

Reprinted: in M. Fournier and H. Lamont, eds.,
Where Culture Talks: Exclusion and the
Making of Society. Chicago University Press,
1993: 289-308

“Morale e Repression”

TWELVE

Citizen and Enemy as Symbolic Classification: On the Polarizing Discourse of Civil Society

Jeffrey C. Alexander

Sociologists have written much about the social forces that create conflict and polarize society, about interests and structures of political, economic, racial, ethnic, religious, and gender groups. But they have said very little about the construction, destruction, and deconstruction of civic solidarity itself. They are generally silent about the sphere of fellow feeling that makes society into society and about the processes that fragment it.¹

I would like to approach this sphere of fellow feeling from the concept of “civil society.” Civil society, of course, has been a topic of enormous discussion and dispute throughout the history of social thought. Marx and critical theory have employed the concept to theorize the very lack of community, the world of egoistic, self-regulating individuals produced by capitalist production. I am relying for my understanding of the term on a different tradition, on the line of democratic, liberal thought that extended from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth, an age of democratic theorizing that was supplanted by industrial capitalism and the concern with “the social question” (cf. Keane 1988a, 1988b; and Cohen 1982).

I will define *civil society* as a sphere or subsystem of society that is analytically and, to various degrees, empirically separated from the spheres of political, economic, and religious life. Civil society is a sphere of solidarity in which abstract universalism and particularistic versions of community are tensely intertwined. It is both a normative and a real concept. It allows the relation between universal individual rights and particularistic restrictions on these rights to be studied empirically, as the conditions that determine the status of civil society itself.

Civil society depends on resources, or inputs, from these other spheres, from political life, from economic institutions, from broad cultural discussion, from territorial organization, and from primordial-

289
in Lamont & Fournier, eds.,
Cultivating Differences

ality. In a causal sense, civil society is dependent on these spheres, but only by what Parsons called a "combinatorial logic." Civil society—and the groups, individuals, and actors who represent their interests in this system's terms—pulls together these inputs according to the logic and demands of its particular situation. This is to say that the solidary sphere that we call civil society has relative autonomy and can be studied in its own right (cf. Durkheim [1893] 1933; Parsons 1967, 1977).

Against the new utilitarianism (e.g., Coleman 1990; cf. Alexander, in press) and critical theory (Habermas 1988) alike, therefore, I wish to defend the position that there is, indeed, a *society* that can be defined in moral terms. The stipulations of this moral community articulate with (not determine) organizations and the exercise of power via institutions like constitutions and legal codes, on the one hand, and "office," on the other. Civil society also has organizations of its own: the courts, institutions of mass communication, and public opinion polls are all significant examples. Civil society is constituted by its own distinctive structure of elites, not only by functional oligarchies that control the legal and communications systems, but by those that exercise power and identity through voluntary organizations ("dignitaries" or "public servants") and social movements ("movement intellectuals" [Eyerman and Jamison 1991]).

But civil society is not merely an institutional realm. It is also a realm of structured, socially established consciousness, a network of understandings that operates beneath and above explicit institutions and the self-conscious interests of elites. To study this subjective dimension of civil society we must recognize and focus on the distinctive symbolic codes that are critically important in constituting the very sense of society for those who are within and without it. These codes are so sociologically important, I would argue, that every study of social/sectional/subsystem conflict must be complemented by reference to this civil symbolic sphere.

The codes supply the structured categories of pure and impure into which every member, or potential member, of civil society is made to fit. It is in terms of symbolic purity and impurity that centrality is defined, that marginal demographic status is made meaningful and high position understood as deserved or illegitimate. Pollution is a threat to any allocative system; its sources must either be kept at bay or transformed by communicative actions, like rituals and social movements, into a pure form.

Despite their enormous behavioral impact, however, pure and impure categories do not develop merely as generalizations or inductions

from structural position or individual behavior. They are imputations that are induced, via analogy and metaphor, from the internal logic of the symbolic code. For this reason, the internal structure of the civil code must become an object of study in itself. Just as there is no developed religion that does not divide the world into the saved and the damned, there is no civil discourse that does not conceptualize the world into those who deserve inclusion and those who do not.² Members of national communities firmly believe that "the world," and this notably includes their own nation, is filled with people who either do not deserve freedom and communal support or are not capable of sustaining them (in part because they are immoral egoists). Members of national communities do not want to "save" such persons. They do not wish to include them, protect them, or offer them rights because they conceive them as being unworthy and amoral, as in some sense "uncivilized."³

This distinction is not "real." Actors are not intrinsically either worthy or moral: they are determined to be so by being placed in certain positions on the grid of civil culture. When citizens make judgments about who should be included in civil society and who should not, about who is a friend and who is an enemy, they draw on a systematic, highly elaborated symbolic code. This symbolic structure was already clearly implied in the very first philosophical thinking about democratic societies that emerged in ancient Greece. Since the Renaissance it has permeated popular thinking and behavior, even while its centrality in philosophical thinking has continued to be sustained. The symbolic structure takes different forms in different nations, and it is the historical residue of diverse movements in social, intellectual, and religious life—of classical ideas, republicanism and Protestantism, Enlightenment and liberal thought, of the revolutionary and common law traditions. The cultural implications of these variegated movements, however, have been drawn into a highly generalized symbolic system that divides civic virtue from civic vice in a remarkably stable and consistent way. It is for this reason that, despite divergent historical roots and variations in national elaborations, the language that forms the cultural core of civil society can be isolated as a general structure and studied as a relatively autonomous symbolic form.⁴

The basic elements of this structure can be understood semiotically—they are sets of homologies, which create likenesses between various terms of social description and prescription, and antipathies, which establish antagonisms between these terms and other sets of symbols. Those who consider themselves worthy members of a national

community (as most persons do, of course) define themselves in terms of the positive side of this symbolic set; they define those who are not deemed worthy in terms of the bad. It is fair to say, indeed, that members of a community "believe in" both the positive and the negative sides, that they employ both as viable normative evaluations of political communities. For the members of every democratic society, both the positive and the negative symbolic sets are thought to be realistic descriptions of individual and social life.⁵

The binary discourse occurs at three levels: motives, relations, and institutions. The motives of political actors are clearly conceptualized (What kind of people are they?) along with the social relations and institutions they are capable of sustaining.⁶

Let us first discuss motives. Code and countercode posit human nature in diametrically opposed ways. Because democracy depends on self-control and individual initiatives, the people who compose it are described as being capable of activism and autonomy rather than as being passive and dependent. They are seen as rational and reasonable rather than as irrational and hysterical, as calm rather than excited, as controlled rather than passionate, as sane and realistic, not as given to fantasy or as mad. Democratic discourse, then, posits the following qualities as axiomatic: activism, autonomy, rationality, reasonableness, calm, control, realism, and sanity. The nature of the countercode, the discourse that justifies the restriction of civil society, is already clearly implied. If actors are passive and dependent, irrational and hysterical, excitable, passionate, unrealistic, or mad, they cannot be allowed the freedom that democracy allows. On the contrary, these persons deserve to be repressed, not only for the sake of civil society, but for their own sakes as well. (These qualities are schematized in table 1).

On the basis of such contradictory codes about human motives, distinctive representations of social relationships can be built. Democratically motivated persons—persons who are active, autonomous, rational, reasonable, calm, and realistic—will be capable of forming open social relationships rather than secretive ones; they will be trusting rather than suspicious, straightforward rather than calculating, truthful rather than deceitful. Their decisions will be based on open deliberation rather than conspiracy, and their attitude toward authority will be critical rather than deferential. In their behavior toward other community members they will be bound by conscience and honor rather than by greed and self-interest, and they will treat their fellows as friends rather than enemies.

Table 1. The Discursive Structure of Social Motives

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
Activism	Passivity
Autonomy	Dependence
Rationality	Irrationality
Reasonableness	Hysteria
Calm	Excitable
Self-control	Passionate
Realistic	Unrealistic
Sane	Mad

Table 2. The Discursive Structure of Social Relationships

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
Open	Secret
Trusting	Suspicious
Critical	Deferential
Honorable	Self-interested
Conscience	Greed
Truthful	Deceitful
Straightforward	Calculating
Deliberative	Conspiratorial
Friend	Enemy

If actors are irrational, dependent, passive, passionate, and unrealistic, on the other hand, the social relationships they form will be characterized by the second side of these fateful dichotomies. Rather than open and trusting relationships, they will form secret societies that are premised on their suspicion of other human beings. To the authority within these secret societies they will be deferential, but to those outside their tiny group they will behave in a greedy and self-interested way. They will be conspiratorial, deceitful toward others, and calculating in their behavior, conceiving of those outside their group as enemies. If the positive side of this second discourse set describes the symbolic qualities necessary to sustain civil society, the negative side describes a solitary structure in which mutual respect and expansive social integration has been broken down (see table 2).

Given the discursive structure of motives and civic relationships, it should not be surprising that this set of homologies and antipathies

extends to the social understanding of political and legal institutions themselves. If members of a national community are irrational in motive and distrusting in social relationships, they will naturally create institutions that are arbitrary rather than rule regulated, that emphasize brute power rather than law and hierarchy rather than equality, that are exclusive rather than inclusive and promote personal loyalty over impersonal and contractual obligations, that are regulated by personalities rather than by office obligations, and that are organized by faction rather than by groups that are responsible to the needs of the community as a whole (see table 3).

These three sets of discursive structures are tied together. Indeed, every element in any one of the sets can be linked via analogical relations—homologous relations of likeness—to any element in another set on the same side. “Rule regulated,” for example, a key element in the symbolic understanding of democratic social institutions, is considered homologous—synonymous or mutually reinforcing in a cultural sense—with “truthful” and “open,” terms that define social relationships, and with “reasonable” and “autonomous,” elements from the symbolic set that stipulates democratic motives. In the same manner, any element from any set on one side is taken to be antithetical to any broader cultural formation, for example, “hierarchy” is thought to be inimical to “critical” and “open” and also to “activistic” and “self-controlled.”

When they are presented in their simple binary forms, these cultural codes appear merely schematic. In fact, however, they reveal the skeletal structures on which social communities build the familiar stories, the rich narrative forms, that guide their everyday, taken-for-granted political life.⁷ The positive side of these structured sets provides the elements for the comforting and inspiring story of a democratic, free, and spontaneously integrated social order, a civil society in an ideal-typical sense. People are rational, can process information intelligently and independently, know the truth when they see it, do not need strong leaders, can engage in criticism, and easily coordinate their own society. Law is not an external mechanism that coerces people but an expression of their innate rationality, mediating between truth and mundane events. Office is an institutional mechanism that mediates between law and action. It is a calling, a vocation to which persons adhere because of their trust and reason. Those who know the truth do not defer to authorities, nor are they loyal to particular persons. They obey their conscience rather than follow their vulgar interest; they speak plainly

Table 3. The Discursive Structure of Social Institutions

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
Rule regulated	Arbitrary
Law	Power
Equality	Hierarchy
Inclusive	Exclusive
Impersonal	Personal
Contractual	Ascriptive loyalty
Social groups	Factions
Office	Personality

rather than conceal their ideas; they are open, idealistic, and friendly toward their fellow human beings.

The structure and narrative of political virtue form the discourse of liberty. This discourse is embodied in the founding documents of democratic societies. In America, for example, the Bill of Rights postulates “the right of people to be secure against unreasonable searches” and guarantees that “no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law.” In so doing it ties rights to reasons and liberty to law. The discourse is also embodied in the great and the little stories that democratic nations tell about themselves, for example, in the American story about George Washington and the cherry tree, which highlights honesty and virtue, or in English accounts of the Battle of Britain, which reveal the courage, self-sufficiency, and spontaneous cooperation of the British in contrast to the villainous forces of Hitlerian Germany.

Whatever institutional or narrative form it assumes, the discourse of liberty centers on the capacity for voluntarism. Action is voluntary if it is intended by rational actors who are in full control of body and mind. If action is not voluntary, it is deemed to be worthless. If laws do not facilitate the achievement of freely intended action, they are discriminatory. If confessions of guilt are coerced rather than freely given, they are polluted.⁸ If a social group is constituted under the discourse of liberty, it must be given social rights because the members of this group are conceived of as possessing the capacity for voluntary action. Political struggles over the status of lower-class groups, racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, criminals, and the mentally, emotionally, and physically handicapped have always involved discursive struggles over whether the discourse of liberty can be extended and applied. Insofar as the founding constitutional documents of dem-

ocratic societies are universalistic, they implicitly stipulate that the discourse can and must be.

The elements on the negative side of these symbolic sets are also tightly intertwined. They provide the elements for the plethora of taken-for-granted stories that permeate democratic understanding of the negative and repugnant sides of community life. Taken together, these negative structures and narratives form the "discourse of repression." If people do not have the capacity for reason, if they cannot rationally process information and cannot tell truth from falseness, then they will be loyal to leaders for purely personal reasons and will be easily manipulated by them in turn. Because such persons are ruled by calculation rather than by conscience, they are without the honor that is critical in democratic affairs. Since they have no honor, they do not have the capacity to regulate their own affairs. It is because of this situation that such persons subject themselves to hierarchical authority. These anticivil qualities make it necessary to deny such persons access to rights and the protection of law.⁹ Indeed, because they lack the capacity for both voluntary and responsible behavior, these marginal members of the national community—those who are unfortunate enough to be constructed under the counterdemocratic code—must ultimately be repressed. They cannot be regulated by law, nor will they accept the discipline of office. Their loyalties can be only familial and particularistic. The institutional and legal boundaries of civil society, if widely believed, can provide no bulwark against their lust for personal power.

The positive side of this discursive formation is viewed by the members of democratic communities as a source not only of purity but also of purification. The discourse of liberty is taken to sum up "the best" in a civil community, and its tenets are considered to be sacred. The objects that the discourse creates seem to possess an awesome power that places them at the "center" of society, a location—sometimes geographic, often stratificational, always symbolic—that compels their defense at almost any cost. The negative side of this symbolic formation is viewed as profane. Representing the "worst" in the national community, it embodies evil. The objects it identifies threaten the core community from somewhere outside it. From this marginal position, they present a powerful source of pollution.¹⁰ To be close to these polluted objects—the actors, structures, and processes that are constituted by this repressive discourse—is dangerous. Not only can one's reputation be sullied and one's status endangered, but one's very security can be threatened as well. To have one's self or movement be identified in

terms of these objects causes anguish, disgust, and alarm. This code is taken to be a threat to the very center of civil society itself.

Public figures and events must be categorized in terms of one side of this discursive formation or the other, although, when politics functions routinely, such classifications are neither explicit nor subject to extended public debate.¹¹ Even in routine periods, however, it is their specification within the codes of this underlying discourse that gives political things meaning and allows them to assume the role they seem "naturally" to have.¹² Even when they are aware that they are struggling over these classifications, moreover, most political actors do not recognize that it is they who are creating them. Such knowledge would relativize reality, creating an uncertainty that could undermine not only the cultural core but also the institutional boundaries and solidarity of civil society itself. Social events and actors seem to "be" these qualities, not to be labeled by them.

The discourse of civil society, in other words, is concrete, not abstract. It is elaborated by narrative accounts that are believed to describe not only the present but also the past faithfully. Every nation has a myth of origin, for example, that anchors this discourse in an account of the historical events involved in its early formation.¹³ Like their English compatriots, early Americans believed their rights to have emerged from the ancient constitution of eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons.¹⁴ The specifically American discourse of liberty was first elaborated in accounts of Puritan saints and later in stories about revolutionary heroes. It was woven into the myth of the yeoman farmer and then into tales about cowboys and still later into pulp stories about detectives and the malcontents they hoped to ferret out. The discourse of repression was made palpable through early religious accounts of miscreants and stories about loyalists and aristocrats in the Revolutionary War. Later it was elaborated in accounts of wild Indians and "populist" immigrants and then in regional myths about treason during the Civil War.¹⁵

For contemporary Americans, the categories of the pure and the polluted discourses seem to exist in just as natural and fully historical a way. Democratic law and procedures are seen as having been won by the voluntary struggles of the founding fathers and guaranteed by historical documents like the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. The qualities of the repressive code are embodied in the dark visions of tyranny and lawlessness, whether those of eighteenth-century British monarchs or Soviet Communists. Pulp fiction and highbrow drama seek to counterpose these dangers with compelling images of the

good.¹⁶ When works of the imagination represent the discursive formation in a paradigmatic way, they become contemporary classics. For the generation that matured during World War II, for example, George Orwell's *1984* made the discourse of repression emblematic of the struggles of their time.

Within the confines of a particular national community, the binary codes and concrete representations that make up the discourse of civil society are not usually divided up between different social groups. To the contrary, even in societies that are wrent by intensive social conflict, the constructions of both civic virtue and civic vice are in most cases widely accepted.¹⁷ What is contested in the course of civic life, what is not at all consensual, is how the antithetical sides of this discourse, its two symbolic sets, will be applied to particular actors and groups. If most of the members of democratic society accepted the "validity" and "reality" of *1984*, they disagreed fundamentally over its relevant social application. Radicals and liberals were inclined to see the book as describing the already repressive or at least imminent tendencies of their own capitalist societies; conservatives understood the work as referring to Communism alone.

Of course, some events are so gross or so sublime that they generate almost immediate consensus about how the symbolic sets should be applied. For most members of a national community, great national wars clearly demarcate the good and the bad. The nation's soldiers are taken to be courageous embodiments of the discourse of liberty; the foreign nations and soldiers who oppose them are deemed to represent some potent combination of the counterdemocratic code.¹⁸ In the course of American history, this negative code has, in fact, been extended to a vast and variegated group, to the British, native peoples, pirates, the South and the North, Africans, old European nations, fascists, Communists, Germans, and Japanese. Identification in terms of the discourse of repression is essential if vengeful combat is to be pursued. Once this polluting discourse is applied, it becomes impossible for good people to treat and reason with those on the other side. If one's opponents are beyond reason, deceived by leaders who operate in secret, the only option is to read them out of the human race. When great wars are successful, they provide powerful narratives that dominate the nation's postwar life. Hitler and Nazism formed the backbone of a huge array of Western myth and stories, providing master metaphors for everything from profound discussions about the "final solution" to the good guy/bad guy plots of television dramas and situation comedies.

For most events, however, discursive identity is contested. Political fights are, in part, about how to distribute actors across the structure of discourse, for there is no determined relation between any event or group and either side of the cultural scheme. Actors struggle to raint one another with the brush of repression and to wrap themselves in the rhetoric of liberty. In periods of tension and crisis, political struggle becomes a matter of how far and to whom the discourses of liberty and repression apply. The effective cause of victory and defeat, imprisonment and freedom, sometimes even of life and death, is often discursive domination, which depends on just how popular narratives about good and evil are extended. Is it protesting students who are like Nazis or the conservatives who are pursuing them? Are members of the Communist party to be understood as fascistic or the members of the House Un-American Activities Committee who interrogate them? When Watergate began, only the actual burglars were called conspirators and polluted by the discourse of repression. George McGovern and his fellow Democrats were unsuccessful in their efforts to apply this discourse to the White House, executive staff, and Republican party, elements of civil society that succeeded in maintaining their identity in liberal terms. At a later point in the crisis, such a reassuring relation to the culture structure no longer held.

The general discursive structure, in other words, is used to legitimate friends and delegitimate opponents in the course of real historical time. If an independent civil society were to be fully maintained, of course, the discourse of repression would be applied only in highly circumscribed ways, to groups like children and criminals who are not usually taken to be in sufficient possession of their rational or moral faculties. It is often the case, indeed, that individuals and groups within civil society will be able to sustain the discourse of liberty over a significant period of time. They will be able to understand their opponents as other rational individuals without indulging in moral annihilation.

Over an extended historical period, however, it is impossible for the discourse of repression not to be brought into significant play and for opponents to be understood as enemies of the most threatened kind. It may be the case, of course, that the opponents are, in fact, ruthless enemies of the public good. The Nazis were moral idiots, and it was wrong to deal with them as potential civic participants, as Chamberlain and the other appeasers did. The discourse of repression is applied, however, whether its objects are really evil or not, eventually creating an objective reality where none had existed before. The symbolism of evil that had been applied by the Allies in an overzealous way to the

German nation in World War I was extended indiscriminately to the German people and governments of the postwar period. It produced the debilitating reparations policy that helped establish the economic and social receptiveness to Nazism.

This points to the fact that the social application of polarizing symbolic identifications must also be understood in terms of the internal structure of the discourse itself. Rational, individualistic, and self-critical societies are vulnerable because these very qualities make them open and trusting, and if the other side is devoid of redeeming social qualities, then trust will be abused in the most merciless terms. The potential for dependent and irrational behavior, moreover, can be found even in good citizens themselves, for deceptive information can be provided that might lead them, on what would seem to be rational grounds, to turn away from the structures or processes of democratic society itself. In other words, the very qualities that allow civil societies to be internally democratic—qualities that include the symbolic oppositions that allow liberty to be defined in any meaningful way—mean that the members of civil society do not feel confident that they can deal effectively with their opponents, from either within or without. The discourse of repression is inherent in the discourse of liberty. This is the irony at the heart of the discourse of civil society.

Notes

This essay is drawn from a work in progress on democracy, civil society, and discourse. Sections have earlier appeared in Italian (Alexander 1990b).

1. For a general discussion of the poverty of recent social scientific treatments of politics and democracy in particular, from a perspective that emphasizes the importance of the civil sphere, see Alexander (1990a).
2. In this sense (cf. Barthes 1977), there is a "structure" and a "narrative" to the discourse of civil society. The first, the binary discourse that describes those who are in and those who are out, should be theorized in terms of the legacy of the Durkheimian tradition. As I have argued elsewhere (Alexander 1982, 1988a), Durkheim's ambition was to create a theory of "religious society," not a social theory of religion, and his major contribution in this regard was his conceptualization of the sacred and the profane as the primitive elements of social classification. The narrative element of contemporary discourse can be taken from Weber's historical investigations into what Eisenstadt (1986) has called the religions of the Axial Age. Weber's principle insight in this regard (cf. Alexander 1989b) was that these religions introduced a fateful tension between this world and the next that could be resolved only through salvation and that, henceforth, a focus on eschatology and theodicy dominated the reli-

gious consciousness of the age. It is a relatively simple thing to see how Durkheim's structural categories provide the reference points for the journey of salvation that Weber describes. (For the prominence in historical religions of the devil imagery, see Russell [1988].)

The central challenge for developing a useful symbolic approach to politics is to translate the understanding and relevance of this classical sociological work on the centrality of religion in traditional society into a framework that is relevant for contemporary secular societies. This means going beyond the overly cognitive emphasis of semiotic and poststructuralist analysis—from Lévi-Strauss to Michel Foucault—that typically highlights "discourse" in a manner that removes it from ethical and moral concerns and from affectivity as well. This removal is one problem with the recent "linguistics turn" in history, which in so many other respects is vital and important.

3. Rogin's (1987) is the only body of social scientific work of which I am aware that seeks to place this concern with the projection of unworthiness at the center of the political process. He describes his work as the study of "demonology." From my perspective, there remain several problems with this serious investigation. (1) Because Rogin's conception of motive is psychological—he does look at social structure—he provides no independent analysis of symbolic patterns. (2) Because he focuses exclusively on overt practices of violent domination—particularly of American whites over Native Americans—he fails to tie demonology to either the theory or the practice of civil society, which can and does allow the inclusion as well as the exclusion of social groups. (3) Because Rogin studies exclusively oppressed groups, he locates his terminology in terms of the aberrant behavior of conservatives, whereas it is just as common among left-wing and centralist forces.

4. This broad argument, of course, cannot even begin to be supported in the present essay. The focus on particular strands of culture that actually have caused or underlain the specific democratic traditions and structures of particular nations has generated a vast field of scholarship for most of this century, singling out specific religious, social, and intellectual movements, influential thinkers, and great books. In American political historiography, e.g., one can trace the debate between those who emphasize Locke, like Louis Hart, those who emphasize Puritanism, like Perry Miller, and those who emphasize republicanism, like Bernard Bailyn and J. G. A. Pocock.

When one surveys even a small part of this enormous historiographic field, the dangers of examining only particular causal studies at the expense of broader hermeneutic constructions soon become apparent. It seems clear that many different historical movements contributed to the emergence of democratic discourse and practice and that, indeed, each is responsible for the particular emphasis, constructions, and metaphors that make every national and even regional configuration of democracy unique. At the same time, it is also clear that there is an overarching "structure" of democratic discourse that is more general and inclusive than any of these particular parts. In one sense, this

structure actually preceded these early modern and modern movements because it was already formed in its broad outlines in ancient Greece. More important, this structure is more general because its broader range is implied by the "sitences," the "what is not said," of each particular positive formulation of freedom and civility. This is the advantage of the dualistic approach recommended here.

5. It is precisely this dualistic, or, in Hegel's sense, dialectical, quality of symbolic systems that discussions of culture in modern society have generally overlooked. Whether framed as "values," "orientations," or "ideologies," culture has been treated in a one-sided and often highly idealized way. Not only has such an approach made culture less relevant to the study of social conflict, but it has also produced an atomistic and ultimately fragmented understanding of culture itself. Whether in the writings of Parsons, Bellah, and Kluckhohn, on the one hand, or Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, on the other, culture is identified in terms of discrete normative ideals about the right and the good. Certainly, political culture is normative and evaluative. What is vital to recognize, however, is that this quality does not mean that it is either one-sided or idealized. To the contrary, as structuralists from Saussure to Barthes and Lévi-Strauss would insist, political culture has a binary structure, a structure that I view as establishing the categories of sacred and profane of civic life. Indeed, it is only within the contradictory pull of these oppositional forces that the cultural dynamics of the political world emerge. From the perspective offered here, it is precisely this dualistic or "dialectical" quality of symbolic systems that discussions of culture in modern society have generally overlooked.

From the perspective offered here, all cultural systems involve an inherent strain, or tension, as each side of the duality that is culture gives rise—indeed, necessitates—its moral, cognitive, and affective antithesis. Because this internal dynamism is overlooked, cultural analysis is too often taken to imply a static approach to society, in contrast to social structural analysis, which typically focuses on conflicts between institutions and groups. When those who acknowledge the importance of culture do focus on dynamics, they typically do so by analyzing the tension between internally integrated cultural patterns and a society that fails to supply the resources necessary to fulfill (institutionalize) them. This leads to discussions about the failure of socialization and the breakdown of social control, which focus primarily on the social rather than cultural sources of conflict and strain and give an unrealistically utopian, or reformist, picture of the opportunities for creating an integrated and nonconflictual society. Of course, there have been a number of students of culture who have recognized internal strains, but they have done so in a manner that portrays these divisions as historically contingent and reflecting social conflict and, therefore, as associated only with particular cultural systems of passing phases of development (e.g., the work of Raymond, Gramsci, and Bourdieu).

6. The following discussion can only appear schematic. It summarizes an ongoing exploration into the elementary structures that inform the complex

and messy mixture of meaning and motives that form the basis for civic cultural life. I want to stress that, despite their schematic form, these models of structure have not been deduced from some overarching theory of action, culture, or democratic societies. Rather, they have been induced from three different sources: (1) American popular magazines, newspapers, and television news reports during the period 1960–80 (see, e.g., Alexander 1989a); (2) an examination of popular discourse, as recorded in secondary and primary material, during crisis periods of American history from the Revolution through Contra-gate (Alexander and Smith, 1992); and (3) an examination of some of the principal themes and symbolic structures of Western political philosophy.

One qualification that must be registered at this point concerns the boundary at which these codes cease to compel and the codes that inform other kinds of (presumably noncivil) societies begin. For example, many modernizing but nondemocratic theories and movements employ much the same set of binary oppositions while placing their emphasis on a different side. Fascist and Nazi societies and capitalist and Communist dictatorships employ related types of codes, although they differ in strategic ways (Lefort 1988). What all these societies have in common with democratic societies is some degree of what must very awkwardly be called "modernity," a social-cum-cultural complex that emphasizes rationality and self-control, two elements of what I will describe as the discourse of liberty. Communist and fascist dictatorships combine these elements with a collectivist, or corporal, emphasis that belies the individualistic emphasis of the civil society code; both, in their revolutionary emphases, also exalt a vitalistic, and irrational, approach to action.

7. To translate fully into an understanding of the discursive nature of everyday life, in other words, semiotic or structural analysis must give way to narrative analysis. Narrative transforms the static dualities of structure into patterns that can account for the chronological ordering of lived experience that has always been an essential element in human history (see Ricoeur 1984; and Entrikin 1990).

8. Until the twentieth century, confession was apparently a uniquely Western phenomenon, one that emerged in tandem with the gradual social recognition of the centrality of individual rights and self-control for the organization of political and religious societies. At least from the Middle Ages on, criminal punishment was not considered to be fully successful until the accused had confessed his or her crimes since only this confession demonstrated that rationality had been achieved and individual responsibility assumed. The discourse of civil society is, therefore, inextricably tied to public confession of crimes against the individuality that compose the collectivity and, indeed, of crimes against the collectivity itself. This is demonstrated by the great effort that is expended on extorting fraudulent confessions in those situations where coercive force has obliterated civility, as in instances of political brutality in democratic societies and show trials in dictatorships (see Hepworth and Turner 1982).

9. In discussing this process, Aristotle (1962, 109) combined different references from different levels of civil discourse: "The name of citizen is particularly applicable to those who share in the offices and honours of the state. Homer accordingly speaks in the *Iliad* of a man being treated 'like an alien man, without honor,' and it is true that those who do not share in the offices and honours of the state are just like resident aliens. To deny men a share [may sometimes be justified, but] when it is done by subterfuge, its only object is merely that of hoodwinking others." Aristotle's translator, Ernest Barker, footnotes this discussion with a comment that illustrates the rule of homology I am suggesting here, according to which concepts like honor, citizenship, and office are effectively interchangeable: "The Greek word *timē* which is here used means, like the Latin *honor*, both 'office' and 'honor.' The passage in the *Iliad* refers to honour in the latter sense: Aristotle himself is using it in the former; but it is natural to slide from one into the other."

10. The role of the sacred and profane in structuring primitive consciousness, action, and cosmology is widely understood. See, e.g., the classic exposition by Durkheim ([1912] 1963) in *The Elementary Forms* and its important reformulation in Caillios (1959), the provocative treatment of archaic religion by Eliade (1959), and the powerful overview provided by Franz Steiner (1986). The challenge, again, is to find a way to translate these understandings of religious processes into a secular frame of reference.

11. "In an existing ethical order in which a complete system of ethical relations has been developed and actualized, virtue in the strict sense of the word is in place and actually appears only in exceptional circumstances when one obligation clashes with another" (Hegel 1952, 108).

12. The omnipresence of cultural frames within even the most mundane political process is powerfully argued by Bennett (1979). The "naturalness" of cultural codes is argued here from the macroscopic perspective. From the perspective of individual interaction, the argument can be made in terms of phenomenology.

Certainly, Bourdieu's (1984) work represents an important contribution to the "secularization" of the Durkheimian tradition and its instantiation in a social structural and micro-sociological frame. Bourdieu's concentration on vertical rather than horizontal social divisions, however, and his insistence that symbolic boundaries are modeled on and derive from social, primarily economic, distinctions detract from the cultural interest of his writing. Bourdieu conceives of the social codes not as a differentiated, representational system of society but as a hegemonic code tied directly to the interest of the powerful. How liberating conflict and democracy are possible in this model is not at all clear.

13. For a discussion of the role of the myth of origin in archaic societies, which has clear implications for the organization of mythical thought in secular societies, see Eliade (1959). For a contemporary discussion of secular society that employs the notion of origin myth to great advantage, see Apter (1987).

14. For this belief in the existence of an ancient constitution and the role it played in the ideological discourse of the American Revolution, see Bailyn (1963). For background, see Pocock (1974).

15. For Puritans and revolutionaries as figures in the discourse of liberty, see, e.g., Middlekauff (1972) and, more systematically, Bailyn (1963). Bailyn, and the many who have followed him, have argued that the ideology that inspired Americans during the revolutionary period was mainly a negative and conspiratorial one, that it was the fear of being overtaken and of being manipulated by the revengeful and evil British, with their royalty and their empire, that primarily inspired the American nation. In fact, however, even on the basis of the material that Bailyn himself provides, it is clear that the American Revolution rested on the bifurcation and interconnection of two discourses and that each could be defined only in terms of order.

For the myth of the yeoman farmers and its intrinsic connection to the discourse of liberty, see the brilliant and still compelling work by Henry Nash Smith (1950, esp. pt. 3). For the relation between this mythical discourse and narratives about cowboys, mountain men, and detectives, see Smith (1950, pt. 2, esp. 90-122). In his work on the manner in which Hollywood's stories about "G-men" fit into these archetypes, Powers emphasizes the manner in which these central characters embodied the contrasts of the overarching discourse. The "mystery" that provides the focus of the detective story rests on the circumstances that allow "a startlingly intelligent hero" to finally pick "a devious murderer out of a crowd of equally likely suspects" (Powers 1983, 74). See also Curti's (1937, 765) argument that the mystical exploits of these early dime store heroes "confirmed Americans in the traditional belief that obstacles were to be overcome by the courageous, virile, and determined stand of the individual as an individual."

For mythical constructions of religious miscreants in terms of the discourse of repression, see early Puritan discussions of antinomianism, particularly Anne Hutchinson's (Erikson 1965). For stories about the evils of the Loyalists and aristocrats in the Revolution, see Bailyn (1974). For the mythical reconstruction of the Native American in terms of the discourse of repression, see Slotkin (1973). Higham's work (1965, e.g., 55, 138, 200) is filled with examples of how earlier core groups in American society constructed southern and central European immigrants under this repressive discourse. These immigrants were often involved in the radical labor politics of the day. Higham displays the antinomian character of the discourse that was used to understand these struggles, and their immigrant participants, in a particularly sharp way.

16. The counterpositioning of heroic enactors of liberty with criminals who act out of uncontrolled passion seems to have been the major point of the "action detective" genre that emerged in pulp fiction in the late nineteenth century, whose popularity has continued unabated in the present day (see Cawelti 1976; and Noel 1954). This genre provided the symbolic framework for J. Edgar Hoover's highly successful manipulation of the popular image of

the FBI, as Powers (1983) demonstrates. Thus, when Americans looked at Hoover, Powers writes, they "saw . . . not a spokesman for a partisan political philosophy, but a suprapolitical national hero" (p. xii) modeled on the action genre. Powers emphasizes the binary nature of the discourse that hallowed Hoover's actions, arguing that, "for the mythological process to produce a Hoover-style hero, there had to be a universally understood formula within the culture for dealing with the sort of villain who had come to represent the public's fears" (p. xiv). In the popular culture/political culture hybrid of the twentieth century, the criminals pursued by "officials" were persistently portrayed as subject to "gang rule," which posed the danger that this form of repressive social organization would spread to "still wider areas of life" (p. 7). For their part, the G-men pursuing these criminals were portrayed both as "rebelliously individualistic" (p. 94) and as the upholders of rational law, as involved in "an epochal struggle between lawful society and an organized underworld."

17. This suggests a modification of my earlier, more traditionally functionalist model of the relations between codes and conflict groups (Alexander 1988b). Rather than neatly separating refracted value conflicts from colonized ones, I would note the possibility that there may be a more general discourse from which even colonized, fundamentally conflictual cultural groupings derive their ideologies. The issue is one of level of generality.

18. Philip Smith (1991) has documented the bifurcated discourse of war in this insightful investigation of the cultural underpinnings of the British war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. For a more impressionistic but still fascinating account of the powerful role that semiotic codes play in producing and enabling war, see Fussell (1975).

References

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. *The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim*. Vol. 2 of *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C., ed. *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988a.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Three Models of Culture/Society Relations: Toward an Analysis of Watergate." In *Action and Its Environments*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988b.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Culture and Political Crisis." In *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989a.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "The Dialectic of Individuation and Domination: Weber's Rationalization Theory and Beyond." In *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989b.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Bringing Democracy Back In: Universalistic Solidarity and the Civil Sphere." In *Intellectuals and Politics: Social Theory Beyond the Academy*, ed. Charles Lemert. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990a.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Morale e Repressione." *MondOperaio* (Rome) no. 12 (December 1990b): 127-30.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Shaky Foundations: The Presuppositions and Internal Contradictions of James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory*." *Theory and Society* (in press).
- Alexander, Jeffrey C., and Philip Smith. "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Culture Society." Typescript, 1992.
- Apter, David. "Mao's Republic." *Social Research* 54 (1987): 691-729.
- Aristotle. *The Politics of Aristotle*. Translated by Ernest Barker. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Barthes, Roland. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." In *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1977.
- Bennett, W. Lance. "Imitation, Ambiguity, and Drama in Political Life: Civil Religion and the Dilemmas of Public Morality." *Journal of Politics* 41 (1979): 106-33.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Caillous, Roger. *Man and the Sacred*. New York: Free Press, 1959.
- Cawelti, John. *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- Cohen, Jean. *Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.
- Coleman, James. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1990.
- Curti, Merik. "Dime Store Novels and the American Tradition." *Yale Review* 26 (1937): 765.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. 1893. New York: Free Press, 1933.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. 1912. New York: Free Press, 1963.
- Eisenstadt, S. N., ed. *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harcourt, 1959.
- Entrikin, Nicholas. *The Betwixtness of Place*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Erikson, Kai. *Wayward Puritans*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965.

- Eyerman, Ron, and Andrew Jamison. *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge: Polity, 1991.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War in Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Vol. 2 of *Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston: Beacon, 1988.
- Hegel, G. H. W. *Philosophy of Right*. New York: Oxford, 1952.
- Hepworth, Mike, and Bryan S. Turner. *Confession: Studies in Deviance and Religion*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Higham, John. *Strangers in a Strange Land*. New York: Atheneum, 1965.
- Keane, John, ed. "Despotism and Democracy: The Origins and Development of the Distinction between Civil Society and the State, 1750–1850." In *Civil Society and the State*. London: Verso, 1988a.
- Keane, John. "Remembering the Dead: Civil Society and the State from Hobbes to Marx and Beyond." In *Democracy and Civil Society*. London: Verso, 1988b.
- Lefort, Claude. *Democracy and Political Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 1988.
- Middlekauff, Robert. "The Ritualization of the American Revolution." In *The National Temper*, ed. Lawrence Levine and Robert Middlekauff. 2d ed. New York: Harcourt Bracc, 1972.
- Noel, Mary. *Villains Galore*. New York: Macmillan, 1954.
- Parsons, Talcott. "Durkheim's Contribution to the Theory of Integration of Social Systems." 1960. Reprinted in *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*. New York: Free Press, 1967.
- Parsons, Talcott. *The Evolution of Societies*. Edited by Jackson Toby. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Pocock, J. G. A. *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*. Bath: Chivers, 1974.
- Powers, Richard. *G-Men: Hooper's FBI in American Popular Culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Rogin, Michael. *Ronald Reagan: The Movie and Other Essays in American Demonology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton. *The Prince of Darkness*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Smith, Philip. "Codes and Conflict: Toward a Theory of War as Ritual." *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): 103–38.
- Steiner, Franz. *Taboo*. London: Cohen & West, 1956.

THIRTEEN

Democracy versus Sociology: Boundaries and Their Political Consequences

Alan Wolfe

The public stories that modern liberal democracies tell and retell emphasize the gradual triumph of inclusion. Once upon a time, it is said, such societies were ruled by privileged elites. Governing circles were restricted to those of the correct gender, breeding, education, and social exclusiveness (Cannadine 1990). All this changed as a result of those multiple forces usually identified by the term *democracy*. First the middle classes, then working men, then women, then racial minorities all won not only economic rights but political and social rights as well (Marshall 1964). While the process is by no means complete—and while there are those who argue for the extension of such rights beyond the human species to nature (Nash 1989)—the history of modern democracy is understood as a process of faking in rather than of keeping out.

There is much truth in this story. Moreover, it is a good story, one that can, and does, make us feel that history has a purpose that in some way corresponds with a more positive understanding of human potential. In this essay I have no intention of suggesting that the story is either incorrect in its basic features or unfortunate in its consequences. My point is simply that it contains a potential conflict with another account, which I will call a sociological, rather than a democratic, understanding of the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion.

A sociological understanding is one that recognizes humans as best fulfilled when living in groups rather than as isolated atoms. But groups by their very nature are exclusive rather than inclusive. They function best only by keeping others out (Coser 1956). A richly textured social life requires boundaries, membership rituals, privileged space, and other demarcations designed to ensure that the group will constitute itself at some point lower than the universality of all humankind (Cohen 1985, 1986). The study of society, from either a sociological