

Open Lecture

**Political Theory International Seminar:
Civil Society and the State**

Speakers: Terrell Carver (University of Bristol),

“Civil Society and Class: Centrality and Occlusion in Discourse and Practice”

James Martin (Goldsmiths College, University of London),

“Post-Marxism and Civil Society: From Relative Autonomy to Radical Contingency”

Jens Bartelson (The University of Copenhagen),

“Unpacking the Concept of Civil Society”

Commentator: Takashi Kibe (ICU)

Floor Discussants: Chantal Mouffe (University of Westminster)

Bob Jessop (Lancaster University)

Chair: Shin Chiba (ICU)

Date: January 10, 2001 (13:30-15:30)

Place: Administration Building 206

A political theory international seminar was held at ICU on January 10, 2001 under the auspices of SSRI, of the Division of Social Sciences at ICU, and of the Japan Foundation. It was indeed an exciting occasion to have such a symposium at ICU by welcoming eminent and leading political theorists from Europe as speakers and floor discussants. The number of the participants in the symposium was about seventy.

Dr. Terrell Carver's paper critically engages in a kind of displacement and occlusion which took place in the recent resurgence of civil society arguments. According to his analysis, “civil society” has displaced state-centric theories and practice

with democratizing concepts relating to both economic and political practice, thus occluding authoritarian and hierarchical concepts of ruler and subject. It has also displaced both Marxist and market-centric accounts of the state-society relationship with pluralist notions of voluntary activity and participation. Carver also criticizes the lack of the serious analysis of the class division or its potential cleavage on the part of recent theories of civil society.

Dr. James Martin's paper is critically examining the claim that civil society in its recent theorizings presents itself as a promising space for radical democratic politics. Martin highly evaluates a "Post-Marxist" theoretical position on the topic of civil society as illustrated by Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau. A Post-Marxist anti-essentialist deconstruction of Marxism shifts the interpretation of social identity from "causal", "structural" factors to the "discursive" context in which a struggle for hegemony occurs across a variety of sites, not simply the economic. Here civil society is a *discursively constituted public space*. While recognizing the positive potentials of civil society as the site of radical democratic politics, Martin nonetheless underscores various types of power relationships constantly occurring in it. Post-Marxism in his view, like Marxism, recognizes that civil society is premised upon structured relations of power.

Dr. Jens Bartelson has proffered in his paper a profound thesis that the state and civil society should be regarded not as antithetical to one another as presupposed in earlier liberal and republican interpretations but rather as complements. To state this thesis, Bartelson used and combined various methods and approaches such as a Foucaultian genealogical method, a political historical approach, a perspective of the history of political thought, a political theorizing. The dialectic of the political tragedy inherent in modernity, i.e., potential anarchy, on the one hand, and the utopian solution of it, i.e., the modern aspiration for the proliferation of civility and unity, on the other, has propelled, in his view, both the state-centered discourse as well as various kinds of civil society argument. So power relations are ingrained not merely in the state mechanism but

also in the formation of civil society. Bartelson concludes that in view of the resolution of the tragedy of modern political life it is perhaps safer to regard the concept of civil society as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution.

Some important questions and comments are made by a commentator, floor discussants and the floor itself, regarding postmodernism, Post-Marxism, civil society discourse and its impact on local civic movements, and so forth. Despite the general difficulty of the papers themselves, to our delight a constructive exchange of opinions and comments was made.

(Written by Prof. Shin Chiba, Seminar Chair)