

The Impossibility of a Civil Society

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Abstract

Those who tend to subscribe to a normative theory of civil society usually understand civil society as *civilized* on the basis of democratic and liberal values like individual rights and free expression (Freedom and Autonomy), the individual taking part by being related to the larger whole of socially connected alternatives (Participation), community accord through collectively pursued common ends or a commitment to the commonwealth (Unanimity), pluralism and the toleration of dissenting beliefs (Representation), and operating within a social group that is reasonably and equitably regulated to ensure impartiality and fair and accurate results (Logically Well Behaved Choice). Given these central conditions, it is tempting to assume that a civil society (as the basis for democracy and social justice) is possible. In the spirit and form of Kenneth J. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, in this treatise I demonstrate that individual social preferences, having certain tractable formalizations, demonstrably cannot be aggregated into a collective choice and satisfy the aforementioned five plausible formal conditions for a liberal civil society to be possible.

Introduction

Civil society has become an important concept in the social sciences,¹ and has emerged as a central topic among policymakers and practitioners alike.² It is often touted as an antidote against absolutist theories of the state, a vital force in the creation of modern liberal democracy, essential to finding solutions to vital challenges in modern democracies, a mediating realm that somehow maintains a delicate balance between private and public interests, and a means toward more harmonious social relations and social justice. Although some may dispute its definition and function,

...a liberal account of civil society would include all social groups that are or can be understood as voluntary and noncoercive, thus excepting only the family, whose members are not volunteers, and the state, which, even if its legitimacy rests on the consent of its members, wields coercive power over them.... They are motivated by interest or conviction or by cultural or religious identity; they pursue wealth (in partnerships and companies), or power (in parties and movements), or salvation (in churches and gathered congregations); or they aim to advance some particular good (in interest groups or trade unions), or to deliver some general benefit (in philanthropies and foundations),

¹The focus of this treatise is the **philosophy of the social sciences**—*the study of the logic and methods of the social sciences*. Since the field is **about** the social sciences, an aim of my essay is to provide a critical evaluation of existing social science claims ...*by identifying faulty assumptions, forms of reasoning, or explanatory frameworks*. Accordingly, a critical evaluation of civil society, as an important concept in the social sciences, may seek to question the possibility of civil society itself by looking at claims about it *put forward as true or probable, and ... justified on rational grounds (empirical and theoretical)*. (Adapted from *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by Robert Audi, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²Helmut K. Anheier, *How to Measure Civil Society*.

or to ward off some general evil (in organizations for the prevention of this and that).³ Civil society makes room for all these aims and includes all the resulting associations, by virtue of their free and consensual character. This means that it reaches to politics and economics as well as to the multitude of social activities distinct from these two.⁴

Accordingly, a liberal account of a civil society demands, at the very least, that each community member of this social sector be able to choose to do otherwise and so be ascribed the possibility of alternative social action. Furthermore, such society demands that each community member (as a rational and autonomous individual able to make informed, uncoerced decisions) be consulted to bring into play personal responsibility and free choice as a precondition for civil behavior. It becomes important, then, to consult the wishes of the community members of a civil society to let them express whatever preferences they really have, for whatever possible alternative social actions they happen to choose.⁵ When the wishes of the community members of this social sector are consulted, it is commonly assumed that such individual social preferences can be aggregated into a collective choice for a liberal civil society to be possible.

In this treatise, however, I shall confront common sense with a disquieting idea: I hope to show, in the spirit and form of Kenneth J. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, that such individual social preferences, having certain tractable formalizations, demonstrably cannot be aggregated into a collective choice and satisfy five plausible formal conditions for a liberal civil society to be possible⁶: (1) Logically Well Behaved Choice, (2) Representation, (3) Unanimity, (4) Participation, and (5) Freedom and Autonomy. This I hope to do by constructing an impossibility result about social aggregation functions for combining individual social preferences.

³No doubt some *good, benefit, and warding off of evil* may be obtained from such noble pursuits; but, as I shall demonstrate in this essay, we will never be able to achieve a liberal civil society (accordingly, nor will we be able to restore *uncivil* society to *health* as Peck optimistically maintains in his *A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered*).

⁴Michael Walzer, *Equality and Civil Society*, 35 (emphasis mine). In Chambers and Kymlicka, *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*.

⁵The general context here is Social Choice Theory,...*the study of collective decision processes and procedures...concerning the aggregation of individual inputs (e.g., votes, preferences, judgments, welfare) into collective outputs (e.g., collective decisions, preferences, judgments, welfare)*. Some questions of primary importance here are: ...*How can a group of individuals choose a winning outcome (e.g., policy, electoral candidate) from a given set of options? ...How can a collective (e.g., electorate, legislature, collegial court, expert panel, or committee) arrive at coherent collective preferences or judgments on some issues, on the basis of its members' individual preferences or judgments? How can we rank different social alternatives in an order of social welfare?* (Adapted from List's **Social Choice Theory** in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

⁶There are two basic forms of *impossibility*: the *physically* impossible and the *logically* impossible. A thing is *physically impossible* if and only if it *does* violate a *law of nature* (e.g., laws of Physics, Chemistry, etc.). In contrast, something is *logically impossible* if and only if it violates a *law of logic*. One of the most fundamental laws of logic may be expressed as *the law of noncontradiction*, which says that contradictions are *not* logically allowed. So a thing cannot both have a property and lack it at the same time (in the same sense). For example, anyone who is a *bachelor* (by definition) cannot at the same time be *married*. One cannot be both a *bachelor* and *not-bachelor*; one cannot be both *not-married* and *married*. So, a *married bachelor* is logically impossible. Moreover, if it is not logically possible, it cannot be physically possible. And, if it is not physically possible, it cannot be *actually* the case. This is because of the relationship between *the actual* and *the possible*: *the actual* is a subset of the *physically possible*, which in turn is a subset of the *logically possible*.

Specifically, I will show that the foregoing five conditions prohibit a liberal civil society because when applied each of which seems, when independently considered, to be plausible, but when taken together in fact conflict and are logically incompatible. Because of the paradoxical aspect that is the hallmark of this problem, one cannot (except for rehearsing the following proof itself) see *why* the five formal conditions should clash. That is why this difficult and complex issue will be posed and brought to a definitive resolution by using logically tractable formulation. But, without such a resolution, one may be tempted to accept the mistaken view that a liberal civil society is possible. To be sure, the logical notation and proof that follows will be largely beyond the training and understanding of some. However, the diligent reader should be able to follow the corresponding conceptual explanations to make sense out of it all.

The critic may well wonder what *practical* difference all this makes to civil society (as the basis for democracy and social justice). The answer is very crucial to the study of group life, which purports to *identify, describe, explain, and understand* our interactions or associations with others to advance common interests and govern social conflict. Put in a crude and provocative way, the following proof will strongly suggest that sometimes, when it matters the most, a liberal civil society is much like a group of individuals trapped in a fire all heading out toward the same exit.⁷ Within minutes, the building is in flames: a fireball sweeps inside and smoke comes in the air ducts, quickly filling the rooms with thick, blinding black smoke. As the fire engulfs the building, it quickly spreads roaring down the corridors leading to the only exit—the building’s front entrance. As panic ensues, people are pushing toward the exit, shoving and throwing people out of their paths. Some are climbing and stepping over others. But the exit soon becomes a death trap: the rush to exit leaves a pile of trampled people lying on top of each other, trapped in the entrance of the burning building. Human nature being what it is, they all voted with their feet⁸ and tried to go out the same way they came in as the flames sprinted through the building, but the exit soon grew choked in a crush of people pushing through the front door. So, not even rescuers from outside the building could pull people from the front door pile. The community is overcome with black smoke pouring out over their heads and out the side windows. The building finally collapses on most, but a few (if any) survivors.

To be sure, the analogy is inexact, but the comparison makes clear two things. First, that although the preference of each individual (supposedly) exercising free and autonomous agency is to exit the building quickly to save his or her life, combined individual social-preferences (given certain plausible conditions) produce a collective choice that leads to tragedy. Certainly, what the individual prefers is not always the same as what the community as a group prefers.

⁷I used this same analogy in *Beyond Ethical Codes: A Call for Critical Thinking in Religious Culture* to point out some of the hidden dangers in a code of ethics grounded on either the doctrine of **ethical (or moral) absolutism** or **ethical (or moral) relativism**. In *The Fallacy of Misplaced Temporality in Western Philosophy, Natural Science and Theistic Religion*, I draw out the metaphysical footing of absolutist theories as a mode or identification of constancy in relation to relativist theories as a mode or identification of change. This bifurcation of time (and/or corresponding bifurcation of knowledge) has led some to commit the fallacy of misplaced temporality, which privileges one aspect of time (the static or dynamic) over another. In our fire analogy, metaphysical heirs of the bifurcation of time may be seen in the split between a static view that advocates for a *dictator* (surrendering sovereignty to a common dogmatic and fixed power that terminates freedom and autonomy) and a dynamic view that advocates for a *liberal civil society* where each individual (supposedly) exercises free and autonomous agency. As we shall see, privileging one strategy of exiting the burning building over another (the static or dynamic) will not save the group of individuals trapped in the fire.

⁸See Somin on the advantages of this in *Foot Voting, Federalism, and Political Freedom*.

But, whatever its application to the purely private case, a preference really comes into its own in communal settings. Accordingly, such communal choice, whether derived from specific individuals or the general community, affects the community besides just the individual. Hence, prevailing circumstances block a liberal civil society.

Second, and in contrast, the analogy confirms the strong sense that a civil society cannot be secured by appealing to a powerful dictator by surrendering sovereignty to a common power (and thereby terminating one's freedom and autonomy). For, advocating for a *dictator* (an individual or subgroup) that would have the society line up for an orderly escape would not do either, since no *rational*⁹ individual would rather be directed to the end of a very long line to be (possibly) sacrificed. Moreover, there is the reality that some society members may not fare well in such a scenario if the dictatorship is class-conscious, racist, sexist, oppressive, fascist, prejudiced, unjust, or pathological.

Because of the great value placed in a liberal society on operating within a social group that is reasonably and equitably regulated to ensure impartiality and fair and accurate results (Condition #1: Logically Well Behaved Choice), on pluralism and the toleration of dissenting beliefs (Condition #2: Representation), on community accord through collectively pursued common ends or a commitment to the commonwealth (Condition #3: Unanimity), on the individual taking part by being related to the larger whole of socially connected alternatives

⁹The critic may note that making **rationality** (whether self-interested or not) a primary value goes against our very nature as emotional and traditional kinds of creatures. But, this is not what is at issue here. This is the case because even if we can take *society* to refer to **...an aggregate of correlated individuals, each of whom is driven by non-logical, psychological/emotional motives** (See Goldman, 149-150), a preference really comes into its own in its communal setting—whatever its application to the purely private case. And, such communal choice, whether derived rationally or non-rationally, affects the community besides just the individual. Nevertheless, there must be some logical space accorded to **rationality** in this discussion. The reason for this is that one cannot, on pain of contradiction, *reason* against rationality (adopting a position that makes rationality theoretically impossible), yet appeal to it by *reasoning* that the actions/choices of different individuals require different **methods** of analysis or evaluation. The critic may suggest, for example, that the progress sought in this discussion cannot be achieved by appealing to *reason* because the individual is governed by his/her own separate **interpretist** or **social constructivist** methods of analysis or evaluation. But, this would not, in this sense, make one immune from rational analysis or evaluation (pejoratively characterized by some as appeals to impersonal standards and impartial procedures dictated by **rationality**). For, in the sense that these approaches are attempts to try to **argue** for a claim about *what is*, there is the need to analyze or evaluate such arguments by crossing the different domains. Moreover, by refusing to conform to rationality one cannot, on pain of contradiction, sidestep a **rationality** ordered way of understanding or accomplishing something—as the detailed procedures and techniques that suggest order characteristic of a particular process or method. So, for instance, the person refusing to conform to rationality cannot, on pain of contradiction, hope to persuade by presenting the argument (possibly critiquing rationality as a blatantly *absolutist* enterprise) for the conclusion that *all rationality is oppressive*—that is, one cannot use rationality to reject (or defeat) rationality. Correspondingly, that rationality has been shown to **sometimes** be oppressive (characterized by some as appeals to impersonal standards and impartial procedures) does not entail that we are somehow **always** filtering what we *know* via theory and evidence so that there simply and literally are no neutral arbiters. This form of *self-sabotaging epistemology* that accepts no independently accessible locus of truth is untenable, since we could not establish the truth of the claim that **there simply and literally are no neutral arbiters**. For if the claim is *itself* derived by rational means, then we are using the very thing we are arguing against. On the other hand, if the claim is *itself* derived on the basis that there can be a position **outside rationality** from which to arbitrate and adjudicate, then we are engaged in circular reasoning—where **neutral arbitration** (which is itself in question) is assumed to somehow establish the position against neutral arbitration. Since either result is untenable, we can thus reject the claim that the progress sought in this discussion cannot be achieved by appealing to rationality.

(Condition #4: Participation), and on individual rights and free expression (Condition #5: Freedom and Autonomy), it is tempting to assume that a civil society (as the basis for democracy and social justice) is possible. But, our group of individuals trapped in a fire all heading out toward the same exit illustrates an insurmountable problem for civil society—whether one should...*make private interests harmonize with the general interest*.¹⁰ It is clear that this is a misguided notion, since in such situations one cannot hope to straddle the fault-line between the personal and the public¹¹ without suffering the consequences. For, in practice, an individual may prefer to escape the fire by rushing out the main entrance, but any such aggregated procedure or action by the group would simply generate unanimity of false judgments. To be sure, given the social creatures that we are, making ourselves civil constrains us to making ourselves civil to others. But, one can never really silence the group to make room for the individual. So, what we think of as *civil society* is in its essence a record of conflict and uncivilized behavior. Therefore, such a community as a whole cannot advance common interests nor fully govern social conflict—establishing the impossibility of a civil society. Parallely, what follows will formally show that five central conditions embodying both democratic and liberal values easily distinguishable from those of *uncivil society* prohibit a liberal civil society because when applied each of which seems, when independently considered, to be plausible, but when taken together in fact conflict and are *logically* incompatible.

Conditions and Definitions

I will forge this impossibility result in the spirit and form of Kenneth J. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, for which he shared a Nobel Prize in economics in 1972.¹² Arrow's Impossibility Theorem shows that there cannot be a device satisfying certain plausible minimal conditions that will aggregate the preferences of individuals in society to yield a social choice. Generalizing on the notion of *aggregation device*, my general strategy shall be to construct an impossibility result about social aggregation functions for combining individual social preferences that shows that it is impossible to construct an ideally rational social-preference *aggregation procedure or action* (APA), given certain plausible conditions. Specifically, I hope to show that each of the following five essential conditions seems, when independently considered, to be plausible, but when taken together in fact conflict and are logically incompatible.

I begin by defining a liberal civil society as one that is ruled by a *collective social choice function APA*, the range of which is restricted to the set of orderings over X . Let X be the set of social states. A collective choice function APA is an aggregation procedure or action that combines individual preferences to obtain a collective choice. The aggregation procedure or action has a wide-scope, for it can vary according to the type, amount, and format of the individual preference information, and according to what the procedure or action does with that

¹⁰Taken from Alexis de Tocqueville's *American Notebooks*, 51. See Zunz and Kahan.

¹¹This may suggest a type of **levels confusion**, where, as in Bertrand Russell's famous paradoxes, individuals and sets of individuals that are on two different levels are combined to lead to paradoxes.

¹²I have relied directly on key elements of his formal proof, as a model of the way the philosophical issue I raise in this essay can be posed and brought to a definitive resolution. See Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (In Arrow's original proof of 1951, there were *five* conditions. He had two conditions in this proof that implied the Pareto principle in his later, more compact proof of 1963). I have also relied directly on the work of the following contributors in the field in the construction of key elements of this essay: DeLong (pp. 5-6, 41-42), Heap (pp. 209-216, 289-291), MacKay (pp. 103-111), and Sen (pp. 41-46).

information. For instance, consider casting and recording voted ballots using an ideal procedure (e.g., a version of machinery, with hidden detailed inner workings); or consider, in contrast, an idealized action that registers or reveals a choice, like (hypothetically) raising your hand, marking a paper, voting with your voice, voting with your feet, or voting with your wallet/pocketbook, etc.

My goal is to demonstrate the theorem that no APA can jointly satisfy the following *five plausible formal conditions*¹³ (let x , y , and z be elements of X so that there are at least three alternative social states and at least two persons in the community under consideration).

- (1) Logically Well Behaved Choice: The standing background assumption here is that social preference and indifference, both individual and collective, should be logically well behaved so that individual social preference and indifference should be *transitive* and *complete*; collective social preference and indifference should be *transitive* and *complete*. This condition places an underlying emphasis on operating within a social group that is reasonably and equitably regulated to ensure impartiality and fair and accurate results.

a) By *transitive* I mean that *if social state x is preferred to social state y , and social state y is preferred to social state z , then social state x is preferred to social state z ; and if social state x is taken indifferently to social state y , and social state y is taken indifferently to social state z , then social state x is taken indifferently to social state z .*¹⁴

b) By *complete* I mean that *for any two alternative social states x and y , either social state x is preferred to social state y , or social state y is preferred to social state x , or social states x and y are taken indifferently.*

- (2) Representation: The domain of the collective social choice function APA must include all logically possible combinations of individual orderings of social states. This condition places an underlying emphasis on pluralism and the toleration of dissenting beliefs so that one can, for instance, choose any pattern of preferences as a possible representation profiling an individual.

¹³I will take the five conditions restricting the *ideally* rational social-preference aggregation procedure or action as *conceptual*—as neither *empirical* nor *normative*. The conditions may be taken initially as not empirical because the facts, whatever they turn out to be, do not determine the ideal. And the conditions may be taken initially as not normative, since the *ought* of rationality is not the normative *ought*. But, if found to be conceptually inconsistent, the conditions (taken together) cannot be empirically possible. Accordingly, any normativity ascribed to the five conditions will not be translatable into practice, regardless of the specific context and/or application. Furthermore, tinkering with the *number* of conditions imposed on the aggregation device amounts to changing the subject. In a search for a more compact set of minimal conditions, it might be shown that our impossibility result could be reproduced without resorting to one or more of the five conditions. But this is a topic for another treatise.

¹⁴The plausible counterexamples based on a model that exploits the concept of a *discrimination threshold* (found in perceptual psychology) do not show that the Logically Well Behaved Choice condition has problems with the transitivity of preference or indifference. The real trouble with transitivity is not attributable to preference or to indifference. Whatever nontransitivity there is in these preference relations is dependent on prior perceptual nontransitivities, which spring from a very special series of underlying perceptual discrimination failures. Moreover, preference is not enough like perception for the analogy with perceptual cases to do any work (See Mackay, Chapter 3).

- (3) Unanimity: If social state x is *preferred* to social state y by all *individuals* without exception, then social state x should be *collectively preferred* to social state y . This condition places an underlying emphasis on community accord through collectively pursued common ends or a commitment to the commonwealth.
- (4) Participation: The collective ordering of any given set of social alternatives (for each person participating) should depend only on the individuals' preference orderings of those alternatives.¹⁵ This condition places an underlying emphasis on the individual taking part by being related to the larger whole of socially connected alternatives.
- (5) Freedom and Autonomy: This condition places an underlying emphasis on individual rights and free expression so that none may be a social dictator. That is, no individual is able to determine the collective social behavior in all circumstances such that the collective ordering of social states coincides with the ordering of that individual independent of the preferences of all other individuals.

I continue by considering some *key definitions* for *social dictator* and *socially decisive* (remember that x , y , and z are three alternative social states):

- (1) Social Dictator: Individual I is a *social dictator* with respect to x and y (symbolized¹⁶ as $D(x,y)$) iff *if I prefers x to y then, irrespective of the social preferences of all others, the community prefers x to y .*
- (2) Socially Decisive: Individual I is *socially decisive* with respect to x and y (symbolized as $d(x,y)$) iff *if I socially prefers x to y and all others socially prefer y to x , then the community socially prefers x to y .*
- (3) A social dictator is also socially decisive: If individual I is a *social dictator*, then individual I is *socially decisive* (symbolized as $D(x,y) \Rightarrow d(x,y)$).

Other key definitions correspond to the binary relation of *weak preference* R (*at least as good as*). The following define the relations of *strict preference* P and of *indifference* N .

- (4) $P(x,y)$ iff $[R(x,y) \ \& \ \neg R(y,x)]$
(x is strictly preferred over y if-and-only-if both x is at least as good as y and it is not the case that y is at least as good as x).
- (5) $N(x,y)$ iff $[R(x,y) \ \& \ R(y,x)]$
(x is taken indifferently to y if-and-only-if both x is at least as good as y and y is at least as good as x).

¹⁵The condition of Participation limits the aggregation procedure or action by requiring that only the bare ordering of individuals' preferences be taken into account. So the procedure or action does not, for example, respond to how much one thing is preferred to another—that is, to preference *intensity* information.

¹⁶See Virginia Klenk's *Understanding Symbolic Logic* for a comprehensive introduction to the content and methods of formal deductive logic used throughout this essay. Logical notation varies from text to text.

In the next section, I construct the initial portion of the proof for the conclusion that there is no collectively chosen social function APA that simultaneously satisfies the conditions of Logically Well Behaved Choice, Representation, Unanimity, Participation, and Freedom and Autonomy.

Proof: Part I

With the foregoing key conditions and definitions in mind, I introduce the following five helping theorems to construct the initial portion of the proof.

Lemma no. 1: $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)$;

Lemma no. 2: $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(z,y)$;

Lemma no. 3: $d(x,z) \Rightarrow D(y,z)$;

Lemma no. 4: $d(y,z) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$;

Lemma no. 5: $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$.

Consider, for instance, how one might derive Lemma no. 1: $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)$. I will start by reiterating that x , y , and z are elements of set X , the set of social states (i.e., x , y , and z are three alternative social states). I assume $d(x,y)$, that is, person I is decisive for some x and y . I also assume $P_i(x,y)$ and $P_i(y,z)$, that is, person I 's preference ordering is x , y , and z , where z is another alternative. This assumption is permitted because by the condition of *Representation*, I can choose any pattern of preferences as a possible representation that profiles individual I (Note that by transitivity individual I will prefer x to z). Now, let J refer to all individuals other than I . I will assume that each individual J prefers y to x and y to z , that is, $P_j(y,x)$ and $P_j(y,z)$, but J may prefer x to z , or z to x , or be indifferent between x and z . Again, by the condition of *Representation*, I can choose any pattern of preferences as a possible profile for individual(s) J . From all this it follows that $[d(x,y) \& P_i(x,y) \& P_j(y,x)] \Rightarrow P(x,y)$, that is, x will be collectively preferred to y , since $[d(x,y) \& P_i(x,y) \& P_j(y,x)] \Rightarrow P(x,y)$ amounts to saying that *If I prefers x to y and all others prefer y to x, then the community prefers x to y*. But I prefers x to y (i.e., $P_i(x,y)$) while everyone else prefers y to x (i.e., $P_j(y,x)$). Thus, the community prefers x to y (i.e., $P(x,y)$).

Moreover, $[P_i(y,z) \& P_j(y,z)] \Rightarrow P(y,z)$. For, by the *Unanimity* condition, y is collectively preferred to z , since everyone (i.e., both I and J) prefers y to z . Up to now I have shown that $P(x,y)$ and $P(y,z)$. But $P(x,y)$ and $P(y,z)$ implies that $P(x,z)$ by the condition of *Logically Well Behaved Choice*. Thus $D(x,z)$ holds, since x is collectively preferred to z regardless of the preferences of anyone between x and z other than individual I . For if the preferences of anyone between x and z other than I had any influence on the ranking of x and z , then the rankings of x in relation to y and of y in relation to z would have an effect on the collective choice between x and z . But, this would violate the condition of *Participation*. So, $P(x,z)$ must be independent of these particular assumptions and it must be the result of $P_i(x,z)$ alone irrespective of the other orderings. However, this means that individual I is a dictator with respect to x and z . Therefore, $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)$ is derived and so our first lemma is proved. To get at the subsequent stages of the proof will require some of the same unavoidable logical labor we have endured so far. But, I will try to keep this to a minimum by skipping the comparable derivation of lemmas no. 2 through no. 4. Moreover, I will introduce the very compact notation of symbolic logic in order to cover more territory quickly, while making the reasoning of the several stages of the proof

explicit.

I turn now to how one might derive Lemma no. 5: $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$.

1. $d(x,y)$Assume
2. $d(x,z) \Rightarrow D(y,z)$Lemma no. 3
3. $d(y,z) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$Lemma no. 4
4. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)$Lemma no. 1
5. $D(x,z)$4,1 Modus Ponens
6. $d(x,z)$5, Definition no. 3
7. $D(y,z)$2,6 Modus Ponens
8. $d(y,z)$7, Definition no. 3
9. $D(y,x)$3,8 Modus Ponens
10. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$1-9, Conditional Proof

With the foregoing five lemmas in hand, I move on with our next important helping theorem to continue constructing subsequent portions of the proof for the conclusion that there is no collective social function APA that simultaneously satisfies conditions one through five.

Proof: Part II

Lemma no. 6 states that if individual I is decisive for any pair in a triple, then he or she will be a dictator for all pairs in that triple. Symbolically speaking: $(\exists x)(\exists y) d(x,y) \Rightarrow (\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z) [D(z,y) \& D(x,z) \& D(y,x) \& D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$.

Prove: Lemma no. 6: (I postpone the use of quantifiers until later).

1. $d(x,y)$Assume
2. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)$Lemma no. 1
3. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(z,y)$Lemma no. 2
4. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(y,x)$Lemma no. 5
5. $D(x,z)$2,1 Modus Ponens
6. $D(z,y)$3,1 Modus Ponens
7. $D(y,x)$4,1 Modus Ponens
8. $D(z,y) \& D(x,z) \& D(y,x)$5,6,7, &Introduction
9. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow [D(z,y) \& D(x,z) \& D(y,x)]$1-8, Conditional Proof
10. $d(y,x) \Rightarrow [D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$9, Interchange x and y
11. $D(y,x) \Rightarrow d(y,x)$Interchange x and y in Definition no. 3
12. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow d(y,x)$4,11 Hypothetical Syllogism
13. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow [D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$12,10 Hypothetical Syllogism
14. $d(x,y)$Assume
15. $[D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$13,14 Modus Ponens
16. $[D(z,y) \& D(x,z) \& D(y,x) \& D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$...8,15 &Introduction
17. $d(x,y) \Rightarrow [D(z,y) \& D(x,z) \& D(y,x) \& D(y,z) \& D(z,x) \& D(x,y)]$
...14-16, Conditional Proof.

Proof: Part III

With the foregoing lemma proved, I move on with our next important helping theorem. Lemma no. 7 states that if individual I is decisive for any pair in a triple, then he or she will be a dictator for all possible alternatives. Symbolically speaking: $(\exists x)(\exists y) d(x,y) \Rightarrow (\forall u)(\forall v) D(u,v)$.

Prove: Lemma no.7: $(\exists x)(\exists y) d(x,y) \Rightarrow (\forall u)(\forall v) D(u,v)$.

1. $(\exists x)(\exists y) d(x,y)$Assume
2. $(\forall x)(\forall y) [D(x,y) \Rightarrow d(x,y)]$Definition no. 3
3. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z) [d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(x,z)]$Lemma no. 1
4. $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z) [d(x,y) \Rightarrow D(z,y)]$Lemma no. 2
5. $d(a,b)$1, Existential Instantiation
6. $d(a,b) \Rightarrow D(a,v)$3, Universal Instantiation
7. $D(a,v) \Rightarrow d(a,v)$2, Universal Instantiation
8. $d(a,b) \Rightarrow d(a,v)$6,7 Hypothetical Syllogism
9. $d(a,v) \Rightarrow D(u,v)$4, Universal Instantiation
10. $d(a,b) \Rightarrow D(u,v)$8,9 Hypothetical Syllogism
11. $D(u,v)$10,5 Modus Ponens
12. $(\forall u)(\forall v) D(u,v)$11, Universal Generalization
13. $(\exists x)(\exists y) d(x,y) \Rightarrow (\forall u)(\forall v) D(u,v)$1-12, Conditional Proof

So, I have shown that if individual I is decisive for any pair in a triple, then he or she will be a *social dictator* for all possible alternatives. But if individual I will be a *social dictator* for all possible alternatives, then condition no. 5 of *Freedom and Autonomy* cannot be satisfied. The lesson here, given the overarching goal of showing that a liberal civil society is impossible, is that although many take this social sector to be a response or antidote to repel coercive force or absolutism from dictatorial agents or powers, a civil society itself cannot escape a dictator.

Putting it all together, if individual I is decisive for any pair in a triple, then condition no. 5 that promotes non-dictatorship cannot be satisfied. However, if condition no. 5 cannot be satisfied, then there is no collective choice function APA that simultaneously satisfies conditions one through five. Thus, if individual I is decisive for any pair in a triple, then there is no collective choice function APA that simultaneously satisfies conditions one through five. Accordingly, if I can show that there is some individual I who is decisive for any ordered pair of alternatives, then it follows (by *Modus Ponens*) that there is no APA satisfying conditions one through five. I can do this via an indirect proof. Let me first assume that *it is not the case that* there is some individual I who is decisive for any ordered pair of alternatives.

By the *Unanimity* condition, for any pair of alternatives there is at least one set that dictates. That is, there is at least one dictating set, namely, the set of all individuals. Now, since a social dictator is also socially decisive (by definition $D(x,y) \Rightarrow d(x,y)$), then it must be the case that for every pair of social alternatives there is also at least one set that is socially decisive. Lacking unanimity, I look around in search of the smallest decisive set. I will call this set S and will let it be socially decisive for x against y. I need not continue searching if S contains only

one person. But if S were to contain two or more individuals, I divide S into two parts. Let S_1 contain one person and S_2 contain the rest of S . I note that all the other individuals not in the smallest decisive set will make up the set S_3 .

Given the condition of *Representation*, I can assume any logically possible combination of individual orderings. Consider the following social preference profile: (1) For all i in S_1 , $P_i(x,y)$ & $P_i(y,z)$ [Note that by transitivity this also means that $P_i(x,z)$]. (2) For all j in S_2 , $P_j(z,x)$ & $P_j(x,y)$ [Note that by transitivity this also means that $P_j(z,y)$]. (3) For all k in S_3 , $P_k(y,z)$ & $P_k(z,x)$ [Note that by transitivity this also means that $P_k(y,x)$]. Now, given that S is decisive for x against y , and given that every person in S prefers x to y , and every person not in S does the opposite, I conclude that $P(x,y)$. Considering y and z , only S_2 members prefer z to y , and the rest prefer y to z , so that if $P(z,y)$, then S_2 must also be a decisive set. But S was designated as the smallest decisive set; yet, S_2 is a proper subset of S so S_2 must be smaller than S . Thus, it is not the case that $P(z,y)$. Therefore, for R to be complete as required for the condition of *Representation*, $R(y,z)$ must hold. For *Representation* requires that the domain of the function APA must include all logically possible combinations of individual orderings. But $[P(x,y) \& R(y,z)] \Rightarrow P(x,z)$. However, only the person in S_1 prefers x to z and the rest prefer z to x . Hence, a certain person has turned out to be decisive. And this contradicts my original assumption. So, there is no APA satisfying conditions one through five.

Summary and Responses to Objections

Although it is intuitive for some to suppose that individual social preferences can be expressed formally, and then aggregated into an expression of social preferences, such preferences, having certain tractable formalizations, demonstrably cannot be aggregated to satisfy the five plausible formal conditions of Logically Well Behaved Choice, Representation, Unanimity, Participation, and Freedom and Autonomy for a liberal civil society (as the basis for democracy and social justice) to be possible.

The critic may be (possibly) pressed to look carefully to determine whether there is something terribly wrong with the scope or limits of our aggregation procedure or action. But, it is important to recall that our aggregation procedure or action has a wide-scope. This is because it can vary according to the type, amount, and format of the individual preference information, and according to what the procedure or action does with that information. For instance, besides the more formal or traditional casting and recording of voted ballots using voting boxes or booths, and lever or electronic voting machines, social preferences in a liberal civil society can also be aggregated into a collective choice by registering the individual's marking of a paper, voice voting, raising of a hand, voting with a wallet, or foot voting, etc. All other things being equal, in the end it really does not matter how (or with what) we count or record votes (preferences).¹⁷ Moreover, the aggregation procedure or action is supposed to combine

¹⁷Some may claim, however, that there are *better* ways of counting or recording votes via **non-rank order voting**. Instead of relying on **the standard model of social choice** where voters produce ranked lists of preferences, a **majority judgment** may be proposed where voters grade the candidates (or issues) and determine the winner by *aggregating the grades using the median grade as the decisive factor* (see Edelman's book review: *Michel Balinski and Rida Laraki: Majority Judgment: Measuring, Ranking, and Electing*). But, this is not without its flaws (Edelman highlights the two basic types of flaws pointed out by the works of Felsenthal, Machover, and Zahid). Of importance here is the **no-show paradox**, which sometimes is exhibited by **majority judgment**. The problem is

individual social-preferences to obtain a collective choice consistent with what it means to be a liberal civil society. So, for a liberal civil society, the five conditions defined in this essay embody a conception of the way social-preference aggregation procedures or actions *rationally* ought and ought not to be. Accordingly, the five conditions restrict the *ideally* rational social-preference aggregation device.

But, to conclude that it is impossible to construct an ideally rational social-preference *aggregation procedure or action* (APA), we are logically committed to the (sub) conclusion that there is no collective social choice procedure or action that simultaneously satisfies our five conditions. For the critic, however, the main argument of this essay may be viewed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of its premises, rather than a proof of its conclusion. On that account, one *could* violate one (or more) of the five essential conditions. Accordingly, one must be willing to get rid of one (or more) of a civil society's formal conditions. Nevertheless, those who tend to subscribe to a normative theory of civil society usually understand civil society as *civilized* on the basis of democratic and liberal values like individual rights and free expression (Freedom and Autonomy), the individual taking part by being related to the larger whole of socially connected alternatives (Participation), community accord through collectively pursued common ends or a commitment to the commonwealth (Unanimity), pluralism and the toleration of dissenting beliefs (Representation), and operating within a social group that is reasonably and equitably regulated to ensure impartiality and a fair and accurate result (Logically Well Behaved Choice). So although the critic may be (possibly) pressed to look carefully to determine whether there is something terribly wrong with one (or more) of the five conditions, one cannot but help to find them to be plausible.

If this is the case, then, a civil society can by no means be secured because its limitations cannot be seen to be just a matter that it sometimes operates in ...*an arena where contradictory forces are at play*—where [*p*]eople organise in the civil society sphere not only around 'civil' democratic and liberal values, but also around values that can be defined as 'uncivil' (see White 1994; Bastian 1999; Kaldor 2003) to protect their group-based interests.¹⁸ So, the distinction between civil and uncivil society presented by ...*the idea... that strengthening civil society contributes to democratization [and] requires civil society to be imbued with both democratic and liberal values, and for it to be easily distinguishable from 'uncivil society' which lacks these values,*¹⁹ is misleading. For, one may argue that civil society should be considered as part of a wider category of *uncivil* society²⁰ (not the other way around). This is because since the concept of a *liberal* civil society is closely related to the five plausible formal conditions (that

that the *no-show paradox* violates our plausible condition of **Participation** (where great value is placed in a liberal society on the collective ordering of any given set of social alternatives (for each person participating) so that these depend only on the individuals' preference orderings of those alternatives). This condition places an underlying emphasis on the individual taking part by being related to the larger whole of socially connected alternatives. But, for **majority judgment**, participation sometimes is irrelevant. So, for instance (adapting the example cited in Edelman's book review), consider a collective in a civil society that comes to majority judgment (grading the candidates/issues **A** and **B** and determining **A** to be winner *by aggregating the grades using the median grade as the decisive factor*). For an individual added to that collective seeking to participate in the decision process, it does not matter to the existing tally of votes the addition of his or her preference. In fact, it would have been better for this individual to not participate, given that the added input will not even change the winner from A to B.

¹⁸Camilla Orjuela, *Dilemmas of Civil Society Aid*, 3.

¹⁹Marlies Glasius, *Uncivil Society*, 4.

²⁰For the wide spectrum of the different forms of uncivil society see Marlies Glasius, *Uncivil Society*.

characterize civil society as *civilized* on the basis of democratic and liberal values), it may in turn be linked to the kernel idea that the foregoing formal proof embodies—that the five conditions prohibit a liberal civil society because when applied each of which seems, when independently considered, to be plausible, but when taken together in fact conflict and are logically incompatible. Because of the paradoxical aspect that is the hallmark of this problem, one cannot (except for rehearsing the proof itself) see *why* the five formal conditions should clash. That is why this difficult and complex issue was posed and brought to a definitive resolution by using logically tractable formulation.

It would be a mistake, though tempting, to regard this conclusion as the result of trivial or unwarranted logical abstraction. For some, I appear to have attempted an impossible task of logical legislation against a purely empirical possibility. What in fact I have shown, however, is that central conditions that belong to our understanding of liberal civil social life are incompatible no matter the purported context and/or application of a civil society. This is because these central conditions when taken together in fact conflict and are logically incompatible, prohibiting a liberal civil society. When we speak of the possibility of a civil society of this type, then, we literally do not understand what we are saying. Although this admission of logical incompatibility undermining a liberal civil society does not offer immediate solace to the problem of what to put in its place, on the whole I conclude that without the foregoing definitive resolution one may be tempted to accept the mistaken view that a liberal civil society is possible.²¹

And yet, many may continue entertaining the possibility despite this resolution. For, as the old Spanish proverb warns, *there is no worse blindness than that of the person who refuses to see*. Part of this blindness, of course, is that people may characterize themselves as *civilized*,

²¹For some, I appear to have demonstrated a purely *negative* or *depressing* conclusion, which would question the very goal to seek *good*, *benefit*, and the *warding off of evil* by the noble pursuit of a liberal civil society. However, finding such a conclusion *negative* or *depressing* only serves as a psychological limit to the possibility of reality. To be sure, such an emotional response (against *uncivil* society as the evil twin of *civil* society) may demand that we read this conclusion as a *glass half-empty* (focusing on the negative aspects of *uncivil* society) instead of *half-full* (focusing on the positive aspects of *civil* society). Nevertheless, what I have shown is that there is no such glass. Accordingly, it makes no sense to sidetrack this discussion by focusing on flaws of the glass (tainting *civil* society)—as if it existed and its flaws could be fixed with time, effort, resources, and/or the right approach. Furthermore, invoking flaws on the grounds that we will never have a *perfect* civil society because *there is no such thing as perfection* will not do either, since one cannot, on pain of contradiction, be perfectly sure that there is no such thing as perfection. Moreover, demonstrating that a civil society (as the basis for democracy and social justice) is impossible need not entail a *negative* or *depressing* conclusion. Consider, for example, the belief that Santa Claus exists (as it applies to most young children that celebrate Christmas). One would think it a purely negative or depressing conclusion to have demonstrated that Santa Claus does not really exist to a young child. But, as maturity sets in, this conclusion no longer becomes a psychological limit to the possibility of that reality. In fact, one may still seek the *good* or *benefit* of gift giving, for instance, without the existence of Santa Claus. Accordingly, although I have shown that civil society should be considered as part of a wider category of *uncivil* society, there is a wide spectrum of different forms of *uncivil* society. This suggests that anarchy or violence, for example, need not be a default position, nor a hallmark of *uncivil* society (see Glasius, *Uncivil Society*). Moreover, when it comes to the really violent and alarming aspects of *uncivil* society, critical thinking and prudence dictate that things *should not be changed for light and transient causes* (adapted from the Declaration of Independence).

treating others as *inferior* or *less civilized* (or *uncivilized*) to justify the bad treatment of one person at the hands of another. As history has shown, many colonizing imperialistic powers, for instance, saw themselves as *superior* and characterized entire cultures, races of people, or nations as *savages* or *barbarians* as an excuse to subjugate and/or enslave individuals for economic, political, and/or social exploitation. But, all this just goes to show that none are more hopelessly uncivilized than those who falsely believe they can be organized around core values that can be defined as *civil*.

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