

## **CIVIL SOCIETY: MODERN ARISTOTELIAN *POLIS*?**

### **ABSTRACT**

Even in his own day, Aristotle had difficulty identifying a real-life example of his ideal political community. Can we do any better today?

I would propose looking for the current “home” of the neo-Aristotelian *polis* not in any contemporary political arrangement but rather within elements of modern “civil society”. Although the perfect actualization of the neo-Aristotelian ideal is as elusive now as it was in Aristotle’s own day, elements of it can certainly be found in practice. Indeed, it is only in very recent years that modern technology has for the first time enabled human beings to connect with one another in a way which truly furthers each of their *eudaimonia* in the neo-Aristotelian sense.

In the Western world, the idea of “civil society” has always been a central tenet of any reasoned attempt to organize communal life. I identify four different historical paradigms for this ancient term, arising at different points in succession in the history of Western philosophy. Unfortunately, none of these work particularly well today: modern life requires a concept of civil society which goes beyond the political, the ecclesiastical, the economic and the nostalgically voluntary. If community is to provide the key to the Good Life in the 21st century, it must incorporate all of these and more.

Instead, I propose a more contemporary fifth model of civil society, one built directly on the neo-Aristotelian principles of autonomy, capabilities and flourishing. Under this definition, civil society is seen as any sort of directly linked community of shared values. It is a coming together of individuals seeking political stability in their search for the Good Life as they unabashedly stand for intersubjectively defensible values, but also allowing for the diversity and tolerance both within the community and in relation to others on which the long-term health of any modern Aristotelian *polis* depends.

Some particularly timely examples can illustrate just how these principles can be put into practice in modern life. Provocatively, while globally linked communities such as *Al Qaeda* may seem at first glance to fit the bill, this modern *polis* clearly cannot live up to the normative standards of our neo-Aristotelian paradigm. Communities based on shared sexual identity, such as the Gay Liberation movement, fare somewhat better, but must ultimately discover that this facet of human identity is not enough to truly bind citizens into a flourishing community. The most appealing current example, *Amnesty International*, is one that is truly based on shared values, and that has found ways to use the global links of modern community to put those values into action, if only in anecdotal and sketchy ways.

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**Modern Aristotelian *Polis*?**

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**Dr. Mark Young**

**Humboldt Universität zu Berlin**

Recent political philosophy has seen a lively new interest in the Aristotelian *polis*. Here is a model, say commentators such as Raz, Nussbaum and MacIntyre<sup>1</sup>, which is eminently worthy of renewed attention as we seek to tackle many of the contemporary problems of life together in a pluralistic, liberal society, especially those revolving around questions of the Common Good and the liberal/communitarian debate. We are enjoined to carefully reconsider Aristotle's classical template. For it is far from obsolete, and can yield valuable new insights as we search for a more philosophically defensible liberal society.

In most of this analysis, however, the empirical element is regrettably shortchanged. While the model sounds attractive in theory, how does it look in practice? Where, exactly, is such a modern Aristotelian *polis* to be found? Where, in the complex global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, can we identify particular communities that actively work to promote their citizens' autonomy, furthering their capabilities so that they can indeed flourish individually and together as a society? Where has it been shown to be possible to achieve both political stability and liberal pluralism in a way that furthers the interests of both the individual and the community?

I would propose looking for the current "home" of the neo-Aristotelian *polis* not in any contemporary political arrangement but rather within elements of modern "civil society". Although the perfect actualization of the neo-Aristotelian ideal is as elusive now as it was in Aristotle's own day, elements of it can certainly be found in practice. Indeed, it is only in very recent years that modern technology has for the first time enabled human beings to connect with one another in a way which truly furthers each of their *eudaimonia* in the neo-Aristotelian sense. Thus we today have the possibility to realize Aristotelian ideals to a far greater degree than he would have dreamed possible.

This paper will start by offering a fresh definition of “civil society”, a term that is currently much in vogue, but which unfortunately also remains poorly defined. Especially since the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, much has been written both enthusiastically and critically about this new darling of political philosophy. Little of it has been truly illuminating, however, and the literature remains sketchy at best.<sup>2</sup>

I propose, with John Ehrenberg, that we think along the lines of at least four different historical paradigms for this ancient term, arising at different points in succession in the history of Western philosophy. Unfortunately, none of these work particularly well today: modern life requires a concept of civil society which goes beyond the political, the ecclesiastical, the economic and the nostalgically voluntary. If community is to provide the key to the Good Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must incorporate all of these and more.

My paper will then explore a more contemporary model of civil society, one built directly on the neo-Aristotelian principles of autonomy, capabilities and flourishing. Under this definition, civil society is seen as any sort of *directly linked community of shared values*. It is a coming together of individuals seeking political stability in their search for the Good Life, but also allowing for diversity and tolerance both within the community and in relation to others. It is a modern political ideal.

Finally, I propose to make the picture clearer by looking at some particularly timely examples. While globally linked communities such as *Al Qaeda* may seem at first glance to fit the bill, this modern *polis* clearly cannot live up to the normative standards of our neo-Aristotelian paradigm. Communities based on shared sexual identity, such as the *Gay Liberation movement*, fare somewhat better, but must ultimately discover that this facet of human identity is not enough to truly bind citizens into a flourishing community. The most appealing current example, *Amnesty International*, is one that is truly based on shared values, and that has found ways to use the global links of modern community to put those values into action.

## FOUR HISTORICAL MODELS

While “civil society” has recently become a fairly fashionable term for political philosophers, the idea is certainly not new. In the Western world, at least since the time of the Greeks and Romans, it has always been a central tenet of any reasoned attempt to organize communal life. The fundamental question remains the same: how to reconcile the public and the private, and mediate effectively (and fairly) between individual interests and larger public concerns? How can we posit a prescriptive as well as a descriptive model of the social order, one that can effectively lead each of us to the Good Life?

The organizational paradigms for how to do this have changed repeatedly, however, over the centuries. The following admittedly selective and cursory tour through the history of philosophy as applied to the term of civil society will show that what began as a model of *political commonwealth* was supplanted by the notion of *Church as Community*, then by an economic interpretation of an *integrated system of needs* and, most recently, by the Tocquevillian (and neo-Tocquevillian) ideal of *voluntary association*.

### Political communities

The first historical model of civil society<sup>3</sup>, that of the *political commonwealth*, is of course the legacy of Greek and Roman philosophy. Whether the object of analysis is a small- to medium-size Greek city or the larger Greek and then Roman empires, the fundamental thinking is the same: political community is the highest, most natural and most developed form of human association, and the state must therefore be the primary keeper of value. It is through organizing ourselves under the political power of a ruler that we make civilization possible, and thus separate ourselves from the barbarians.

Plato's *Republic* provided the first full-scale articulation of this early vision of civil society. In keeping with his general tenet that the best and most complete is to be found in the most Universal, it should be no surprise that, for Plato, the ultimate Good Life can only be the one lived under the tutelage of the State. As Socrates brought Thrasymachus to realize for himself, individual interest is simply too narrow a foundation on which to base human happiness, justice or civilization. For that, we need a larger political entity, and preferably the ideal political State as described in the *Republic*.

In such a society, individual associations such as families, households, villages and cities all sum together to form the larger harmonious whole of the State. In one of the earliest depictions of the principle of Division of Labor, Plato describes for us vividly just how each individual's unique skills, aptitudes and contributions to society are brought together in the reasoned, organized and organic unity of the State, not so much in order to coordinate interests as to provide for the greater welfare of the Whole. Much as hands, legs, eyes and ears all contribute to the overall life and functioning of the human body, so do we all have a role to play in furthering the greater Good of the State in which we live.

Aristotle's analysis, while somewhat more sophisticated, still fits in well with this general worldview.<sup>4</sup> Because the *polis* is the highest form of *politike koinonia*, men will actively seek to join some form of political association, and willingly learn to subjugate private interests to the public sphere. While Aristotle emphatically rejects the analogy of the body and its parts<sup>5</sup>, he does emphasize the inestimable value that community provides for its members in their search for *eudaimonia*. And he tells us that free citizens, through the public discourse which active membership in a political association affords them, will come to deliberate together and discover the public as well as their own individual good, and then organize public action in order to attain that good for themselves and their civic neighbors.

But Aristotle also took issue with Plato's monistic imposition of unity on the question of political association. He told us that the Aristotelian *polis*, unlike Plato's *Republic*, "cannot go on and on and become ever more of a unity. Rather it is, by nature, some kind of *aggregation*."<sup>6</sup> Thus it must also allow for *multiple spheres of action*. While the different associations of communal life do add up to and find their highest expression in the State, they also continue to provide value and to allow for different modes of expression for the individual along the way. We are fathers, children, employers and hobby enthusiasts as well as political citizens. And while the political is the most comprehensive of the spheres in which we operate, it complements rather than subsumes the others. Only through it do we reach the good life, transcending mere survival to fully consummate our human moral development, while at the same time preserving the diversity which makes our lives rich and which ensures the benefits of trading to mutual advantage.

The Romans concurred with the model of the political association as the highest form of civil society, but added to it the Stoic virtues of self-sufficiency and authenticity. Citizenship was thus tempered by private responsibility for seeking and living the Good Life. But here, again, the State provides for the paramount virtue. As Marcus Aurelius put it, the whole universe can be seen as a civic community or "single city" in which everything alive shares in a harmonious way organized by reason.<sup>7</sup> We must overcome the swan song of self-interest, and instead look to the State for the ultimate grounding for individual happiness. "What is beneficial for my community", he tells us, "is the sole Good for me."<sup>8</sup>

Because the *res publica* is greater than and morally superior to any form of self-interest, civic virtue and (disinterested) public service must naturally be highly prized. As we enter into membership in a political partnership for the common Good, we are sharing in "right Reason that is consonant with nature". We are expressing the social spirit inherent in our natures<sup>9</sup>, and must therefore honor the institutions erected to cement that social bond between us.

The State has authority because it expresses value which comes from the natural harmony of the universe, value which transcends individual self-interest.

In all of these models, the dimensions are clear: from the initial experience of individual striving for happiness, we move naturally and successively through ever larger circles of man-made political association, and finally find our highest level of flourishing through our membership in the most perfect of these: the State. In this ultimate commonwealth organized by political power we each come to find our individual as well as a greater communal happiness and thus will freely accept the norms that come with membership in that Commonwealth.

There were, under the Classical notion, no serious alternatives to political power. Religion was largely a private affair and the Church had, as yet, no established independent power base. While Aristotle allowed for the value of trading between citizens, commerce was, in general deeply frowned on in both the Greek and Roman societies as activity which may be driven by economic necessity but which does little to help human beings attain the Fine. Yet it is precisely these two alternatives which then came to challenge this model of civil society, and, over time, to supplant it.

### **The Church as keeper of value**

The Classical model was derived from the ideal of a perfect and utterly self-sufficient community of men as the ultimate end of action. This worldview was to receive a body blow with the decline of the Roman Empire and the concomitant rise of the Christian Church. For with the new (Augustinian) paradigm of man as a sinful creature utterly dependent on God for his salvation came the concurrent need for a second kind of community: a Civil Society endowed with the authority and the capability to provide a higher kind of Good than that which is invested in political authorities.

While the Church concurred with the Classical view that the Universe is an ordered and harmonious Cosmos, with an appropriate place and function for all that is within it, it naturally sought the foundation of that order not in human reason but in the Divine. Because human beings are fallible creatures, their political conventions and associations can at best only be imperfect creations, good for meeting the temporal needs of any given group of citizens. True happiness, in the Classical sense, requires more than this, and can only come through submission to the Will and Law of God, as interpreted by the Church.

While men were famously enjoined to “render unto Caesar” that which is Caesar’s due, they were also reminded that they must also assume a second and higher obligation to their Creator. The Church does not supplant the state, but rather stands alongside it as a complementary and correcting institution. Citizens then assume, if you will, two parallel “practical identities”<sup>10</sup>: they are both citizens of a town, state or republic and children of God and thus contributing members to his Church in an *ecumene*, or Community of Saints, participating joyfully and voluntarily in the Life of Christ.

Note that this creation of a second public sphere, severe as the dictates of the Church may seem, also allowed, for the first time, for a substantive notion of human liberty. The separation of the public from the private and the secular from the spiritual allowed for individuals to interact in public spaces that were not controlled by political authority. It recognized at least two dimensions of identity, and two different ways to express that identity.

This new paradigm of civil society also brought the addition of *morality* as a further vital dimension for any theory of the good life. Virtues are thus not only inherent in human practices and in the proper living of life, but they are imposed on us by a higher authority. It is not enough to be happy; we must also be in harmony with God’s Will. We must constantly seek His guidance as we seek to do not only what is Good but also what is Right.

The Church also endorsed the Classical notion of the fundamentally social nature of man. Just as we could not reach earthly happiness in isolation, so we certainly cannot come to discern and obey God's Will by ourselves: for this, we need the community, and authority of the Church. Through the institutional mechanisms and coercive authority of this second form of *koinonia*, we can band together as children of God in an effort not only to further earthly happiness but to ensure our salvation for eternity. This community of shared belief, then, becomes the more important kind of civil society.

Under this new kind of communal arrangement, faith and grace came to supplant reason and public action as the driving forces of our life together.<sup>11</sup> While we have political obligations to fulfil and public laws to obey, our highest energies should always be reserved for service in the community of true believers. Only by submitting to the authority of the Church, participating in its institutions, following its Laws and wholeheartedly joining its fellowship can we hope to flourish both in this life and in the next. We are Christians first, and secular citizens of a particular nation or community second.

While this model more or less held sway for a thousand years, it was never as monolithic as it seemed. Arguably, the increasing fragmentation of both Church and State throughout the Middle Ages carried the seeds of rebellion in the heart of both institutions, and ultimately served to implode the system from within. In the end, both claimants of our allegiance were to gradually lose their grip on our loyalty and attention, as the individual began to reassert herself as the most compelling reason for human striving.

The challenge came, ultimately, from two directions. Luther's Reformation put a new emphasis on conscience and on inner experience, positing that the private spiritual life of each individual is inviolable and the only sure path to God. And, in parallel, the Italian Renaissance let to a general reawakening of the individual in both the political and personal context, with the focus of human Good returning to the Classical humanistic ideal of

flourishing and individual self-expression. What kind of civil society could do justice to these new sorts of values?

### **An integrated system of needs**

This time, the change in paradigms was dramatic. It amounted to no less than the removal of God or even any other kind of abstract transcendent value as the normative foundation of human community. The Universe was no longer assumed to be a harmonious place, with a function for everything and a Reason towards which we can all reliably strive. Rather, we must recognize that we are on our own in an atomistic and mechanistic world, with a call to make our own sense of our surroundings. Value resides not in the community, but in us.

All that is left for public life in such an environment, said Machiavelli, is the pursuit of *interests*. Human beings come together not because of the logic of Reason or the expression of any abstract value, and still less in obedience to a divinely imposed Moral Law. Rather, they seek community only in furtherance of their own particular interests, and will always remain in community only as long as they can safely assume that their interests are better served in that context than they could be under any other alternative arrangement. We band together in order to avert social chaos and because we realize that that is the best way for each of us to reach her own self-interested ends.

In such a value-free mechanistic universe, we must *make our own meaning* and fend for our survival as best we can. But because untrammelled pursuit of self-interest will inevitably lead to a permanent state of war, it is only rational that we instead choose to subject ourselves to some form of communal discipline. The establishment of a Hobbesian Sovereign is, then, only a judicious way to channel *power*, organizing it in a way that will best further individual interests, maximizing utility for all. Collective public reason is little more than the expression of enlightened and socialized self-interest, and civil society is any institutional arrangement

(usually sanctioned by or identical with the State) which will cement that thinking into effective action and compliance.

Other Enlightenment thinkers put a more humane gloss on this idea. For John Locke, civil society is first of all about a *social contract*, freely entered into transcendently<sup>12</sup> between free and equal citizens. Because natural law tells us that we all enjoy individual rights to happiness and freedom, any sort of lasting and fruitful association between us must be voluntary, one based on at least theoretical agreement that the proposed community is conducive to each of our interests as individuals. Mill and Hume and especially Adam Ferguson dropped Locke's transcendentalism; they viewed community as a far less bloodless concept, built on theoretical contracting. Coming together is, in their view, quite normal for us, given our inborn disposition for empathy, altruism and sociability. It is a natural expression of our innate moral sentiments and a rational decision for each of us.

Adam Smith took this paradigm of the civil society as an economic community of interests one step further. For him, there is no real need for a coercive Sovereign or even a theoretical social contract between free and equal citizens. In a free society, economic forces will organize themselves without any such overt arrangements or theories of intended consequences. For as any collection of *homo oeconomici* come together, they will already automatically constitute a "market-organized sphere of private advantage that stands apart from the State", built only on their individual "propensities to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another."<sup>13</sup> We will naturally form communities of advantage, using the considerable gains to be gleaned from the division of labor to better further our individual ends.

Note that in all of this there is no talk of any kind of higher justification for community, be it the ordered Cosmos, Reason, God, Duty or even a general Common Good. "Civil Society" becomes any sort of artificial social network created and existing to protect property and an orderly market, with economic considerations in the forefront of our thinking. Only individual

advantage can serve as justification for community coercion. Public virtue is thus not an end in itself, still less something that emerges from ethical deliberation or political action. It is nothing more than the unintended result of the individual dealings of self-interested but interdependent economic actors.<sup>14</sup>

The interpretation of this model on the Continent varied slightly from the teachings of the English and Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. Especially for Rousseau, but also for Kant, value was not to be entirely rejected or equated with economic utility. While it must reside in each individual as an end in himself, it can only be fully expressed in the bonding of individuals one to another *in a public space* in an effort to find (for Rousseau) Civic Virtue and a General Law, and, for Kant, adherence to the Moral Law, not as a divine prescription but as the natural result of human Freedom and a natural expression of (individual) Reason.<sup>15</sup>

It was, however, G.F.W. Hegel who was to bring the notion of Civil Society as an association of individuals to its full fruition with his now-famous phrase of an “integrated and interdependent system of needs.”<sup>16</sup> Like Rousseau and Kant, Hegel rejected the Hobbesian picture of a mechanistic Universe, and returned to Freedom as an ideal and a value. But his definition of freedom was somewhat different from that of his Enlightenment predecessors. As discussed in Chapter 5, Hegelian Freedom was not so much about negative constraints on mutual action as a communal arena of positive self-actualization, expressed in the world through a structure of interactions in which the self-determination of each is a necessary condition of the self-determination of others.

The integrated system of civil society is, then, nothing less than the very expression of true Freedom. In the space between family and State, self-serving individuals will naturally form an interactive network, always remaining rooted in individual interests and linked to one another in an autonomous chain of social connections.<sup>17</sup> But they do this not because this is

a natural choice made by freely contracting people, or because of moral sentiments, but rather because they are a part of a larger historical Force. Locke's Social Contract and Smith's Invisible Hand will thus take on a life of their own, as the "Bürgerliche Gesellschaft" becomes an inevitable larger expression of universal human Freedom.

But Hegel also pointed out forcefully that because we have no control over our own destiny under such a worldview, the system will inevitably become oppressive. While history will ensure that civil society comes about as a response to integrated individual needs, it cannot, in the end, lead to complete human fulfilment. For that, humans must become devoted to something larger than themselves. If not to a value, then they must at least submit to the flow of history.

For Hegel, and certainly then for Marx, this "something larger" turned out to be an all-powerful State which ultimately eclipsed and negated bourgeois civil society and led to a new and revolutionary form of human community. If we reject this train of thought (as I think we must)<sup>18</sup>, the question still remains: to what can human beings strive in order to find a higher fulfilment? If moral sentiments are too weak, economic interests too impersonal and the Force of History too terrifying, then what value beyond individual interest can fairly and effectively animate a modern civil society? Is there any kind of tenable antidote to an untrammelled *homo oeconomicus*?

### **Voluntary associations**

The answer to this, and the foundation for a fourth model of Civil Society, finds its roots in the thinking of the French Enlightenment. As one of the most vocal aristocratic critics of the French Revolution, Montesquieu was also appalled at the excesses of life after the Monarchy, and all too aware of the deficits of economic advantage as a normative foundation of society. Surely there is more to life than the pursuit of material wealth, and a greater role for community than the maximization of individual economic utility. And surely there must be

a civilized way to check the violence and tyranny which ensued from the power of the uneducated majority in the new French State, so soon after the echoes of grand speeches about liberty, fraternity and equality had faded from public life.

Civil society, seen as an *intermediate sphere of voluntary association* between individuals and the State, provides the room for this. But the value of such a coming together of free and equal citizens far exceeds the economic. As Aristotle taught us, life is about balance and about virtue, and it is to those values which we must return, at least as a complement to the unprecedented economic successes of the Enlightenment view of society.

Thus, “civility” became a new ideal in itself. For the aristocracy, this was expressed in manners, decorum and artificial conventions designed to take the brutish edge off *homo oeconomicus*. But the idea was deeper than that. *Culture* is what civilizes us, as common values are created and propagated across all social classes, and cemented by the institutions of our life together. We join a community as free and equal individuals, but it is not only economic advantage that binds us. As rational beings, we can learn to share higher goods as well. We create a moral sphere between us, and we do that willingly and freely.

We are autonomous creatures, but with a natural disposition to civility and altruism. If public institutions and the networks of social interactions that we create will only allow us to express it, we will evidence a deep appreciation of something higher than self-interest. Indeed, it is only through Rousseau’s “commitment to publicness” that we can hope to fully reach our ideal of autonomy. We recognize and constitute our mutual humanity in society, and embrace ethics and “civic virtue” naturally as an integral part of civilization itself.<sup>19</sup>

Nowhere was this new ideal of voluntary association practiced with greater success than in the emerging nation of the United States of America. De Tocqueville famously extolled the virtues of the new spirit of volunteerism in unabashedly capitalist (and Humean) America,

pointing especially to New England town meetings as the first real recreation of the Athenian *polis*. Americans believed deeply in individual rights and in autonomy, but also were far better able to form well-functioning communities than were their European counterparts. Here was civility in action, but a civility that had loosened its dependence on aristocratic norms and privilege and instead was truly “commonized” and democratic.

The uniquely American propensity to form voluntary associations that complemented rather than competed with political participation in the institutions of the State provided fertile ground for a civil society which could truly yield its citizens’ satisfaction and happiness. All across this vast and decentralized nation, citizens’ groupings formed around sport, community involvement, joint learning and deeply pragmatic mutual support provided for a powerfully effective fusion of Common Good and private interests. Indeed, this voluntary “Connection of the Right with private interest”<sup>20</sup> has proved to be a lasting bulwark against the tyranny of the democratic majority, helping to ward off fear and to cultivate the cultural values of equality, liberty, excellence and virtue.

It is this (neo-) Tocquevillian model which also serves as the philosophical foundation of modern communitarianism, as espoused both from the Left and also, most recently, from the Republican Right in the United States.<sup>21</sup> The Community of Saints is supplanted by many “Cities Upon a Hill”<sup>22</sup> If only communities can rediscover the joy of voluntary association and come together in the name of shared values, then we could perhaps halt the moral decay and dissolution of “social capital” so decried by Putnam and other more conservative commentators.<sup>23</sup>

As attractive as this nostalgic call for a return to community is, it also seems oddly archaic and unsatisfying. Surely the political philosophy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must offer a template which goes beyond the customs of eighteenth and nineteenth century America, one that is suited for mobile and anonymous urban life and for the tremendous diversity of the modern

global family. Values are certainly important, especially autonomy, freedom and the rights of the individual. *Solidarity* and *mutual trust* seem to be newly essential as well in the *entzaubert* global economy. But how are these potentially conflicting values to be defended, espoused, traded off and furthered in a global economy vastly more complex than that of the small towns of Colonial America?

## **A MODERN PROPOSAL**

The challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require a more modern proposal. Unfortunately, none of the templates outlined above will suffice if we are to effectively tackle the complex problems of the post-Enlightenment, post-existentialist global economy. Modern life requires a concept of civil society which goes beyond the political, the ecclesiastical, the economic and the nostalgically voluntary. If community is to provide the key to the Good Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must incorporate all of these and more.

I want to propose a neo-Aristotelian foundation for such a paradigm. Seen this way, civil society becomes any sort of actual or ideal *community of shared values, directly linked, and normatively justified*. It is a societal group which is built on a shared commitment to autonomy, capability-building and flourishing, one that is bound together by values which are intersubjectively defensible, but which also allow room for the plurality, diversity and individual freedom upon which the long-term health of any modern Aristotelian *polis* depends.

### **Communities of shared value**

To a far greater extent than Aristotle himself would have done, the neo-Aristotelian model of civil society concurs with the Enlightenment premise that value resides first of all in the individual. There is no abstract public Good which is separate from and larger than that invested in the community by its citizens, and communities must therefore be viewed as

constitutive arrangements entered into by individual actors for the sake of values which will further their own greater happiness.

The modern civil society is also duly respectful of the significant economic value that community can bring to its individual members. It recognizes that there is *prima facie* nothing wrong with communities of advantage: economic justifications provide for human happiness at its most basic level, and will always remain the primary reason that people seek each other out for community. But it also holds that advantage is not enough. If we embrace the neo-Aristotelian “thicker” view of the self, we must also hold ideal communities to a higher standards, and ask whether they provide for other sorts of value as well.

In order for an individual narrative to sustain a life over time, it must lead to some sort of sufficiently substantive and fulfilling overall end. Human beings, universally, feel a deep need to *stand for something*. Beyond the effort to satisfy their immediate and not so immediate economic needs, they seek to *flourish*. For that, they will also seek to gain the knowledge, skills and values that will allow them to live well as well as merely survive. And it is with this in mind that they will choose to become a part of a modern civil society.

The primary task of communities that come together in this way is the provision of *common frameworks of meaning*. As individuals organize and reflect on their lives, creating a coherent and defensible narrative that will allow for true neo-Aristotelian flourishing, they will be in search of a *context* for the stories they create. As they tell the stories of their lives, they will need an audience and a (sometimes challenging) response. They will realize that they cannot hope to be truly happy and fulfilled human beings in the absence of a community in which all of this is embedded, and which then provides the norms against which to measure the progress of their living.

In addition to trading goods and services, people may well form neo-Tocquevillean communities around common interests, or because of shared hobbies such as stamp collecting, sports or the love of animals. They may also bond with others for weightier reasons: because they share religious or political values, or in order to express a commitment to some sort of idealistic Cause. But their associations are valuable not only because they are voluntary but primarily because of the larger sense of self that they give to their members. In the end, individuals seek to become a part of community not only because of that they want to get but because of who they want to be.

This ideal model of a modern community is first of all a tangible expression of what Jürgen Habermas (and Hannah Arendt before him) famously referred to as the “public sphere”: that area of human community which exists between the political and economic. We come together without the institutional support of a government or the discipline of a market structure, in a space in which we are all equals and in which the objective, is first of all, (nonstrategic) communication with one another about what is truly important for each of us. We thus join a community which transcends Hegel’s necessary system of needs and is instead a voluntary association based on autonomy, shared meaning and choice.

But, unlike Habermas, I would argue that this is an arena which does not necessarily exclude the economic<sup>24</sup>. For it is about all facets of life that we converse with one another (including the economic), employing rational argument when we disagree and affirming our mutual solidarity when we concur. As we jointly develop a framework of meaning and societal norms which will govern individual behavior, we recognize that we are accountable to one another for the stories we tell, and dependent on one another for the moral and intellectual support that those stories give to our individual searches for meaning and happiness.

It is, then, all about values. A modern civil society is bound together by *shared commitments* to one another. This applies to economic bargaining, but also to ideals, principles and

norms, in addition to the quest for mutual advantage. In the sense of Hannah Arendt, and well beyond anything ever described by Tocqueville, we are always searching for public values, and feel a deep need for any societal arrangement which will yield those as a normative foundation for our lives.

But perhaps the Habermasian/Arendtian picture is a little too optimistic. For we should always remember that understanding does not necessarily constitute agreement. While we naturally bond to one another in communities of values (broadly defined), there is no automatic common harmony. In a modern civil society created by free and reflective individual agents. Just because we genuinely seek to understand each other does not necessarily mean we will always agree on a joint course of action. Even an “ideal speech situation” can yield a stalemate when it comes to recommendations for community policy.

There is in fact bound to be serious disagreement about the values upon which the community is to be built, and a neo-Aristotelian civil society welcomes such disagreement as a positive sign of the diversity which is essential if the community is truly to function. As interests and narratives will invariably clash with one another, we will need to find mechanisms with which to manage the conflict. We come together in search of the Good Life, but it is a good life which must be mutually negotiated, not only theoretically and in advance, but constantly and repeatedly as we interact with our fellow citizens over all the decisions of everyday life together.

Modern civil society is not a universal language game. It is far more complex than that. Joint narratives are notoriously difficult to create and fragile once we have them. The *eudaimonia* which is the proper goal of a neo-Aristotelian civil society must remain a chimera if we cannot find practical ways to seek it in the context of actual modern communities.

## Global linkage

But the Habermasian model has been criticized on other grounds as well. From the start, it has always been plagued by the empirical question: just where, precisely, is this “public sphere” to be located, and where do we find real examples of the “ideal speech situation” in action? Like Rawls, Habermas stands in danger of being dismissed as a bloodless theoretician, and a creator of ideal sociological models which, while intriguing as thought exercises, do not take us very far in our effort to make public policy in the real world.

This notion of a public sphere is indeed elusive. Certainly, face-to-face communities such as those of ancient Greece and, perhaps even more perfectly, in colonial America seem to be tangible examples of value-based civil societies of the neo-Aristotelian variety. Here we can find inclusive public discourse about matters of common concern, as well as an attempt to jointly articulate values, norms and an agreed course of community action. Here every member has a voice and can be an active and direct participant in the life of the *polis*.

If we are to propose a model of civil society that is public in the Habermasian sense, we must also be able to recreate the immediacy of these sorts of civil forums. Citizens must have unfettered access to one another, without intermediaries, and with little institutional baggage to impede or limit their discussion. If geography and economic constraints do not allow the world’s four billion citizens to interact face-to-face the old-fashioned way, then “civil society” must remain the privilege of isolated pockets of the affluent and well-traveled few, and will not serve as a template for a modern neo-Aristotelian *polis*.

But technology is, of course, rapidly changing all that. With 50 million people now on the Internet, and another 1-2 million joining *per month*<sup>25</sup> we are now enabled, for the first time in human history, to communicate directly with one another, with no regard for distance and increasingly little concern for cost, social status or even educational background. The

hardware is in place for modern civil society to form and be actualized in ways that Aristotle would never have dreamed possible.

*Power* is shifting at the same time, away from traditional nation-states and towards alternative configurations of community. Especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are playing an increasingly significant role: whereas there were only a hundred or so of these a century ago, 1998 counted 10,000 or more.<sup>26</sup> It is no longer traditional (or even non-traditional) households that form the basic units of community, and the Tocquevillian associations of clubs, churches and charitable groups have been superseded and replaced in a myriad of ways by communities of value that range from the local to the global, all directly linking their members and all freely accessible to any who wish to join.<sup>27</sup>

It would seem that now, at last, we can have communication in the Habermasian sense, but it is a communication which can, for the first time, be completely global. His unified public sphere has now become a multiplicity of networked spaces. Rather than coming together in one public place within a particular society, individuals can now become a part of multiple communities, communicating directly with “value partners” from all over the globe, and expressing a part of their reflected identity in each.

In this modern *cosmopolis*, nations are fast becoming nested institutions within a larger global community, directly linked without the benefit of political superstructures. While we are still striving to find a new equilibrium between individual nation-states and this new sort of global civil society, it is clear that this is the trend of the future. The technology is in place, and there is no return to the paradigms of the past. But how can we use the potential we have created to ensure that these new kinds of community indeed fulfil the functions of a neo-Aristotelian *polis*?

Here one serious further caveat is also in order. While the growth of electronic communication is unparalleled in human history, taken all together, the new media still link less than 2% of the world's 4 billion citizens. So far, it is only the (computer-)literate who have been able to take advantage of these new instruments of communication, with most of those disproportionately in the world's richest countries. Does not the ancient charge of Aristotelian elitism then apply equally today? Is the modern *polis* again to be a closed circle of leisurely, wealthy and educated gentlemen?

In order to be truly valuable as a political paradigm, modern civil society must at least in theory be inclusive in the neo-Aristotelian sense. But it must also be *properly aimed at the Good*. For this, it will not suffice to construct the new machinery of communication and to revise the organizational structures of the principal actors. "Social capital" requires more than nominal membership in voluntary associations. What counts is the *content* of the discussion. What is it that modern citizens bring to and take away from face-to-face and/or electronic interactions with their fellows?

Are citizens in these communities truly bound together by shared values as described above, or are they rather merely linked in furtherance of aims which do not relate even indirectly to their individual autonomy and flourishing? Is the community inclusive, with at least a potential voice for all members, or have the hierarchies of traditional power structures already taken hold in this medium, as they have in every other before it, stifling individual participation, and turning the public sphere into yet another closed system of dominance?

### **Normative criteria**

We should recall that Aristotle was a staunch defender of objective value. He believed that, while there are any number of ways in which individuals may choose to constitute and specify their own *eudaimonia* in a particular situation, it does not follow from this that anything goes. Values are not therefore relative. There is an objectively discernible Good

for man, and true flourishing must be distinguished from flashy false alternatives. And only communities which help their citizens aim at this true Good can be considered viable candidates for a modern neo-Aristotelian *polis*.

It would seem, then, that if we are to make productive use of this modern paradigm of civil society as a normative as well as a descriptive model, we will need to lay out more specific criteria by which to judge the extent to which modern forms of community live up to neo-Aristotelian standards. I would propose five, all of which emerge naturally from the discussion of the previous chapters: *autonomy*, *capability building*, *flourishing*, *stability and diversity*.

First, the modern civil society must be firmly based on the value of ***autonomy***. Whatever other values the members of such a globally linked community may share, it must be clear from their words and their actions that the starting point of their joint efforts is in every case a free decision by each individual to enter into community. The freedom of the individual is non-negotiable, and neo-Aristotelian communities will always seek to express and advance that individual freedom, never to subjugate it to other communal values.

But a stated and even demonstrated commitment to autonomy is not enough. In order to give this value affirmation bite, the community must also actively seek to further the ***capabilities*** of its members. Membership in the civil society must go beyond talk of values. If the community is indeed to further human happiness, it must demonstrably equip individuals with the physical, mental and spiritual means by which to better reach their individual blueprints for *eudaimonia*. It must always be clear that they are able to accomplish far more together than they ever could have separately.

While the third criterion, ***flourishing***, may not be directly articulated in the context of most forms of civil society, its meaning should by now be clear. Does the community in question

truly offer tangible support for the full flowering of its members' identities and skills? Does it help them to reach their full potential and to live happy lives in the Aristotelian sense? Is the happiness of the community members indeed the ultimate end of community action, or are members' contributions (and satisfaction) instead means to some other, exogenous end?

The fourth criterion also comes from Aristotle, although it has not been directly discussed so far. Just as was critical for the Aristotelian *polis*, so also must the ideal modern civil society evidence **stability**. The values that are shared and the activities jointly undertaken must withstand the test of intersubjective scrutiny. Over time, its members must remain convinced, even after due reflection, of their normative validity. Narratives of lives (and of communities) will be told and retold to each other, and repeatedly tested.

Habermas told us a great deal about the functions of rational discourse and the need for community norms to be intersubjectively defended through open-ended communication and contestation. *Pace* MacIntyre, traditions are never, *qua* traditions, inherently normative, but must always be reflected on and changed as needed when the rules that they engender no longer fit with the above criteria of autonomy, capabilities and flourishing. We assume practical identities in a community and reaffirm those identities and norms as long as the overall story that they produce is true to us all.

Finally, we dare never forget the Aristotelian emphasis on **pluralism and diversity**. In a neo-Aristotelian *polis*, tolerance is not just one more virtue among others. Its inviolability is essential both within the community and between communities, if new norms and value expressions are to remain on course with the overall goals of community and individual *eudaimonia*. While, in the aggregate, fundamental values are shared, specific interests must be weighed one against another and conflict managed creatively if the overall life of the community is to continue to allow for free expression of each individual and give to each what she needs to make that expression a reality.<sup>28</sup>

As John Keane has aptly put it, what we are after is some sort of “post-foundationalist normative justification” for community, one “built on multiple narratives”.<sup>29</sup> Rather than attempting to return to a unitary teleological foundation for the ideal modern community, we must try instead to recognize the wide variety of ways in which societies can express the fundamental values of autonomy, capabilities and flourishing, necessarily allowing that no particular form of expressing these values has pre-emptive power over the others. This kind of “principled plurality” remains the best weapon against dictatorship, and ensures that we will continue to do justice to the complexity and dynamism of modern forms of civil society.

Some concrete modern examples may help to make this clearer.

### **THREE POSSIBLE EXAMPLES**

Where might we find some modern interpretations of a neo-Aristotelian *polis*? Where are there contemporary working models of globally linked communities of shared value, templates that might teach us just how the neo-Aristotelian picture sketched out above might profitably be applied to modern life? Where can we observe and evaluate this kind of community in action?

Three particularly timely candidates come to mind. Let us consider briefly the modern communities of *Al Qaeda*, *the Gay Liberation movement* and *Amnesty International*.

#### **Al Qaeda**

Few modern communities have achieved the fame (at least since September 11, 2001) or had the profound impact on contemporary life all over the globe than has the infamous terrorist network of *Al Qaeda*. Here, inarguably, we can truly observe a globally linked

community of shared values in action, one that has made creative use of modern technologies and ways of life in order to further its objectives with breathtaking success.

Perhaps surprisingly, *Al Qaeda* would seem to easily fulfil many of the criteria of our neo-Aristotelian *polis*: it is firmly value-based, effectively globally linked, and it was formed to help its members fulfil their own uniquely shared vision of *eudaimonia*. Measured against those objectives, it has certainly produced demonstrable results. Why, then, should it not serve as a normative model?

*Al Qaeda*, the first globally linked terrorist network, is a community with truly worldwide membership. Now estimated to be at work in 76 countries, including a number without significant Muslim communities<sup>30</sup>, it brings together somewhere between 6 and 7 million radical Muslims, 120,000 of whom are thought to be willing to take up arms in support of their cause.<sup>31</sup> This is, significantly, not only a ruthlessly effective nonstate community, but in fact the first nongovernmental actor to actually control a state (Afghanistan), at least before the American invasion in the fall of 2001. As such, it deserves our attention as an innovative contemporary model of a modern nongovernmental institution of civil society.

The organization is, first of all, certainly globally linked. While *Al Qaeda* makes brilliant use of modern communication technology, including satellite encrypted messaging and Internet chatrooms, it also relies heavily on old-fashioned one-to-one contact for its most confidential interactions. Recognizing that electronic communication is also quite vulnerable to interception by the authorities, it still works heavily with personal couriers who travel physically between locations to convey messages. Thus, in a real sense, this *polis* functions much like the Athens of Aristotle's day, as an elite face-to-face network of citizens engaged in a common pursuit.

That common pursuit is, as it was for the original Aristotelian *polis*, primarily one of *values*. *Al Qaeda's* 1988 founding document, published in *Al-Jihad*, makes it clear that the organization is dedicated not only to mutual advantage or convenience, but to the furtherance of common ideals. It derives its mandate from eight normative guidelines, principally those of abstention from worldly pleasures, belief and trust in the ideology, determination to continue to death, loyalty and devotion and a constant wariness of a ubiquitous enemy.<sup>32</sup>

This value of loyalty to the Leader is paramount within *Al Qaeda*. Because the organization is run as a family clan, with multinational "Brothers" in assumed familial relationship to one another, all in deference to the Elder Brother Osama Bin Laden, all are bound by the ties of filial friendship. There is thus no question but that all have assumed a filial obligation to obey the edicts of the Leader, and that that obligation must always supersede any competing values such as the avoidance of discomfort, sacrifice, hardship or even death.<sup>33</sup>

*Al Qaeda's* training manuals make it more specific. They detail fourteen further values, or qualifications, which are expected to be fully demonstrated by all members of the organization: knowledge of Islam, ideological commitment, maturity, self-sacrifice, discipline, secrecy and concealment of information, good health, patience, unflappability, intelligence and insight, caution and prudence, truthfulness and wisdom, the ability to observe and analyze and the ability to act.<sup>34</sup> These personal traits are preached but also inculcated in Aristotelian fashion in the education that all serious *Al Qaeda* agents receive.

While this list of virtues is somewhat more eclectic than those we might find in Aristotle, including a number of tactical values in addition to the intellectual and the moral, it makes it clear that the organization is dedicated to more than economic furtherance or mutual convenience. This is full-blooded modern civil society as sketched above: a community of

values, joined because of deeply held beliefs, all striving together to make those values a reality for themselves and for all other citizens of the planet as well. It is committed to a form of positive freedom in the sense of Isaiah Berlin, a Freedom which does not depend on the consent of the freed and which goes far beyond the principle of non-interference.

Such a freedom is also worth dying for, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Thus the second overriding value of Al Qaeda (after loyalty to the Leader and closely related to it) is *conquering the fear of death*. By fundamentally reframing the act of suicide (traditionally proscribed under Islamic law) as a glorious sacrifice of martyrdom, the organization has dramatically pushed back the limits of the possible as it carries out its attacks on the enemy.

Although he is, formally, not a recognized Muslim cleric, with no authority to issue a *fatwa* or *jihad*<sup>35</sup>, Osama presides over a spiritual organization with primarily ideological appeal. It makes no effort to offer material reward to the members of its community, instead appealing to their identity with and loyalty to the values of the greater Whole. While duties remain individual (including the duty to give one's life if the Leader calls for it), the rewards are abstract and thoroughly communal: a greater Good which does not attach to any member.

But how does this globally linked community of values measure up to the criteria of the neo-Aristotelian *polis* outlined earlier in this paper? To what extent does it further autonomy, capabilities and human flourishing, while at the same time evidencing both organizational stability and flexibility as it allows for diversity and pluralism both within its ranks and in relations with others?

Here the record is not so good, and the shortcomings of this modern form of community become woefully apparent. When considered in terms of *autonomy*, at least under one interpretation, the organization would seem to measure up fairly well: *Al Qaeda* is a thoroughly decentralized organization, with individual cells of no more than 2-15 members

and remarkably loose command and control. There is no real hierarchy in the organization, and very few levels of management intervene between individual agents and Bin Laden himself. Each unit has a high degree of freedom to act, within the constraints of the values outlined above.

But this is, of course, not Aristotelian autonomy. For, given the supreme emphasis placed on loyalty to the Leader, it is clear that very little value is given to individual reflection or choice. The will of Bin Laden is paramount, and that will is assumed to have so thoroughly been ingrained in individual agents as to make additional, more traditional methods of management control superfluous. This is not about enabling individuals to choose their happiness freely. Far from it, the aim is unabashedly to place “sleeper cells” all over the world, cells that can be activated automatically by a brief word from the Leader. This may be Pavlovian conditioning, but it is not autonomy.

But surely *Al Qaeda* does provide *capabilities* to its members? Certainly, it is true that the 10,000 – 110,000 recruits that have graduated from the organization’s training camps since 1989<sup>36</sup> are all well versed in the requisite skills of terrorism, from handling explosives to escaping police surveillance to communicating effectively with other cells. But these are instrumental capabilities aimed only at the successful fulfilment of the mission of the community, or Leader, not at individual *eudaimonia*. Nothing is provided economically for the sustenance of *Al Qaeda* members, and there is no further effort to meet physical, mental or spiritual needs of the community’s citizens. The agent is thus himself instrumentalized as a cog in the larger machine, not uplifted as the source of value and reason for community action as in the model we have considered.

Given this approach, it can hardly be surprising that *Al Qaeda* agents can not be said to flourish. Indeed, the shared objective of this community is clearly not a healthy, fulfilled life for its members, one that develops all human potentialities and enables a defensible and

satisfying narrative. *Al Qaeda* agents are in the organization not for the sake of this life, but rather for the next, and have subscribed to the supreme value of martyrdom, abdicating any interest in or right to flourishing on this earth. This is a very different understanding of *eudaimonia* from anything inspired by Aristotle.

Where the organization fares somewhat better is under the criterion of *stability*. By harnessing globalization rather than fighting it, through exceedingly clever infiltration of liberal democracies and open societies, and especially thanks to the sophisticated and financially robust system of nonstate *hawala* financing<sup>37</sup> which ensures the ongoing financial health of the organization, *Al Qaeda* has been not only able to grow exponentially through the 1990s, but also (presumably) to weather the full force of the US military attack in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001.

While *Al Qaeda* is unquestionably a value-based community, it is also deeply pragmatic. By reaching out beyond its core believers to attract both non-Muslims and non-Arabs, and by borrowing organizational principles from “foreign” philosophies such as Marxism, the organization has built a number of purely tactical relationships, connections that will serve it well as enemy pressure increases.<sup>38</sup> This unique blend of dogmatism and pragmatism is puzzling, disturbing but also a powerful source of stability.

*Al Qaeda*’s unique accomplishment, especially for a community arising from the Muslim world, is the transcending of the traditional tribal loyalties which had defined all of its predecessors to build a larger and much more effective network of both advantage and shared value. This sort of global community is far less likely to “fizzle” under external pressure. Infinitely more mobile and flexible, it runs a much smaller risk of detection. Its stability is dismayingly apparent.

Finally, *Al Qaeda* must be assessed for its contribution to the neo-Aristotelian ideals of *pluralism and diversity*. Here again, the picture is deceptively attractive. The organization is truly transnational and diverse, bringing many nationalities and races together especially across the diverse Asia/Pacific region (widely defined). Significantly, it has also, for the first time, effectively bridged the Shia/Sunni divide within the Muslim community. Smaller theological differences are all put aside in the name of the greater joint objective.

But all of this is to little avail when one considers the nature of that joint objective and the ideology joining the peoples thus assembled. Once a member, one must pledge unquestioning allegiance to the Cause. There are no compromises, and no toleration of dissent from the Leadership. There is no neo-Aristotelian constituting of local paths to the global goals, no flexibility in considering alternative life plans. And there is certainly no mercy for the Enemy. This is the very antithesis of a community valuing pluralism and diversity, and the fundamental worth of each human being.

*Al Qaeda* is a globally linked community of shared values, but it stands for values that no Aristotelian, traditional or neo-, could ever endorse. Ideological confrontation with these values through other global communities will be the defining battle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This dare not be seen as a fight between the Western and Muslim worlds, but rather as a fundamental conflict between starkly divergent visions of a morally defensible community.

### **The Gay Liberation movement**

For most members of this second and very different global community, life together began on June 27, 1969 at the Stonewall bar in New York City. This now-famous spontaneous riot of gay patrons in a public place standing up for their rights and for their common identity was to serve as the unplanned founding event for a new kind of modern community, one based on shared sexual identity.<sup>39</sup> To what extent does this global citizenship of a minority qualify as a modern neo-Aristotelian *polis*?

It is, of course, nearly impossible to gauge the size and geographic reach of the global gay community, if only because its members are not always easily recognizable, especially in inhospitable cultures. More importantly, this is a community which one *chooses* to join: while any person feeling sexual attraction to members of the same sex may theoretically be a member, true citizenship in this *polis* is by no means automatic. And there is a wide variation in the degree to which each individual chooses to openly name himself as “gay”, as well as to seek the companionship of others like him. At least in the United States, however, a sizeable portion of the country’s estimated 20-30 million homosexuals are now open community members, creating a constituency which must be taken seriously as a modern attempt at community.

The various US national organizations which sprang from Stonewall such as the *Gay and Lesbian Task Force (GLTF)*, the *Gay Activists Force (GAF)*, the *Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF)* and, later and more militantly, *Action to Unleash Power (ACT UP)*, have in turn spawned “cells” on virtually every college in the United States, as well as an impressive grass-roots community of many thousands of volunteers. Even within the US, however, this “gay liberation” movement is certainly not as globally linked as is, for example, *Al Qaeda*. It remains largely a by-product of Western cultures, flourishing not only in the US but also in other liberal democracies which allow this kind of expression. It is famously chaotic and decentralized, with no real leader. But it is gaining in power, strength and visibility.

Ironically, it is the rise of the world’s great cities which gave birth to this remarkably intimate new form of community. As gay and lesbian people forsook the security and fled the strictures of family and small towns for the anonymity of the city, they also found there the opportunity to come together in a new kind of chosen community. The unpromising nucleus of the gay bar led to a myriad of other forms of face-to-face bonding, such as discussion groups, support networks, and, with the advent of AIDS, life-saving institutions. Certainly first

to some degree for sex, but then, increasingly, for the sake of deeper shared values, individual *eudaimonia* became embedded in a larger whole.

What are the values that these individuals share? More than anything, it is a common *identity*. As different as gay and lesbian people may be in other regards, they have all come to see their sexual orientation not as a sin and not as an affliction but rather as an integral part of their very being. It is, in neo-Aristotelian terms, an integral (and positive) part of their individual narrative. It is more than a lifestyle and certainly more than sexual behavior: celibate gays, under this definition, are still gays. And this community or “family” of individuals sharing an identity deeply values freedom of expression and the right to develop one’s character and self in a way that is also in keeping with this fundamental facet of one’s identity.

Flowing directly from this shared identity and these values are also a series of shared demands. In 1969, the specific goals were clear: the new community sought an end to all forms of social control and discrimination, demonstrated tolerance of their sexual preference, and legal and societal acceptance and sanctioning of their civil rights. They fought, briefly put, for the right to be left alone.

This is, unquestionably, a uniquely modern interpretation of neo-Aristotelian *autonomy*. As gay and lesbian people have often attested, the experience of being different (and often reviled) inevitably heightens awareness of oneself and of others, as well as producing a need to question as well as obey the rules and conventions of society. In order to go from being despised to being proud, one must, in effect, re-invent oneself from scratch, in a truly exemplary illustration of Aristotelian reflection. To the extent that the gay community aims to give its members back their self-esteem, help them further their self-determination and make their own free informed choices within the pluralistic system of a liberal democracy, it can be regarded as neo-Aristotelian in the best sense of the word.

The shared experience of “coming out” brings with it another interesting effect much discussed in Aristotle: a blurring of the public and the private. In a community which is based on something as intensely private as sexuality, there is little concern for individual interests which are at war with a greater communal Good. The private is what links the citizens in the first place, and gay and lesbian citizens have come to experience firsthand just how engaging to link individual interests within the larger community has furthered their own *eudaimonia*, and not just in the sexual arena. They need each other not because of a greater abstract Cause, but because that is the only way to effect true individual self-actualization.

But to what extent does this community work to provide its members with the *capabilities* to further their autonomy? Here the record is mixed. Certainly, national organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign Fund have created institutions like the 5,000 member Field Action Network to train grassroots volunteers in fundraising and other organizational skills.<sup>40</sup> More decentrally and spontaneously, a myriad of local support groups have sprung up all over the Western world, providing counselling, psychological support, and, in the case of AIDS organizations, essential physical sustenance to community members as well. Thus, citizens in this *polis* are quite well equipped to do the activist work that is in the organization’s interest, and those that are stricken by illness are looked after by their own as well.

It is less clear, however, whether the gay community is self-sustaining in a larger sense. Increasingly, community members report that the substance of their work together is monotonous, focusing only around support of their sexual identity. While that is of course important, they remind us that there is far more to life than that. The panoply of human needs that go beyond this narrow area go largely unmet, at least in the context of this community. Is the gay and lesbian *polis* then perhaps really little more than an interest-

based alliance, falling short of the Aristotelian civic and virtue friendship to which it often aspires?

If human *flourishing* is indeed to be the aim of this community, and I believe that, for the most part, it is, then this question of practical help to assist members in building all facets of their identity in a positive and self-affirming way will become ever more critical. While the clearly evidenced commitment to honesty and also to positive freedom are admirable, truly holistic attempts to help gay and lesbian people build a life narrative which will lead them to develop all their capabilities remain relatively few and far between on the agenda of this movement.

And this is a shame. For while the shared political interests of the community are obvious, some members of the international gay community have come to discover Aristotelian “civic friendship” as well.<sup>41</sup> The intense experience of being pioneers together, redefining individual and group identity from the ground up, as well as the fundamental redefinition of “family” to mean any small group of human beings with a shared commitment to nurturing one another, have served as powerful reminders of the strength that a community can enjoy when it succeeds in placing *eudaimonia* at the center of its vision.

How *stable* is this unique modern community? While the definitive answer to this remains to be seen, there are growing signs of problems here. After some initial political successes and an undeniable shift in public awareness and growing tolerance for this alternative lifestyle, the movement is increasingly fraught with divisions and disharmony. Early advances have been followed by some major defeats, as well as a general feeling of stalemate and lack of direction. Perhaps the gay liberation movement is running out of steam, at least as constituted in its present mode?

From the beginning, there has been a fundamental philosophical split within the community between the “assimilationists” on the one hand, who argue for a rights-based approach within

the framework of the system, and the “revolutionaries”, who are convinced that the system itself must be fundamentally transformed if there is indeed to be lasting social change. While the assimilationists have been fighting for a seat at the table, working through mainline lobbying organizations such as HRCF and GLTF to advance community interests according to the rules of a pluralistic and legalistic society, the revolutionaries want to overturn the table itself, increasingly urging that community members take to the streets in more radical and provocative measures in order to remake society more fundamentally.<sup>42</sup>

How effective has the gay liberation movement really been in advancing the interests of its members? Ironically, the conduct/status distinction for which the community fought in the early days is increasingly proving to be a liability, as community members have moved beyond their 1969 goals, and now want not only the right to be gay people but also to act out that identity sexually. Unsatisfying compromises such as the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of the US military, and reaffirmations of sodomy laws such as the 1986 Supreme Court decision in *Bowers vs. Hardwick*, 1986) have clearly weakened the assimilationists’ hand.

This disagreement on strategy has deeply split the movement and called its future direction into serious question. The highly centralized national organizations of HRCF and GLTF are finding that they are ill-equipped to deal with more decentralized community challenges in the US, to say nothing of international questions in other, less hospitable cultures. Because of this, not all members continue to identify with the aims and methods of the movements, turning to other (splinter) organizations for help instead.

The fundamental question is whether sexual identity is a strong enough base on which to ground a full-fledged neo-Aristotelian community over time. For, as we have seen, community members have other identities as well, and must wrestle with the question of what to do when those identities collide. As their quest for reflective flourishing leads them to

rise above purely sexual identity, their communal needs have become larger and more fundamental than ever before. To some extent, these citizens are outgrowing their *polis*.

Related to this is the philosophical question of just what constitutes identity, sexual or otherwise. Here again, there is fundamental disagreement within the community. Is identity “essential”, fixed from birth or early socialization, or is it rather socially constructed? Is identity essentially individual, or does it arise from community? The ramifications of this question are profound for future strategy and public policy.

If the gay liberation (or rights) movement is to continue to grow and prosper, it must come to terms with these fundamental questions. It must also succeed in moving to the next phase of a more mature movement, using modern media skilfully to change issue frames beyond the still unwon battles over gays in the military and same-sex marriage to include larger questions of coalition-building with other minorities, dealing effectively with the AIDS crisis and developing a more holistic approach to furthering the flourishing (and diversity) of all its members.

This final question of *diversity* is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the gay and lesbian community today. Unfortunately, as has been noted all too often in other movements, so too has this oppressed community evidenced signs of repressing its members itself. Intolerance to differences within this sexual minority has led to tensions and fragmentation of identity, providing a graphic illustration of the dangers of failing to live up to neo-Aristotelian ideals of diversity and pluralism.

Finding common ground between the various identities within the gay liberation movement has never been easy; with hindsight, it seems clear that this has always been many movements rather than just one. There has always been fundamental tension between male gays and female lesbians, with the former perceiving a lack of empathy especially for the

AIDS issue<sup>43</sup> and the latter complaining of male domination and subjugation in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. More recently, “political correctness” has induced the movement to also consider the special interests of transgendered, transsexual and bisexual citizens, resulting in complexity and fragmentation which have both seemed forced and harmful to the long-term coherence and stability of the movement.

The fact remains that the gay and lesbian community is still largely made up of and run by white middle-class men. Even in the more radical groups, people of color and lower-income citizens are underrepresented, and ties to potential coalition partners such as the feminists and the civil rights movements remain uneasy at best. There is not only dissension about goals and tactics, but also growing mistrust between factions, and a general feeling that what began as a “rainbow” coalition celebrating diversity is fast becoming an oppressive and politically correct regime.

To truly flourish as a neo-Aristotelian *polis*, the gay and lesbian community will have to learn to celebrate differences while still focusing on common ground. The challenge here is substantial.

### ***Amnesty International***

The third modern community under review in this chapter arose improbably as “one of the larger lunacies of our time”.<sup>44</sup> It is the remarkable global manifestation of the idea of one man, Peter Berenson, an outsider to most systems of power, and an individual without authority or resources. Since its founding in 1961 in a café in Luxembourg, the global organization built on this simple idea has met with overwhelming public response (not all of it positive) and considerable international success, culminating in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. Clearly, the values propagated by this particular community have touched a nerve, and the organization that formed around them has managed to achieve results far greater than any of its founders would have dreamed possible.

*Amnesty International* is indeed a globally linked community in the thoroughly contemporary sense. The low-key, frugal and disarmingly simple core activities of this modern *polis* have from the beginning been performed across ideological, religious and racial boundaries in all corners of the world. Today, 4200 local groups of 85,000 grass-roots supporters<sup>45</sup> in 160 countries and territories perform *Amnesty's* work, supported by a central headquarters staff of 350, and an annual budget of GBP 20 million, almost all of it raised from (local) private funds. To date, the organization sends 130 delegations a year to 80 countries all over the world, and can document its review of 47,000 "cases" and 10,000 "Urgent Action Appeals", most of them closed successfully.<sup>46</sup>

The basic cell of *Amnesty*, the "adoption group", forms much as it might have in Aristotle's day, locally and face-to-face, in a factory, church or neighborhood. It consists of a small group of people sharing only a political commitment to free speech, thought and association, who meet regularly to discuss the cases of "prisoners of conscience" that they have "adopted" and to write letters to make a difference. While many letters go unanswered, these "Urgent Action Appeals" have indeed had a powerful effect in changing the fortunes of political prisoners all over the world, as governments, opposition groups, warlords, drug traffickers, leftist guerrilla organizations and other organizations have been literally flooded with unwanted international attention and bowed to no other force than the power of the spotlight of public shame.

That *Amnesty* is a genuinely value-based community should be evident as well. From the beginning, the organization's "mandate" has been clear: the immediate and unconditional release of selected "prisoners of conscience"<sup>47</sup> in the name of the fundamental principles of free speech, thought and association. It is the plight of these individual victims of repression all over the world that mobilizes the international community to act, even when victim and

sponsors are physically far apart, linked only by the modern global media of communication and persuasion.

This fundamental objective of working impartially for the release of those imprisoned for their opinions has always served as the central core of the “onion” of Amnesty’s value system. Layered around that are the commitment to work for free and fair trials for those prisoners, and then, for all, opposition to the death penalty, to torture, and cruel and unusual punishment for prisoners of any kind. Thus Amnesty’s guiding principles move seamlessly from the particular to the universal, affecting an ever growing circle of constituents.

These initial aims on behalf of individual prisoners have thus been built on, quite naturally, by a concerted effort to enlarge the right of asylum for all, as well as to urge the engagement of effective international machinery to guarantee freedom of opinion in the widest sense. Thus, Amnesty has involved from a personal advocacy organization to a larger norm-forming and enforcing community, all in the name of the same clear and simple set of values.

Starting from the powerful notion of just letting prisoners know they are not forgotten, Amnesty seeks to occupy the moral high ground in international politics, serving as a “starting motor” for more general advances in the global fight for human rights. By creating a universal sense of obligation and by working on the basis of principles rather than power, Amnesty has developed what Ann Marie Clark has called a “discursive process rooted between practice and ideals”.<sup>48</sup> The organization is idealistic, but also deeply pragmatic. It seeks to remain true to its “big ideas”, while also constantly searching for allies and vehicles that will help leverage its limited resources to put those values into practice.<sup>49</sup>

This is not to say that Amnesty is prepared to compromise on its principles. In contrast to most other agents in international politics, the organization always puts its core values before interest-based considerations based on realism. It has thus consistently worked to establish

that the principle of human rights must always be at least as valid as that of national sovereignty, thereby fundamentally changing the normative foundation of international relations. By refusing to follow the Machiavellian rules of power which govern much strategic thinking in international relations, this unique modern community retains the moral authority to serve as a norm-setting institution, creating meaning and establishing the normative environment in which states must act. Through its work, even toothless UN resolutions have been enforced, as unwilling actors were forced to recognize a moral obligation to comply.

*Amnesty's* brief has expanded significantly over the years. Today, the organization is known as much for interpreting facts as for collecting them, and participates actively in international norm-setting work in most of the relevant international bodies, including the United Nations, acting as adviser and even co-drafter on resolutions, guidelines, declarations and treaties, and then leading the fight to build international consensus to get these ratified and enforced. Its ongoing effort to maintain its impartiality and fight a lingering left-wing reputation has caused it to clash with many liberal Western democracies as well as with more traditional authoritarian regimes. This is especially so as it now seeks to apply its value system to such controversial issues as arms exports, the rights of homosexuals, asylum law and ethical standards in the business community. *Amnesty* has thus evolved into a community built on the shared value of human rights in the broadest sense.

So how does this third modern community measure up to the criteria of the neo-Aristotelian *polis*? If we consider this in the context of the ideal of *autonomy*, we must first differentiate between the degree to which this is attained for *Amnesty* community members and for *Amnesty* constituents, the “prisoners of conscience” on whose behalf the members work. For members, it is not clear that autonomy is a particular value for this community; there is no emphasis in the organization on enabling reflective choice for community citizens, certainly not to the degree that was evident, for instance, in the gay community. Members

are there to perform a function and to incorporate a value, but that value is not on their own behalf.

For constituents the picture looks somewhat more positive. By fighting to attain the minimal prerequisite for autonomy, physical freedom, *Amnesty* is making a major contribution to further this value worldwide. Surely the assumed right of each human being to reflect on and choose her own identity and pursuit of *eudaimonia* is first of all dependent on freedom from incarceration on the basis of expression of opinion. Indeed, this continued focus on the particular, with attention paid to named individual cases, in order attain the universal is deeply Aristotelian in nature, as we have seen.

Under the criteria of *capabilities*, the picture seems to be reversed. Grass-roots *Amnesty* members do receive very effective training in the requisite skills of prisoner-of-conscience advocacy, both decentrally in their individual “cells” and centrally through training manuals and regular meetings. Thus almost any reasonably educated person can quickly learn to function effectively as a member of the community and will soon be able to make a substantive contribution.

For constituents, there is unfortunately less support. As *Amnesty* provides no particular guidance on how a free life should be lived, it is in no position to provide capability training to prisoners once they are released. Indeed, it can well be argued that follow-up is a weakness in the system. What counts is the successful release of the prisoner, and there is little tracking of his or her progress (or flourishing) thereafter, or even of the degree to which his subsequent actions and lifestyle vindicate the efforts made on his behalf.

This is not to say that *flourishing*, is not a core *Amnesty* value. Not only the literature but also the actions of the organization clearly demonstrate a deep commitment to the free flowering of every individual human being, both economically, politically and spiritually.

Human dignity has always been the starting point of *Amnesty's* efforts, a philosophy that Aristotle certainly would have endorsed.

*Stability* is a strong suit of the community as well. *Amnesty* has always recognized that its key competitive advantage in the international arena is its absolute loyalty to its principles, especially the impartiality that is enshrined in Article 2a of its statutes. The leadership has therefore strived scrupulously to balance ideology and geography, directing its criticisms against both East and West, North and South, the "Free" World and the rest. Furthermore, it maintains an almost fanatical devotion to always ensuring that published information is accurate and reliable. That this has almost always succeeded is a key reason for the continuing credibility of the organization and for its enduring success even in hostile environments.

There have, of course, been challenges along the way. Famously, *Amnesty* probably erred on the side of caution by refusing to adopt Nelson Mandela because of his refusal to formally renounce violence. Conversely, the organization's somewhat puzzling continued advocacy of the Baader-Meinhof prisoners in Germany, where solitary confinement was condemned as cruel and unusual punishment, and the evident crimes of the incarcerated were minimized or even overlooked, did substantial damage to the organization's reputation for putting principle above partisan passion. That the leadership of *Amnesty* was able to learn from these mistakes and take corrective action to restore credibility is testimony to the Aristotelian stability and resilience of this modern community.

Remarkably, this stability was achieved without undue cost to the concomitant value of *diversity*. *Amnesty International* had no formal organization or administration at all in the early days, and today still operates with a relatively lean staff of headquarters management and researchers. While the organization is quite centralized (final decisions on the adoption of prisoners of conscience are still made top-down from London), there is plenty of room for

conflict resolution within *Amnesty*. While dignity and human freedom are uncompromisable values, the particular way in which those values are lived out around the world are left free to local cultural interpretation. Guidelines for carrying out core activities are tightly controlled, but both membership and constituency evidence a wide degree of flexibility and diversity.

This modern *polis*, then, while by no means perfect, would seem to come closest to our neo-Aristotelian ideal. It works for autonomy, if not for its members, then at least for its constituents, and also provides the requisite capability-building to help its members attain at least the physical prerequisites for that autonomy to be enjoyed by all. It is deeply committed to dignity and human flourishing, and has survived a turbulent history in its efforts to remain true to those principles while at the same time refusing to sacrifice flexibility and diversity among its global network of members and constituents. It is a particularly interesting modern value-based community.

## **CONCLUSIONS - AND ONE FURTHER CONCERN**

This admittedly selective review of three modern global communities has unfortunately still left us wanting in our search for the ideal neo-Aristotelian *polis* in action in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although each evidences significant merit in one regard or the other, and each has much to teach us about the benefits of modern community, it seems clear that none can truly serve as a clear example of this fifth paradigm of modern civil society.

Exhibit 6.1 shows a purely subjective summary of the degree to which these three modern global communities meet the standards of a neo-Aristotelian *polis*. *Al Qaeda*, as an example of a remarkably resilient and stable community that is certainly globally linked and fiercely value-based, falls far short when measured against the neo-Aristotelian values of autonomy, flourishing and diversity/pluralism. It also serves as a potent reminder that this

new paradigm requires not just any values at its core, but intersubjectively defensible ones: martyrdom, terror, murder and blind allegiance to a religious leader must firmly be rejected if we are to remain true to the neo-Aristotelian ideal.

The Gay Liberation movement seems more promising, especially given its clear focus on autonomy and flourishing, and its demonstrated commitment to helping its members reflect on and form their own narratives in solidarity with one another. Its purview of sexual identity remains very narrow, however, and the divisions and disharmony within its ranks do not bode well for future stability of the movement, even within the partial universe of the United States. At the same time, although diversity is proclaimed as a core guiding value, these dissensions must be seen as worrying signs of a fundamental lack of tolerance of differences and a militant insistence on dogmatic interpretations of goals and policy. Oppression of others by the oppressed is also decidedly un-Aristotelian.

Our strongest candidate, *Amnesty International*, comes closest to the mark, with a commitment to values that Aristotle certainly would have endorsed, a global network that is both stable and flexible and a clear record of success in translating the universal into the particular and making a tangible difference all over the world. What is unclear here is the extent to which members of this community truly acquire all the key capabilities they need in which to function effectively as human beings as well as political activists, and also whether the difficult balance of ideology between Left and Right and North and South can be maintained over time. Certainly, at its best, *AI* can only provide anecdotal evidence of just how this paradigm can be made to work in a particular context and with a very specific focus on some few neo-Aristotelian ideals.

**EXHIBIT 6.1**

**Where to find a neo-Aristotelian *Polis*?**

COMMUNITIES / CRITERIA	Autonomy	Capabilities	Flourishing	Stability	Diversity/ Flexibility
Al Qaeda					
The Gay Rights/ Liberation Movement					
Amnesty International					

Estimated Degree of Fulfillment: Fully Substantially Slightly Not at all

Where does this leave us? Perhaps our conclusion should not be as dispiriting as it may first seem. For it bears repeating that Aristotle himself had no more luck in finding complete empirical evidence of his ideal. Even after his exhaustive research into the various City States of ancient Greece, he regretfully came to the conclusion that none truly lived up to the ideals of the *polis* as delineated in Books IV – VI of the *Politics*. That we today have no better luck should not come as a great surprise.

Aristotle’s template is, as is my own modern interpretation as applied to civil society, meant purely as an “ideal type”. It is a measuring stick against which to gauge the excellence of communities. And while concrete modern examples can be of great help in our efforts to illustrate its criteria, the validity of the model does not depend on empirical verification. It

remains an ideal toward which modern individuals – and communities – can and should strive in their common search for the Good Life.

One final concern remains, however, and it is a fundamental one. For it is not only the gay and lesbian community that has struggled with divisions in its ranks. Even if we assume the presumed tension between individual happiness and Common Good to be largely false, this is not to say that the two will always naturally coexist. Certainly, there will always be plenty of conflict between individuals in a given community. Individual searches for *eudaimonia* rarely harmonize naturally with one another, and the interests that each produces are bound to collide with one another.

This is, it should be stressed, not at all a bad thing. Neo-Aristotelian happiness in community is not diminished by conflict – rather it is strengthened and enriched by the creative and constructive tension which will inevitably arise between individual pursuits of happiness. Aristotle made his fundamental distaste for a monolithic Platonic Republic all too clear, and pleaded strenuously for the richness of the Particular as free manifestations of the Universal. For him, the whole will always be larger than the sum of its individual and disparate parts, provided that they can be brought together in harmony.

But how are we to provide for proper diversity within the unity of a neo-Aristotelian community? How are conflicts to be managed both within the community and, perhaps far more, between communities in the context of a global community of free individuals, especially when those conflicts go to the heart of individual or group identity and lead to bitter divisions between people. Interests remain critical for individual and community *eudaimonia*, and interests are usually divergent as well as common.

These are rich topics for another paper.

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> I am thinking especially about Raz's work on perfectionism, Nussbaum's „Was Aristotle and Social Democrat?“, and MacIntyre's eloquent defense of Aristotelian ethics in *After Virtue*.

<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions might be John Hall's excellent anthology *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison*, as well as John Ehrenberg's *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* and John Keane's thoughtful work on new paradigms for the phrase.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis will be confined to Western political philosophy, largely tracking the taxonomy offered in John Ehrenberg's *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*. Certainly inspirations drawn from other (especially Eastern and Muslim) cultures could yield important new insights, but since “civil society” is arguably first and foremost a Western concept, I have chosen to limit the scope of this inquiry to that sphere.

<sup>4</sup> At least as interpreted conventionally! The point of this chapter, of course, is to apply a neo-Aristotelian vision to a more modern worldview.

<sup>5</sup> See my discussion of this in Chapter 4 of my *Negotiating the Good Life* (Ashgate Press, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> *The Politics*, 40-1, emphasis added.

<sup>7</sup> *Meditations*, p. 65. Aurelius is picking up here on central stoic notions of Seneca and Epictetus, who extolled the value of inward contemplation but also recognized the ineluctable sociability of man.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup> Cicero, *The Republic*, pp. 65-67, paraphrased.

<sup>10</sup> To borrow Chris Korsgaard's term, as discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> It is of course true that St. Thomas Aquinas made a valiant effort to rehabilitate Aristotelian reason as the “companion of revelation”, but this project, even if successful, does little to challenge the authority of the Church as the highest form of civil society of man, or to seriously undermine its foundation of faith and grace.

<sup>12</sup> Adam Seligman has argued fairly convincingly for the religious vision of Locke's thought, given his firm (and logically unprovable) conviction of the natural Rights of Man. If he is right, then the shift between the second and third paradigms are perhaps not as abrupt as they look, with Locke serving as an unwitting bridge between the Church and *homo oeconomicus*. See his *The Idea of Civil Society*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 21

<sup>14</sup> Note that this is also the philosophical template that underlies modern game theory, as well as most utilitarian theories of value.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Seligman has argued that this Continental doctrine of civic virtue is in irreconcilable tension with the Anglo-Saxon sketch of civil society described above. I disagree. Both see the only possible source of value in the individual, although they differ somewhat in the degree to which this is expressed in community and also in the extent to which that community may then legitimately wield authority over its members. But the fundamental model is the same. See his “Animadversions upon Civil Society and Civic Virtue in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century”.

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, especially pp. 124-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> I am also choosing not to pursue the model offered by one of the most famous civil society theorists: Gramsci's *societa civile* as an answer to political hegemony. This is, after all, a selective tour through the historical models, and it is my judgment that a proper examination of the Marxist viewpoint would greatly expand the scope and at the same time add little to the argument.

<sup>19</sup> This human capacity to be guided both by self-interest and by altruism/idealism is what Emile Durkheim was later to term the “duality of human existence” or, more famously, “*homo duplex*”.

<sup>20</sup> *Democracy in America*, 2: pp. 245-6.

<sup>21</sup> The *January 2001 Inaugural Address of George Bush* is the best example of this newly fashionable way of thinking. See the excerpt at the start of this volume.

<sup>22</sup> This poetic depiction, much quoted by Ronald Reagan, comes originally from the Puritans, and is believed to have been coined by John Winthrop. Note that religion remains a key element of civil society in America, albeit not as interpreted by the Catholic Church. Robert Bellah has termed this the American “civil religion”.

<sup>23</sup> Note that Tocqueville and his more modern admirers such as Putnam tend to exclude “social advocacy” networks such as Amnesty International (see the discussion later in this chapter) from this definition. Associations do not make public policy or divide citizens one from another, but rather bring them together more innocuous shared interests, such as, famously, bowling.

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- <sup>24</sup> It is thus not the same as the „lifeworld” so familiar from Habermas’ sociological writings. I am thus closer here to the civil society concept put forward by Gellner, and well within the liberal tradition.
- <sup>25</sup> As cited by John Keane. This includes both what he calls “residents” (those with a Net presence or webpage), and those simply surfing and reachable by email. But the numbers are astounding to anyone attempting to predict the progress of this new communication medium even a few years ago. See his *Civil Society, Old Images, New Visions*, Chapter 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Again, as cited by Keane. P.33.
- <sup>27</sup> Internet „newsgroups“ are perhaps a particularly interesting example of this.
- <sup>28</sup> Amitai Etzioni’s recent work on *Diversity Within Unity* is of particular interest in this connection. We want both, and neither to the exclusion of the other.
- <sup>29</sup> See his *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*, p. 53. I borrow this phrase without necessarily recruiting Keane as a neo-Aristotelian. The emphasis on plurality is, however, wholeheartedly shared.
- <sup>30</sup> As cited in Rohan Gunarathna’s *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, p. 79.
- <sup>31</sup> Gunarathna, p. 95
- <sup>32</sup> These were the ideals as laid out by *Al Qaeda*’s founder Abdullah Azzam, modified only slightly by his mentor Bin Laden in later years. They provide a firm normative grounding for membership in the organization, and make it clear that this is indeed an association of values rather than one of mere advantage in the Aristotelian definition.
- <sup>33</sup> This loyalty has been brilliantly reinforced by Bin Laden through the taking in and harboring of refugees all over the world, international criminals who thus owe their freedom and their life to the generosity of the organization that gave them a home and a new identity.
- <sup>34</sup> *Declaration of Jihad Against the Country’s Tyrants: Military Series, Al Qaeda Training Manual*, UK Government Exhibit 1677T, 1997.
- <sup>35</sup> Note bin Laden has also, brilliantly, reframed “jihad” to mean “Call for Justice” rather than Holy War”. Under this more abstract definition, he has all the authority he needs even over non-Muslims.
- <sup>36</sup> Gunarathna, p. 8
- <sup>37</sup> According to Gunarathna, Al Qaeda has consistently had at its disposal more funds from liberal democracies than from its more traditional (Muslim) state supporters. See Gunarathna, p. 231.
- <sup>38</sup> Including the highly effective infiltration of many unsuspecting NGOs. See pp. 112, 122 and 132-33 in Gunarathna.
- <sup>39</sup> Most historians now differentiate the modern “gay liberation” movement from the various “homophile” efforts which preceded it. Certainly, there was much homosexual community activity before Stonewall, with a fairly extensive network in NYC (and other large cities) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and 50 such groups already then in existence. Predecessor organizations included the *Mattachine Society* and the *Daughters of Bilitis* in California in the 1950s, and of course the *Scientific Humanitarian Committee* formed in Berlin by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1892. For a good historical summary of these early beginnings of the gay community, see Craig Rimmerman’s *From Identity to Politics*, p. 20
- <sup>40</sup> See Rimmerman, p. 31.
- <sup>41</sup> Walt Whitman’s poetic term “adhesiveness” to refer to the nonsexual affection between partners of the same sex intimates at the same thing.
- <sup>42</sup> These would include some of the more (in)famous initiatives of ACT UP, such as the disruption of services at Sr. Patrick’s Cathedral and the throwing of blood vials on public figures to protest inaction on AIDS.
- <sup>43</sup> Even within the subcommunity of AIDS-affected people, the coalition between gay white men and straight intravenous drug users has been anything but easy!
- <sup>44</sup> As quoted pithily in the introduction to Jonathan Power’s excellent history of *Amnesty, Like Water on Stone*.
- <sup>45</sup> *Amnesty* is unique among modern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in that its membership is entirely public. Thus it is, at least organizationally, a truer example of a neo-Aristotelian *polis* than most comparable “competitors” such as *Human Rights Watch* or *Greenpeace*.
- <sup>46</sup> Power, pp. 119, 135
- <sup>47</sup> as explained by Peter Berenson in “The Forgotten Prisoners”, *The Observer*, 28 May 1961, p. 20, this is defined as any person who is physically restrained (by imprisonment or otherwise) from expressing (in any form of words or symbols) any opinion which he honestly holds and which does not advocate or condone personal defined as prisoners incarcerated solely because of the expression of political beliefs, with a clear renunciation of violence.
- <sup>48</sup> See her *Diplomacy of Conscience*, p. 126.
- <sup>49</sup> These have been the various UN bodies, initially highly sceptical and even hostile to *Amnesty*’s advances, but also fellow NGOs working on related issues and *Amnesty* “graduates” working within national governments and institutions.