political core with its utopian cast remained recognizable in various European languages well into the 1780s and attracted men of middling ranks, as well as the aristocracy [47: p. 72]. It was precisely its utopian cast to transcend rank and confession that provided Freemasonry with particular appeal in continental Europe. 'As soon as we gather together', ran a 1753 German lodge speech, 'we all become brothers, but the rest of the world is foreign to us.... The prince and the subject, the nobleman and the burgher, the rich and the poor – each is as good as the other, nothing distinguishes one from the other, and nothing separates them. Virtue makes everyone equal' [quoted in 58: p. 210]. In the early 1780s, a Freemason from Wetzlar recorded the partial fulfilment of this promise of equality in his diary. A lasting impression of his admission into the lodge there was, he wrote, the 'harmony of the brothers, where poor and rich sat together like gentlemen, without rank or status'. And later on

he writes, 'my spirit sang with feelings of which it was previously incapable of feeling' [40: p. 33]. The experience of the rituals, even more than enlightened lodge speech, seemed to have given an immediate sense of equality to the 'brothers'. The Masonic handshake, loyalty oath, brotherly kiss, and drawn dagger on the initiate's breast sensuously conveyed and reinforced the new, cosmopolitan community of this self-proclaimed virtuous elite. This constant evocation of equality and fraternity was clearly a utopian dig at the corporate order, even if the participants in the new sociability were always aware that theirs was only a 'staged equality'.

The connection between virtue, sociability, and the improvement of society was fundamental for Russian Freemasons as well. With over 3000 members active in more than 135 lodges in the eighteenth century, the educated elite in the Russian lodges too was 'working the rough stone' of the individual self as the precondition for a betterment of the social order. Russian Freemasons believed that the cultivation of virtue would protect society from moral (and therefore political) corruption, just as Tocqueville maintained. The practice of morals and manners, or *nrvouchenie*, led to virtue. One way of achieving this was through the elaborate rituals of Freemasonry:

The lodge, therefore, occupied a privileged place in the social landscape of the public. Its inhabitants claimed both to possess secret knowledge required to attain virtue and to be the personification of virtue. This, less than the danger of state repression, accounts for the main function of Masonic secrecy. For through their actions, the Masons attempted to establish a hierarchy within the public based not on the nobility of one's family, nor on one's rank (*chin*), status at court, or wealth, but on one's proximity to virtue, having placed themselves at its pinnacle. The Masons saw themselves as engaged in nothing less than the construction of a new man, a man of morals and virtue who possessed the traits necessary for the maintenance of the social order and the betterment of the common weal.

[59: pp. 35, 37]

The example of Freemasonry shows how strongly the elite society of Imperial Russia shared the moral sentiments, political language,

and social practice of the rest of Europe. As historian Douglas Smith points out, the long-standing truism that Russia lacked any form of public sphere and civil society obscures the richness and complexity of Imperial Russia's past and its entanglements with the history of the 'West'.

Liberty, Equality, Sociability

The emphasis on the ideas of moral improvement and civic virtue is not unique to the lodges. Rather, it is at the core of the European Enlightenment and one force that drove the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century passion for associative sociability across state borders. Proponents of the Enlightenment, who shunned conflicts and hostilities and valued harmony and grace, expected that *sociabilité* (the French concept came into being only at the beginning of the eighteenth century) would lead to a synthesis of the local and the foreign, of reason and feeling, and of morality and economy, without having to call the political order fundamentally into question [44; 29; 56].

In Russia, one of the most widely published works of the century was the pamphlet *On the Duties of Man and Citizens*, which begins with a section on the 'education of soul' and details proper social and moral decorum. The English Enlightenment thinker William Hutton maintained that 'Man is evidently formed for society: the intercourse of one with another, like two blocks of marble in friction, reduces the rough prominence of behaviour, and gives a polish to the manners.' His German-Jewish contemporary Moses Mendelssohn, too, saw 'moral improvement, culture, and enlightenment' as 'modifications of sociable life' alone, 'the effects of the industry and efforts of men to improve the state of sociability' [quoted in 59: p. 34; 32: p. 267; 57: p. 751]. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith, read enthusiastically throughout Europe, also believed that in an increasingly egoistic and fragmented world, sociability could be a – if not the – key to political virtue and, therefore, a better society. For the Scottish moralists, ethics originated not in abstract logic and legislation but in the sentiments and virtues produced by small-scale sociable interactions of a seemingly trivial kind [38: p. 171; 39; 55; similarly for Shaftesbury: 49]. The European Enlightenment was attracted

to sociability because of its belief that human nature is ruled by more than reason alone. The Enlightenment thus produced its own critique.

Along with ‘club mania’ (*rage de s’associer*, *Vereinswut*) there emerged another contemporary catch phrase: ‘reading addiction’. Civil society and the public sphere emerged historically in tandem; sociability and reading belonged together. The desire for moral improvement and conversation beyond one’s own horizons led to the founding of reading circles and clubs. These appeared first in England in the early eighteenth century and, beginning in the middle of the century, spread rapidly to continental Europe (especially France and Germany), parallel to the rapid increase in book production. In the *chambre de lecture*, similar to the English book club, members would find a reading room, a room designed for discussion, and a library – at a time when most ‘common people’ were unable to read or write.

The boundaries between the reading clubs and literary societies (*sociétés littéraires*), which since the middle of the century had rapidly increased in number, were fluid. The German reading societies (*Lesegesellschaften*), too, viewed sociable conversation as the focus of their work. The first German reading society was founded in 1760 and over the next 30 years the number increased dramatically – to more than 500 such organizations according to some estimates. Like the lodges, reading societies were meeting places for educated elites – nobles, civil servants, lawyers, doctors, professors, and clergy. Such social exclusivity can hardly be surprising considering that in the eighteenth century at most one-quarter of the population could be counted among the reading public. In large commercial cities like Hamburg, Frankfurt, or Leipzig, many merchants and businessmen were members of reading societies. As in the case of the lodges, the number of reading societies increased especially in Northern and Central Protestant Germany, the centre of the German Enlightenment.

As Roger Chartier has emphasized, the members of such circles and societies throughout Europe were equals among each other, whatever their position in the corporate order might have been. They wanted to help each other attain a higher level of civilized behaviour and created a new, transnational social space in which the texts and ideas of the European Enlightenment could be circulated and critically discussed [36]. This space encompassed

all European countries and also, in part, British colonies overseas. From the middle of the eighteenth century to its end, a network – incredibly difficult to reconstruct today – of reading societies, lodges, and clubs, as well as informal forms of sociability like coffee houses and salons (which cannot be covered here), spread throughout the European world and its colonies [43; 46: chs 6, 7; 31: part II].

Commerce and the market society were by no means opposed to the ideology of virtue but were rather connected to sociability in manifold ways. Freemasons paid initiation fees, dues, fines for misconduct, charitable funds, and loans – only those of considerable wealth could afford the pleasures of a lodge night. The lodge certificate not only made sure a member was credit-worthy. It let Freemasons visit lodges in other cities and countries when they travelled. There they often gained access to local social circles, which in turn created commercial contacts. Masonic sociability opened up access to the local elites for foreigners and even religious minorities, as the example of the Leipzig Huguenots shows [30; 48]. The transnational diffusion of forms of sociability like the lodges thus often followed business and trade routes. In most cases London was the starting point, and from there a new form of sociability would spread to anywhere from Boston to Amsterdam, Bordeaux to Hamburg, or Riga to St Petersburg. German and English businessmen, for example, founded the first social clubs in Russia. This was the case with the ‘*Bürger Club*’, founded in the early 1770s in St Petersburg, and the ‘English Club’, which for a century was one of the most prestigious clubs in Russia. The ‘English Club’ counted among its members not just the city’s better sort of German or English descent but also many renowned Russians like, for example, the historian and writer N. M. Karamzin, the poets A. S. Pushkin and V. A. Zhukovskii, and the enlightened statesman M. M. Speranskii [60: p. 79].

Although Enlightenment sociability expanded so quickly and widely, we should not ignore the fact that there was a gradual decrease in the density and significance of sociable institutions as one moved from west to east. In spite of all the enthusiasm for the shared ideas and social practices of eighteenth-century sociability, there were still national and regional differences. Just as scholars today no longer speak of one Enlightenment but of many different Enlightenments, one could speak of multiple, loosely

connected sociable societies whose political and social contexts could vary widely. The biggest difference between Western (including the colonies in New England) and Eastern Europe was that the provincial towns in Eastern and East Central Europe did not experience the same degree of diffusion and density of associative sociability as did the provincial towns of Western Europe. If, in addition to its famous coffee houses, England had a multitude of clubs and associations already in the eighteenth century (in Norwich, for example, every fifth man belonged to an association in 1750), these associations spread to New England and the continent in a significant way beginning only in the mid-eighteenth century.

Before 1760, Maine and Massachusetts had only a few dozen associations, and a third of those were in Boston, which, with Philadelphia, were the only large cities in the colonies. This situation changed dramatically in the following decades of political upheaval when, between 1760 and 1820, more than 1900 associations were founded in Massachusetts and Maine [34: p. 38]. Voluntary associations were also more socially diverse in English- and French-speaking regions than in Central and Eastern Europe. Between 1760 and 1790, previously excluded strata of the middle ranks – the affluent artisans and small merchants – streamed into the French lodges; before 1789 France had about 700 lodges with almost 40,000 members, a large percentage of whom came from the Third Estate. At the same time, however, a social hierarchy of voluntary associations that was to become typical in the early nineteenth century was anticipated in the lodges. In the French provincial towns there was often a tripartite division: The aristocracy and the financial elites, the middling groups, and finally the shopkeepers and craftsmen all met in their respective lodges, which operated independently of each other and were in direct contact with Paris [61].

In East Central and Eastern Europe, ‘sociable society’ was more elite, more closely connected to court society and could not, in the smaller and more mid-sized towns, be based to the same degree as in Western Europe on a morally zealous and sociable middle stratum. Nevertheless, in Vienna, for example, (and to a lesser degree in Warsaw, Prague, Buda, and Pest) there were salons, reading circles, and lodges whose unique cultural and spiritual life gave birth to the Enlightenment opera *par excellence*: the

‘Magic Flute’ of the lodge brothers Schikaneder and Mozart. Also of significance across Europe and typical for a century characterized by the intersection between the state and ‘sociable society’ were the scholarly ‘Patriotic’ and ‘Economic’ societies whose goal was to convert scientific knowledge about topics like agriculture or hygiene into practical economic and social reform projects. The ‘Free Economic Association’, for example, founded in 1765 under Catherine II, survived all the vicissitudes of Russian politics and persisted until the end of the tsarist empire in 1917 [2: p. 1107].

Precisely because they saw themselves as a small, government elite, the Freemasons and members of scholarly societies could exercise influence over the Josephine reform policies in the Habsburg Empire (as they would with the Prussian reforms a few years later). This also holds, though to a lesser degree, for Russia. Here, relative to provincial towns in England, France, or Prussia, the more than 135 lodges with their approximately 3000 members only lightly penetrated remote provincial capitals like Kazan or Irkutsk. But the Russian lodges’ influence should not be underestimated; they played an important role, for example, in creating an indigenous philanthropic culture in Russia. ‘Detaching the obligation to do good from its strictly religious context, Masonry also made it the moral and civic duty of every enlightened individual. The humanitarian element in Masonic philosophy introduced to Russia the idea of charitable activity as a means of improving the general welfare’ [52: p. 103]. In 1782 the well-known Moscow Freemason and Enlightenment figure Nikolai I. Novikov founded the first privately financed Russian charitable society, which combined the ideas of individual moral improvement and social reform. The European Enlightenment discourse, with its emphasis on *sociabilité* and *civilité*, not only shaped the practice of voluntary associations, but also acted as a conceptual filter that shaped the self-image of the Russian educated elite. A consequence of this is that for more than a century the distinction between ‘enlightened’/‘civilized’ and ‘backwards’/‘barbarian’ became an ideological *idée fixe* in Russian political discourse, just as the Western European discourse on Eastern Europe has, since the Enlightenment, operated with this same civilizing measuring stick [27].

Another conspicuous difference between Eastern and Western Europe lies in the authority of the state. In light of recent

research, today one would no longer say that eighteenth-century Russian society was merely an ‘affair of the state’, completely deprived of civic sources. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say the opposite, that in late eighteenth-century Russia a ‘civil society’, in today’s understanding of the term, was coming into being, especially since even of Western Europe such claims must be made with caution. In Central and Eastern Europe voluntary assemblies were under stricter state tutelage than in the West; already in the years leading up to the French Revolution, a wave of repression had been unleashed in the Habsburg Empire against associations suspected of having Republican or democratic sympathies. In 1785 Joseph II decreed that the Freemasons had to consolidate the number of their lodges and be put under state surveillance. After the outbreak of the French Revolution and the death of Joseph II, the counter-Enlightenment brought the lodges into disrepute. In 1794 the last Viennese lodges ceased operations. In Russia, Novikov was arrested in 1792 and Freemasonry temporarily prohibited.

The politicization of sociability, already apparent in the years leading up to the French Revolution, led to a crisis in enlightened sociability throughout all of continental Europe precisely because this sociability was tied to the political and social order. In the United States and England, however, the situation was different. Again, the example of the lodges illustrates this point. In the United States, the lodges gained a prominent new significance after the political upheavals of the 1770s. ‘Colonial Masons considered their order a means of entering public life, of teaching the manners necessary for genteel behavior, and for encouraging the love that holds society together. The growing post-Revolutionary disjunction between a competitive, impersonal world and an affective private world, however, changed Masonry. The rapidly expanding fraternity gained a new role in civic ritual and came to be seen by many as a key element in republican attempts to spread liberty and create public virtue’ [35: p. 4]. In England the lodges retained their conservative and Christian character and did not see themselves in opposition to the constitutional monarchy (at their head in 1782 was the Duke of Cumberland, and the Prince of Wales succeeded him in 1789). The English lodges’ guiding principles were not *‘liberté, égalité, and fraternité’*, but rather the practice of political virtue and patriotism through an

intentionally exclusive sociability in a time of political, social, and economic transformation [54].

In France, the lodges were subjected to strong centralization and reform ‘from above’ with the founding of the ‘Grand Orient de France’ in the early 1770s. After 1789, most lodges and other forms of enlightened sociability like academies and reading circles were closed. The Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 does not contain the right to free association – for the revolutionaries there were to be no intermediary powers between the individual citizen and the state. Only the new Jacobin clubs were allowed, and it was there that the democratic radicals organized. Later, because they were charged with responsibility for the revolutionary terror, the new constitution of 1795 prohibited political clubs. After the end of the Revolution, Napoleon permitted the lodges to exist again, but under state surveillance – the same was true for Russia, too, though only for two decades. In Prussia, after the introduction of the Prussian Code, the lodges became more closely tied to the state. Like other voluntary associations they were regarded with suspicion; still, a rather significant number of the civil servants who were involved with the reforms also counted themselves among the lodge brothers.

The new public sphere and sociable circles, especially the Masonic lodges, were later accused of bringing about the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror – the alleged political consequence of their egalitarian ideas. But such a direct connection between the Terror and sociability, a connection in which many later historians believed, does not correspond with the self-image of practitioners of sociability. Looking for the origins of modern democracy or even twentieth-century totalitarianism in enlightened sociability seems utterly anachronistic. The lodges, reading circles, museums, scholarly societies, and academies were sites of social compromise, but not of political radicalism, and this was true all over Europe. Reason and virtue were just as much at home in enlightened sociability as occultism and aristocratic amusement. Far from being ‘democratic’, enlightened clubs, lodges, and societies were constantly drawing new boundaries, often to exclude women or Jews, but always to exclude the ‘common people’. The sociable societies of the *ancien régime* did have an egalitarian ethos, but they were not harbingers of democracy. By inventing ‘the social’ as a distinct sphere

separate from politics and absolutist hierarchy, enlightened sociable society could enjoy the theatre of equality with its tone of transgression and excitement, without seeking to undermine the existing political order [44: p. 33].

Such a pointed view that emphasizes how much Enlightenment sociability was a product of its time, contrasts with another interpretation suggested most forcefully by Margaret Jacob. She views Enlightenment sociability as a genuinely modern and political phenomenon – as the beginning of civil society. Regardless of their social exclusivity and seemingly unpolitical objectives, organizations like the lodges and reading societies and clubs can, according to this view, be seen as social spaces within the old regime in which members could experience democratic practices (drafting regulations, voting, debating new projects). Thus they were quite literally ‘living the Enlightenment’. The European Masonic lodges, according to Jacob, ‘transmitted and textured the Enlightenment, translated all the cultural vocabulary of its members into a shared and common experience that was civil and hence political’. In opposition to Koselleck and Furet, who had claimed that the Enlightenment was incapable of politics, Jacob invites us to look to the lodges for a nascent political modernity, in other words, for the origins of civil society [47: p. 224].

These two views are not, however, necessarily incompatible. Ideas, discourses, and social practices are not bound solely to their origins and the intentions of their contemporaries; they can have unintended political effects. In the case of Enlightenment sociability, its political significance could remain shrouded from its eighteenth-century practitioners. Implicit in enlightened ideas and practices – the belief in a connection between virtue and sociability, the partial transcendence of social, confessional, or state boundaries, the emphasis on legality and legitimacy, moral improvement and publicity, self-command and reform of society – there was undoubtedly a critical judgment of the principles of the existing political order. This is true even if the practitioners of enlightened sociability did not see themselves in opposition to the prevailing order, but were in fact pillars of the old regime [36: p. 166].

2 Intimacy and Exclusion: Bourgeois Passions of the Early Nineteenth Century

Historians generally consider the three decades before the European revolutions of 1848–49 as the ‘golden age’ of civic associations. Simultaneously with the United States, where the years between 1825 and 1845 are seen as the ‘era of associations’ (Mary P. Ryan) [91: p. 105], French and German cities experienced a burst of civic activism that formed a dense network of self-governing associations, a phenomenon that has only recently been closely examined. The precursors to many of these associations are to be found in the social and moral reform societies of late eighteenth-century England. But before comparing the transnational manifestations of the rich nineteenth-century tapestry of voluntary associations, we will first examine diachronically how early nineteenth-century societies evolved out of Enlightenment sociability.

Classical Republicanism and Liberalism

There were definite continuities in organization and personnel between early nineteenth-century and Enlightenment sociability. Recent local studies of German and French cities have shown that associations founded after 1800 were often direct descendents of eighteenth-century lodges, reading societies, and clubs and adopted from these such policies as electing members and officials, operating under a constitution of statutes, and setting up reading rooms and libraries. Contrary to the claims of much of the literature on the subject, the new associations in no way replaced the

older forms of enlightened sociability. On the contrary, the lodges, secret societies, and reading clubs, as well as informal meeting places like cafes and circles, all surged in the nineteenth century. Deeply intertwined with the new associations, they together formed the sociable network of local civil society.

There were, however, and this has often been overlooked, also discursive continuities between early nineteenth-century practitioners of civil society and Enlightenment ideas, most importantly, the emphasis on civic virtue and sociability. Widely accepted arguments from the history of political thought run counter to this thesis. Stated in simple terms, one argument claims that classical republicanism and civic humanism, with their emphasis on political virtue, travelled from Renaissance Italy to eighteenth-century America [87]. By the end of the century, these concepts were replaced by the belief in progress and the pursuit of individual interests, which, by producing equality, ultimately conferred stability on a market society. Classical republicanism, the Enlightenment, and liberalism are thus brought artificially into opposition with each other. However, the Aristotelian discourse on civic virtue with its belief that politics has to be based on a fundamental conception of the common good was not replaced but *transformed* during the periods of the late Enlightenment and early liberalism. Sociability and moral improvement became the paths to civic virtue and civil society, a transformation that occurred amidst the sense of crisis that accompanied the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. As Gordon Wood has observed: ‘For Revolutionary Americans sensibility and sociability became modern surrogates for the classical virtue that theorists for millennia had thought necessary for sustaining a republican government. Some substitute for this ancient martial virtue had to be found, and many discovered it in what was increasingly perceived as the natural sociability, sentimentality, and politeness of people’ [103; 102].

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century took a variety of forms in the English-speaking and continental European worlds. However, all of its manifestations shared a belief in what Kant described as the ‘unsocial sociability’ inherent in human beings, their tendency to isolation and their need for association with others [Immanuel Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, quoted in 121: p. 30]. This anthropological understanding of civil society stayed within the Aristotelian tradition by

connecting individual virtue and the common good. In their social interactions, human beings were supposed to acquire the social virtues they needed as citizens of a polity. Eighteenth-century political theorists, as well as lesser known practitioners of civil society, stated over and over again that sociability led to ‘mutual improvement, for increasing our knowledge and mending our hearts’ [Tristram Burges *Solitude and Society Contrasted* (1797), quoted in 37: p. 413]. Thus, on this understanding classical republicanism and enlightened liberalism, which intellectual history sharply and unnecessarily separates, share the idea that the natural sociability of human beings – their ability to acquire civic virtue through association with others and to govern themselves according to the laws of reason – will counter the perceived ‘modern’ tendency toward individualism and its corrosive effects on the polity [14; 100; 87].

Numerous examples from voluntary associations across Europe reveal such discursive links between classical republicanism and enlightened liberalism during the decades immediately before and after 1800. This was Tocqueville’s concern, as we saw in the introduction, and he was by no means alone. One need only think of his liberal contemporaries in southwestern Germany, Carl von Rotteck and Carl Theodor Welcker, editors of the famous liberal *Staatslexikon*, who articulated similar concerns in articles on ‘*Associationen*’, ‘*Gemeinsinn*’ (public spirit), and ‘*Bürgertugend*’ (civic virtue). Rotteck and Welcker considered free associations ‘the source of all higher humanity and culture’, grounded in divine providence and an anthropological ‘drive for sociability’.

Other creatures can satisfy their needs, protect themselves, and fulfil their destinies without a great deal of social interaction. Men can sustain themselves only through associations, which may vary widely in time, place, and circumstance, and through the mutual exchange of ideas, experiences, and abilities. It is in precisely these associations that men can attain a higher level of development as well as the necessary incentives and means to realize the richness and greatness of their potential.

[90: vol. 2 (1835): pp. 21, 23]

Like Tocqueville, Rotteck and Welcker regarded associations as a way to lead individuals out of their selfishness and isolation.

Consequently, they believed that public spirit was ‘the most beautiful fruit of the spirit of association’ [90: vol. 6 (1838): p. 448]. True virtue consisted in self-denial and a willingness to subordinate selfish interests for the common good. The article on ‘Bürgertugend’ and ‘Bürgersinn’ contains an even pithier formulation of civic humanism: ‘The art of all politics and political constitutions, all wisdom about a just and happy formation and preservation of a civil society, of civil life and rights, are worthless without civic virtue and its most important features: a sense of civility and civic courage. These constitute the lifeblood of civic associations. They would wither and die without them’ [90: suppl. vol. 1 (1846): p. 748]. Civic virtue, like virtue in general, is promoted through ‘spiritual and moral development; education and practice; enlightenment, improvement, and strengthening of the moral sense; and subordination of the selfish and immoral to the moral’. The practice of virtue and sociability belong together in civil society. In contrast, absolutism leads to the moral degeneration of citizens; their virtue rots and decays. ‘Despotism, wherever it has thrived, has invariably led to selfishness, sensuousness, cowardice, and idleness, thereby corrupting the majority of its citizens, especially its civil servants’ [ibid: pp. 749–50].

Moral improvement, *Bildung*, *obrazovanie* and *émulation* – these were the terms used in different countries to express the political and moral objectives of sociability. Self-improvement, derived from social interaction, was intended to generate and strengthen a belief in civic virtue and, more generally, in humanity. This belief often had Christian undertones. Tocqueville and many of his contemporaries believed that associative sociability derived its deeper meaning from the Christian ethic of brotherly love. Only those who learned to govern themselves, their thoughts, and their feelings in associations were capable of governing others. The purpose of the associations, similar to that of the lodges, was to pursue individual virtue as well as the common good, which were united in the harmonious image of a ‘klassenlose Bürgergesellschaft’ (classless civil society), so typical of the liberalism of the time [67]. French and German burghers of the early nineteenth century, like their American counterparts, believed that individual interests were by definition narrow and politically destructive. Only those capable of renouncing their own interests could open their ‘souls’ in association with others and thus strengthen the

bonds of civil society [88: p. xi; similarly 70: p. 38; for Germany see 81: p. 341].

Early nineteenth-century voluntary associations, which were socially exclusive and open, for the most part, only to educated and propertied men, provided relief from the conflicts in career, family, and politics [99: p. 217]. They also clearly provided amusement in a socially respectable context. By joining an association, members became part of sociable society, practised civility and manly virtue and displayed those qualities to the outside community and their families in parades and public gatherings. To be sure, associations also fulfilled immediate social or political goals: they blurred old social boundaries between the nobility and bourgeoisie and created new boundaries between the upper and lower classes. It is also clear, however, that the nineteenth-century passion for association originated in large part from a political and moral understanding – connected in manifold ways to the ideas and practices of the sociable utopia of the Enlightenment – of the same problems inherent in civil society that Tocqueville had described so forcefully.

Imagining the Middle Class

Socially, the most important difference between early nineteenth-century and Enlightenment ‘sociable society’ in England, the United States, France, or Germany was that it was now predominantly middle class. Accordingly, social historians have described voluntary associations as a means by which the European middle classes attempted to exert cultural hegemony and overcome the deep social, political, and economic crises in the decades after 1800 [76].

In early nineteenth-century England neither the gentry (or aristocracy) nor the working class had any significance in voluntary associations. The sociable elites presumed that it was their duty to discipline those who were less respectable or even potentially dangerous – their own lower order, the Catholics, or the colonized subjects [84: p. 409]. Furthermore, English associations also performed the task of unifying the middle classes culturally and, hence, politically, in the midst of the social and economic upheavals brought about by the onset of industrialization [82: p. 116]. Yet

even in the case of England some historians have challenged the idea that there is a close connection between voluntary associations and the rise of the middle classes. Such a connection is certainly the case for industrial centres like Leeds, but in other provincial towns associations much more frequently served to bring the old and new elites together [37: pp. 444ff.; 89]. This is precisely one of the reasons they were so popular. Sociability united Anglicans and Dissenters, Whigs and Tories, and businessmen and gentlemen by promoting social harmony instead of conflict.

Beginning in the 1820s, associations for the social and moral reform of society – most of which had Protestant undertones – experienced a large surge in growth. An abundance of new associational types and goals sprouted up. In Leeds, for example, already in the 1830s and 1840s there was a wide spectrum of different associations that operated in the areas of charity, culture, moral improvement, the economy, and religious and social reform. ‘I might dwell upon many institutions and associations’, wrote Edward Baines in 1843, ‘for the diffusion of knowledge, and for the dispensing of every kind of good, which have arisen within the present or last generation and which have flourished most in the manufacturing towns and villages – such as mechanics institutes, literary societies, circulating libraries, youth’s guardian societies, friendly societies, temperance societies, medical charities, clothing societies, benevolent and district visiting societies – forty-nine fiftieths of which are of quite recent origin’ [quoted in 82: p. 95]. There was hardly an activity of local English society left untouched by voluntary associations.

England was considered the Eldorado of associations and clubs from the beginning of the early eighteenth century. But contemporaries were much more amazed by the passion for sociability in early nineteenth-century America:

Men and women came together to form hundreds and thousands of new voluntary associations expressive of a wide array of benevolent goals – mechanics’ societies, humane societies, societies for the prevention of pauperism, orphans’ asylums, missionary societies, marine societies, tract societies, Bible societies, temperance associations, Sabbatarian groups, peace societies, societies for the suppression of vice and immorality, societies for the relief of poor widows, societies

for the promotion of industry, indeed societies for just about everything that was good and humanitarian.

[102: p. 328]

In Massachusetts and Maine, 70 new associations were founded annually in the 1820s; and although its population was continually on the move and only an eighth of its adult residents spent their entire life in the city, about a third of all of Jacksonville's (Illinois) population belonged to an association between 1825 and 1870 [34: p. 38; 66: p. 334]. And in a small town like Utica, New York, with barely 15,000 inhabitants, the local directory for 1828 lists no less than 21 religious and charitable societies, three reform societies, five benefit associations, six fraternal orders, and six self-improvement associations. Voluntary associations took up far more space in the directory than did public institutions and offices. Four years later the number had increased even more and only began to subside in the mid-1840s [91: p. 105; more generally: 92; 93; 64; 68]. The motives behind the creation of many of these associations were often religious and moral or the desire to reform society: the abolition of prostitution, alcohol, poverty, squalor, and slavery were just a few of many causes. As one Temperance Society put it, in sentiments that evoked the sociable utopia of the eighteenth century, it tried 'carefully to avoid any course of conduct which shall give countenance to one particular religion or political sect of men in preference to another' [quoted in 91: p. 133].

The older reading and music societies, militias, secret societies, and more exclusive clubs continued to exist alongside these new associations. The older associations, too, believed that a sociability that transcended social boundaries would lead to moral improvement. An 1848 essay on the social influence of the 'Odd Fellowships' sharply distinguished the world of work and family from that of the association:

Here place around him men in every circumstance of life, and of every creed and profession, and before him a worthy object to enlist his feelings, and then you will have evoked the true man, and may study him at your leisure. Does he not enter into the feelings and interests of those around him? Does he act here, where all eyes except a few are shut out from him, with

interest and energy? Has he forgotten the caste which the world has arbitrarily assigned to the men around him? Does he look at them with a fellow feeling, and honor them as men, not as rich or poor, but men who are acting on the same broad bases as himself, and whose hearts beat responsive to the same calls as his own?

[quoted in 64: p. 229]

The vision of social harmony that lay behind such a classless fraternity often contradicted the exclusivity practised by many associations and societies. Nevertheless, if one looks for causes of the surge in associations beginning in the 1820s, the belief in the ideal of a 'classless civil society' that forms itself in sociability and would meet the allegedly social and moral danger of the rising class-based society emerges across Europe as an important motive for the founding of associations.

Early nineteenth-century sociability in France and the German states was similar to that of England and the United States, a fact that has been established by historical research only very recently. For it was not only the Americans – French and German civil society, too, overcoming the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars, organized into a tight network of voluntary associations between the 1820s and 1840s. This finding is surprising, especially for France, as scholarly opinion has for a long time followed Toqueville's view that the post-revolutionary state suppressed voluntary associations. The laws governing associations laid down in the Napoleonic Code of 1810, which curtailed the freedom of and subjected to state control voluntary associations with over 20 members, remained in effect for almost a century. As a result, historians of French society have focused more on informal sociability and the family.

But if one turns from Paris to the local provincial society, the significance of voluntary associations for French society in the 1820s and 1830s becomes clear [70]. In small towns like Lons le Saunier, Besançon, and Mulhouse, which border Switzerland and southwest Germany, the unpolitical voluntary associations and circles ("one should belong to the 'best' ones", wrote Flaubert in his satiric *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*) fulfilled social functions similar to those across the border. As elsewhere, these bourgeois associations were egalitarian with respect to their members, but

elitist with respect to the outside world. Bourgeois men spoke of virtue, equality, and social harmony in shooting clubs, learned societies (*savants*), and Masonic lodges, but out in society the rules of status and distinction carried the day. As Carol Harrison has shown, this paradoxical combination enabled bourgeois men of the post-revolutionary era to reconcile the older notions of civic equality with the new desire for social order. With the concept of ‘emulation’ bourgeois Frenchmen could conceive a meritocratic society where those regarded as undeserving would remain excluded from full citizenship: ‘Civic-spirited bourgeois men justified this exclusion by claiming to represent the best interests of the entire community, including those men who had not proved capable of representing themselves’ [70: p. 224].

Bourgeois associations in Germany reveal a similar social mechanism. Here, too, the association was seen as a remedy for the class-based society. For example, in 1846 Eberhard von Groote, the president of the Art Association of Cologne, thought it remarkable that

in a time in which, in the face of the growing proletariat and increase in pauperism, one so readily reproaches egoism, the tyranny of money, hedonism, and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the individual, from out of the desires of the people themselves – without any state intervention – there have emerged associations and brotherhoods that do not value estate, wealth, or special calling, but only the competence, ability, and effort to be useful to the community. Moreover, in these associations, out of the mutual recognition and observation of rights and duties, great and extraordinary things are accomplished.

[quoted in 81: p. 167]

A similar sentiment was to be found at a southwestern German singers’ festival in 1841:

Though there may be distinctions between the estates, and though the different occupations are necessary for our existence and to promote our material welfare, this inequality becomes a harmonious unity in song: the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, the rich and the poor can all

equally well and upliftingly harmonize in song; here brother speaks to brother, friend to friend, man to man.

[quoted in 77: p. 268]

Such an ideal, of course, did not correspond to the social reality of German civil society. Recent studies on the associational life of 14 German cities in the Vormärz (1815–48) directed by Lothar Gall have come to the same conclusion, as have others in the field [see the summary by 71]. Although the leading hypothesis of the 14-city research project was that a ‘classless civil society’ was to be found in the social network of voluntary associations beginning in the 1820s, the empirical findings suggest that this claim contains a good bit of ideology. For, as the studies show, it was their nearly obsessive passion for social exclusivity, even from a comparative perspective, that characterized German civic associations of the time. Regardless of their typical names, like ‘harmony’ or ‘unity’, voluntary associations were places of social and political demarcation and conflict. As a rule, an association’s exclusivity was stricter the older the association was; rejection from an exclusive society was tantamount to social ostracism and could ruin political and professional careers. Associations maintained their social exclusivity through the secret ballot, which needed at least a two-thirds majority, but also through high membership dues. A further hindrance was the complexity of the admission process; there were often inquiries, a pre-selection by the directors, and demands for guarantees. Membership seldom rose above four or five hundred, and many associations capped their membership and only took on new members when older ones retired. A father-in-law or business friend were often needed to smooth the way for entry into an exclusive society. Commerce and connubiality thus created the social fabric of voluntary association. If the dues did not suffice to support a prestigious club building, an association might offer its members subscription shares.

The large majority of civic associations’ members came from the wealthy and educated upper-middle class. Young craftsmen found alternatives, though, especially in the patriotic singers’ and gymnastics clubs. These clubs’ memberships grew enormously in the 1830s and 1840s, but at their head were usually members of the urban upper class. In contrast to the less wealthy and influential burghers of a city, who usually had to content themselves with one

or two associations, some bankers, businessmen, and factory owners, especially if they harbored political ambitions, often belonged to multiple associations simultaneously. In sum, class mattered for the status of a member in an association and class defined if one could become a joiner in the first place.

Class, however, was not the only barrier. One of the most conspicuous exclusions by the voluntary associations of this time was that of women. The local civil society was overwhelmingly a male enterprise; associations and clubs not only constituted a space beyond church and state but beyond family as well. The social practices of bourgeois men were in harmony with politics and the public sphere, but in sharp contrast to the domestic sphere, which in the bourgeois discourse was increasingly considered the woman's realm. Ever since Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's classic study on bourgeois English men and women, the voluntary association has been seen as a means for separating public and private, male and female spheres and social experiences [65; for France: 70; for Germany: 69; esp. pp. 137–54]. Precisely because women were largely excluded, clubs gained in popularity among bourgeois men. All male associations represented 'an alternative to home life, where an ethos of fraternalism replaced the ties of family' [98: p. 129].

Nevertheless, one ought not think of this separation too rigidly. Mary P. Ryan and Rebekka Habermas have shown how the early nineteenth-century association and family complemented each other more than they competed [91: p. 106; 69: p. 145]. The boundaries between domestic and associative sociability were often fluid, as the example of the salons illustrates. Furthermore, sociability itself was a space in which gender relationships were constantly negotiated. Women were involved in the associations' sociability in many ways (for example, at celebrations), even if they occupied a subordinate role. And many forms of domestic sociability, like the salons, evolved into associations – the patriotic singers' clubs or charitable societies are two examples. Relative to enlightened sociability, however, civic associations in the early nineteenth century restricted much more than they encouraged women participating in local civil society and, therefore, in social and political life. The well-known exceptions of charity and religious and moral reform with their specifically 'female' tasks and ideas of virtue only serve to strengthen this impression.

To be sure, religion could also serve as a justification for social exclusion. (The strained relationship between civil society and political Catholicism in the nineteenth century will be discussed in more detail later.) One example of confession-based exclusion is the voluntary associations' dealings with religious minorities. Though the claim to transcend religious affiliation was part of the sociable utopia of the eighteenth century and even partially manifested itself in its social practices, in the nineteenth century the limits of this claim came more and more frequently to the fore. Thus, because they were often denied participation in the local exclusive sociable circles, German and French Jews founded their own voluntary associations in the 1820s and 1830s. 'If German Jews could not enter bourgeois German society – if they could not achieve satisfactory, let alone total, social integration – they could create parallel institutions, gaining membership in the larger society in the sense that theirs closely resembled it' [96: p. 116; similarly for French provincial cities: 70: pp. 118–21]. Moreover, German Jews appropriated the ideology of moral improvement of bourgeois culture even while remaining separate. Admittedly, one reason behind the growth in Jewish associational life in continental Europe was the desire of the Jewish community for a distinct sociability based on confession. Often, however, exclusion from the local society's elite associations preceded the founding of Jewish casino societies, *cercles*, or clubs.

Which minority was excluded from 'respectable' sociability, and the strictness with which they were excluded, depended on a society's particular political and social context. But few barriers were as severe as those that excluded African-Americans from civic associations in the United States. American clubs remained closed even to free and 'respectable' African-Americans, who early on formed their own associations and secret societies. In 1818 an English visitor to Philadelphia noted: 'No respectability, however unquestionable, no property, however large, no character, however unblemished, will gain a man, whose body is (in American estimation) cursed with even a twentieth portion of the blood of his African ancestry, admission into Society' [quoted in 85: p. 226]. Accordingly, African-Americans in Philadelphia and elsewhere attempted to create lodges and associations that would surpass those of the white middle classes in respectability and civic virtue. In early nineteenth-century Philadelphia alone there were

three ‘Prince Hall’ lodges to which almost the entire upper stratum of the city’s ‘black’ male inhabitants belonged. New African-American associations like the ‘Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality’ as well as reading and music clubs evolved out of these lodges. They presented themselves to the city’s ‘white’ sociable society by parading through the city at patriotic celebrations like George Washington’s birthday.

Entanglements and Variations

Voluntary associations, as we have seen, were a global phenomenon. However, their focus was the local community and city; only a few, like the Freemasons, were national or international in scope by the eighteenth century. After 1800, some associations, to achieve political and humanitarian goals like the abolition of slavery, began to operate beyond the horizon of their local civil society. Though somewhat anachronistic, one might see in these associations the precursors to today’s global network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One famous example of such a movement was philo-Hellenism, the associational network that supported the Greeks’ struggle for freedom against the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s. Societies to help the Greek cause sprang up rapidly in the Christian world on both sides of the Atlantic. How philo-Hellenism was interpreted later in different countries depended on the tradition of each nation’s historiography. The interpretations range from the characterization of English philo-Hellenism as a reform movement motivated by domestic politics, to the interpretation of the American and French movements as harmless charitable undertakings. Conversely, German philo-Hellenism has been described by historians as a political movement to fight autocratic regimes [75: p. 4]. One might thus be easily misled into thinking that historians were dealing with completely different and unrelated movements.

The transnational perspective on nineteenth-century sociability also calls other assumptions of national historiographies into question. It is clear that early nineteenth-century voluntary associations in Western Europe were primarily the domain of the educated and wealthy middle classes. Nevertheless, the ideas and social practices of civil society were not bound solely to the rising

'bourgeoisie' as a social class. Several popular as well as aristocratic sociable traditions continued into the early nineteenth century and merged with the associational ideal. Only by abandoning social history's assumption that there is a close connection between the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a class and liberalism as its emancipatory ideology can one understand the popularity of liberal ideas and practices within educated and elite circles in societies that lacked a strong 'bourgeoisie'. One of the most common of these liberal ideas was the notion that one can improve society through sociability [see, for example, 86; for Russia see 2; more generally for Poland: 73]

The Habsburg Monarchy's own associational life, though delayed, began to emerge in the 1830s, particularly in reading societies, casino societies, and charitable organizations. Hungarian nobles enthusiastic for reform brought liberal ideas back home from their trips in France, England, and Germany. The experiences of these nobles abroad and their readings of liberal works engendered in them a belief in the necessity of a political and moral enlightenment and education of the Hungarian people. Like their English, French, and German counterparts, clubs founded in 1825–27 in Pressburg/Pozsonyi (today's Bratislava) and Pest by the Hungarian liberal Count Istvan Széchenyi (1791–1860) after a trip through England promoted entertainment, social interaction, and especially education through reading the foreign press. These associations marked the beginning of an association-based reform movement in Hungary, which in a few years had clubs and casino societies in most provincial towns. In 1833 there were 29 casino societies and reading societies whose number had risen to 210 with 10,000 members by 1848. In 1848 there were an estimated 500 associations in Hungary, 80 of which were in Pest and Buda. Astonished by this association mania, the local press jokingly called for the founding of an association to fight the increase in associations [86: p. 29].

It is striking that Hungary's provincial associations were less exclusive than their metropolitan counterparts: not only did nobles and magnates participate in them, but craftsmen, petty retailers, and even in some cases (for the first time) Jews and women. True, the older nobles' casino societies (*úri kaszinó*) maintained their exclusive character, but new, bourgeois casino societies

(*polgári kaszinó*) often formed in the same city. Yet it was the nobles' casino societies and associations in the provinces, and not the bourgeois clubs, that lobbied for political liberalization and were the first to accept Jews. In a small town like Arad, for example, the citizenry did not grant local Jews citizens' right (*incolat*), that is, the permanent right to settle, and spoke out against their participation in local sociability, while in Arad's nobility-dominated reading association two Jews belonged to the association's directorate [95: p. 299].

The political pressure of the Metternich regime and restrictive association laws could not control civil society's urge for a sociability that worked towards liberalizing the state. Thus in 1847 the Hungarian liberal reformer Móric Lukács declared:

If it is anywhere in the world, then it is in Hungary that the right to free association is important and indispensable, and its careful protection is one of the opposition's most important tasks. When we examine our situation, do we see progress in any area of public life that does not come from associational life? Can we not, either directly or indirectly, trace back to the associations' activities the disappearance of prejudice and enmity between classes, the development of science, the awakening of artistic taste, the charitable concern for the sacred task of education, the spread of rational agricultural techniques, the surge in industry, and the lively development of trade?

[quoted in 97]

Therefore, the difference between Western Europe and Austria-Hungary lies not in the absence of, or delay in, the idea and social practice of voluntary associations, but, due to the agrarian character of the Habsburg Empire, in a thinner associational density and network. The Austro-Hungarian state only prevented the founding of secret societies, worker associations, and political associations: 'There was no freedom of assembly in Hungary, but as societies' founders liked to point out, there was no law prohibiting it' [86: pp. 30–1].

Despite a suspicious state and the liberal view, which historians followed for some time, that Austro-Hungarian neo-absolutism was a dark period of governmental omnipotence, the Austrian half of the empire developed its own, specifically differentiated

sphere of sociability between 1815 and 1848. It is not without reason that Prince Metternich (1773–1859), the conservative state chancellor of the Habsburg Empire, is said to have called associations a ‘German plague’. Associations that formed in Berlin spread from Prague to Vienna, and a few years later to Pest and the provincial towns of the Habsburg Empire. Vienna alone was home to an estimated 200 associations by 1848 [86: p. 30]. Particularly noteworthy were the ‘Society of Friends of Music’ (1812), the ‘Association for the Care and Employment of Blind Adults’ (1829), the ‘Gardeners’ Society’ (1837), the ‘Juridical and Political Reading Club’ (1840), the ‘Men’s Singers’ Club’ (1843), the ‘Kreuzer Association for the Support of Viennese Businessmen’ (1847), and the ‘Arts Association’ (1850). The situation was similar in provincial towns like Salzburg or Klagenfurt.

As elsewhere in Austria-Hungary, women were generally excluded from associations, with the exception (which also held for Western Europe) of charities. In Vienna, the ‘Society of Noble Women for the Promotion of the Good and Useful’ formed in 1811 and, following its model, women’s associations formed in Lemberg (1816), Salzburg (1818), and Brünn (1819). These associations were barred from any political activity, but they often took on a political character, and not only with respect to the emancipation of women. The highest police authorities in the Habsburg Empire, for example, eyed the activities of the Lemberg charitable society with suspicion; the women in the society openly supported Polish patriots. Even though there are no studies dealing solely with this subject, one can conclude from scattered evidence in the literature that the majority of unpolitical, purely voluntary associations were able to develop largely undisturbed by the imperial state apparatus. Marco Meriggi has pointed out that in Lombardy, which from 1815 belonged to the Habsburg Empire, there was only one case – that of Count Frederico Confalonieri – of the state not authorizing the creation of a scientific-cultural association. Confalonieri was – not unjustly – suspected of conspiratorial activities that threatened the established order [80; similarly for Hungary 86: p. 32].

The example of Lombardy’s capital city Milan also shows how dependent membership in voluntary associations was on the local political and social context. Milan’s civil servants, who were perceived as representatives of an imposed power, were, in

contrast to other parts of the Habsburg Empire, only marginally represented in Milanese associations. Instead, it was the Milanese nobility who played a prominent role in local sociability in the first half of the nineteenth century. Though some associations (for example, the ‘Casino dei nobili’) were based on voluntary participation and made use of the individualistic practices of ‘civil’ society, these associations were open only to the nobility and thus followed the corporate principle. Between 1815 and 1821 the nobility counted for more than half of all Milan’s association members. By the mid-1840s their numbers had sunk to around a third, but nevertheless remained significantly higher than the percentage of nobles in English or French voluntary associations [80: p. 288].

There are no comparable local and dense studies on the history of voluntary associations in the early nineteenth-century tsarist empire. The only well-known fact is the government’s suspicion of voluntary associations. However, a glance at the continental European states after the Napoleonic wars reveals that governmental suspicion does not necessarily say anything about the actual extent of local sociability. In 1822 Alexander I forbade the Masonic lodges, and fear of secret societies made his successor Nicholas I also regard them with suspicion. Beginning in 1826, free associations were required to obtain state approval of their statutes. A consequence of this was that many voluntary associations met without government approval, as was the case with the illegal student circles in the 1830s and 1840s, while other informal places of discussion like literary salons and circles (*krushki*) were silently tolerated by the state. Only 20 of the new charitable societies founded in Russia between 1826 and 1855 received official recognition [52: p. 115]. Yet while their significance as places of social interaction and the acquisition of Western ideas of social reform should not be underestimated, the Russian state nevertheless achieved, relatively speaking, some success in suppressing and controlling sociability, enough so that the situation there in 1830 resembled Western and Central European sociability less than it had done 60 years earlier.

Despite the autocratic state’s hysterical reaction to voluntary associations, there were nevertheless good reasons, from the point of view of the autocracy, to regard with suspicion the seemingly unpolitical associations that focused, allegedly, only on

moral goals. It is not an exaggeration to claim with Agulhon that the politicization of continental European society in the 1830s and 1840s took place essentially in voluntary associations and circles [1]. For both the liberals and the early socialists, terms like ‘association’ and ‘club’ carried emotional and utopian weight, an anticipation of a better society [94: pp. 201–5]. In 1844 Karl Marx, who later would have nothing but scorn for the social-democratic ‘club mania’, articulated the essence of this utopia:

When the communist *workers* unite, their initial goal is to teach and propagandize. At the same time, they acquire through this process a new desire, the desire for society, and so what seems to be a means becomes the goal. . . . Society, the association, and entertainment, which again have society as their goal, are now sufficient. The brotherhood of man is not a phrase but a reality for the workers, and the nobility of humanity shines to us from these figures hardened by work.

[79: pp. 553–4]

That, later on, Marx and other communist intellectuals did not recognize the significance of the seemingly unpolitical workers’ associational life and instead concentrated on exclusively political and ideological organizational principles might be taken as one reason for their ultimate failure in attracting popular support. [101: p. 240]

In general, non-bourgeois associations increased throughout Europe at this time as well. In early nineteenth-century England, popular ‘friendly societies’ dedicated themselves, in a time without state insurance, to the mutual aid of workers and tradesmen. And in France and Germany, several somewhat more formal lower-class associations were founded in the years leading up to the Revolutions of 1848 [44]. These associations hearkened back to informal forms of sociability like the café and tavern, but they also imitated, yet with their own goals, bourgeois associational culture. The workers’ clubs distinguished themselves from associations for workers under bourgeois-liberal tutelage like the ‘Association for the Welfare of the Working Classes’. The latter tried in vain to make its ideals of class harmony and moral improvement useful in solving the ‘social question’ [19: p. 189].

For European liberals, moral improvement and reform through association were the keys to social progress. At the same time, as the examples of Toqueville, John Stuart Mill, and Jacob Burckhardt show, they never abandoned their suspicion of the masses or democracy. Ever since 1789, despotism, in their eyes, always threatened from both ‘above’ *and* from ‘below’ [14: p. 142]. This elitist aspect of nineteenth-century liberalism produced a duality that manifested itself in the clubs’ social practices: liberalism was characterized, according to Dagmar Herzog, by a ‘simultaneous tolerance and intolerance – the elastic, always potentially inclusive aspects, and the continually contested and renegotiated exclusions’ [72: p. 83].

In 1848 the concept of ‘association’ became a general solution to the political crises of the time. In contrast to 1789, freedom of association in 1848 was one of the Revolutions’ most important demands. Innumerable new, openly political clubs and associations appeared on the revolutionary stage in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Milan [for Paris see 63; for Vienna see 74: pp. 29–67]. Programmatically they went beyond the exclusive and intimate character of the bourgeois associations.

I summon’, declared the Hungarian revolutionary Lajos Kossuth in September 1848, ‘... in the holy name of the fatherland, everyone who loves his country and in whom only a single spark of national pride glows, to form, in every city and every village, associations for the salvation of the fatherland... All efforts by the parliament, the authorities, the commissioners, and the civil servants to save the fatherland will be found wanting and unsuccessful if they are not supported by the societies of well-meaning citizens. For anyone who wants to bring something about, the associations offer a way to make it happen’

[quoted in 78: p. 57]

The Revolutions of 1848 brought about a short efflorescence of political associations and clubs. Across Europe, those who were denied political engagement in voluntary associations founded their own organizations: workers, women, or people defining themselves as members of ethnic groups such as Hungarians or Czechs. With the defeat of the Revolutions, all these new democratic

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associations and their political goals failed and were dissolved by 1849 at the latest. Other voluntary associations were renewed and placed under state surveillance and therefore could not develop freely. At the beginning of the 1850s, hardly anyone in Europe would have suspected that the true 'golden age' of civic activism was still to come.

3 Nations of Joiners: Practising Democracy in the Age of Nationalism

In the spring of 1862 in the small Bohemian town of Budweis (Budějovice), three members of the local ‘Liedertafel’ Choral society called for the informal practice of occasionally singing songs in Czech to be made into a set rule. The German faction of the singers rejected their proposal that every third piece be sung in Czech. This did not deter the defeated party, however, and they soon founded their own choir, the ‘Beseda’, and at their first concert sung only Czech songs. Meanwhile, at the ‘Liedertafel’s’ next concert a few months later, the remaining club members performed Ernst Moritz Arndt’s ‘Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?’ (‘What is the German’s Fatherland?’). Several singers sprang from their seats in a fit of patriotic enthusiasm, while others removed their choir badges and left the stage. Two weeks later the ‘Liedertafel’s’ next performance took place at a newly founded German club. Arndt’s song was sung not once but twice and was bravoed by those present. And as the local German-speaking newspaper reported, in a slightly irritated tone, one could hear, in addition to the German ‘*hoch*’ (hurrah), the Czech cry of ‘*výborně*’. This would not have been unusual: both languages were familiar for the citizens of the city. What *was* unusual, though, was to act and define oneself primarily as a ‘German’ or ‘Czech’, and not simply as a citizen of Budweis and a subject of the Habsburg Empire [127: p. 3].

As this example shows, associative sociability of the 1860s and 1870s was closely connected to the era’s fundamental trends: the rise of the nation as an organizing political idea and the demand for democratic participation. Both of these trends put new pressure

on sociability's traditional political and moral claims. But before examining this pressure and its related problems in more detail, we will first take a look at the incredible spread and gradual liberalization of associational life in the countries under consideration.

Civil Society and the State

Despite political pressures from the state, civil society experienced another and yet more forceful surge in post-Restoration Europe. The passion for association in the first half of the nineteenth century turned out to be only a prelude to the 'club mania', as it was soon to be called again, in the two decades following Tocqueville's death in 1859. Voluntary associations grew increasingly popular in the 1860s and 1870s as European (and, after the Civil War, North American) societies overcame their dramatic political and social crises. Associations now sprang up not just from Boston to St Petersburg, but also in the West as far as San Francisco and in the East as far as Vladivostok. This third surge in civic activism occurred simultaneously in Western and Eastern Europe where industrialization and urbanization had given rise to similarly far-reaching social upheavals and had strengthened the will for liberal reform of society. Again, England, where developments in voluntary associations typical for the 1860s and 1870s had begun a half-century earlier, is the lone exception. Historical scholarship, though, because it has focused so exclusively on the tradition of the authoritarian state, has ignored the plethora of associations in continental Europe. Geoff Eley's remark on the historiography of the German Kaiserreich holds true for much of the literature on the Habsburg and Tsarist Empires as well: 'If liberalism in Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany was such a broken reed, historians see little point in studying the emancipatory purposes of local associational life. If the main story was decline and degeneration of liberalism and the public sphere, then the value of looking at the associational arena tends to fall' [114: p. 299]. In contrast, scholars in the United States and Great Britain, who saw their countries in an unbroken liberal tradition, attributed paramount importance to their history of voluntary associations as evidence of that continuing liberal tradition. And while there were certainly fewer associations in the East than in

the West, the degree to which similar types of associations and similar motives for forming them transcended national boundaries is astonishing. It is equally remarkable that the enthusiasm for voluntary associations occurred in all these countries simultaneously.

In Russia's western provincial towns after the Crimean War and during the era of 'great reforms', particularly after the abolition of serfdom, the first signs of a local civil society emerged and began forming voluntary associations. These associations met alongside the *Zemstvos*, the self-governing bodies created after 1864, and other existing informal social groups like circles and salons. In 1848 the Ministry of the Interior prohibited the founding of new charitable societies, but by the end of the 1850s the state's stance began to relax, partially in reaction to the increasing number of petitions requesting authorization for new associations. During the regency of Alexander II (1855–80) the number of private charitable societies alone rose from 49 to 348 [52: p. 122]. In order to remain on top of the situation politically, the state gave into the pressure to liberalize society. A new generation in Russia, the *shestidesiatniki*, considered civic activism (*samodeiatel'nost'*) in society a moral duty. Women played a prominent role in this impulse to reform, especially in the charitable societies. 'The 1860s', wrote one woman from this generation in her memoirs, 'can be called the spring of our lives, an epoch of the flowering of spiritual forces and social ideals, a time of passionate strivings for light and for new, previously unknown social activity' [52: p. 124].

The social range of voluntary associations in the Tsarist Empire also broadened at this time, though relatively modestly. The thin stratum of the educated and wealthy Russian bourgeoisie increasingly discovered the pleasures of club life. In fact, Russian society now looked back nostalgically at their own enlightened sociability. Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, published at the end of the 1860s, evoked the lost world of early nineteenth-century Russian Masonic lodges, much to the displeasure of the authoritarian state, which still prohibited lodge activity. And as in Western Europe, associations for the popularization of science like the 'Society of Friends of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography', which was founded in Moscow in 1863 and counted among its statutory goals the 'democratization of knowledge', emerged [2: p. 1114]. The overwhelming majority of the

population, though, especially the peasants, did not form their own civic associations [125: p. 16–17].

Nevertheless, Russian civil society, too, tended to differentiate itself [119; and, more generally: 5]. In 1831 there was already an ‘English Club’ in the multi-ethnic city of Odessa, and in the following years clubs like the German ‘Harmonia’, the ‘Club of the Well Born’, and the Jewish ‘Beseda’ emerged, where the new local elite of Odessa businessmen, entrepreneurs, and government officials congregated. Businessmen’s clubs were of particular importance in Russia. Regardless of their unpolitical objectives, they assumed an important political function as places of discussion and reading. In the 1860s in the reading room of a club in the Russian provincial town of Kursk, one could find not only the *Augsburger Zeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and the *London Times*, and in the 1870s the Muscovite professors’ gazette *Russkie Vedomosti* and the pro-government St Petersburg newspaper *Novoe Vremja*, but also the popular German family magazine *Gartenlaube* and, beginning in 1891, the reports of the prestigious and increasingly politically critical St Petersburg ‘Free Economic Society’. The surge in associational growth in the 1860s and 1870s must also be considered in connection with the development of the press and public sphere. Just as the number of new associations in Russia rose from a few dozen to thousands within a few years, the press in Russia – and in the rest of continental Europe – ‘took off’ in 1860 as well.

The end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery ushered in a new passion for association in the United States. Americans were already a ‘nation of joiners’ (Arthur M. Schlesinger) during the half-century before the Civil War, and virtually all important social, economic, and cultural developments in American society in the decades after the war can be understood in the context of the history of voluntary associations. The sociable network of American civil society was revitalized beginning in the mid-1860s and helped to overcome the social and political disruption caused by the war. After 1865–66, Union and Confederate army soldiers organized into their own veterans associations. In 1880, for example, the ‘Grand Army of the Republic’ alone had 400,000 members. New types of associations also emerged dedicated to specific purposes: leisure activities, professional life, or ethnic community.

At first glance, it might seem particularly astonishing that, in a time of a massive expansion of the public sphere, the number of secret societies mushroomed and became, with several million members, one of the era's most popular forms of sociability [108; 110; 113]. Contemporaries spoke of a 'golden age of fraternity'. The Masonic lodges, with their vague humanism and bizarre rituals of masculinity, not only served as a model for the new secret societies but also experienced a renaissance themselves. Other secret societies like the Odd Fellows, the Druids, the Red Men (which admitted only palefaces), and the Good Templars were open even to the white lower-middle classes. Special interest groups like the 'Order of the Patrons of Husbandry', founded in 1866 and directed primarily at farmers, or the first trade union, the 'Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labour', incorporated secret rituals and other lodge practices into their practice of sociability. 'The plain citizen', wrote Schlesinger, 'sometimes wearied of his plainness and, wanting rites as well as rights, hankered for the ceremonials, grandiloquent titles, and exotic costumes of a mystic brotherhood' [136: p. 16]. In a society that was differentiating itself socially, the secret societies' exclusivity and intimacy aroused particular fascination. These societies served as sacred spaces for moralistic cults of brotherhood in a disillusioned world ruled by capital, the market, achievement, and competition.

The liberalization occurring in the increasingly national continental European states (or nationally divided, as in the case of Austria-Hungary) was also related to the unprecedented growth in associations. Beginning in 1860, a vibrant associational life flourished in Naples, for example, whereas formerly, Italy's few associations were founded only in northern commercial centres like Milan [131; 107]. And historians have not recognized the extent to which the association movement gained momentum after 1860 in French and German provincial towns [138; 137; both works run counter to the older notion that voluntary associations experienced a decline after 1860]. In contrast, contemporaries, especially the early sociologists, recognized that the associations were of paramount importance. In 1867 Lorenz von Stein wrote that 'associational life and its explosive growth is the intrinsic characteristic of our time', and a year later Otto von Gierke saw in associational culture the 'intrinsically positive and

formational principle of the new epoch' [112: p. 119]. Germany became, like the United States, a nation of joiners *par excellence*.

Democracy, Ethnic Nationalism, and Associational Life

The explosion in associations went hand in hand with their social democratization, that is, the participation of groups formerly excluded on the basis of class, ethnicity, or race. To be sure, many bourgeois associations nervously held on to their social exclusivity. Their claims to social and moral hegemony within the local civil society in England, France, and the German states were now called into question, however, particularly by new types of associations like the 'Working Men's Club', the 'Cercle populaire', and the 'Arbeiterbildungsvereine' (educational clubs for workers) [135; 70: p. 150ff.; 101]. In most cases the workers' clubs were founded and overseen by liberal notables for the 'moral improvement' of the 'working classes', but workers and craftsmen gradually appropriated them and even founded new clubs on their own. In the short period between 1860 and 1864, 255 'Arbeiterbildungsvereine' were founded in Germany alone [137: p. 62]. Social privileges and hierarchies – like an honorary chairmanship for local notables – were abolished and the associations stood open, in principle, to all men so long as they adhered to democratic-republican rules. These 'cultural' associations for workers were particularly prominent in France and the German states compared to England because of restrictions on trade union organization. However, we should take seriously the proclaimed moral and cultural objectives of these new associations. They were not merely surrogates for 'true' political participation or social representation. Workers, too, regarded moral improvement as the precondition for civic and, hence, political engagement. The leader of a Bamberg workers club, for example, rebuffed the offer of a local industrialist to join the association and set up a sick fund by arguing 'that our association is a working men's moral improvement club and not simply a workers' insurance society. Further, the workers rely on themselves to improve their material situation and manage their social and political interests in the state on their own; they do not accept the alms or charitable donation of some Mr. W. or similarly thinking bourgeois who's a politician through and through' [quoted in 101: p. 237].

The workers' clubs' claim that they promoted moral improvement engendered the staging of respectability by their members. One did not go to the association and to meetings in worker's clothes, but in one's Sunday finest [101: p. 248]. The workers' clubs operated similarly to the bourgeois reading societies: they set up libraries and reading rooms, organized lectures and readings, and, above all, made informal conversation possible between members. In addition, they organized celebrations and outings, had flags and insignia, and some, like Prague's 'Dělnická beseda' even invented their own uniform: a light-blue jacket with black tassels (a reference to the 'Sokol Gymnastics Club'), gray pants, a wide belt with the association's monogram, a red neckerchief, and a red hussar cap decked out with a white feather [128: p. 142].

As the example of the Prague workers' club shows, the passion for associations gripped Austria-Hungary as well. After its defeat at the hands of the Prussians and in the face of growing internal political pressure, in 1867 the Habsburg Empire saw itself in need of fundamental reform: first the so-called *Ausgleich* that created a largely independent Hungarian state within a state, then a new constitution that instituted important basic liberal rights. In the same year the law governing associations was relaxed, which was at the same time a reaction to, and encouragement of, the already wild growth in associations since the 1850s. Nevertheless, the law did not guarantee complete freedom of association; 'foreigners, women, and minors' were barred from political associations, and the government maintained the right to prohibit associations that showed a tendency to 'endanger the state'. In practice, however, this prohibition only applied to political associations in the narrow sense, and even here the limits of what counted as political were extended, over time, further and further. The three largest political factions (national-liberal, conservative-Catholic, and social democratic) all formed their own associational culture and defined the political life of the Habsburg Empire until 1918.

As elsewhere in Europe and North America, Austrian liberals did not regard the political clubs purely as special interest groups. Rather, they hoped to infuse politics with the seemingly unpolitical ideas of virtue and civility of civic associations. Indeed, it seemed that the liberal utopia was becoming a reality: the gradual reform of society under bourgeois-liberal auspices and without revolutionary violence. It is not surprising, therefore, that beginning

in the 1860s in the Habsburg Empire, purely civic associations experienced a regular boom in foundings [74; p. 144–5]. In 1868 all of Cisleithania, the Austrian part of the empire, had around 5200 associations, 8000 already by 1870, and experienced nearly a doubling in each of the next three decades.

In 1860 the northern Bohemian industrial city of Aussig (Ústí nad Labem) had only a few associations; by 1867, which was before the new law, it had 22, and 32 by 1870. Thereafter the number doubled every decade, a rate that corresponded to the associational growth in the rest of the Austrian part of the empire. German was spoken in the overwhelming majority of these associations. Though the Jewish population traditionally had its own charitable societies, it was otherwise well integrated into German-speaking associational life. Only those citizens of Aussig who increasingly defined themselves as Czechs founded separate associations [124]. In Preßburg/Pozsony, with Hungarian, German, and Slovakian populations of often conflicting loyalties, there were only 11 officially approved associations during the 1850s. By the 1870s this number rose to approximately 80 and counted more than 18,000 members. As elsewhere, the associations' growth rate far exceeded that of the population [129]. In general, voluntary associations were more significant for the social life of small towns than they were for large cities. Leutschau (Levoča), a city located in upper Hungary (now Slovakia) with 6000–7000 Slovakian, Hungarian, German, and Jewish inhabitants, had approximately 40 associations in 1870. In 1860, the local casino society's 150–200 members could choose from 32 newspapers and journals like Pest's *Lloyd*, the *Revue des deux mondes*, and London's *Illustrated News* [109: p. 242].

As Hans Peter Hye has demonstrated, the development of voluntary associations in Austria-Hungary took place without substantial interference by the state authorities [124]. The Masonic lodges were an exception; the conservative Catholic faction in the Habsburg Empire continued to impute radical democratic designs to the lodges, which remained prohibited by law in the Austrian half of the empire until 1918. Nevertheless – and this shows how little laws governing associations say about the actual extent of a local sociability – in the late 1870s the Habsburg Empire experienced a surge in lodge culture. Because of the different legal systems on each side of the dual monarchy, lodge

culture manifested itself differently in both parts of the empire. In Transleithania at the end of the 1870s, German and Hungarian Freemasons were able to found their own lodges in Budapest. Some Freemasons, like Count Gyula Andrassy, the Prime Minister in Hungary's first government in 1867, returning from exile in France, Italy, or Switzerland where they had become Freemasons, gathered in the lodges alongside the wealthy and educated middle class and reform-minded nobility. Between 1870 and 1886 there were always at least 20 Freemasons in Parliament [118: pp. 75, 83].

The legal situation was different in Cisleithania where the lodges remained prohibited, while non-political associations were not. A peculiar practice resulted from this situation. Viennese citizens would become members of Hungarian lodges and then founded, with state authorization, lodge-like clubs in Vienna. The 'Humanitas' club was formed in this way in 1869, and in 1871 constituted itself as a lodge with its headquarters in the Hungarian border town of Laytha Szent Miklos. It was there that the Masonic rituals were performed, and it was in Vienna, in contrast, where the sociable side of lodge life took place. Other Austrian Freemasons, the majority of whom belonged to the free professions or were businessmen, and among whom were many Jews, followed this example and routinely held their ritual meetings in Hungarian border towns or in Preßburg. Going to these meetings on the Hungarian side was closer to a bourgeois associational outing than a conspiratorial meeting of a secret society. Once a month the Viennese Freemasons would travel either by rail to the new part of the city where they would board waiting coaches and arrive in Neudörfl (just across the Hungarian border) in a quarter of an hour; or they would take a streetcar from downtown Vienna that would take them to the centre of Preßburg in an hour. Even the Freemasons in faraway Prague followed this example and founded, beginning in the 1870s, lodge-like associations in Prague and, though somewhat delayed, their own lodge 'Hiram zu den drei Sternen' in Preßburg in 1909. Such Hungarian 'border lodges', by skirting the prohibition on Masonic lodges, created a liberal-influenced lodge life in Austria before 1918 – tolerated by the state and operating right before its eyes.

The Habsburg state regarded ethnic political associations with more mistrust. In the Transleithanian part of the monarchy, the

Hungarian state encouraged Magyarization associations, but strictly controlled non-Hungarian minorities like the Slovaks. In early 1862, the German-Czech gymnastics club 'Sokol' was founded in Prague by the young academic, Miroslav Tyrš and the businessman and bank director Heinrich (Jindrich) Fügner. But while Fügner saw in physical training only a means of conditioning the lower-middle class so as to 'wean it from servility', Tyrš saw much more: a political movement for the creation of a Czech nation [115: p. 32; 132]. That Tyrš only gave up his German name Friedrich Tirsch in the 1860s, and that neither founder of the 'Sokol' spoke Czech as his native tongue, shows how fluid ethnic identities were in the Habsburg Empire at this time. As with the older German gymnastics clubs, the 'Sokol' propagated ideas of an egalitarian patriotism; uniform clothing and the familiar 'Du' were – like gymnastics itself – supposed to create a shared patriotic sentiment.

In the 1860s the 'Sokol Gymnastics Club' quickly gained popularity and became, over time, the most important reservoir of Czech and pan-Slavic nationalism. In 1866 there were 21 branches in Bohemia alone, and in the next two years that number doubled. In 1869 there were already 100, and by 1897 there were 466 'Sokol' clubs with 43,870 members. They did not, however, reach their ambitious goal of making 'Every Czech a Sokol' [126: p. 148]. A reason for this lies in their emphasis on bourgeois respectability, which led, at the end of the century, to the reactive founding of Czech workers' gymnastics clubs that at first accepted only social democrats. Like other Czech-speaking associations of the 1860s and 1870s, the 'Sokol Gymnastics Club' drew sharp boundaries between itself and the city's non-bourgeois classes. The previously mentioned 'Beseda' in Budweis was not far behind the ex-brothers of the 'Liedertafel' in terms of social exclusivity. In 1870 both rivals owned their own elegant club building in which the city's Czech and German middle classes met [127: p. 51].

Beginning in the 1860s, associations that had previously united Czechs, Germans, and Hungarians now separated and multiplied along 'ethnic' lines [see 111]. The issue was often simply a matter of political interests. German liberals saw themselves as a national and educated elite that could represent the less socially enlightened 'ethnic' groups in Cisleithania better than these groups could themselves: "To a historically rooted understanding

of German superiority, liberals added a bourgeois and meritocratic, civic one. The proper political stance of lower-class citizens was passivity and deference. Through self-improvement, though, they could earn enfranchisement and membership in the Cisleithanian ‘nation’, which happened to speak German” [127: p. 34].

The associations were a venue for the many conflicts that grew out of such moral and political claims. The ‘občanska beseda’, founded in the Prague suburb Smichov in 1863, at first united Germans and Czechs and operated bilingually. But the city’s Czech upper-middle class increasingly began gathering there and when the Czechs, with active assistance from the ‘občanska beseda’, won the municipal elections in 1867, the German and German-Jewish members left the association and began founding their own associations (like the educational society ‘Eintracht’ or the ‘Casino’) in which only German was spoken. By this time there were already eight Czech associations in Smichov, including the ‘občanska beseda’, which collectively had approximately 1000 members. At the same time, the Czech associations served, both in Smichow and elsewhere, as models for an independent ‘German’ associational life [128: pp. 178, 197]. Thus, despite initial difficulties and its elitism, the German Casino society in Prague grew from 632 members in 1862 to 1098 by December 1870 and united the city’s German-speaking liberal bourgeoisie, among which were many Jews. Into the 1880s, most of Prague’s other German associations were formed or directed from the Casino [111: pp. 68, 70].

With the appearance of an ‘ethnically’ divided associational life, political affiliation in the Habsburg Empire became increasingly nationalized. One consequence of the success of this nationalization is that even today the dominant historiography on continental Europe claims that in the second half of the nineteenth century, independent nationalities were formed out of pre-existing ethnic groups like Germans, Hungarians, and Czechs. One could call this view, following Jeremy King, ‘ethnicism’ [126: p. 113]. In reality, well into the 1860s, and in some respects until World War I, citizens of the Habsburg Empire had many other allegiances that were often intersecting and more important: citizenship in a city and loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy, social class and confession. Since members were often fluent in several languages or dialects, the use of a single language, whether Czech, Hungarian, or German often had to be ruled by statute. Moreover,

outside of the associations, there were many areas of social life that were not affected by ethnic classifications. As in Western Europe, the nationalism of the 1860s and 1870s was not a return to a lost identity but a new political invention:

Through ethnicism, early Czech activists could struggle against the non-national Habsburg state and phrase that struggle as one against Germans – thus both avoiding direct conflict with a superior force and contributing to the development of a third factor in the politics of the Bohemian land. . . . The state, meanwhile, gradually became multinational, in considerable part through attempts by officials at mediating between Czechs and Germans.

[126: p. 148]

Therefore, the rise of the ethnic nation as a political concept cannot be separated from liberalization and democratization, the two fundamental tendencies of the 1860s and 1870s. Historians have rightly argued that nineteenth-century nationalism was essentially a popular associational movement, and not only in Austria-Hungary but in all of continental Europe. National associations were less socially exclusive (even if they excluded workers) and promised, above all, more political participation. The liberal utopia of moral improvement through social exchange was already committed to the nation in the late Enlightenment and early liberalism. For Tocqueville, the fatherland was supposed to be the most important and tightest bond that held people in a democracy together. For liberals like Welcker, to stay with our earlier quote from the *Staatslexikon*, in 1846 the highest civic virtue was to die for one's fatherland – a demand that would reveal its true meaning only later in the age of wars between nation-states [90: p. 751].

The massive increase in less socially exclusive associations like the gymnastics clubs did not diminish the belief in the connection between sociability and political virtue, but rather led to a translation of this idea into a new language that seemed to capture the political sentiments of the time. To take just one example, in 1865 an orator at a gymnastics competition in Dessau declared that 'Associations constitute a preparatory school for *Bürgerturn* [civic sense]. They allow the most beautiful civic virtues to blossom: self-control, manly discipline and

modesty, friendship and devotion. In sociability the narrowly drawn boundaries of society are blurred; men become men [*Menschen*] and begin to see others as men' [quoted in 116: p. 102]. And in the 1890s, a speaker in a 'société de gymnastique' claimed that

the unity of souls is more important than harmonious actions [gymnastic exercises]: discipline is an external harmony that should lead to a deeper inner harmony. Members of the same association that are subject to the same rules surely impart to each other more than physical abilities.... The spirit of sociability, camaraderie, harmony, tolerance, and mutual understanding is the highest goal of training together.... Thus understood, gymnastics serve not only to train the body..., but are a moral education as well.

[105: p. 318]

The gymnastics movement, one of the nineteenth-century's most popular types of association, illustrates the political problems such a belief entails in an age of nationalism. Gymnastics clubs began forming in the German states with the Napoleonic wars, stagnated after 1848–49 due to political repression, and revived in Central Europe at the beginning of the 1860s [see 116; 130]. Contemporary statistics from 1862 indicate 1284 gymnastics clubs with 134,507 members in the German states; more than a thousand of these new clubs came into being during the preceding two and half years. By 1864 the number of gymnastics clubs had almost doubled [116: p. 62]. The number sank towards the end of the 1860s under the pressure of the wars of 1866 and 1870–71, but a few years later again began to grow enormously – and not only in the German Kaiserreich but in France as well [123: pp. 39–60; 104]. Before World War I, the 'Deutsche Turnerschaft' (German Gymnast Society) counted 1.4 million members and the 'Union des Sociétés Francaises de Gymnastique' over 300,000!

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, gymnastics became one of the most popular athletic leisure activities for young men in both Germany and France. The clubs promoted both physical and moral-political education and the militarization of social life. Similarly to the German movement's rise out of German military defeat against Napoleon in 1806, French gymnastics clubs grew rapidly after the military humiliation at the

hands of the German 'barbarians' in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. These associations were called 'L'Asace-Lorraine', 'La Revanche', or simply 'France!'. The political conditions in both countries were, to be sure, quite different: the Kaiserreich was a constitutional monarchy and France a republic. Nevertheless, there was an extraordinary degree of similarity between the practices and ideas of both movements (and also those of the Czech 'Sokol' gymnastics movement). The French gymnastics clubs consciously adopted the collective martial exercises of the German gymnasts and not, for example, the more elegant and individual style of the Swedes; German gymnasts understood themselves as the 'body of the nation', their French counterparts as the 'athletes of the Republic'; and both were deeply enmeshed with other nationalistic associations like the 'Alldeutschen Verband' (Pan-German League) or the 'Ligue des Patriotes'. In both countries the gymnastics clubs promoted a national mobilization, especially among the lower-middle classes, against the enemy of 'culture' and 'civilization' across the border.

The clubs also felt themselves obligated to fight against alleged enemies within the fatherland. Thus, just as the 'German Turnerschaft' excluded the workers' gymnastics clubs in Germany, so too the republican 'Union des Sociétés de Gymnastique de la France' fought the Catholic gymnastics movement in France. The appeal to the nation in associations like the gymnastics clubs reveals, to the degree to which 'sociable societies' transformed into national societies, more about a country's internal and external conflicts than an abstract common good. The universality of the association principle, its success in the nineteenth century, is based, paradoxically, on this connection between moral claims and special interests. The global spread of associations and the circulation of the ideas and practices of sociability did not lead, as it was expected to by eighteenth-century practitioners of the Enlightenment, to a transnational moral sentiment of universal brotherhood and civility, but rather opened new social and political rifts.

The Limits of Universalism

Freemasonry is a perfect example of the dilemmas of universalism in a time of rampant nationalism. In the nineteenth century the

lodges saw themselves as ‘schools of civic virtue’ in Tocqueville’s sense. Freemasonry was supposed to effect, as a southwest-German lodge pamphlet stated it in 1859, ‘what neither the state nor the church can effect; [Freemasonry] should increase and spread *inner* virtue and integrity’. Civil society was not capable of commanding inner virtue ‘without setting itself up as the judge of [men’s] thoughts and ways of thinking, which would be the wickedest tyranny and against the true goals of human society’. Thus social spaces like the lodges were necessary to foster the ‘inner civility’ of the individual and ‘advance the good that civil society cannot effect; maintain wisdom, freedom, and virtue in their essential purity; abolish the separation and divisions produced by states, religions, estates, and all contingent relationships; and simply reunite all people [*Menschen*] in a universal bond and under the laws of reason. According to this law we are all *human* [*Menschen*] and nothing more’ [quoted in 121: p. 208]. This political and moral framework explains why the lodges in the age of the public sphere held fast to their cult of secrecy: they wanted to maintain a place in which virtue could be practised free from the conflicts of society. Thus the Masonic lodges and other secret societies did not, as Toqueville thought they would, disappear in the century after the Enlightenment. Rather, in the 1860s in Germany and France they gained new popularity and political significance as reservoirs of contemporary republicanism and liberalism [133; 134: ch. 1; 117; 120]. The Freemasons saw themselves as a national, educated elite that was successfully pushing for the gradual reform of society and the state.

At the same time, the Masonic connection between civic and universalist claims brought the Freemasons into completely new conflicts abroad. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the lodges were only in regard to their self-image a ‘moral International’. At this point they actually had fewer international contacts than in the eighteenth century, which was due in no small part to police control. However, this situation gradually changed in the 1860s. The correspondence between grand lodges, the exchange of representatives, and individual visits from other countries’ lodges all contributed to making Freemasonry truly more cosmopolitan. However, as lodges of different nations grew closer to each other over the course of the century, their differences, not only in their language but in social practices as well, became

more visible. This gave rise to fresh disputes within the 'moral International'. For instance, in the 1860s American Freemasons criticized their German brethren for excluding Jews. They viewed such exclusion as an immoral violation of the universal principles of Masonry, not realizing that the Hamburg Grand Lodge, against which they levelled such reproaches, was in fact a resolute advocate of Jewish emancipation within German Freemasonry [121: pp. 283–324]. The Americans had directed their reproaches against the Hamburg Grand Lodge because it was that lodge which had, with similar appeals to Freemasonry's moral universalism, denounced the non-recognition of African-American Freemasons in the United States in the late 1850s. The Hamburg Freemasons did not, however, go as far as the French 'Grand Orient', which for this reason went so far as to break off all contact with their American brothers in 1858. Like the liberal faction of German lodge brothers, the French Freemasons were enthusiastic supporters of the emancipation of African-Americans [133: p. 223]. Liberal Freemasons in Germany saw themselves as modern proponents of the Enlightenment and, in a very concrete sense, citizens of the world. They were in close correspondence with Boston's African-American 'Prince Hall Grand Lodge' and were its honorary members. German Freemasons demanded as well that the 'Negro lodges' be made equal, a demand that the rest of the American lodges refused. On the other hand, both the German and American lodges' moral teaching was strongly coloured by Protestantism, which led them to sharply repudiate the fiercely secular Freemasonry of the French. Conversely, the exclusion of German Jews, supposedly on the basis of religion, provoked the protest of French Masonry as well; the French lodges solemnly appealed to their Prussian brothers on this account.

These examples illustrate how a chasm existed between the lodges' self-image as a 'moral International' and the actual unity and brotherhood of the lodge systems in different nations. And as national civil societies moved closer together, this gap widened. The only area of agreement was a bitter anti-Catholicism. The question of how Masonic principles were realized in the lodges of other countries and the resulting moral rebukes and political conflicts only surfaced as a problem with the advent of internationalization. In other words, the entanglement of European and

North American civil societies exposed the particular character of the universalist pretensions of the national lodge system.

This was revealed with particular drama in the Franco–Prussian War. All the informal contacts between German and French Freemasons and their shared belief in ‘civilization’ and ‘universal brotherhood’ quickly became obsolete or even antagonistic when war broke out [122]. Each side tried to disparage the other as ‘barbaric’. French Freemasons viewed the German prosecution of the war as a morally reprehensible consequence of Prussian militarism and an outmoded authoritarian state. The Germans, in turn, threw the reproach of barbarism back on the French. For German Freemasons, the lie was given to French claims of a common European civilized race by France’s employment of African soldiers and their alleged savagery. What was so confusing about the Franco-Prussian War, both for German and French Freemasons, was that two ‘civilized’ nations (and their lodges) were entrenched in war and ideological conflict – something liberal belief in moral and scientific progress had not thought possible.

On a European scale, the concrete universalism of increasingly entangled markets and peoples brought the pressure to draw ethnic or national boundaries within or between civil societies to a head. It also put political pressure on liberal universalism’s notion of moral improvement through sociability. As Etienne Balibar has noted, the more ‘humankind as a single web of interrelations is no longer an ideal or utopian notion but an actual condition for every individual’, the more ‘distorted images or stereotypes of all the others, either as “kin” or “aliens” multiply and take root.’ Identities thus became ‘less isolated *and* more incompatible, less univocal *and* more antagonistic’ [106: p. 56]. With the advent of the nation-state, practitioners of civil society throughout Europe felt that identifying friend and foe was more urgent than the lofty idealism of universal brotherhood.

4 Mass Culture, Mass Politics: *Fin-de-Siècle* Crises

‘Liberalism’, as Reinhart Koselleck once observed, ‘is best described as a movement that consumed itself. That was the price it paid for success’ [166: p. 37]. The history of liberal enthusiasm for voluntary associations is a case in point and it is especially true of the fourth surge (from 1890 to about 1910) in civic activism. At no other point did associations permeate social life in Europe as strongly as in these two decades. In those countries that already had a developed associational life, the numbers exploded and reached rural society and the European colonies extensively for the first time. Hardly a segment of civil society was left untouched by this final transnational ‘club mania’ – even opponents of the ‘club mania’ founded associations so as to not remain alone in their displeasure. At the same time, though, doubts began to grow, especially among liberals, about the political and moral value of associational life. The crisis in liberalism at the end of the century called into question the belief, formulated by Tocqueville, in the power of civic virtue and sociability. In its place there now arose new ideas and practices of how to organize social interests, enjoy leisure time, and shape political demands – ideas and practices that would come to characterize the history of the twentieth century but, ironically enough, often came out of associational culture itself.

Beyond the Bourgeoisie

Around 1890, the number of clubs and members exploded in countries with an already developed associational culture. In late

nineteenth-century Great Britain, the growth in voluntary associations outstripped population growth and penetrated all areas of social life, even into the colonies, where the ‘gentlemen’s clubs’ played an important role in local sociability [37: pp. 473–4]. Between 1870 and 1914, English clubs were at their peak. Contemporaries spoke of independent ‘Clublands’ that had formed in provincial industrial cities like Birmingham, Manchester, or Leeds [159: ch. 4]. The clubs were frequented by bachelors but mostly by married men, who – as was typical for the time – ‘spent a large part of their lives as though they were bachelors’ [Brian Harrison, quoted in 98: p. 187]. The 1890s were also the ‘high noon for religious activity in Britain’, which was organized by an immense network of religious associations. In contrast to the elite clubs, these religious associations were not open only to the upper crust and did not exclude women. Voluntary associations also held an enormous attraction for workers that grew parallel to the rise of commercial mass culture (for example, music halls, early cinema, and sports) [144: p. 5; and the classic study on the local associational life of Reading between 1890 and 1914: 200].

On the other side of the Atlantic, associational life, too, experienced its heyday. After 1890, membership in secret societies alone rose to 5.4 million in the United States. According to contemporary estimates, every eighth, or perhaps even every fifth man belonged to at least one of North America’s 70,000 fraternal lodges [W. S. Harwood, quoted in 108: p. 1]. A review of city directories of 26 North American towns demonstrates that the late nineteenth century was a time of unusually vigorous associational growth. Just as at the beginning of the century, the increase in voluntary associations at the end of the nineteenth century was especially apparent in small towns. In general, associations were proportionally less dominant in the rapidly growing metropolises [155: pp. 514, 533; 141].

In Europe too, there is much evidence that the enormous growth in associations around 1890 was predominantly a phenomenon of small and middle sized towns. Of course, the number of associations rose in the large cities too. The Breslau city directory, for example, lists a good 250 associations in 1876, 605 in 1902, and almost 800 in 1906 [184: p. 102]. But because of the more varied leisure activities and political culture in large cities, voluntary associations were not as significant there as they were in

small towns, where they structured the entire community life. For example, an ethnological microstudy of associational life in Weinheim, a small southwestern German town located between Mannheim and Heidelberg, points to an unusually strong growth in voluntary associations after 1890 [187: p. 30; similarly for Marburg 167: p. 96]. Parallel to this vigorous growth in the Kaiserreich, French provincial towns were experiencing an even bigger surge in civic activity. Of the 275 associations formed in Roanne (northwest of Lyon) between 1860 and 1914, for example, almost 90 per cent emerged after 1880 and 50 per cent after 1900. These local associations, a large percentage of which were voluntary and neither political nor special interest groups, formed the civic backbone of the Third Republic. On the eve of the introduction of the unrestricted right to associate in 1901, there were no fewer than 45,000 associations in France (138: p. 4; 70: p. 33).

In those countries, Austria-Hungary and Russia in particular, where the density and entanglement of associations were traditionally less pronounced, associational culture now experienced rapid growth as well and began to exert increasing influence on local urban society. Beginning in 1880, the number of associations doubled every ten years in the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire (1880: 14,300; 1890: 30,600; 1900: 59,800; 1910: 103,700). Most of these new associations were located in Bohemia (always more than a third), lower Austria, and Moravia, and, after 1900, in Galicia. The northern Bohemian city of Aussig (Ústí nad Labem), for example, had 37,300 inhabitants in 1900; in the same year the number of club members numbered 31,600. In 1910 the population had risen to 39,300 and the number of members, due to multiple membership, to more than 47,700! [124: p. 246]. In Transleithania, especially in Budapest where in 1900 there were 18.5 Freemasons for every 10,000 inhabitants (in comparison, Vienna had 5.2 per 10,000), the number of lodge members rose from 1158 in 1886 to 1557 in 1893 and finally to 2366 in 1900 [118: pp. 87–8]. Prague's 1890 city directory lists 700 associations in 1890 and in 1901 lists 1600; in Preßburg in the 1880s there were more than 80 associations, and in the years before the outbreak of war there were 120.

One consequence of this enormous growth was that voluntary associations lost their exclusivity; almost all of a city's social and

political groups now gathered in their own clubs. Separate clubs were founded with the sole aim of parodying the social and moral pretensions of civic associations. For example, the ‘Schlaraffia’ (‘Cockaigne’, or ‘land of plenty’), a club for artists and art-lovers founded in Prague in 1859, spread rapidly, beginning in the 1870s, to Austria-Hungary and the German Kaiserreich. As the name indicates, the club promised a fairy-tale land of milk and honey, where money grows on trees and whose inhabitants considered laziness the highest virtue. Their rituals, too, seemed to be conscious distortions of the Masonic ideology of civic virtue [174].

Here, as elsewhere in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, Czechs, Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Slovenians gathered in their own associations: ‘Nations no longer go to church. They go to national associations’, wrote Joseph Roth in his novel *Radetzky-marsch* [185: p. 162]. One did not necessarily preclude the other, however. In Carinthia (Kärnten), where a third of the population was Slovenian, only seven of 381 associations were registered as ‘Slovenian’ in 1880. Not until the political conflicts and rise in nationalism of the 1880s was there a significant change in this respect. By 1914, however, there existed over a hundred national Slovenian associations – the majority initiated in the regional capital Ljubljana – whose worldview was based not on liberal, but Catholic principles [152: pp. 51–2].

The crisis in Austro-Hungarian liberalism, which had been festering since 1879, did not affect its main pillar of strength: the network of German civic associations whose geographic and intellectual centre was located in Prague, for example, in the exclusive Casino society. In 1890 Prague had approximately 130 German-speaking associations with more than 25,000 members [151: p. 7]. Not included in these numbers are the pan-German nationalistic ‘protection associations’ that evolved out of the liberal network. The ‘German Schools Association’, for example, had more than 100,000 members in 1886 after six years of existence in Cisleithania. Liberals hoped to use such radically nationalistic associations and leagues to regain political influence and popular support. ‘Particularly at the local and provincial levels, nationalism became, almost overnight, the rallying cry for German Bürger across the monarchy’ [74: p. 220]. At the same time, bourgeois liberals in the provinces of the Habsburg Empire

tried to increase the social diversity of their associational network as a means against the rise of both class-oriented and consciously 'ethnic' politics.

In reality, though, few German bourgeois associations, except for the gymnastic clubs, were able to attract other groups of society. At the beginning of the 1860s, neither descent nor sociability had distinguished Germans and Czechs sharply in the Habsburg Empire. Forty years later, almost every emerging political and 'ethnic' group was organized by its own elaborate associational culture, whose boundaries were carefully guarded. By 1914, the Jewish-German writer Paul Leppin correctly argued that Prague's German population was not united by a common past but 'merely by a number of associations' [quoted in 111: p. 52]. Similarly, the Czech historian Josef Karásek noted in 1895 that for the Viennese Czechs their associations were 'what for other people is their *community and state*. Everything that we have been able to accomplish nationally had its origin in the associations' [quoted in 157: p. 74].

Still, multiple group loyalties, so typical for the Habsburg Empire, had not yet completely vanished, as Karl F. Bahm has shown by using the example of the German-Czech manual worker Wenzel Holek, who participated in socialistic *and* nationalistic, German *and* Czech associations [140: p. 25]. Some associations attempted to maintain multiple allegiances. Since the *Ausgleich* of 1867, Hungary was an independent constitutional monarchy within the Habsburg Empire. While Germans insisted on superiority over other ethnic groups in Cisleithania, the Austrian part of the Empire, they subordinated themselves loyally in Transleithania to the authority of the Hungarian state. For example, although the Preßburg lodge 'Zur Verschwiegenheit' ('Secrecy') split into separate German and Hungarian lodges in 1902 (while continuing to meet in the same building), the local singers' club, founded in 1857, tried to resist giving into such ethnic and political disputes [170]. To this end, the singers' club presented itself at the 'pan'-German singers' festival in Hungarian dress, under the Hungarian flag, used the Hungarian name 'Pozsonyi dalárda', and sung Hungarian and German songs. In everyday club life, and especially at official functions, Hungarian was used alongside German, the native language of the majority of the members – a fact that did not prevent participants from seeing themselves as Hungarian

citizens and patriots. In contrast to many new associations in the Austrian half of the empire, no free association of German-speaking Hungarian citizens used the adjective 'German' in its name [175: p. 70].

Civic Activities, Connected Histories

As in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a flow of practitioners and practices of civil society beyond national borders as the century drew to a close, in particular in connection with global migration. For countless immigrants to America or within Europe, voluntary associations were the first places of refuge in their new homeland. For example, Ian Buruma described his great-grandfather Hermann Regensburg's arrival in London in 1882, when, after an extremely arduous trip, he hurried on the day of his arrival to the German gymnastics club. There he met his brother Adolf, who had left Germany several years earlier and had already established himself in London as a businessman, along with many other German Jews [147: p. 180]. Moreover, there was an actual export of forms of voluntary associations across national borders. One example is the B'nai Brith order, which took the Masonic lodge as its model. The order was founded by German-Jewish emigrants in New York in 1843 and spread to the European continent starting in the 1880s, partly as a reaction to the anti-Semitism that was particularly rampant in Central Europe.

In the mass emigrations beginning in the 1880s, approximately half a million predominantly rural 'Slovaks', few of whom would have identified themselves ethnically as such, moved to the United States. There they founded, like almost all other immigrant groups, their own voluntary associations and began for the first time to see themselves as Slovaks in an ethnic sense. About a quarter to a third of them returned with this experience to their home country and founded associations [176: p. 476; and, to name just one study out of the rich US literature on ethnic associational life: 188]. Czech workers who found work abroad in the industrial region of the Bohemian-Saxon borderlands also founded their own clubs. Already in the 1870s the 'Vlastimil' club, which served as a model for Czech associations in the German

Kaiserreich, was operating in Dresden. In 1909 there were seven Czech clubs in Dresden, including a branch of the nationalistic Sokol gymnastics movement that alone had more than 200 members. These associations attempted to maintain cultural and political contact with the homeland and participated in celebrations and festivals in Bohemia. Despite the options these clubs presented, though, many Czech workers simply joined local German associational life [179: ch. 1].

The 'Sokol' gymnastics clubs also played a key role in the independent network of Czech immigrant associations in the United States. Already by the mid-1860s 'Sokol' clubs had formed in St Louis, Chicago, New York, and other American centres of Czech immigration. In 1884 there were around 1000 'Sokol' members in the United States, more than 5000 in 1908, and after World War I more than 10,000 [181: p. 15].

Like other ethnic associations the Czech-American 'Sokol' clubs attempted to adapt their political and moral ideas and social and cultural practices to their new surroundings. This adaptation would, however, lead to conflicts with the 'Sokol' officials back home. Even though the American gymnastics clubs felt bound to 'Sokol's' political and moral claim to be working for the moral and physical improvement of their members (which would, in turn, effect reform in both the individual and society), in practice the American clubs struck new paths. For example, in 1878 the leaders of the Chicago gymnastics club got rid of the quasi-military, pompous 'Sokol' uniform and, to better suit American tastes, replaced it with a simple blue suit, a belt with the 'Sokol' symbol, a white shirt, a red neck tie, and a black cap. A far graver breach of tradition in the eyes of Austro-Hungarian Sokol officials visiting the American 'Sokol' branches was the fact that many of the new branches also functioned as insurance companies, as was typical for American clubs. Yet the demand to remain true to 'Sokol' traditions was not solely made by officials from the homeland. Even within the American clubs, younger members successfully lobbied for a return to the movement's purely sociable and political-moral goals. Still, when in 1909 an Austro-Hungarian 'Sokol' delegation led by president Josef Scheiner visited 'Sokol' branches in Chicago and other American cities, they were shocked at the extent of cultural assimilation in the local clubs.

Most painful of all for us', noted Scheiner in his travelogue, 'was the English slang, which unfortunately was spread all over the training field, as though we were not among our own people. Our hearts ached when we heard our boys from places like Plzeň, Čáslav or Písek speaking English with each other, calling out to one another in English; we could not believe our ears... We do not envision Sokols in this way... There is no excuse for this – it is betrayal of the nation, and there is no place for it in our ranks.

[quoted in 181: p. 29]

That the American 'Sokol' clubs were less exclusive and therefore, in Scheiner's eyes, less civilized, was the reason, he thought, for their 'betrayal' – and not the obvious fact that patriotic associations with what appear, on the surface, to be the same ideas and practices will transform as soon as they spread to other countries.

This transnational spread of associations took place to an unprecedented degree as the century drew to a close. Victorian reform societies, like learning societies and the 'Temperance Movement', even spread their message of moral improvement and alcoholic abstinence to Russia. Often, as in the case of temperance societies and their 100,000 members in the years before 1914, the impulse to reform fed on doubts about the legitimacy of Russia's autocratic regime [163: p. 8]. As in other associations for social reform (for example, the fight against prostitution), bourgeois women played an active role in these societies. In 1900, Russian and English feminists founded the 'Russian Society for the Protection of Women', which worked together with doctors and lawyers. It was thought that prostitution and alcoholism were problems that would not be solved by the state but by the social and moral intervention of civil society [182: p. 330]. Another example of this reform impulse is the theatre movement, a ubiquitous phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. The Russian participants in this movement, who came exclusively from the educated elites, hoped to educate the predominantly illiterate rural population politically and morally by staging amateur plays [189; see for comparison 156].

Charitable societies, too, registered another dramatic increase at this time. More than half of the 2200 charitable organizations

counted by the Russian state in the early twentieth century were formed after 1890 [52: p. 198]. They were primarily located in the provincial towns of the European part of Russia – east of Poland and west of the Urals. The actual number of organizations was surely much higher than the government figure, as many charitable organizations of national minorities, especially of Jews, were not counted in the official numbers. The state tolerated Jewish, Polish, and Armenian charitable societies, but demanded that they speak Russian and submit monthly reports. Nevertheless, until the end of the Tsarist Empire, charity in Russia was primarily the domain of the private efforts of voluntary associations. ‘Never was I in a country’, wrote an English traveller in 1905, ‘where there are so many private institutions for the benefit of the poor’ [Edith Sellers, quoted in 52: p. 230].

Russian practitioners of civil society often made their first sociable experiences in Central and Western Europe. Russian Freemasons, for example, were typically initiated into lodges in Paris where they had traveled on business. Thus, there existed a large number of Russian Freemasons in St Petersburg and Moscow, even though lodges were still officially prohibited in Russia. In the wake of the political revolution of 1905, liberal circles in Russia renewed efforts to found lodges in St Petersburg and Moscow. The following year, different political factions of the bourgeoisie, tenuously united by the desire to abolish the old order and establish liberal democracy, gathered in the Russian lodges. These new lodges, which quickly spread from St Petersburg and Moscow to cities like Odessa, Kiev, and Nizhnii Novgorod, came under the patronage of the ‘Grand Orient de France’. Like their French brothers, the Russian Freemasons were militantly laic and politically minded, and they condemned the Protestant ritualism of English- and German-speaking Freemasonry. Yet there was also, since 1909, a conservative current in Russian Freemasonry that wanted to continue the tradition of St Petersburg’s eighteenth-century grand lodge ‘Asträä’ and, like German grand lodges and the ‘Grand Lodge of England’, was politically inclined to constitutional monarchism. In 1913 there were 40 lodges with around 400 members in Russia – not a small number considering their elite composition – and this number continued to rise until the revolution. The lodges were also closely connected to local

sociable society (for example, to the ‘Free Economic Society’ in St Petersburg, to the peace movement, and even to spiritualism). The partial crossover between the liberal-bourgeois movement and Freemasonry (Kerenski, Nekrasov, Tereshchenko, and other later ministers of the provisional government were Freemasons) has been used as a justification for denouncing the entire liberal and socialist movements as a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy [161].

In the waning days of the Tsarist Empire, Russian society possessed a public sphere of societies, referred to by contemporaries as *obshchestvennost’* [2; 145; 146; 164; 196; 5; 119]. Not only in Austria-Hungary and Germany (after the repeal of the Socialist Law in 1890), but also in Russia, the state seldom, or at most perfunctorily, exercised its right to monitor local sociability – that is, so long as the associations were not politically active [124: p. 244; 168; 160: p. 181]. Chronic *maloliudstvo* (understaffing) prevented the Russian bureaucracy from effectively monitoring civic activism. Authorities would realize only years later that associations had failed to send in reports. Thus, contrary to long-held assumptions of historical scholarship, it is fair to say that the majority of clubs could pursue sociability without substantial interference or control of the state.

The number of associations in Russia increased rapidly, especially after the Revolution of 1905 and the first (still restrictive) law of association of the following year. According to estimates by Nikolai Anufriev, the most astute contemporary observer of Russian associational life, 4800 new associations and societies were founded between the years of 1906 and 1909 alone [160: p. 183]. In 1897, 400 different associations were registered in St Petersburg and in 1912 more than 600 in Moscow, among which were private museum societies – the classic embodiment of the belief that culture could engender civility and moral improvement [145: pp. 136, 144–6]. Though only to a comparatively modest degree, passion for association even managed to make it into Russia’s sleepy provincial towns. Elite associations like businessmen’s clubs, which for a long time had a monopoly on sociable life in local society, were now criticized for their exclusivity and faced with increasing competition. Saratov, for example, had only two associations in 1850, but 37 in 1899 and

111 in 1914 – ranging from an Esperanto club to a vegetarian society. Kazan', the provincial capital situated on the Volga, had 190,000 inhabitants in 1914, and its nearly dozen voluntary associations had only around 2000 members. Kazan's most prominent association, the 'New Club', was correspondingly socially exclusive. The club's religious and ethnic tolerance was thus all the more remarkable: Russian Orthodox gathered in the 'New Club' as well as Old Believers, Catholic Poles as well as Mosaic Jews and Jews converted to Russian Orthodoxy, and Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed Protestant Germans as well as Muslim Tartars [160: p. 233]. Towards the end of the Tsarist Empire, other less exclusive clubs also experienced an enormous increase in membership. Among such associations, which cannot be covered here in depth, are those like the mutual aid and consumer societies that promoted economic goals. By the mere fact of their existence, these societies contested the state's traditional right to be the sole representative of the people's interests [194: p. 147; 143; 191]. The local society of Russian cities thus transformed itself into a civil society based on personal networks, informal sociability, voluntary associations, and self-governing bodies [119]. At the end of the Tsarist Empire, some civic associations could produce publications in honor of their fiftieth or even hundredth anniversaries!

A panoramic view from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century reveals a picture of sociable societies that emerged within late *ancien régime* Europe and spread in density from west to east as the nineteenth century progressed. By 1914, virtually all of European urban society revolved around associations, although the majority of European states were constitutional monarchies and not democracies. In contrast to long-held historiographical assumptions, there was no decline in civic activism during the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, the civil societies of Europe and the United States prove exactly the opposite and bear witness to the common quest for social and moral improvement through association. Despite the nationalism of the time with its strict antagonism, we can discern in this quest for moral improvement and civic self-organization one of the most prevalent transnational political phenomena in what contemporaries regarded as the 'civilized' world before the Great War.

Liberalism Transformed: Turn-of-the-Century Critics

Paradoxically, it was around 1890 – when voluntary associations reached their highpoint in terms of raw numbers, suggesting a triumph of liberal ideas and practices – that they lost, in particular in the eyes of many liberal contemporaries, the moral and political significance Tocqueville and others had once accorded them. Accompanying the proliferation of associational life throughout all levels of society was an increasing fear among liberal elites throughout Europe that they might lose their claim to moral and political leadership, a claim that they had, up to that point, exercised through domination of associational culture.

There had always been, of course, critiques of (petite-)bourgeois associational life ('Vereinsmeierei'), especially by intellectuals. Charles Baudelaire, for example, complained in *La Fanfarlo* (1847) of 'English life – that death of the heart – the life of clubs and circles' [quoted in 29: p. 477]. And Ralph Waldo Emerson, Baudelaire's contemporary, railed against associations in a similar vein: 'At the name of a society, all my repulsions play, all my quills rise and sharpen.' According to Emerson, men gather in voluntary associations for one reason only: "I have failed, and you have failed, but perhaps together we shall not fail" [quoted in 136: p. 20].

Now, however, this critical stance began to influence the educated elites who had previously believed in the liberal promise of moral improvement by sociable exchange. The more associational culture spread and engaged previously excluded groups, the shallower the language of virtue and civility sounded. "A Skat club is still a Skat club even if it calls itself 'Freedom Skat Club'", wrote one observer contemptuously in 1906 when he surveyed what he considered the philistinism of the countless worker associations supposedly devoted to culture [177: p. 119]. It was not the social practice of associations, therefore, that was in crisis at the end of the nineteenth century. It was, rather, the political and moral vision of a society built on civic associations, a vision Tocqueville had formulated so passionately. 'The proliferation of associations was', as Adrian Lyttelton has observed, 'not matched by a reinforcement of the *values* of civil society' [172: p. 79]. The diversification of those active in civil society led to a fragmentation or even outright rejection of civil society's original political and moral core.

However, this disintegration of the liberal claim to civic virtue and moral improvement was a result of social democratization. Associational life across Europe became increasingly more democratic as workers, Catholics, and women, for example, began using and forming voluntary associations. Liberal-led workers' associations in England, France, and Germany that had promoted social reform and moral 'improvement' within the working class evolved in the second half of the century into a sociable counterculture that rejected liberal tutelage and replaced it with its own visions of the civilizing and disciplining effects of sociability [169; 135; 193, who shows that French workers did not like German workers to form an 'alternative culture' but were much more likely to participate in local civic associations; furthermore, with a comparative perspective: 154]. In 1912, B. T. Hall, one of the English leaders of this movement, wrote that

A workman's club is the best school for character which can exist anywhere ... for workmen [...and] it is the only possible school. Few go to church or chapel [...and] Friendly Society or Trade Union ... meetings are but casual. Only in a club is there that continuous association, the constant practice of deference to others, the willing obedience to self-made rules, the necessity for, and the expectation of, mutual courtesy, the unconscious elevation of the standard of comfort, the even less conscious widening of thought and habit, and the personal brightening and purifying which arises in happy surroundings, and in freedom from those which are squalid and sordid – in all indeed which is necessary to the making of the 'gentleman' in the word's truest sense.

[quoted in 135: p. 124]

Other non-bourgeois associations, however, like the 'friendly societies' and consumer associations, increasingly gave up all pretence of promoting sociability and began instead to function exclusively as insurance companies [158: p. 211].

Civil society became more democratic as worker associational life flourished. Even the Socialist Law, a 12-year prohibition (1878–90) of the associational network of the Social Democrats in the Kaiserreich could not stop this trend. In fact, as is evidenced by the explosive growth after 1890 in the workers' club

counterculture, which encompassed all manner of associational aims and objectives, it actually unwittingly intensified it. Almost every bourgeois gymnastics, singers', Samaritan, abstinence, health, rowing, or theatre association had its equivalent in the workers' associational culture. German workers' culture adopted democratic practices and procedures as a matter of course, while simultaneously producing their own vision of civil society [139].

Democracy arrived in many forms. Early mass culture, for example, promoted leisure activities that transcended class and were often organized like associations. In the last third of the century, the rise of sports was a crucial part of the explosive growth in associations. This was, again, a transnational phenomenon with England as the starting point. The British Empire's political and commercial entanglements helped the new enthusiasm for sports spread rapidly, as is illustrated by the example of the English wine trade's influence on Rugby's popularity in Bordeaux [123]. Teenage boys who, with women, had long been barred from participating in voluntary associations, now took part in the booming sport sociability. A new youth culture emerged that organized itself associationally in groups like the 'Boy Scouts' or the German 'Wandervögel' and for which physical training was a natural part of their activities and goals.

There was, to be sure, no lack of effort made by the middle classes to transmit the ideas of moral improvement and social reform to the early cinema, youth organizations, and sport. The turn to physical training was not necessarily a retreat from the idea of moral improvement. In Victorian England, for example, sport was supposed to make the youth physically fit for higher goals just as it was supposed to do for the German, Czech, and French gymnasts, groups that also experienced tremendous growth in this period. [173; 171; 123, p. 40; 116; 104]. The cycling club the 'Wanderer', founded in 1887 in the Bohemian city of Aussig, ambitiously described cycling as 'Work for humanity . . . in the physical sense and, consequently, in the moral sense as well' [124: p. 252]. Within the sports movement, however, new tendencies emerged that went beyond the traditional associational ideal. One example is the increasingly eugenics-inspired image of humanity that demanded permanent physical improvement and health. In general, sport became, especially in the 1890s, a part of the commercialization of leisure and embraced all social classes.

As a consequence, when everyone started riding bicycles, the middle classes lost their fascination with the no-longer exclusive cycling clubs.

It was not just wealth or education that determined who belonged to associations before they became more democratic at the end of the nineteenth century. Religious affiliation and gender also played important roles, as civic virtue was often equated with both Protestantism and masculinity. Until the end of the nineteenth century, women were largely excluded from respectable clubs, lodges, and civic associations; now they began founding large numbers of their own associations that often promoted social and moral objectives such as charity and social reform and, as a result, expanded the existing women's associational network. The social – and around 1900 the political – women's movement, too, began to organize transnationally.

It was not only the workers' and women's movements that seized upon the idea of self-governing associations to forge political participation. European Catholicism, which was seen by contemporaries as the fiercest opponent of liberalism, turned to associations to protect itself from the secular state. It mobilized associations throughout society, reaching even the rural population, to promote the social purpose and political objectives of the Catholic Church. In 1907 a journal published by a league of Christian Austrian workers wrote that 'Every Catholic should join an association, and every Catholic must join an association if he has recognized that he has a duty not only to care for his own soul but to help work for the salvation of others' [124: p. 47]. In 1880 the 17 most important Catholic associations of Salzburg counted almost half of the city's population among its members. Together with the two veterans' federations, the Catholic-conservative associations had gained superiority over the liberals. The Catholic association movement did not reach such numerical supremacy in France or the Kaiserreich. Republican and liberal anti-Catholicism, however, banded the Catholic population closely together. Josef Mooser has estimated that in 1900 one-third to one-half of the Catholic population in the Kaiserreich belonged to an association [178: p. 75]. A large portion of these associations formed immediately after the fierce struggle between the liberal state and the Catholic Church in the 1870s. Conversely, liberalism expanded its own associational auxiliaries like the

‘Protestant association’ that declared Catholics to be enemies of the nation [195].

As we saw in the last chapter, the belief in a connection between sociability and civil society also suffered as a result of yet another Janus-faced liberal success: the rise of nationalism as the dominant organizing political idea. As Pieter Judson has observed, the continuing use of the association as a model of public participation secured the survival of liberal practices and ideas in a time of nationalistic mass politics. However, the democratic transformation and numerical increase in associations also made the bourgeois elites across Europe receptive to a new, radical nationalism that would enable them once again to claim the moral and political leadership that was previously guaranteed to them by their prominent role in the associations of local civil society [74: p. 265]. Radical nationalism, like ‘ethnicism’ an international phenomenon at the turn of the century, was not necessarily opposed to reason, science, or democracy. By deciding who belongs to the nation on the basis of ‘race’, radical nationalists all over Europe claimed to have a ‘scientific’ answer to the problems of society and ultimately a modern model of political order. In principle, nationalists excluded those considered racially or ethnically different or inferior, but assumed equality within the *Volk* and, hence, in their numerous associations. In other words, radical nationalism was not merely a conservative, anti-modernist reaction. Rather, it utilized earlier liberal beliefs in moral improvement, scientific progress, and associational activism and transformed it into a different, utterly modern way of shaping political action [183: p. 137; similar for the German Kaiserreich: 153; 149; for the Habsburg Empire: 74; 126; in general: 201].

The same is true for internationalism, which reached a high-point as well before the First World War. A multitude of international organizations emerged in those years, often out of the transnational scientific, athletic, cultural, social reform, or hygiene associations. These associations, most of which had emerged by 1914, were in most cases – paradoxically – premised on nationalism. Thus, to pick just one example, Leila Rupp has shown how the international women’s movement always landed in new difficulties because it – unlike the women’s associations of the first half of the nineteenth century – often took the nation-state as the starting point for any mutual exchange. In place of the lofty ideals

of civic association that transcended the nation but remained rooted in local sociability, international organizations emerged that aimed to assert and organize concrete political or economic interests, for example, of nation-states [186; 142; 12: ch. 5].

The international federations thus operated with a new conception of politics that had already established itself within nation-states and had caused the associations to lose political significance. Mass organizations like unions and leagues were the most visible manifestations of this change. These organizations often evolved out of civic associations and formally adopted some associational characteristics, but they increasingly promoted only specific, neo-corporate interests and abandoned, for the most part, all pretence of sociability. Political parties, too, emerged out of the networks of civil society while simultaneously replacing, very much like the federations and unions did, older notions of class harmony and elite representation with democratic struggle and mass participation.

When liberal elites were no longer in control of associational life, they became increasingly sceptical of its value in resisting the dangers of democracy. That laws were passed guaranteeing freedom of association relatively late in France (1901) and Germany (1908) is less the result of a supposedly authoritarian character of the state and more a reflection of the fear French republicans and German liberals had of 'uncivil' forces of society, like Catholics or Polish immigrants and their organizations [165; 192; more generally: 195]. The proliferation of enthusiasm for associations through all elements of society spawned a growing fear among liberal elites that society was losing its moral compass. Max Weber, for example, declared indignantly at the first meeting of German sociologists in 1910 that the modern 'last man' was 'an association man (*Vereinsmensch*) to a horrible, unimaginable degree. . . . One has to believe this cannot be surpassed since associations have been formed whose sole purpose is to eliminate associations' [197: p. 53].

Many sociologists and political scientists, practitioners of scholarly disciplines that were just emerging in the late nineteenth century, were doubtful of the political and moral significance of associations and, hence, of civil society. Despite, or rather precisely because of, the mass expansion of the associations, they did not, like Tocqueville and his contemporaries, take their significance

for granted. To be sure, the international Left, from Peter Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid in the Animal and Human World*, 1890–1902) to Eugène Fournière (*L'individu, l'association et l'Etat*, 1907), discussed the political and moral value of associations and declared them to be kernels of an ethical socialism. Catholic conservatives such as the French historian and sociologist Augustin Cochin maintained that there was an intimate connection between the rise of mass democracy and associative sociability [150]. That the first modern party in France, the 'Parti radical, républicain et radical-socialiste' evolved in 1901 out of Masonic lodges seemed like empirical proof of Cochin's thesis [117]. At the same time, however, some conservatives vilified this historical process as a politically fateful development. But it is striking how most sociologists and political scientists of the time neglected the phenomenon or dealt with it only in passing. References to 'civil society', 'sociability', and 'civic virtue' became rare in social and political thought by the end of the nineteenth century.

A typical example is James Bryce's *American Commonwealth* (1888), an attempt to rewrite *Democracy in America* for his time. Like Tocqueville, Bryce travelled around North America and collected his observations. But he was convinced that only an Englishman like himself or an American (and, by implication, no Frenchman) 'can grasp the truth that the American people is an English people, modified by the circumstances of its colonial life and its more popular government, but in essentials the same' [148: p. 936; and his *The Predictions of Hamilton and Tocqueville*, in 148: p. 1546].

Bryce departed from Tocqueville not only in his jingoism. Positivist belief in the infallibility of facts also informs *The American Commonwealth* and makes it difficult for today's reader to digest. While Tocqueville draws powerful conclusions from simple observations, Bryce dwells on his empirical material without offering much insight; and where Tocqueville studies the Americans' elusive mores and manners to learn about the workings and hidden dangers of democracy, Bryce takes over a thousand pages to describe the political institutions of democracy (state and municipal government, political parties and national government). Tocqueville devotes two entire chapters to associations and emphasizes their political value in creating civic virtue and public spirit. In contrast, the single paragraph on associational life in

Bryce's multi-volume work asserts in sober terms that associations offered practical advantages for the organization of special interests and influencing public opinion. According to Bryce, politics has nothing to do with morality and virtue, but only with hard facts that had to be determined dispassionately and objectively. Although Bryce often praised his distinguished French predecessor, he criticized Tocqueville's theory of democracy in devastatingly harsh terms: Tocqueville's 'new political science' may have been stimulating, but it certainly was not scientific. Tocqueville's passionate belief that civic virtue and politics were deeply intertwined and his pessimistic tone seemed antiquated at best to Bryce and to many contemporary European and North American sociologists and political scientists from across the ideological spectrum.

Max Weber was an exception. Deeply influenced by the sense of crisis that gripped *fin-de-siècle* Europe, Weber found new meaning in classical political theory's concern with civic virtue and sociability. Weber was concerned not just with a sociological analysis of rationally organized capitalistic society, but with modern society's effect on the 'constitution of souls', the humanity ('*Menschentum*') of its individual members, in short, with the ways in which capitalism had conquered the human 'soul' [162: p. 44]. Weber thus went beyond the positivistic spirit of the sociologists and political scientists at that time, even though he is considered to be representative of them today.

Weber's interest in voluntary associations came out of these political concerns. He shared Tocqueville's understanding that the expansion, entanglement, and composition of associations are not in themselves politically significant. 'How does belonging to an organization affect an individual internally?', Weber asked. 'Does it exert influence on the personality as such? . . . Which specific ideal of "manliness" is cultivated deliberately or consciously or even unconsciously?' And further: 'What connection exists between an association (of any kind), from a political party to, and this sounds like a paradox, a bowling league, and what one would call a *Weltanschauung* in the most general sense? [197: p. 55].

In his reservations about ordinary bowling leagues, Weber expressed his own scepticism as to whether evoking the connection between civic virtue and sociability was still in keeping with his time. In the end, 'it was common practice that associations that

originated in seminal ideas became mechanisms that contradicted their original purpose. This was a result of the “tragedy” inherent in any attempt to realize ideas in practice.” Furthermore, ‘every successful association shares the characteristic that as soon as it begins to develop its own machinery and starts to spread its propaganda, it will in a sense become banal and dominated by professionals (*Berufsmenschentum*).’ It is these professionals who will, according to Weber, destroy political virtue and populate capitalist society in the future. He writes passionately at the end of his *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* that these ‘last men’ will be ‘experts without spirit, hedonists without a heart’ [199: p. 204]. Weber identified this as the core problem of modernity: ‘How can we oppose this machinery to keep a part of humanity (*Menschentum*) free from the destruction of the soul that results from the exclusive domination of the bureaucratic ideal?’ [198: p. 413].

Weber’s pessimistic image of modernity’s dangerous ‘destruction of the soul’ was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings. Nietzsche was mockingly contemptuous of the liberal belief in the political value of sociability. He drew a sharp contrast between his own ‘aristocratic concept of virtue’ and the coming of mass democracy that was apparent in the spread of associations throughout all levels of society. When ‘last men’ gather together like sheep in ‘sociable societies’ and ‘democratic fatherlands’, they lose, according to Nietzsche, their true political virtue, which requires isolation and a focus on individualism. In an era of massive associational growth, of ‘philistinism’ and ‘Vereinsmeierei’, Nietzsche valued just one virtue: solitude. ‘Solitude is a virtue for us, a sublime tendency and impulse toward purity which inevitably guesses how impure relations must be when men come into contact with one another in society.’ Nothing seemed more absurd to Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century than the liberal conviction (based on faith in associations) that social interaction leads to civic virtue: ‘Every association breeds vulgarity – in some way, in some place, and at some time’ [180: p. 232].

Tocqueville believed throughout his life that face-to-face interaction in associations was the only way to thwart despotism and to ensure that it did not conquer the human ‘soul’. Despotism walls people off in their private lives and takes advantage of their tendency to keep apart: ‘Their feelings toward each other were

already growing cold; despotism freezes them' [190: p. 87]. However politically opportune a belief in virtue and sociability may seem today, historically the consequences of such a belief were ambiguous. The claim to work for the common good was based on the assumption of belonging to an elite, who ensured its 'quality' in associational culture. Thus, this claim was always bound up with social or moral, ethnic or racial, religious or gender-specific presuppositions. Nineteenth-century practitioners of civil society were passionate not just about working for the common good but also about excluding and disciplining those who did not meet their social or moral standards. Tocqueville's thesis, therefore, that democracy and sociability are fundamentally connected – a thesis frequently invoked today by friends of civil society – must be placed in historical perspective. How associations were constituted, the nature of their social and moral claims and objectives – and what occasionally unintended political results those claims and objectives may have produced – must be examined in greater detail.

By the end of the nineteenth century, liberal and conservative elites interpreted the political plurality and social popularity of associational self-organization – a hallmark of democracy – as a sign of decline. Anti-Semites and philo-Semites, socialists and Catholics, veterans and pacifists, scientists and occultists, friends of club life and its opponents – they all gathered in associations that promoted their peculiar objectives. More than anything else, though, nationalism spurred innumerable associations in Central Europe, which also bitterly fought each other. The spread of voluntary associations democratized society and gave the previously excluded a place and a voice – but not necessarily a deeper belief in the liberal idea of a civil society.

Conclusion: Paradoxes of Civil Society

The relationship between civil society and democracy seems even more problematic when seen in the light of the history of voluntary associations in the two decades after 1914. Admittedly, we can give only a tentative account of this history since research on civil society for the ‘age of extremes’ (Eric Hobsbawm) is rather scanty compared to the research on the workings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civil society.

In the United States, the number of newly founded associations, due to the sense of crisis described in the previous chapter, stagnated between 1910 and 1940, albeit they were still being founded at a rather high level. The rise of ‘mass culture’ and ‘mass democracy’ – both contemporary expressions with a pejorative ring – put pressure on associations despite their high numbers. Before World War I, to participate in social life, commerce, politics, or leisure, one had to be a joiner. Voluntary associations continued to serve as auxiliaries for all these purposes, but now it was no longer necessary, as a condition of participation, to subscribe to a voluntary association’s moral and political norms [206: p. 1358; 155: p. 514; similar for Britain: 159: pp. 187–99]. The Great Depression further lessened the moral and political expectations that Progressive-Era social reformers had connected with civic activism. Although the majority of Americans still belonged to at least one voluntary association, the state, special interest groups, and the media increasingly shaped the public sphere.

Until the early 1930s, the situation was similar on the European continent. For example, Germany’s social, cultural, and political

life after the Great War remained based on voluntary associations. These associations, however, were not necessarily concerned with the moral and political ideas connected with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sociability. For example, one of the countless associations of the time, founded in 1920, was the 'Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Arbeiterverein' – the precursor to the Nazi Party. To be sure, Hitler spoke contemptuously of the 'terrible German club-life' and the 'philistinism of bowling societies'. These clubs and societies, according to Hitler, did not function truly politically – in Hitler's sense of the term – that is, as a 'movement', but more 'like a Parliament' with statutes, debates, elections, and rules [205: p. 309]. Nevertheless, as he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, National Socialism initially needed to take root in German associational life – and it did. After 1925, the Nazi Party not only counted 1400 local branches with 100,000 members, but, much more importantly, the far Right permeated bourgeois and workers' associational culture, which had been predominantly liberal or socialist before 1914. In other words, the Nazis conquered German civil society from within. Ultimately, though, the Nazi Party's inner organization changed considerably, becoming much more centralized and oriented towards the 'Führer'. In a campaign against local club-life ('Vereinsmeierei') in 1926, Hitler officially forbade party members to belong to other associations, with the telling exception of the veterans' organizations [205: p. 322].

As the German example shows, the enemies of democracy can utilize the dense and vibrant associational culture of civil society for anti-democratic ends. There are, of course, peculiarities in German political culture after the defeat of 1918 that can be used to help explain the rise of National Socialism and the demise of the Weimar Republic. The absence of civil society, however, cannot be counted among them.

Nevertheless, one of the first things a totalitarian regime does to protect its power is suppress local associational life. German Fascists and Soviet Stalinists alike replaced voluntary associations with centralized and controlled mass organizations. This did not happen overnight [similarly for Italy, see 207]. In the Soviet Union, associational life had a surprising but short revival in the 1920s. Parallel to the initially successful Soviet experiment of a 'New Economic Policy' (NEP), which gave the market more space in the Soviet

economy, one can discern something like a ‘NEP of civil society’ (Irina Il’ina) as well. Many of the pre-Revolutionary associations for scientific, cultural, or economic purposes survived the civil war, particularly in the towns of the Russian provinces. Between 1921 and 1929 thousands of new associations were founded to promote science and technology, ethnic groups like Germans, Jews, Koreans, or Chinese, and socialist youth. These associations were, to be sure, closely watched by the Bolshevik apparatus; many, like the ‘Society for the Abolition of Illiteracy’, the ‘Society of the Militant Godless’, the ‘Association of the Rule of the City over the Village’, the ‘Friends of the Radio’ and other similar curios of the Soviet social utopia, were even initiated by the state itself. These *Obshchestvennye organizatsii* had to develop under the constraints of evolving totalitarian rule and the destruction of public and political pluralism [125: pp. 145–6]. Still, the new associations did retain elements of civic activism. Only with the advent of Stalinism in the 1930s did ‘societal organization’ become something quite different. To be active in society under Stalinism meant service to the socialist state and its military protection. Organizations in this period only superficially resembled the voluntary associations of pre-Revolutionary Russia. As in Nazi Germany, all Soviet citizens had to be members of mass organizations that were controlled rigorously by the party and watched closely by the police and secret service.

As Europe, in the wake of Nazi Germany’s initial military and diplomatic successes, became more and more dominated by authoritarian regimes that shut down all voluntary associations and despised liberal democracy, American social scientists rediscovered the political significance of civic activism (and the writings of Tocqueville). In their eyes, the embodiment of democracy in free associations became once again a hallmark of the exceptionalism of the American national character, which was seen to be in stark contrast to European political culture [202]. In an influential essay published in 1944 on the ‘Nation of Joiners’, Arthur M. Schlesinger echoed Tocqueville’s earlier assertions:

Considering the central importance of the voluntary organization in American history there is no doubt it has provided the people with their greatest school of self-government. Rubbing minds as well as elbows, they have been trained from youth to take

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common counsel, choose leaders, harmonize differences, and obey the expressed will of the majority. In mastering the associative way they have mastered the democratic way.

[136: pp. 24–5]

Since the end of World War II, this belief in sociability as the bulwark of American democracy and, conversely, isolation as a source of potential decline has been revived in social scientific bestsellers – from David Riesman’s *Lonely Crowd* (1950) to Robert D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000).

It is precisely this political belief in an intrinsic connection between democracy and civil society that gained new currency in Europe after the collapse of communism around 1990 and the parallel crisis of the Western welfare state. ‘Civil society’ and ‘public sphere’ became global catchphrases in academic debate and spurred a still growing literature in political science and sociology. Advocates of civil society see the concept as a possible solution for the present crisis of democracy and the challenge of global governance [see, for example, 16]. In contrast, recent historical scholarship focuses on the workings and dilemmas of civil society in the past, partly inspired by a fresh reading of the post-war studies of Reinhart Koselleck, Jürgen Habermas, or Hannah Arendt, who had traced the emergence of ‘society’ and a ‘public sphere’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [51].

Koselleck, following the conservative argument of Augustin Cochin and Carl Schmitt, had regarded enlightened sociable society with its unbounded moralism as the precursor to modern totalitarianism. For him, the modern understanding of politics did become dangerously depoliticized by the rise of ‘society’ and its opposition to the state. By drawing a distinction between the state as the realm of political authority proper and the strictly subordinated subjects, early modern politics did create subjects who were not citizens and thus free to pursue highminded moral ambitions without being forced to take the restraints of political reality into account. The more these ambitions grew, for example in Masonic lodges with their utopian vision of universal brotherhood, the more did the political authority of the state diminish: ‘Freedom in secret became the secret of freedom’ [50: p. 75]. In twentieth-century totalitarianism, Koselleck detected a similar moralism that supplanted the negotiation of political interests with

a utopian vision of society. Ultimately, modern totalitarianism attempted to change reality into utopia by violent force.

Habermas, though influenced by Marxist critical theory, took a more liberal stance and discovered the roots of the twentieth-century's political cataclysms in the decline of Enlightenment Europe's public sphere and the rise of mass society in the nineteenth century. It is there, Habermas noted with characteristic ferocity, that 'critical publicity is supplanted by manipulative publicity' [8: p. 178]. In contrast, the public sphere of civil society that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century offered a critical and open discourse that had made politics more rational and civil.

Hannah Arendt's political theory, finally, remained within the tradition of classical republicanism by seeing human isolation and the demise of sociability, both phenomena typical of modern society, as something deeply threatening to the public realm and thus to politics in general. By destroying all space between men and thus the precondition of human sociability, totalitarianism in particular forges an 'iron band' of 'organized loneliness': 'What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals' [203: p. 477; 204]. Individuals lose their capacity to judge as citizens and to create experiences in the world, and become prone to terror and manipulation.

While the recent historical scholarship used for this survey paints a more nuanced and sober image of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civil society than these three post-World War II authors' historical-philosophical writings would indicate, the question that motivated their critical stance remains pressing: What are the dangers to liberal democracy and, equally important, what are the dangers of liberal democracy itself?

In conclusion, we can discern three major trends in the history of civil society: expansion, democratization, and politicization. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, civic activism spread in waves, with each wave giving rise to new associational goals and making the network of civil society denser. This *expansion* can only be understood against the background of global migration, trade, and communication of ideas and practices. Enlightened ideas and practices circulated within exclusive sociable circles that spanned

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the globe from Boston to St Petersburg in the eighteenth century. New voluntary associations arose out of these circles around 1800 and set off a true passion for associations in North America and Europe in the 1830s and 1840s. The associations combined enlightened ideas and practices with the contemporary political currents of liberalism, republicanism, socialism, and nationalism. Continental European states tried, with varying degrees of success in East and West, to control their citizens' passion for associations. At the same time, the associations' causes multiplied: national, confessional, or social reform associations broadened the spectrum, often with new claims to social exclusivity and moral-political visions. In the 1860s and 1870s a new wave of associations arose, which both helped bring about, and was the result of, society's liberalization and nationalization. This trend intensified dramatically at the end of the century, when nearly all aspects of urban society in the countries we have considered were organized around associations. The expansion and specialization of voluntary associations produced new forms of organized interests, politics, and modern mass culture that adopted, and went beyond, many of the older associations' aims and imperatives.

The expansion of self-governing associations led to more social participation in Europe and drew, at the same time, new political borders. The era between the Enlightenment and World War I surely was not a democratic age, but rather an age of *democratization*. At a time when none of the states we are considering had universal suffrage, nineteenth-century associations served as schools for democracy. Joiners experienced a constitution of statutes, the right to vote and freedom of speech, and engagement for self-defined causes and goals; but also the accompanying experience of everyday conflicts and frustrations that are part and parcel of democracy. In this sense, those associations dedicated to unpolitical or trivial causes (measured by today's standards) also had a democratizing effect. However, the use of the secret ballot in voluntary associations could serve not only as practice in democracy, but also as a mechanism for excluding those who did not meet specific social or moral criteria. The desire to participate in social and political life and to have one's own social spaces and practices was, consequently, an important driving force behind the ever-new surges of association formation in the long nineteenth century, in spite of – or rather because of – experiences of exclusion.

The increasing competition between voluntary associations and their political and moral ideas, and the resulting conflicts within civil society, were not a sign of the decline of civic activism but rather of its democratization. Voluntary associations no longer served to secure the political claim to moral leadership and social harmony of a small elite, but rather cleared the way for new forms and institutions to shape political demands. What *fin-de-siècle* liberal and conservative critics regarded contemptuously as the philistinism of club-life and its questionable appeal for ‘the masses’ can be seen as a result of the gradual democratisation of civil society that had brought about new conflicts and increasingly violent struggles between competing political actors [208].

The advent of democracy, in other words, also politicized voluntary associations in all countries this study has considered. Enlightened sociability experienced an initial *politicization* before, during, and after the revolutions of the late eighteenth century when the states of continental Europe set off a wave of government repression against the free association of its citizens. Even more noteworthy is the readiness with which the ‘practitioners of civil society’ formed associations in the early nineteenth century. On both sides of the Atlantic, associations served as supposedly unpolitical, sociable spaces for social and moral improvement of individual members and society at large. The related liberal ideas of social harmony and reform competed, beginning in the 1830s and 1840s, with new political-social movements like the workers’ that made use of associations to shape an alternative culture. Not only did they adopt the ideas and practices of civic association, they developed their own political and moral ideas of the significance of sociability and thereby made the tension between liberalism and democracy more apparent. Simultaneously, the nationalization and ‘ethnization’ of society, and therefore also of sociability, began and, in the 1860s and 1870s, produced a new dynamic in the passion for association. At the end of the century, this passion encompassed nearly all social, confessional, and political groups and aspects of society. However, the more voluntary associations at the turn of the twentieth century became places of self-organization for differentiated and often mutually exclusive social and political actors (and thus an expression of democratic plurality), the more they lost, in the eyes of many of their contemporaries, their moral authority and

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utopian promise to reform society. They were no longer perceived as a remedy for, but rather were seen as a sign of, the loss of society's cohesion and moral compass – the loss, in other words, of precisely that civic virtue that theorists and practitioners of civil society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had understood as vital for a polity. The expansion, democratization, and politicization of voluntary associations were, consequently – and only seemingly paradoxically – a cause of the crises of European civil societies before World War I.

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