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The Author's main conclusion is that nongovernmental associations play an essential role in the formation of a civil society in Russia (as well as in ex-totalitarian, autocratic and bureaucratic-authoritarian societies generally), and are a pre-condition of other limitations on state power. The paper addresses civil society theory, analyzes the historic role of such associations in pre-Soviet Russia, and their current rapid growth in Russia to that role.

Abstract

"In Russia the state is everything and civil society is primordial and gelatinous." (Antonio Gramsci)

Generations of scholars, Russian and Western alike, have concurred with the observation of Gramsci, which seems so aptly to describe Russian political culture. Although in the past decade historians and social scientists have begun to utilize the concept of civil society and to examine aspects of historical civil societies, Russia is rarely invoked as an example. And not without reason. Russian subjects had none of the rights that undergirded civil society in the West. While "classical" western theories of civil society originated in the penumbra of royal absolutism, no such philosophical tradition emerged in the darkness of eastern absolutism. Moreover, historical models of Russian political culture reinforce the philosophical silence. A Hegelian school of Russian historiography has regarded the state as the all-powerful artificer of the Russian nation; the state acts, while a politically immature, passive, and fragmented society is acted upon. A complementary tradition assigns to Russia the curse of backwardness. For the past century historians have assumed that the mortal struggle between autocracy and revolutionaries so polarized nation and polity that civil society and public life, to say nothing of liberalism, constitutionalism, gradual reform, and a middle class, were ill-fated, embryonic, "primordial," "missing," or in some way did not play the role they allegedly played in the evolution of modern polities in western Europe. Finally, the few sprouts of civil society that braved the inhospitable climate of autocracy were frozen during the years of totalitarian communism.

Yet although an all-powerful and repressive state, intransigent radicals, and subjects unprotected by rights have dominated the historical representation of late-imperial Russian political culture, a lively non-revolutionary civic life emerged in the largest cities. Similarly, a lively private, and eventually, public, life emerged in late-Soviet Russia: new professional and artistic elites aspired to create new public identities; and bureaucratic service to state and Party no longer limited the...
concept of public duty. Less than three years into perestroika and glasnost, tens of thousands of voluntary associations had sprung up in the USSR.

This apparent discrepancy between the exclusion of Russia from theoretical and historical models of civil society and the Russian case at the end of the nineteenth century and again at the end of the twentieth poses the following questions: Could the concept of civil society be valuable as a methodological tool for the historian of Russia to investigate broader questions of political culture, often obscured in discussions of state institutions and parliamentary politics? Can a civil society exist under an autocratic government and, if so, what are its most important characteristics? Should western concepts of civil society be modified in light of the experience of a non-western country? Finally, why did traditional explanations of Soviet political culture which emphasized the primacy of the one-party state, a ruling ideology, the atomization of society, and the apathy of the individual poorly prepare us for the surprising appearance of grass-roots activism during perestroika? Could the concept of civil society better explain the efforts to reconstitute a "normal" country?

If we are to understand the recent associational activity in the former Soviet Union, the sudden shift in the state-society relationship, and the efforts to reconstitute civil society, we must understand their historical roots. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the importance of associations in Russian political culture by studying their role in the emergence of civil society.

The first part of the paper will begin by briefly identifying some of the difficulties in applying classical theories of civil society to a country such as autocratic Russia. I conclude that other frameworks of the state-society relationship may prove more fruitful for conceptualizing the state-society relationship in Russia.

In the second, and empirical part of the paper, I will analyze an under-examined feature of nineteenth-century Russia—associational life—with an eye toward its role in the development of Russia's allegedly "primordial" civil society. Given that thousands of associations dotted the Russian landscape, I will proceed by examining the role which voluntary associations played in three broad thematic areas of public life—the application of science to the study of natural and productive resources; the preservation and promotion of the national heritage; and the stewardship of learning and culture for the lower classes. I conclude that associational activity promoted a sense of public duty and civic spirit in nineteenth-century Russia. Associations cultivated a capacity for individual initiative channeled toward certain spheres of practical activity - education, civic culture, rational leisure, the public good - and played a crucial role in the coalescence and mobilization of special interest constituencies. Whatever else may be said about the autonomy, or depth, or viability of Russian civil society in comparison with the more established civil societies of western Europe, the fact remains that Russia's civil associations were able to pursue and promote the very same missions as did their counterparts in Europe and North America.
Finally, I will turn to recent Russian attempts to utilize the idea of civil society as Soviet philosophers and social scientists were reconceptualizing the political community. There were several reasons for using a term that had been neglected or, if used at all, denigrated as "bourgeois." The major analogue of civil society, the state, was no longer perceived in Hegelian terms as the supreme achievement of collective man as a rational being or the universal embodiment of modernization, social reform, and "the radiant future." A crisis in Marxist-Leninist thought had caused analyses of society and politics based on class or the class struggle, to be replaced with analyses based on "new thinking," "the human factor," and "universal values." Indeed, the concept of civil society emerged as an analogue not only to the state, but also to "socialism" and to "Soviet." At the same time, a variety of grass roots associations had created the organizational forms and the public space in which state power has been challenged. Despite the attempt of the totalitarian state to destroy all autonomous structures that normally give shape to social life, to circumscribe independent civic action, and to obliterate the distinction between state and society, Soviet citizens retained the capability of self-organization. Finally, the "self-limiting revolution" and rediscovery of civil society in Eastern Europe in the 1980s demonstrated the liberating power of the idea of civil society.

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Russia has never occupied a prominent place in the theories of civil society or in the history of voluntary associations. Analyses of the Russian experience habitually proceed along a well worn path: categories of analysis borrowed from western theories. Yet, in the world-wide reexamination of the state-society relationship and of the meaning of civil society, the Russian case affords an opportunity for Russian historians and social scientists to make an original contribution to social science theory. The Russian experience--both past and present--is particularly relevant to post-Marxist theories of civil society and associational activity on four grounds. First, the concepts of civil society and associational activity help explain the processes of public initiative, self-constitution of interest groups, and rapidly changing social identities in a country with a strong state tradition and fragmentary social structure. Second, they permit an examination of the sphere outside the state in a country with weakly developed property rights and a small bourgeoisie. Third, voluntary associations and civil society help us conceptualize the struggle against absolutism spearheaded from below by non-entrepreneurial social groups and which reflected anti-bourgeois sensibilities. Finally, these concepts offer a new way to study liberalism and reform in a country without the corporatist tradition of Germany or the individualistic tradition of England and America.

In countries such as Russia and the USSR, where arbitrary autocratic-bureaucratic authority prevails, civil society is not a consequence of the inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, and the rule of law, as often theorized in the western tradition, but a pre-condition of such
limitations on the scope of state power. Likewise, civil society is a pre-condition of liberalism, citizenship, free enterprise, pluralism, and democracy. In the absence of inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, and the rule of law, associations become not a consequence of civil society, but a pre-condition. Associations become the leading element in the emergence of civil society and a source of civil society's vitality against high odds. If civil society may be regarded as a moral community, then associations are its real communities. And it is from such communities—the real and the moral—that the political community may be reconstituted.
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Generations of scholars, Russian and Western alike, have concurred with the observation of Gramsci, which seems so aptly to describe Russian political culture. Although in the past decade historians and social scientists have begun to utilize the concept of civil society and to examine aspects of historical civil societies, tsarist Russia is rarely invoked as an example. And not without reason. Russian subjects had none of the rights that undergirded civil society in the West. While "classical" western theories of civil society originated in the penumbra of royal absolutism, no such philosophical tradition emerged in the darkness of eastern absolutism. Moreover, historical models of Russian political culture reinforce the philosophical silence. A Hegelian school of Russian historiography has regarded the state as the all-powerful artificer of the Russian nation; the state acts, while a politically immature, passive, and fragmented society is acted upon. A complementary historiographical tradition assigns to Russia the curse of backwardness. For the past century historians have assumed that the mortal struggle between autocracy and revolutionaries so polarized nation and polity that civil society and public life, to say nothing of liberalism, constitutionalism, gradual reform, and a middle class, were ill-fated, embryonic, "primordial," "missing," or in some way did not play the role they allegedly played in the evolution of modern polities in western Europe. Finally, the few sprouts of civil society that braved the inhospitable climate of autocracy were frozen during the years of totalitarian communism.

Yet although an all-powerful and repressive state, intransigent radicals, and subjects unprotected by rights have dominated the historical representation of late-imperial Russian political culture, a lively non-revolutionary civic life emerged in the largest cities. Economic growth, mobility, urbanization, and advances in education, coupled with the Great Reforms of the 1860s, fostered the growth of organized structures that mediated between the individual and the state. New professional, entrepreneurial and artistic elites aspired to create new public identities. Bureaucratic service to the state or visionary service "to the people" no longer defined the concept of public duty. In the nineteenth century educated Russians could increasingly engage in practical, purposive civic activity directed by, and at, structures "between tsar and people." Similarly, if it may be said that a

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3 Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York, 1971): 238. I would like to thank Eldon Eisenach, Gary Hamburg, Andre Liebich, Gary Marker, Paul Rahe, and Christine Ruane for reading earlier versions of this paper.
lively civic life emerged in late-imperial Russia, we may say that a lively private life emerged in late-Soviet Russia; new professional and artistic elites aspired to create new public identities; and bureaucratic service to state and Party no longer limited the concept of public duty. Less than three years into perestroika and glasnost, tens of thousands of voluntary associations had sprung up in the USSR.

This apparent discrepancy between the exclusion of Russia from theoretical and historical models of civil society and the Russian case at the end of the nineteenth century and again at the end of the twentieth poses the following questions: Could the concept of civil society be valuable as a methodological tool for the historian of Russia to investigate broader questions of political culture, often obscured in discussions of state institutions and parliamentary politics? Can a civil society exist under an autocratic government and, if so, what are its most important characteristics? Should western concepts of civil society be modified in light of the experience of a non-western country? Finally, why did traditional explanations of Soviet political culture which emphasized the primacy of the one-party state, a ruling ideology, the atomization of society, and the apathy of the individual poorly prepare us for the surprising appearance of grass-roots activism during perestroika? Could the concept of civil society better explain the efforts to reconstitute a "normal" country?

If we are to understand the recent associational activity in the former Soviet Union, the sudden shift in the state-society relationship, and the efforts to reconstitute civil society, we must understand their historical roots. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the importance of associations in Russian political culture by studying their role in the emergence of civil society. Using the example of Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this paper will suggest some answers to the above questions. The first part of the paper will begin by briefly identifying some of the difficulties in applying classical theories of civil society to a country such as autocratic Russia. In the second, and empirical part of the paper, I will analyze an under-examined feature of nineteenth-century Russia—associational life—with an eye toward its role in the development of Russia's allegedly "primordial" civil society. Finally, I will turn to recent Russian attempts to conceptualize civil society in the late- and post-Soviet years. I will suggest that the idea of civil society offers the best way not only to conceptualize the revival of associational life in the late-Soviet period. It offers the best way—and is acknowledged by philosophers and social scientists in the former Soviet Union—to conceptualize "new thinking" regarding the relationship between the state and the individual.

I.

Modern political thought separates civil society from the state, a distinction not made by the ancients. Natural right philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke theorized social contracts to
constitute legitimate government and to protect natural rights. 4 Philosophers of the Scottish 
Enlightenment such as Ferguson and Smith theorized an arena where private persons pursued 
enlightened) self-interest; protected by a benevolent and unobtrusive sovereign, such a civil society 
protects and polishes the mechanical and commercial arts, cultural achievements, public spirit, and 
the rule of law. 5 Finally, philosophers of the continental enlightenment such as Montesqueieu 
regarded "intermediary bodies" of civil society as a bulwark against absolute rule and the abuses of 
political power and privilege. A discourse of "society against the state" emerged during the 
Enlightenment as a way to conceptualize institutional and moral attempts to limit the scope of state 
power. 6

The grand theory of Hegel synthesized the "classical" concepts of civil society. Civil society in 
the Hegelian sense usually refers to the tripartite separation of family, civil society, and the state; the 
"mediation" performed by civil society between the individual and the state; and the equation of civil 
with "bourgeois" society. Civil society is the arena where men satisfy individual needs through work 
and exchange, thereby creating a condition of interdependence, whose transactions are regulated by 
civil law. The institutions of civil society defend property rights and group interests, regulate the 
market economy, provide access to public welfare, and mediate between individuals. In the words of 
Manfred Reidel, civil society is a "continually self-reproducing fabric of relations between private 
persons," "rooted in interests" and "free from the constraints of estates and power." 7

Until recently, the Hegelian synthesis has remained the basis for all subsequent theories of civil 
society. Yet several features of the classical theories of civil society make application of these 
theories to an autocratic country problematic. First, the state-civil society dichotomy itself is often 
artificial. The borders are frequently poorly guarded and individuals can often cross from one 
territory to the other when necessary, or expedient, to do so. Moreover, such a state-society 
dichotomy underestimates the degree to which the state itself, especially in polities with few 
autonomous centers of power, creates civil society, albeit for its own purposes. 8 Second, the 
thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel, to say nothing of Marx, viewed civil society as an

Company, 1980), par. 89. See also Z. Rau, "Some Thoughts on Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Lockean 
5 Adam Ferguson, quoted in John Keane, ed., Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives (London 
and New York: Verso, 1988): 40; see also 15-16, 169-170. See also Salvador Giner, "The Withering Away of Civil 
6 See the discussion in Keane, Civil Society, 35-72; Dwayne Woods, "Civil Society in Europe and Africa: Limiting 
State Power through a Public Sphere," African Studies Review, 35 (September 1992), p. 79
7 For Hegel, I have relied on Manfred Riedel, Between Tradition and Revolution: The Hegelian Transformation of 
Political Philosophy, trans. Walter Wright (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Z. 
8 David A. Bell, "The 'Public Sphere', the State, and the World of Law in Eighteenth Century France," French 
Historical Studies, 17 (Fall 1992), pp. 934, 955.
arena where private individuals pursued private gain. Hegel’s and Marx’s civil society is the arena of private pursuits, selfishness, egoism, individual isolation, and corruption, compared to which the state is superior. It is a "battlefield" where private interests struggle against each other. There is a tendency to reduce civil society to market relations or bourgeois society (burgerliche Gesellschaft), a linguistic ambiguity nicely captured by the German term. But Marxian categories yoke civil society to class and cannot inform an analysis of a society without a clearly demarcated class structure, let alone without a dominant ("hegemonic") bourgeoisie.

Third, classical theorists and their epigone assume that legal guarantees, that is, some form of Rechtsstaat, is essential for the existence of civil society. According to Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, "Civil societies, whatever their form, presuppose a juridical structure, a constitution ... Civil society exists only where there is a juridical guarantee of the reproduction of various spheres in the form of rights." But since rights "begin as claims asserted by groups and individuals in the public spaces of an emerging civil society," it is not clear what to make of the situation, as under autocracy, when rights are not guaranteed. Similarly, Edward Shils identifies the "central and indispensable" feature, the "decisive" feature, and the "hallmark" of civil society variously as property rights, the market, and the autonomy of private associations and institutions. Not surprisingly, such imprecise frameworks are difficult to apply to an autocratic polity where rights and "essential" institutions are precarious.

Such inconsistencies lead to a final difficulty encountered in attempts to apply classical theories to autocratic politics: It is frequently unclear what is a condition, or pre-requisite, for the existence of civil society, and what is a consequence. To put it slightly differently, it is difficult to determine whether any given "civil society" is becoming or established. Is civil society present at its own creation? Cohen and Arato partially extricate themselves from this conundrum by observing that "a

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11 Cohen and Arato, "Civil Society and Social Theory," 43. Emphasis added.

12 Edward Shils, "The Virtues of Civil Society," Government and Opposition, 26, no. 1 (1991). 10. Similarly, Shils suggests that civil society must possess "primary" institutions—competing political parties, universal suffrage, representative legislative bodies, independent judiciary, free press—which "protect it from the encroachment of the state." "Supporting" institutions—voluntary associations, and the freedoms of association, assembly, petition, religion—then become "essential to the functioning of the primary institutions."
civil society in formation, being molded by movements and other civic initiatives as in Eastern Europe, may for a time have to do without the settled structures of rights.  

Examining civil society as a work in progress rather than as a final product may provide greater analytical flexibility. As I argue elsewhere, voluntary associations, acting in an emerging public sphere, have begun to figure more prominently in theories of civil society. Indeed, in a significant revision of his earlier work, the preeminent theoretician of the public sphere, Jurgen Habermas, argues that "the institutional core of civil society is constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy."  

Social historians have recently begun to examine the role of associations in civil society and in the formation of middle-class publics and sensibilities in the nineteenth century. Geoffrey Eley and David Blackbourn have challenged the prevailing Marxist paradigm in nineteenth-century German historiography of a "failed" bourgeois revolution. In particular, a network of voluntary associations was the "major agency through which the bourgeoisie set the tone in the material and cultural spheres of civil society." Moreover, associations were essential in the process of class formation: "Associational life was one of the principal means by which various constituent groups of bourgeoisie came together as a class." Finally, associational activity proceeded regardless of the political fortunes of the middle class. Indeed, the middle class was the most successful (and united) where its influence was the most quiet, natural, and anonymous; when it entered the political arena, the middle class became exposed, divided, and easily challenged by other groups.  

Perhaps even more suggestive for my purposes, Theodore Hamerow has noted the importance of non-political associations in political life under absolute monarchy. A government suspicious of its subjects' political activities drives reform efforts into the guise of scholarly, professional, economic, or even musical and athletic associations. . . . Interest in public affairs was often channeled into organizations which were ostensibly nonpartisan or nonpolitical. Meetings of historians, naturalists, jurists, physicians, . . .
teachers, singers, etc., began to perform a quasi-political function. All the civic organizations were symptoms of a political life. A congress of civic activists was more than just a congress of certain specialists; it was the pre-parliament which leads to the real parliament. Organizations . . . exercised a powerful influence over public affairs on the basis of property, status, and education.\textsuperscript{17}

At this point prudence might still dictate the difficulty of attempts to apply western theories of civil society to an autocratic polity. Under Russian absolutism, certain pillars of civil society as usually understood in western thought—the rule of law, inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, freedom of speech and assembly, some sort of parliament or assembly of the estates—were precarious at best. Yet, voluntary associations, acting in a public sphere, although always under the watchful, and often suspicious, eye of autocracy, became the institutional core of an emerging civil society. It is to this institutional core that we must now turn.

II.

Essential to the development of a dynamic urban environment, Russian civic spirit, and new public identities were the nation's growing number of voluntary associations. Yet despite their importance, we know very little about them—largely due to the prevalent assumption that there is little to know. Thus, at a recent conference devoted to Habermas and the public sphere, Geoff Eley observed that "nineteenth-century Russia provides an excellent counterexample for the growth of the public sphere. It displayed the absence of all those processes—particularly the emancipatory impulse of free associational initiative. . . ."\textsuperscript{18} Even in our own field, Victoria Bonnell has recently written, "Tsarist Russia, with its highly centralized autocratic system, had an exceedingly weak tradition of voluntary association. . . . Mass-based political parties, trade unions, cooperatives, and other voluntary associations did not appear until the 1905 Revolution and for a dozen years they led a precarious existence."\textsuperscript{19} However, my preliminary research suggests that voluntary associations were hardly "absent" from Russian public life. The "highly centralized autocratic system" did not prevent Russians from forming associations and from displaying "the emancipatory impulse of free associational initiative."

The remainder of this paper will investigate more closely the activity of voluntary associations as a first step toward assessing their role in civil society.\textsuperscript{20} Given that pace Eley and Bonnell

\textsuperscript{18} Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures," 325.
\textsuperscript{20} This is part of a larger work in progress, "Voluntary Associations and Civil Society in Russia, 1750-1930."
thousands of associations dotted the Russian landscape, I will proceed by examining the role of voluntary associations played in three broad thematic areas of public life—the application of science to the study of natural and productive resources; the preservation and promotion of the national heritage; and the stewardship of learning and culture for the lower classes. I have chosen these broad areas not only for their intrinsic interest and importance. First, each of these broad areas has its analogue in Europe and North America; indeed, one could argue that they are paradigmatic of post-enlightenment public life. Second, in each area a prominent association or set of associations may be identified as archetypical. Third, the archetypical associations span a long chronological period—from the reign of Catherine II at the end of the eighteenth century to that of Alexander III and Nicholas II at the end of the nineteenth. After examining the role of a sampling of Russian associations thus derived, it will be possible, in the conclusion, to judge the contribution of voluntary associations to the development of Russian civil society.

"TO DISSEMINATE USEFUL INFORMATION"

Improvement and progress by means of the application of science to the study of natural and productive resources was one of the most important goals of the enlightenment. By bringing the benefits of science to agriculture, for example, nature itself could be improved and made more productive. To accomplish this goal, in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, agricultural societies were founded in Scotland, Ireland, England, France, and Switzerland.21 New publications catered to and stimulated a fascination with publicizing the results of experiments and improvements. Russia was no exception to this trend. Few could doubt the need. However, in Russia, the central purpose of the manorial estate was not the exploitation of nature but the exploitation of serf labor; the result was poor estate management.22 But in the 1750s and 1760s a few government officials such as Nikita Panin began to connect the goal of a more efficient and humane economic and political system with improvements in Russian agriculture and with curtailment of the abuses of serfdom.23 At the same time, a few landowners became "enlightened seigneurs" and sought new ideas of estate management.24 Although Catherine's true intentions have long been disputed, there is


evidence to suggest that the empress wanted "to mitigate the evils of serfdom without arousing excessive expectations among the serfs or hostility among the nobles" by creating a "climate of opinion in which the nobles might agree to reforms to improve the life of the serfs."²⁵

A body designed to study agriculture seemed to be the best institutional mechanism for creating such a "climate of opinion." In 1764 Jacob Johann von Sievers, governor designate of Novgorod, recommended "an Agricultural society, whose foundation would be most useful." Acquainted with the Royal Society of the Arts in London and a representative of "enlightened seigneurialism," Sievers spoke with some authority.²⁶ A private, or independent society bore superficial resemblance to European organizational arrangements, while at the same time it could be situated in a network of personal patronage rather than of institutional loyalty, a fact no doubt appealing to Catherine.²⁷ From Catherine's point of view, a society had the additional advantage over a government department in that the deliberations of an independent society did not carry the expectations of policy response. Catherine could easily permit discussion, even public discussion, and at the same time dissociate herself from it when advantageous to do so. In any event, in 1765 was born Russia's first association, the Free Economic Society. There is no doubt that the society, while independent of government, benefitted from Catherine's moral and material support. Catherine conferred on the society "separate" patronage and permitted it to use the imperial coat of arms. The society's own symbol was a beehive with the word "useful" (poleznoe).²⁸

The Free Economic Society pursued many goals during its first years. First and foremost the Society collected, translated, and disseminated the most applicable of foreign advances in agriculture and the arts. Second, the society encouraged the generation of such advancements in Russia. Members were to be urged to perform experiments, test innovations, and evaluate the results of experiments submitted to the society. Finally, the society aimed to increase the amount of information available on local economic conditions, primarily, but not limited to, those of

²⁵ Robert E. Jones, The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 137. Soviet historians, of course, have generally held the most negative view of Catherine's intentions; she was the "cruelest serfowner of them all" (rshochaisaia krepostnitsa). (V. V. Oreshkin, Vol'noe ekonomicheskoe obshchestvo Rossii, 1765-1917 (Moscow: Nauka, 1963) p. 17) In addition to the celebrated Nakaz, Catherine encouraged a scheme, or what might be called the "Baltic model," for the gradual emancipation of the serfs by leasing estates whenever they changed hands in order to restrict the landlord's rights over peasant labor. The importance of a "Baltic connection" will be noted below. See Madariaga, Russia in the Age, pp. 133, 142.

²⁶ J. J. Sievers, a Baltic German adviser to Catherine, acquainted the empress with various European organizations, particularly in London. Sievers was also governor of Novgorod, a member of the Legislative Commission of 1767, and involved in the above-mentioned "Baltic model." See Roger P. Bartlett, "J.J. Sievers and the Russian Peasantry under Catherine II," Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas 32, no 1 (1984), pp. 15-16; Madariaga, Russia in the Age, pp. 133, 142.

²⁷ On the importance of personal patronage network in autocratic politics, see Ransel, Politics, p. 1.

agriculture. Though nowhere stated in so many words, the society was to become a public forum for a discussion of, and dissemination of views on, a wide range of economic matters.

No sooner was the ink dry on the Free Economic Society's charter than the empress herself turned this august group of landowners and scientists into something more than an economic forum. Not satisfied with the advice she was getting on the peasant question, Catherine raised the issue of peasant property rights under the auspices of the Free Economic Society. At Catherine's prompting the Free Economic Society launched its first essay competition. Essay competitions were common in the scientific societies of Europe of the day. They generated public interest in matters of economic improvement; gauged, or mobilized, public opinion; and provided a "low intensity" public input into policy without committing governments or institutionalizing the process. According to the nineteenth-century authority on the peasant question, V. I. Semevskii, the competitions of the Free Economic Society were frequent topics of conversation in St. Petersburg: they "raised the peasant question and raised it quite loudly." Moreover, the essay competitions provided a filter, and a government approved filter at that, through which European ideas could be openly discussed and through which Russian ideas on such vital areas of national policy could be formulated outside of official channels.

The Free Economic Society engaged in many other scientific and educational projects. Reliable data on local economic conditions had always been, and continued to be, the bane of a vast empire. The Free Economic Society compiled some of the first systematic survey data anywhere by means of questionnaires sent out in 1766 and 1790. The surveys solicited data on the principal economic activity of the empire's regions, the state of the rural economy, living and working conditions of the peasants, harvests, farming techniques, as well as on transport, handicrafts, women's work, poverty, health, diet, and leisure. Despite obstacles—the society had to rely on the local governors to disseminate and collect data—the effort created considerable enthusiasm, conveyed by A. T. Bolotov, a middling nobleman who discovered the Free Economic Society while visiting Moscow in 1766:

And my satisfaction grew even greater when I saw that, following foreign examples, all the nobles living in the province had been invited to communicate their economic observations to the Society, along with other people of every rank and to pave the way

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29 V. I. Semevskii, Krest'ianskii vopros v Rossii v XVIII i pervoi polovine XIX veka (St. Petersburg: "Obshchestvennaia pol'za," 1888, vol. 1, p. xi. Later essay competitions are discussed in vol. 1, pp. 309-39. See also Confino, Domains et Seigneurs, pp. 202-3, 232-34, 237-51. It must be noted, however, that Confino and others argue that the society failed to confront the nation's most serious economic, legal, and political issues and to solve the more technical problems within its competence or to spread knowledge about agricultural techniques and improvements among the landlords were ineffective. (Domains et Seigneurs, pp. 28-34.) Melton, Jones, and Hoch, on the other hand, argue that it would have taken far more than the efforts of the Free Economic Society to have improved agricultural techniques and altered the central function of the manorial estate. (Jones, Emancipation; Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control, pp. 8-9, 187; Melton, "Enlightened Seignorialism," p. 707.) The Soviet historian Popov adds the Marxist criticism that the society was largely an organization of planters. (N. Popov, "Dvoraanski liberalizm pervoi chetverti XIX v.: Agrarno-krestianskii vopros v vol'nom ekonomicheskom obshchestve," Voprosy grazhdanskoy istorii, (Leningrad, 1935), spp. 139-41, 149-50, 154.)
for this, 65 questions were appended at the end of this book. of such a kind and concerning such matters, to which it could not be complicated or difficult for anybody to answer, provided that he understood something of provincial life and agriculture and knew how to write and possessed a pen.30

The Free Economic Society’s links with government set a pattern for reciprocal and even mutually beneficial relations between Russia’s voluntary associations and the state. The Free Economic Society had imperial patronage, accepted members of the royal family as office holders, received what we might call today government grants, and petitioned government offices for favors and privileges, such as free postage. Like many future associations in the nineteenth century, the Free Economic Society was called on to assist the government in the study of a variety of problems an in implementation of policy. We have already noted that the government permitted the first public discussion of the value (moral as well as economic) of servitude on the pages of the society’s journal. Finally, although several historians have rightly noted the marriage of enlightened self-interest and public action, as well as the cameralist influences in the founding of the society, there is one more element of the society that has often been missed. The society’s draft charter proposed a “patriotic society for the encouragement of agriculture and the economy in Russia.” Nowhere else at the time, except in the Swedish Patriotic Society, founded, interestingly, four years after Russia’s, do we see such a direct link between enlightened self-interest, independent public action, and patriotic duty.31 Whether this was merely “feel-good” phraseology designed to make often despotic sovereigns give their blessings to what amounted to a public experiment, rather than self-conscious self-definition of goals, is somewhat moot. At this point in the development of Russia’s voluntary associations, individual societies’ goals and national goals were one and the same.

Despite such closeness to the government, the Free Economic Society was based on the principle of voluntary association of members. According to its charter, there were no distinctions of rank in membership. The society was self-governing. Elected by the members rather than an official appointed by the government, its president held office for only four months. His actions, including allocation of the society’s funds, needed approval of the general assembly of members.32 Weekly meetings created the opportunity for discussion and disagreement. Items submitted for publication in the Transactions had to be approved by a majority vote of members, making it the first journal exempt from direct government supervision and interference.33 Moreover, there is little evidence

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31 Khodnev, Kratkii obzor, pp. 1-4.
32 On the charter, see Khodnev, Kratkii obzor, p. 4. Pratt makes a similar argument about the “western, parliamentary” nature of the society.
that the government systematically compromised the principle of voluntary membership, internal integrity, or autonomous self-management of the society's affairs. Thus, even while the necessity of a close relationship with the government no doubt circumscribed the society's autonomy, the appearance of Russia's first non-governmental (but government-approved), western-style association was a singular moment. This is perhaps what A. T. Bolotov sensed when he first saw a copy of the Transactions in 1766:

As I already had a certain understanding of economic societies in other countries and of all their institutions, I almost jumped with joy when I saw from this book that the same kind of thing had been set up in our country and even named and taken into her particular patronage by the Empress herself. I almost jumped with joy and began to read everything in it with great enthusiasm and attention. 34

The Free Economic Society was the first public forum for debate on national policy. The essays on peasant property rights, "provided the public with a discussion of the master-serf relationship from a wide variety of viewpoints." 35 The seeds of participatory public dialogue were sown. In Marc Raeff's words, "All things considered, however, the society created a climate of opinion and accumulated a store of information and experience that proved of great value by the middle of the nineteenth century." 36 Ultimately, the significance of the Free Economic Society lies less in any particular product it did or did not, could or could not, deliver. It marked the beginning of a process whereby independent public initiative freely existed under autocracy. Born in the age of "enlightened despotism," this initiative continued even in the age of the "arch reactionary," Nicholas I.

"A SHARED CIVILIZATION"

Spawned by antiquarianism, historicism and nationalism, a "Victorian fascination with the past" spread throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. Monarchs and subjects alike assembled artifacts and curiosities, founded museums, and organized societies, the latter making collectively significant the disparate contributions of amateurs. Collecting and displaying fueled efforts to search and record customs and beliefs that defined "fast disappearing ways of life." All of these activities, James Clifford has argued, were crucial steps in shaping a sense of national identity. 37

34 Bolotov, Zhizn' i prikliucheniia, 2: 318; quoted in Dukes Catherine the Great, pp. 99-100.
37 James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature and Art (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 215-51. The literature on this subject is vast and I have been informed by the following: George W. Stocking, Jr., Victorian Anthropology (London: Macmillan, 1987); Bruce G. Trigger, A (continued...)
As is well known, in the first half of the nineteenth century, educated Russians became obsessed with national identity. As often happens, in their efforts to emphasize difference, Russians paid western Europe the ultimate compliment of imitation. The broadening scholarly and public interest in the Russian nation through study in a variety of disciplines—history, literature and linguistics, ethnology, and natural history, as well as government support for science under Nicholas I and his minister of education, Count S. S. Uvarov, came together in the 1840s with the founding of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. Still located in St. Petersburg, the Geographical Society is one of the oldest continually existing societies in the world. It is one of the few Russian societies that has been extensively studied, both before and after the Revolution. During the last years of the reign of Nicholas I, the Geographical Society was the most active organization of the empire and brought together scientists, scholars, progressive officials, and moderate intellectuals to study social and economic questions. Its "progressive role" in the formation of Russian thought and science and its "broad, humane, and enlightened world view" have been viewed favorably by Soviet scholars, who have found its interest in the Russian nation and its harboring of youthful radicals in the 1840s and 1850s appealing. 38

In a memorandum of 1 May, 1845, to L. A. Perovskii, Minister of Internal Affairs, the famous explorer Fedor Petrovich Litke made the case for a national geographical society. For starters, Litke pointed out that other enlightened countries had geographical and ethnographical societies but, as yet, Russia did not. A national geographical society, Litke went on, could consolidate and coordinate the great amount of private, and seemingly random, collection of geographical information as well as disseminate information. Finally, the society would have an even more significant educational mission: to spread in Russia itself a taste and a love of geography, ethnography, and statistics. 39 Indeed, in the 1840s the Geographical Society was at the center of a quest for national identity and the leader of a movement to study the people in order to save them.

37(...continued)


Assuming that the distinguishing features and original character of the Russian nation were most likely preserved "as if under the volcanic ash of history," in the simple folk, in 1847 the Geographical Society's Ethnographic Division drew up an elaborate program of empirical study based on 7,000 questionnaires sent all over Russia. 40 Today, we might say that the foundation of the Geographical Society marked the birth of institutionalized Russian area studies.

But the society did more than disseminate information about the native land, as important as that was. In its quest for a shared civilization, the Russian Geographical Society furthered the development of civil society. This contribution can be seen not only as a product, but also as a process: its scientific research drew in the public, it was an autonomous organization, and it promoted a sense of community.

The Geographical Society was a great facilitator of scientific research. It built a base of empirical data, an on-going system of questionnaires and instructions, and provided a center for the collection and processing of material. Moreover, its projects involved the public. The questionnaires, for example, acquired a significant number of researchers outside the capital and generated a constant flow of "important and curious observations" about different localities to the society's headquarters in St. Petersburg. According to the silver jubilee report the Geographical Society was a facilitator:

to give order to that constant effort of freely moving forces, which incessantly stream in from the outside, changing in their composition and diverse in their combinations, specializing and directing their work in conjunction with the general goals of the Geographical Society. 41

The society's autonomy also furthered the development of civil society. Arguments over the society's charter proceeded among members openly without heavy handed efforts of the government to dictate the society's policies, course of action, or internal organization. Particularly significant were the society's autonomous divisions. Society members were free to join the division of their own choosing; in turn, each division scheduled its own meetings, determined its own agenda, elected its head, appointed members to its own commissions, and published its own papers. As Semenov wrote in the golden jubilee history:


41 F. R. Osten-Saken, Dvadtsatipiatiletie Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obschestva (St. Petersburg, 1871), p. 44.
With the free entry of anyone interested in the successes of Russian geography, the divisions were turned into the kind of laboratories where ideas are exchanged, where the initiative for public enterprises to advance science are inspired, where research strategies are discussed, where completed work is evaluated and prizes are awarded, and where the results of private investigations are assembled and published.\(^2\)

Such autonomy was by no means guaranteed, and the society’s first Vice President, Litke, viewed the Geographical Society much as a captain would a ship, trying to steer it on a safe course and prevent unforeseen events. According to the Soviet member-historian of the society, Litke “strictly adhered to the 1849 charter offering complete independence to divisions, . . . stood for the removal of censorship from the society’s publications, . . . invited politically suspect persons to work for the Society, . . . [and] petitioned on behalf of Polish exiles in Siberia after 1863.”\(^3\)

Although Litke was certainly concerned that internal bickering over organizational issues might bring about government interference, it would appear that Litke was more fearful of destruction from within than of destruction from without.

The Geographical Society also furthered the development of civil society by providing a sense of community. It became a meeting point for the intelligentsia of the capital, and reports of meetings received coverage in the press. In words that recall Tocqueville, Vice President Litke conveyed a sense of what that community could be in a meeting in January, 1847:

> To give the meetings of the society more life and more significance, it would indeed be useful if . . . we started the practice of public debate during the meeting itself. The topic of these debates could be questions or observations . . . regarding a previously delivered paper, or regarding some information, thought, or proposal . . . One sensible speech will inspire another, one observation will follow another, and answer will follow question. Thus, that common exchange of opinions and information, that convergence among members, that participation in a common intellectual effort that constitutes the goal of our meetings will be born. In this way we will realize the idea of the Society, for without these conditions there in essence will be no Society.\(^4\)

In many ways the society’s first jubilee history, that by F.R. Osten-Saken in 1871, best captures the spirit of early years, its civic significance, and its contribution to a process as well as to a product. Osten-Saken referred to the latter at the beginning of his evaluation. What is noteworthy after the first 25 years, Osten-Saken declared, is not only the Geographical Society’s wide range of activity, its contribution to science and to a greater knowledge of Russia. One distinct feature contributed greatly to its success:

\(^{42}\) Semenov, Istoriia, p. 9.
\(^{44}\) Quoted in B.A. Val’skaia, “Petrashevtsy v Russkom geograficheskom obshchestve,” Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol’kloristiki i antropologii, no. 7 (Leningrad, 1977), p. 57.
From the very start, the Society was not a closed circle of learned specialists who convened from their studies to exchange ideas and inform each other of the results of their research. It threw open the door to all, without exception, who were interested in studying Russia, and summoned all her available and motley forces to independent action (samodeiatel'nost') directed to that study. 45

The society united the activities of free and productive intellects in "an enterprise of the human mind" that would be impossible alone. Moreover, like other "enterprises," this one, according to Osten-Saken, cultivated the habits of public as well as personal intellectual initiative, applied the principle of the division of labor, and provided a training ground for public or government work. Finally, among all its members, from the royal family down to the most modest provincial geographer, the society created that desire to study the nation's productive forces and to facilitate its well-being, and "that spiritual bond that binds us all together in the love for our native land." 46 No doubt unbeknownst to Osten-Saken, the community bonded by a study of the nation was soon becoming one bonded by a desire to educate and reform it.

STEWARDSHIP OF CULTURE

Specialized studies have demonstrated that associations and societies were essential ingredients in social reform movements in Victorian Europe and America. The libraries, lecture halls, workingmen's clubs, mechanics' institutes, temperance societies, exhibitions and museums, and the like furthered education and self-improvement, provided rational amusements, dangled ladders of upward mobility from the social edifice, established community meeting grounds, aspired to mold respectable citizens, and offered national purpose and cohesion to a divided polity. At the same time voluntary associations were important in shaping middle-class identities and in developing and reinforcing values, sensibilities, and cultural aspirations. Associations and the activities they sponsored were living examples of the economic power, creative spirit, paternalist good works, civic stewardship, and refinement of the middle classes. 47

45 Osten-Saken, Dwadtsatipiatiletie, p. 44. This openness became part of the "discourse" about the society. Semenov's golden jubilee account of the society repeats, but does not attribute, almost word-for-word the silver jubilee assessment (Istoritsa, vol. 1, p. xxiv).

46 Osten-Saken, Dwadtsatipiatiletie, p. 45.

It is commonplace that the Russian intelligentsia regarded itself as the steward of Russian culture. Although the claims of the radical intelligentsia, of the titans of Russian literature, and of the populists have received more attention, liberal reformers aspired to transform Russia's cities during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the absence of dispersed bourgeois wealth and numerous individual philanthropists, Russian voluntary associations were arguably more important than in the West as the focal points of cultural stewardship. The multiplication and specialization of Russian associations during and after the Era of Great Reforms of the 1860s means that it will be harder here than in the preceding sections to focus on a single society. Rather, it will be shown that a set of associations was actively engaged in the process of bringing learning and culture to the lower classes.48 We can see this process best if we look briefly at two of the most important components of cultural stewardship: self-improvement and the rational use of leisure.

The needs of a modern economy, the increasing division of labor, and the specialization of the labor force required a greater investment in the diffusion of science and technology and in adult and technical education. Among the many Russian associations which purported to facilitate such self-improvement were the Society to Disseminate Technical Knowledge, the Society to Promote Commercial Education, the Society of Public Universities, and the Russian Technical Society. The Society to Disseminate Technical Knowledge, founded in Moscow in 1869, ran a metalworking school, a vocational school for women, sponsored public lectures, and offered free classes in technical drawing. Particularly innovative was its Commission for Home Readings, created in 1893 and modelled after British and American societies of self-education, which drew up lesson plans and commissioned textbooks.49 The Society to Promote Commercial Education, founded by the banker Aleksei S. Vishniakov in 1897, reflected the commitment of Moscow's merchants to business education. In 1907 the Society opened the Moscow Commercial Institute which provided training beyond the secondary level in both economics and engineering to prepare actual and prospective clerks and foremen for careers in business.50


49 Obshchestvo rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znanii, Komissiia po organizatsii domashnego chteniia, Programma dlia chteniia 4 vols. (Moscow, 1895-1900); A.E. Gruzinskii, Tridtsat' let zhizni Uchebnogo dela Obshchestva rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znanii (Moscow, 1902); "Obshchestvo rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znanii," Entsiklopedicheskii slovar (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz i Efron, 82 vols., 1892-1903), 65: 122; Istoriia Moskvy, 6 vols. (Moscow 1952-57), IV: 641, 662; V: 468-469.

In 1906 the Society of Public Universities opened the first public (literally, "people's") university, modelled after British and American university extension programs. Their public goals were clearly stated: "The Public University is a free cultural institution with a single goal - the diffusion of science among all strata of the population. The basic goal of the University is to disseminate advanced scientific education and instill a love of science and knowledge among the people."\(^{51}\)

But best known and most influential of such associations was the Russian Technical Society (RTO), founded in St. Petersburg in 1866 to promote the development of technical and engineering education by means of papers and lectures on technical subjects, publications, prizes and medals, exhibitions, and studies of educational methods. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the RTO became a national forum for debate of educational policy and provided a meeting place where engineers and other professionals rubbed shoulders with government officials and the business community. By 1896 it had 23 regional chapters, including one in Moscow, founded in 1876.\(^{52}\) One of the most prominent features of the Moscow Section was the very activist Standing Committee on Technical Education: it sponsored public lectures and in the 1890s organized classes for adult workers and a school for workers' children; in 1901 it founded the Museum for Assistance to Labor. Modeled after the Paris Musee Sociale, the Museum for Assistance to Labor became a focal point for progressively inclined professionals and the representatives of craft and clerical associations, collected data, and organized public lectures, classes, and exhibitions. Its educational program for workers was later incorporated into government efforts to preempt a labor movement known as "police socialism."\(^{53}\) In 1905 it sheltered the organizations and meetings of bakers and railway and municipal employees, organized the first All-Russian Conference of Representatives of Professional Unions, and even provided the hall for the first two meetings of what was to become the Moscow city soviet.\(^{54}\)

Public lectures, reading rooms, and public libraries not only facilitated the efforts at self-improvement and diffusion of science and technology. They also served the complementary

\(^{51}\) Vsia Moskva za 1912 g. (Moscow, 1912), cols. 259-60; Pervyi Vserossiiskii s"ezd deiatelei obshchestv narodnykh universitetov i drugikh prosvetitel'nykh uchrezhdeni chastnoi initsiativy, Trudy (St. Petersburg: Sever, 1908).

\(^{52}\) The standard histories of technical societies in Russia are N.N. Gritsenko et al., Nauchno-teknicheskie obshchestva SSSR (Moscow, 1968) and N.G. Filippov, Nauchno-teknicheskie obshchestva v Rossii, 1866-1917 (Moscow, 1976). On the RTO see "Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk deitel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo tekhnicheskogo obshchestva s ego osnovaniia po pervoe ianvaria 1893 g." Zapiski Russkogo tekhnicheskogo obshchestva, 7-8 (1893), 1-20; Alfred Rieber, Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 251-52, 261-62, 269, 277.

\(^{53}\) On the efforts of RTO in education, see B. N. Tits, Ocherk istorii Postoiannoi kommissii po tekhnicheskomu obrazovanii pri Imp. Russkom tekhnicheskom obshchestve, 1868-1889 (St. Petersburg, 1889) and N. M. Korol'kov, Kratkii obzor deiatel'nosti Postoiannoi kommissii po tekhnicheskomu obrazovanii (St. Petersburg, 1912).

\(^{54}\) Laura Engelstein, Moscow 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 81, 100, 116, 156, 163.
component of cultural stewardship: the rational use of leisure. The first public lecture hall was opened in Moscow in 1874 by the Society to Disseminate Useful Books. According to the society’s annual reports, at first the audience regarded the lecture hall as a place of entertainment where for two kopecks one could see magic lantern shows. By the 1890s, however, this attitude allegedly changed, and the “public began to regard the lecture halls as centers created for their continuing education and an enormous number of people began to flock to them.”55 In 1898 the Society to Organize Educational Public Amusements began to sponsor public lectures, along with slide shows, promenades, concerts, and plays. Other societies opening reading rooms or organizing public lectures were the Society to Study and Disseminate Accounting, the Pirogov Society of Russian Physicians, the Society of Free Public Libraries, the Society for the Diffusion of Technical Knowledge, the St. Petersburg and Moscow Literacy Committees, and the Temperance Society.56

Perhaps the most visible example of civic stewardship and the promotion of rationally useful leisure on the part of Russia’s associations—the creation of museums and exhibitions—was that of the Moscow Society of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography. Founded by several Moscow university professors in 1863, the Society (OLEAE in its Russian initials) had a mission to democratize science. Unlike Moscow University’s older learned society, the Moscow Society of Naturalists, which admitted only specialists and whose publications were not in the Russian language, OLEAE strove to be accessible to the public, to publish in Russian, and to attract youth to science. Its decentralized structure of autonomous divisions allowed it to cover many branches of science, to nurture numerous scientists, and to avoid “narrow professional activity.”57 Among its major outreach activities were the Exposition of Ethnography in 1867, two expositions of science and industry in 1872 and 1882, and the creation of the nation’s best known science museum, the Moscow

53 P.V. Krotkov, “Deiatel’nost’ Komissii po ustroistvu v Moskve publichnykh narodnykh chtenii,” Izvestiia Moskovskoi gorodskoi dumy, pt. 1 (July-August 1896): 22-27. This was the official organ of the Moscow City Council and indeed the municipal authorities also were active in promoting rational uses of leisure. See my Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985), especially pt. 3.


57 V. Bogdanov, Piatidesiatiletie Imperatorskogo obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii (Moscow, 1914); V.V. Bogdanov, “Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii pro Moskovskom gosudarstvennom universitete,” Uchenye zapiski Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, jubileinaya seriya, vyp. 53 (1940): 363-64.
Museum of Science and Industry. An example of cooperation between associations, the city government, the scientific community, and the general public, the Museum sponsored lectures, discussions, and Sunday tours pitched at the average worker. By the turn of the century, the museum resembled an open university; indeed the Society of Public Universities sponsored classes on law, economics, literature, natural sciences, and medicine at the museum. By providing meeting halls and auditorium space free of charge to numerous other societies, the Museum became a civic center, contributing substantially not just to self-improvement and the rational use of leisure, but also to civic life.

Through such philanthropies entrepreneurs, city officials, and professionals claimed stewardship over the lower classes and thereby developed an important ingredient of Western middle-class identity: belief in individual self-improvement for the aspiring accomplished by means of adult education and rational use of leisure. Like the instruments of education and literacy, organizations and activities aimed at the worker aspired to "enlarge the mind," "make better citizens," and improve taste. Programs of adult education aimed at nothing less than "the democratization of knowledge," "the levelling of social classes," and "the breaking of all barriers between people." Voluntary associations promoted values commonly associated with the middle classes and commonly regarded as deficient in autocratic Russia: opportunity, individual initiative, autonomy, self-reliance, self-improvement, a spirit of enterprise, industriousness, rationality, the ability to control one's destiny, and a belief in science and progress.

Without question, associational activity promoted a sense of public duty and civic spirit in nineteenth-century Russia. Associations cultivated a capacity for individual initiative channeled toward certain spheres of practical activity - education civic culture, rational leisure, the public good - that avoided both the selfish and rapacious pursuit of gain rejected by Russian Orthodoxy and traditional Russian culture and the nihilism of the radical intelligentsia rejected by Russian liberals. Public meetings played a crucial role in the coalescence and mobilization of special interest.
constituencies: the presence of like-minded people at meetings broke down the sense of isolation, and publicity served as propaganda for a multitude of causes. Whatever else may be said about the autonomy, or depth, or viability of Russian civil society in comparison with the more established civil societies of western Europe, the fact remains that Russia’s civil associations were able to pursue and promote the very same missions as did their counterparts in Europe and North America.

Before closing our discussion of Russian associational life, it must be noted that the public sphere which it spearheaded did not develop as smoothly as the foregoing might suggest. By the end of the nineteenth century, more and more associations were becoming politicized and their relationship with the government more and more confrontational. As I discuss elsewhere, government and society alike were well aware that associations and their many meetings and congresses debated a wide range of issues, made policy recommendations, provided voice and representation, asserted society’s claim to publicly monitor state authority, and gave furtive legitimacy to anti-government views. Whatever theorists and historians may conclude about the absence or weakness of Russian civil society and public life, the Russian government treated it as a formidable foe!

III.

The supreme achievement of the totalitarian state is the destruction of civil society, that is, the space between the individual and the state consisting of private institutions, voluntary associations, the market, and the free expression of ideas and religion. As I discuss elsewhere, such destruction took place in the Soviet Union gradually during the first two decades after the Bolshevik revolution, and most intensively during the Gleichschaltung of the first and second five-year plans. The argument of this singular feature of totalitarianism, a commonplace in the western literature on the subject, has now been joined by late- and post-Soviet writers. The sociologist V. V. Vitiuk even uses it to explain the terror: "Although seemingly irrational and random, the terror did have a target: civil society and its component bonds." However, a half century later, enabled by the twin projects of

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63 V. V. Vitiuk, Stanovlenie idei grazhdanskogo obshchestva ee istoricheskaia evoliutsiia (Moscow: Rossiskaia akademija nauk, Institut sotsiologii, 1995), 82. See also Z.T. Golenkova, et al, Stanovlenie grazhdanskogo obshchestva i sotsial’naia stratifikatsiia, 2 vols. (Moscow: Rossiskaia akademija nauk, Institut sotsiologii, 1995). John Gray is representative of the western view: "I shall take the destruction of civil society to the chief historical result of totalitarianism." (“Totalitarianism, Reform and Civil Society,” in Ellen Frankel Paul, ed., Totalitarianism at the
glasnost and perestroika, a civil society re-emerged. The collapse of the Soviet state, the instability of new political structures, national divisions, and economic hardship make the reconstitution of civil society more difficult, but, simultaneously, that much more urgent.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of civil society reappeared as Soviet philosophers and social scientists were reconceptualizing the political community. There were several reasons for using a term that had been neglected or, if used at all, denigrated as "bourgeois." The major analogue of civil society, the state, was no longer perceived in Hegelian terms as the supreme achievement of collective man as a rational being or the universal embodiment of modernization, social reform, and "the radiant future." A crisis in Marxist-Leninist thought had caused analyses of society and politics based on class or the class struggle, to be replaced with analyses based on "new thinking," "the human factor," and "universal values." Indeed, the concept of civil society emerged as an analogue not only to the state, but also to "socialism" and to "Soviet." At the same time, a variety of grass roots associations had created the organizational forms and the public space in which state power has been challenged. Despite the attempt of the

63...continued)


65 "The term civil society is defined primarily as an antipode to etatism. . . . everything which is not etatic society is civil society." Mykola Ryabchuk, "Civil Society and National Emancipation: The Ukrainian Case," in Rau, The Reemergence of Civil Society, 95-112; quote 99. Clearly, "state," "soviet," and "socialism" are all synonymous with "etatism."
totalitarian state to destroy all autonomous structures that normally give shape to social life, to circumscribe independent civic action, and to obliterate the distinction between state and society. Soviet citizens retained the capability of self-organization. Finally, the "self-limiting revolution" and rediscovery of civil society in Eastern Europe in the 1980s demonstrated the liberating power of the idea of civil society.

One of the leading forums for the examination of civil society was, and still is, the journal of the Academy of Sciences, Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost', formerly Obshchestvennye nauki. In 1989 this journal introduced articles under a new rubric, "The Road to the Rule of Law" (Na puti k pravovomu gosudarstvu, literally, "the road to a law-based state"). Two years later, apparently no longer "on the road," the rubric became "Civil Society and the Rule of Law" (grazhdanskoe obshchestvo i pravovoe gosudarstvo). Civil society has become the premier conceptual framework to rethink a range of issues regarding the relationship between the individual and the state: individual autonomy and natural rights; the rule of law, citizenship, liberalism and democracy; capitalism, entrepreneurship, the pursuit of self-interest, and the bourgeoisie; and shared traditions with Europe. This conceptual framework is more than academic: it is the "road away from" totalitarianism and crisis. The idea of civil society became a way to conceptualize the struggle against state, bureaucratic, party, and police power, the attempt of society to limit the scope of state power, and the struggle against the pervasive sense of individual futility. More than that: it became the way to conceptualize the reconstitution of the political community. In the words of A. Demidov and R. Sharipov, "It is our firm conviction that civil society is the most appropriate guide in overcoming the crisis and in selecting the road for our country's future development." 67

Civil society provides a framework for the recognition of the value of the individual, the idea of individual autonomy, and the priority of the interests of the individual over those of class or of society, all of which are examples of the "new thinking" that entered the public discourse in the late 1980s. The rediscovery of individual autonomy soon led to a rediscovery of "universal" theories of natural rights which had been neglected or scorned for decades. In the view of contemporary Russian contractarians, totalitarianism is akin to a pre-political state of nature; accordingly, post-Soviet individuals, having existed for decades in a state of nature, require the creation of civil society to protect their natural rights. According to Stupishin, civil society is a pre-condition for the rule of

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66 This journal published my "Obshchestvennye organizatsii i razvitie grazhdanskogo obshchestva v dorevolutsionnoi Rossii" in no. 5 (1994), 77-89. Another journal, with which I am less familiar, is Polis, published by the Gorbachev Foundation. See "Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo: 'Trekhchelennaia' ili 'odnochelennaia' model'?" Polis, no. 3 (1995), 58-60.

law: Civil society is "the law-giving power": . . . "To attain a law-based state, that is, the rule of law, it is necessary to originate in civil society." 68

Having been created to protect the individual's natural rights, civil society provides the opportunity, integration, and regulation which allow the pursuit of individual interest and the development of the individual's capacities. In an analysis which recalls that of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment as well as Hegel, and which clearly has implications for post-Soviet Russia, Demidov and Sharipov note the importance of civil society in the development of western civilization:

At a time when the communal organization of life began to erode, Western civilization gradually developed a new form of integration and self-regulation. During the transition to capitalist development, new mechanisms, founded on individual economic and political liberties, are created to establish common interests. A society possessing such mechanisms is called civil society. 69

Since civil society is accompanied by the market and the spirit of enterprise, and since the market connotes predation and rapaciousness to most Russian intellectuals, the regulatory mechanisms of civil society are considered essential to assure a safe transition to capitalism and bourgeois mores. Not only is civil society a mechanism of self-regulation and integration, it is the only effective mechanism of self-regulation, according to Demidov and Sharipov. Being based on spiritual freedom, as well as political and economic freedoms, civil society "creates the conditions for the liberation of the creative human personality." 70

The question may be posed, and is occasionally posed in the current literature, where does civil society come from? It is commonplace that totalitarianism destroys civil society. The Soviet state, founded on a philosophy which celebrated the absorption of civil society into the state—the dictatorship of the proletariat—was less likely than Europe's absolute monarchies to concede natural rights, civil liberties, and an autonomous sphere of public life. In any event, reform efforts to create socialism "with a human face" or a "socialist civil society" having failed, that state no longer exists. No less important, conditions were not conducive to the emergence of civil society from below. No historian, social scientist, or philosopher suggests that a strong, full-blown post-totalitarian civil society has emerged. Moreover, the common argument that Russia is not "ready" for political democracy presumes that the civil basis for democracy—civil society—is absent or weak.

What might be a basis for civil society in late-Soviet or post-Soviet Russia? "Indigenous voluntary associations of citizens have emerged here in recent years," reply Kuzminov and

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69 Demidov and Sharipov, "Integratsiya obshchestva," 158.
70 Ibid., 162.
One of the most striking features of the emerging civil society in the former Soviet Union was the appearance of a variety of non-Party, non-government associations, commonly called samodeiatel’nye organizations, or neformaly. By now the story of their sudden appearance in the last decade of the old (Soviet) regime is well known. From its beginnings in the early and mid 1980s as clubs, amateur organizations, and youth groups, associational activity in the USSR quickly became politicized in the form of movements, popular fronts, proto-political parties, and societies of national revival. Much as their counterparts in tsarist times, many organizations played a cat-and-mouse game with the authorities. Unfortunately, the phenomenon is too recent, and many organizations were too ephemeral and left little paper trail to examine their activities in depth. More important for our purposes is the meaning attached to the phenomenon of association by Soviet and post-Soviet scholars.

First, late-Soviet associations were largely self-generated, self-organized, and self-defined citizen initiatives and social movements “from below” rather than formal institutions. Although they existed in the framework of the state and (largely) state created institutions, they were not creatures of the state. Nor were they intended to serve the public interest as defined by the state. Although

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such associations could pursue economic ends, without property rights, a market, and the ability to pursue self-interest, this pursuit was of necessity furtive. But such associations could also pursue non-market goals such as charity, leisure, and cooperation where there was more room for maneuver. Civil society, then, became "the network of independent individuals, pursuing their own goals, and their voluntary associations." Such a network of "horizontal links" is widely regarded in the literature as providing the historic stability of civil society and democracy in Europe and North America.

Second, late-Soviet voluntary associations reflected and preserved a sense of individual dignity and self-worth and helped shape public identities. "A characteristic of these associations is the sovereignty of their members. Associations themselves originate and function on a contractual basis and make no claims to limit the freedoms of their members." The individual identities and collective solidarities were self constructed, often as a deliberate counter to the "model" identities and solidarities propagated, in bombastic manner, by the regime. A plurality of self-governing, autonomous civil collectivities, self-constituted to engage in non-political affairs, conferred upon its participants a sense of dignity and empowerment.

This mechanism of individual empowerment through self-initiative suggests a third important feature of the rebirth of associational life. Process was just as important as product. In this new associations contrast with socialist organizations designed to deliver a product—building the bright future of justice, abundance, and harmony. Independent activities became not only means but ends in themselves. The dedicated activism among small committed groups of people, and the virtues of freedom of thought and conscience, tolerance, respect for the law, and voluntarism, were means and ends at the same time.

Fourth, the network of collectivities heralded the incremental creation of a "spaces of freedom," of "horizontal links." It is axiomatic that totalitarian rule destroys self-organized and autonomous civic spaces and severs autonomous horizontal ties. In the late-Soviet period, these horizontal links were first reestablished among family members and close friends, becoming enclaves of trust, openness, and solidarity—the kitchen table debates of the Brezhnev years—that broke down barriers of fear and isolation. This virtually autonomous private sphere gradually became public after

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Ibid., 59. Many western observers have made similar observations. See, for example, S. Frederick Starr, "New Communication Technologies and Civil Society," in Loren R. Graham, ed., Science and the Social Order (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 19-50; and Andrew Arato, "Revolution, Civil Society, and Democracy," in Rau, ed., The Reemergence of Civil Society, 161-181. Arato adds the apt observation that the civil society thus constituted was not only a counter to etatism but also to the "aura of revolution," though one wonders how much "aura" revolution still held.

Ibid., 61-62. Rau advances a similar argument in The Reemergence of Civil Society, 6, 11-17, 46.

Ibid. A similar argument has been made by East European dissident intellectuals. See Jeffrey Isaac, "Civil Society and the Spirit of Revolt," Dissent (Summer 1993): 359-60.
1985. The capacity, and virtue, of publicity, of open deliberation, and of public action joined initiative and self-organization as indispensable ends as well as means.

Finally, the emphasis placed on initiative and self-definition, process, and publicity created the capacity of citizenship. Subjects became citizens in the process of resistance to oppression, and rejection of the one-party state's claim to monopolize public life and define the public good. Empowered citizens, emboldened by confidence in their capabilities for pragmatic action in defense of interests, pressured the state and the Party. Thus, associations played a key role in the process of consciousness-raising, the coalescence of special interest constituencies, and the promotion of individual initiative and civic duty. Perhaps most important, the mere existence of independent associations challenged the monopoly of state power over public opinion.

Through associational life, civil society creates the conditions for liberalism, citizenship, constitutionalism, and democracy. According to Novikova and Sizemskiaia, the civil liberties enjoyed in civil society "prepare the people for political representation. This is why various reforms need to begin with civil society." 76 Stupishin puts it more eloquently:

What is civil society? More than simply human society, civil society is formed in the process of turning subjects into citizens, that is to say, into the kind of inhabitants of a given state who, in being members of a community, acquire the feeling of individual worth and the capacity to make a political choice. 77

It is by means of civil society, Stupishin argues, that the political community may be reconstituted and the natural rights of man and citizen can be secured by a social contract with the state in the form of a constitution.

The importance attached to the development of civil society in reconstituting the political community and in securing natural rights is reinforced by predictions of Russia's fate in the absence of civil society and an orderly "transition." In an early, and widely cited analysis of the transition, Andranik Migranyan argued that in the short run civil society was incompatible with a weak state. The "long road to the European home" would proceed through a stage during which an authoritarian regime would nurture civil society. 78 According to Akhizier, in the Russian tradition liberalism was an opposition movement, never an end in itself. Not having secured a civil foundation, liberalism

76 L. Novikova and I. Sizemskiaia, "Ideeinye istoki russkogo liberalizma," Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost' no. 3 (1993): 124-135; quote, 130. This is also a common argument in the western literature. See, for example, George Weigel, "Coping with Newly Unleashed Social Forces," in Roberts and Belyaeva, eds., After Perestroika, 99-101.


78 A. Migranyan, "Dolgii put' k evropeiskomu domu," Novyi Mir, no. 7 (July, 1989), 166-184.
was even more vulnerable in the political arena. According to Novikova and Sizemskaia,

Political changes must follow [civil society] in order to secure the development of civil society along the chosen path; political changes must not precede this. Otherwise, it is possible that the natural order of things would be violated, and this would be fraught with conflicts and cataclysms.

Similarly, in the view of Demidov and Sharipov, political democracy can succeed only where civil freedoms are secured and where individuals recognize themselves as citizens. Otherwise, the democratic state will be vulnerable to totalist ideologies and tyranny.

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Russia has never occupied a prominent place in the theories of civil society or in the history of voluntary associations. Analyses of the Russian experience habitually proceed along a well worn path: categories of analysis borrowed from western theories. Yet, in the world-wide reexamination of the state-society relationship and of the meaning of civil society, the Russian case affords an opportunity for Russian historians and social scientists to make an original contribution to social science theory. The Russian experience--both past and present--is particularly relevant to post-Marxist theories of civil society and associational activity on four grounds. First, the concepts of civil society and associational activity help explain the processes of public initiative, self-constitution of interest groups, and rapidly changing social identities in a country with a strong state tradition and fragmented social structure. Second, they permit an examination of the sphere outside the state in a country with weakly developed property rights and a small bourgeoisie. Third, voluntary associations and civil society help us conceptualize the struggle against absolutism spearheaded from below by non-entrepreneurial social groups and which reflected anti-bourgeois sensibilities. Finally, these concepts offer a new way to study liberalism and reform in a country without the corporatist tradition of Germany or the individualistic tradition of England and America.

In countries such as Russia and the USSR, where arbitrary autocratic-bureaucratic authority prevails, civil society is not a consequence of the inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, and the rule of law, as often theorized in the western tradition, but a pre-condition of such limitations in the scope of state power. Likewise, civil society is a pre-condition of liberalism, citizenship, free enterprise, pluralism, and democracy. In the absence of inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, and the rule of law, associations become not a consequence of civil

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80 Novikova and Sizemskaia, "Ideinye istoki," 129.
81 Demidov and Sharipov, "Integratsiia obshchestva," 162.
society, but a **pre-condition**. Associations become the leading element in the emergence of civil society and a source of civil society's vitality against high odds. If civil society may be regarded as a moral community, then associations are its real communities. And it is from such communities—the real and the moral—that the political community may be reconstituted.