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Does Vital Citizenship Require Moral Consensus?

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Abstract

Does a unity of convictions make a republic strong? Is normative consensus a requirement for vital citizenship? Many rulers and theorists seem to assume as much when they argue for more civic responsibility, for moral regeneration and a strengthening of nationalism. This article questions those efforts on two points. Doesn't the idea of a consensual society run counter to liberal principles of freedom and to the insight that resilience resides in diversity? And, assuming for the sake of argument that consensus is desirable, can such commitments be brought about through appeals and manipulation?

1 Introduction

In the decades following the Second World War rulers and theorists in Western countries thought that a certain degree of citizen apathy was functional for democracy. Participation by many would raise the spectre of ideological politics and totalitarian democracy, that the victors in the war had laid to rest. Recently, however, rulers and theorists have begun to worry that too few people participate. The vitality of citizenship, they fear, will suffer, and society will become ungovernable if many individuals go their own way and remain uninterested in politics.

The *tonus* or vitality of citizenship is difficult to observe and measure directly. If citizenship is a reserve circuit, to be activated in unstructured situations of emergency, when the normal institutions of the republic cannot function as usual, looking at behaviour in quiet times does not tell you much. A vital republic does not require that all participate every day, but obviously cannot work if only very few ever bother to act as citizens. Furthermore, it cannot work if those who do participate act selfishly without exception. Because the vitality of citizenship is difficult to observe, it is easy to worry about. This, we shall show, is precisely what many people, rulers and intellectuals in particular, do.

They are worried that social divisions and conflicts, as well as indifference to what may bind citizens together, will make societies ungovernable. Thus, they fear, the republic will lose the vitality that it needs to survive in a globalizing

and competitive world. As an antidote they argue for the re-establishment of moral unity, of consensus, among the citizenry. This article questions such efforts on two points. Doesn't the idea of a consensual society run counter to liberal principles of freedom and to the insight that resilience usually resides in diversity? Isn't a consensual society a dead society, cut off from its sources of vitality? And, assuming for the sake of argument that consensus is desirable, can such commitments be brought about through appeals, argument, and social engineering? Isn't the manipulative nature of such efforts incompatible with the spontaneous and voluntary character of what it wants to achieve? This paper will first consider efforts by political leaders to stimulate a citizen's morality, to encourage civic responsibility, and to discourage selfish behaviour. Subsequently the efforts of intellectuals to see nationalism as a revitalising force for citizenship will be analysed. We then consider a common assumption underlying both these attempts: the idea that normative consensus is the key to viable citizenship – an idea that we shall find to be untenable. We conclude the article by suggesting an explanation as to why the consensus assumption is so widespread.

2 Morality and civic responsibility

In the Netherlands during the first half of the 1990s several leading politicians voiced their concern about the civic responsibility of the Dutch. They linked various social problems, such as criminality, sickness and disability, with the decline of moral standards which they claimed to observe in society. The politicians' concern concentrated on two issues; the disintegration of Dutch society, and the overburdening of systems of democracy and law.

They observed that not much was left of the orderly, well-organized society of earlier times. Most people appreciate the increased freedom that came with individualization, but the politicians pointed out that there is a shadow side to this development. Individualization, emancipation, and differentiation may result in social disintegration. When this happens people only think of themselves and feel no responsibility for the community; they do not exercise social control by holding each other accountable; for their needs they call upon the state; they try to buy out of their duty to care for their kin and their neighbours by way of insurance premiums; and they may even avoid paying dues and taxes. In short, citizens are said to be selfish and to no longer believe in the basic standards and values of the society. The politicians insisted that this trend towards disintegration has disastrous consequences.

First, disintegration was claimed to be harmful to the good life of the citizens themselves. Prime Minister Lubbers stated that a growing number of people had become recipients of massive and "anonymous" social care.¹ People who

were dependent on this care were placed outside the community or felt left out of it. They would become isolated, mere clients of the welfare state systems. A political system that allowed this to happen would forsake its important task of integrating citizens into the national community in such a way that they can flourish in society and can participate in its social processes.

The Minister for Justice Hirsch Ballin was especially concerned about another result of the trend towards disintegration: it would undermine the very basis of the constitutional state.² A just society not only requires that the state guarantee the legal rights of the citizens, but also that the latter feel actively responsible for maintaining them. Social disintegration jeopardizes community responsibility, without which the realization of formal rights will remain defective.

A third aspect of the trend towards disintegration was emphasized by Brinkman, at the time leader of the Christian-Democratic Party in parliament.³ He worried about the effect of disintegration on public support for the welfare state. As citizens increasingly rely upon government care instead of on community responsibilities it becomes difficult to keep up the necessary level of provisions for those who really need them.

These three aspects are of course closely related. They express the concern that citizens lack community spirit and a feeling of responsibility, without which the policies of the welfare state cannot work. Therefore, the speakers concluded, a contribution to the solution of the problems of the welfare state will, to a large extent, have to come from the community itself. This is where politicians join each other in an appeal for civic responsibility. To them, this means active citizenship which is not only expressed in loyalty to the law and political participation in a narrow sense, but also in the acceptance of responsibility for oneself and others, in one's contributions to social life. Civic responsibility is conceived as not only pertaining to the sphere of the state, but also as a leading principle outside the public-political realm.

The second issue politicians were concerned about was the overburdening of democracy and the legal system. A dangerous double movement was said to be taking place: on the one hand citizens increasingly turn towards politicians and the courts to promote their interests and rights, on the other hand they increasingly fail to obey the laws and regulations. They use the legal and democratic systems as it suits them, as consumers, without accepting responsibility for the continuing functioning of those systems. These become over-used and overburdened. The politicians admitted that the state itself was also to blame. It had not only made too many laws and regulations, but also contributed to the "pollution of standards" by placing insufficient emphasis on the moral content of legal rules, by making obscure regulations, by failing to enforce the law, and often by not abiding by its own rules. However, the citizens were also criticized. They were said to show calculating behaviour and to

accept moral standards, if they knew them at all, in theory but not to adhere to them in practice. It would be time for a new public morality: in line with the requirement that the government learns a new way of governing, the citizen is expected to develop a new lifestyle in which civic responsibility should have a central position. In this context "civic responsibility" would mean abiding by the laws and rules and holding others accountable for doing the same.

The emphasis on responsibilities and duties, the politicians insisted, involves more than a smart attempt to curtail the cost of government provisions or to guarantee compliance with the law. Making the individual citizen accountable for his own deeds and omissions, they argued, is a sign of respect for who and what he is, an indication that he truly belongs to the community as a full member. Experiencing and fulfilling duties would give the community the chance to care for the people who really need it and it would give the citizen the chance to grow from object of care to subject of integration and freedom.

These interventions on the part of the politicians aroused mixed feelings in the media and the population at large. They undeniably addressed important matters, but what the politicians were saying did not seem quite acceptable. Or was it the way, or the position from which, they said it? In order to clarify these misgivings, we shall analyse the politicians' remarks. We shall not only consider their meaning, but also examine them as speech acts. We ask what the politicians *do* when they make these speeches. In our opinion three things:

1. they draw inspiration from the past;
2. they misapprehend contemporary plurality;
3. they speak to the responsible citizens, who are present, about the calculating citizens, who are absent.

These three aspects of the speech acts of politicians are analysed below.

2.1 The past as a compass: filth, danger, purification rituals, or, the republic ruined by its own freedom and saviours

Drawing inspiration from the past is a well-known strategy of political renewal. Revolutions and revolutionaries model themselves on the past.⁴ To the Romans, an appeal to authority (*auctoritas*) meant a return to the source, to the act of the foundation of Rome. When we get stuck, in quarrels or otherwise, we return to the acts, to the documents that contain binding agreements which constituted our relationship. Protestants return to The Acts of the Apostles, as they were laid down in the Bible. By returning to the source, future deterioration and corruption may be fought.

This is done by way of rituals of confirmation and purification. Confirmation rituals take us back to the original source which regenerates us, which gives

our common actions direction and power. Before we are able and allowed to get to the pure source, we must cleanse ourselves and the community from impure elements. Without purification there is no regeneration. Purification rituals vary from washing off graffiti to eliminating traitors by using the guillotine.

Dirt is matter out of place. It disturbs the (correct) order. Dirt that has to be washed off stands for danger – the danger of disintegration and lack of direction of the community. “Foreign commentators in one voice criticize the pollution and danger in the streets of the large Dutch cities” wrote the Minister for Justice Hirsch Ballin.⁵ Complaints about degeneration, about filth on the neighbour’s balcony, about dog faeces on the street, about carelessness, apparently mean more than they seem to at first. They signify danger. Dirt implies a polluter, a breaker of order, who is therefore also dangerous. Dirt also bears the risk of infection. Purification and the removal of tumours is needed to prevent illnesses from spreading. And if such an isolation of dangerous dirt is not possible, applying as antidote an equally dangerous and potentially polluting medicine may prove necessary.

This vocabulary of dirt, danger, illness and regeneration may be recognized in contemporary arguments about civic responsibility. A comparison with older strategies and vocabularies of political renewal makes one realize the extent to which current experiences of pollution and danger may be determined by the notions of order that people hold. Where one person sees plurality, the other sees rubbish. Where one person sees variety another sees disorder. Where the one sees monsters (unacceptable combinations such as centaurs), the other sees fascinating novelties. Someone who fears that order will collapse is bound to see many dangers. If dirt is a sign of danger, such a person will have a lot of cleansing to do.

In view of these considerations, frequent manifestations of concern about a lack of civic responsibility indicate first and foremost a fear that order will collapse. That is, someone’s fear and someone’s conception of order. The question whether an acceptable order in political and/or social interaction is actually in danger cannot simply be decided by referring to the idea of order that lives in a particular politician’s head or heart, because politics is precisely about conflicting conceptions of order and ways of dealing with them. Conflicting conceptions of order, that are mutually felt to be threatening, are bound to generate a sense of deterioration and pollution. Politics, therefore, is inherently dirtier than many other human activities and relations.

The past cannot, strictly speaking, be brought back, but it is precisely this impossibility which enables politicians to mobilize and manipulate it for the purpose of contemporary repairs. “Pillarisation” (the division of society into non-overlapping segments) in the Netherlands, for instance, is a thing of the past. It may, however, serve as an example of what is possible, of what we, the

Dutch, were once able to do and should therefore be able to do again. It may serve as a model of and a model for a workable political community. Politicians want citizens to conform to such models.

However, this poses a problem. In the models the source of civic responsibility was located outside the public-political sphere itself – in a strict religion (de Tocqueville); in the rhythm of working in industry (Durkheim); in discipline in schools and other institutions (Foucault); in the family. In their speeches, politicians also look for sources of civic responsibility outside the public-political sphere. But where should they look? In contemporary society there is little unity of culture and ways of life. We find religious people and non-believers; people who are subjected to the discipline of a “regular” job and those who do irregular work or have no job; ambitious students and dropouts; families and other forms of cohabitation. While becoming more varied, religion, work, school, and family have also become less all-embracing.

We live in a plural society where civic responsibility primarily arises *in* the interaction between pluralities in the public-political sphere itself. Politicians do have a task here, but they cannot fulfil it adequately by moralizing and by making appeals to other spheres. To a large extent the public-social and private spheres no longer work the way the politicians assume in their interventions. They are rightly worried about disintegration and selfishness in the democratic welfare state, but in their attempts to save the welfare state they deny precisely the plurality which that democracy wants to advance and organize.

The theme of democracy being ruined by its own freedom is an old one. Democracy implies the freedom of the individual to live the way he sees fit, to do whatever he wants to do, within the limits of the law. This freedom may lead to calculating egoism and narcissism, to a loss of self-control and civility. According to Plato, he who restlessly tries to satisfy his momentary desires is not free. He is addicted, a slave to his own desires. He who is ruled by his own desires is not a citizen. A democracy that has gone too far, that is mainly populated by such addicts, was traditionally regarded as susceptible to tyranny. People follow the demagogue who promises them instant satisfaction of their desires. (The narcissist sees himself in the mirror the demagogue represents. He identifies with the leader and feels perfectly represented, for as long as it lasts.) In classical republicanism, civic virtue was supposed to form a barrier against such derailments.

It is difficult to soberly assess such dangers and to deal with them in a reasonable way. Consider the trouble that members of parliaments have in determining their position with regard to their colleagues on the extreme right. They have a hard time trying to find a balance between ignoring and fighting them. Those who easily see dangers, (who want to recognize and fight them “in time”), jeopardize plurality in their eagerness to defend

democracy and, with it, democracy itself. Democracy can be ruined by paranoia, suspicion, and the inability to adequately organize and tolerate inconvenient plurality. The refrain of complaints about insufficient civic responsibility can be found in Plato's work, when Socrates says: "For I am told that Pericles made the Athenians idle and cowardly and talkative and covetous, because he was the first to establish pay for service among them."⁷

Thus civic responsibility is an explosive topic not an innocent one. Those who seek to heal and save the "sick society" or the unbridled democracy by reorientating towards the community that is said to have existed in former times, run the risk of do-gooders in the public sphere. "The total paranoid control promised by all schemes of social engineering and by totalitarian societies are attempts to heal the terrible wounds caused by the destruction of kinship forms of social solidarity. They create, in fantasy or in reality, a solidarity more inflexible, more controlling, more overwhelming than any kinship system ever provided."⁸

Yet we do need a source – of inspiration, orientation, and identity. We have to find it and shape it, however, in the context of the present time. An appeal to a source does not work when it implies a denial of current social reality. Then the source is the opposite of what is wrong now and the ideal becomes contemporary society minus its shortcomings. Such an ideal is fed by resentment about how society now works, by a failure to accept the present (with its plurality, immigrants, uninterested people). Resentment and nostalgia are not good guidelines. The present is not an anomaly which has to be erased as quickly as possible.

The speech-making politicians regard contemporary society as an objectionable fact, a source of problems they have to concoct a solution for. They do not want reality as it is, but as it would arise in its improved form from their interventions. They seem to ask themselves: "Why do the citizens not participate in what is good for them? Why are they so stubborn or indifferent? If they only showed some civic responsibility, our tasks would be less unmanageable. In the old days, people used to participate." In the old days, yes ... When a social, cultural and normative orientation to the past is combined with a pragmatic-technological and industrial orientation to the future, we have a conservatism which, at first, may look reasonable, but which, as we know from bitter experience, is in fact a dangerous and uncontrollable mixture.

2.2 Contemporary plurality: multiple calculations without one ultimate standard

An orientation to the past has consequences for the observation of contemporary plurality. This is regarded in terms of how it used to be. In the following

discussion, we will see that this leads to a misperception and misjudgment of contemporary society and its possibilities. Contemporary society is indeed offensive, exciting, and it shows disintegrative tendencies. Old associations fall apart or lose influence. They can no longer be trusted and it is no longer possible to rely on members' behaviour. New associations, such as temping agencies, futures markets, old people's organizations, organized crime, and various protest-oriented social movements come and go before they have found an acceptable and recognizable place within established decision-making structures and data-collections. Categories, such as those of the Central Bureau of Statistics or of the political parties, with which we classify reality and make it manageable, fail time and again. They provide insufficient grip on what we want to grasp. The dynamic and multiform social reality – or should we say realities? – is not readily represented, neither in parliament or other representative bodies, nor in the classifying work of economists, sociologists, and other scientists.

Is there a guaranteeing story, a founding principle which can keep this recondite plurality manageable and acceptable? People used to find this in a "hidden hand" (Adam Smith); in the dialectics of history (Hegel, Marx); in the fight against prejudices (The Enlightenment); in discussions, hearing both sides, technological pragmatism Nowadays, however, the belief that such a founding principle exists has disappeared. Each attempt to construct an authoritative metastory is suspect. Each attempt to tell such a story is distrusted as hidden tyranny.

The task and place of politics are no longer guaranteed in a metastory either. Politics – we, participants in plural society – must maintain and renew its legitimacy itself. The place and task of politics are not guaranteed by "the" standards of "the" Dutch culture. That culture is plural not unitary. Therefore, an appeal for civic responsibility cannot refer to a common cultural standard, the existence of which is taken for granted.

Misled by an imaginary stability in the past, the politicians construe a false opposition between the calculating and the responsible citizen. They misperceive the indispensable role of calculation in the organization of plurality, or for that matter in any modern form of social order. Even some slaves had to calculate to do their work; citizens even more so. Appealing to citizens to adhere to standards and to not take a calculating attitude is simply inappropriate. A citizen who complies with this will, by not calculating, often disturb the organization of plurality. After all, calculation is indispensable in the organization of changing plurality and in the formation of a judgment about what constitutes a sensible application of standards. We count on each other's calculation – without it the organization of contemporary plurality is not conceivable.

Calculation and adherence to moral or legal standards are not opposites. Without standards there is no calculation. Calculation presupposes the attri-

bution of value to the elements that are part of the calculation, as well as rules concerning the combination of these elements. In the evaluation of the usefulness and appropriateness of calculations in a certain situation, standards as well as calculation play a role. Also, calculation is acceptable with regard to standards and their appropriateness. Consider judicial tenets of *force majeure* and self-defence. Calculation is allowed, and is part of citizens' normal behaviour. Law both promotes and restricts calculation. Consider, for instance, the doctrine of the lawful act of government, which states that certain government actions are not unlawful as long as the government pays for the (calculated) damage resulting from its actions. Calculation is used to organize accountability. Calculation means thinking in consequences, "being able to count on it", taking into account that Consultants, lawyers, officials of an unemployment agency or a business firm assist their citizens/clients by making calculations on their behalf. Calculation is simply an indispensable element in the normative organisation of social interaction.

2.3 An appeal addressed to whom?

Who exactly are the people to whom the appeal for civic responsibility is addressed? The active citizens or those who are uninterested? Also companies, consultants, children, stay-at-homes? And people who live in the country but are not citizens of that country? In fact citizens' lack of interest is criticized in speeches which are addressed to those who were interested enough to come and listen. The politicians' criticism, however, concerns those who do not hear the speeches, the outsiders who did not come to listen. Thus, what the speakers in fact do is to rally the insiders against the uninterested outsiders. More will be said about uninterested citizens below. First we will consider the people the appeals are primarily meant for; the good citizens. An appeal directed at them also poses problems, those of paradoxical communication and of the colonization of their life-world.

Paradoxical communication arises when the act of communication denies the content of the message that is communicated. For example, "Be spontaneous": the act of commanding conflicts with the content of the message. Such communication leaves those it is addressed to perplexed, in two minds. Imposing civic responsibility on free citizens, or talking them into it, is experienced as paradoxical by many. "I'll be the judge of that" is a much heard reaction to appeals for civic responsibility.

One could argue that such a reaction is uncalled for, because these are attempts by citizens to convince fellow-citizens. However, it is not that simple. After all, attempts to convince fellow-citizens are made by people who, as office holders, have a compulsory relationship of authority with those whom

they address. To many, a cabinet minister is not simply a fellow-citizen when he is giving a speech. Yet, accusations of a lack of civic responsibility also have their problems in a debate between free and equal citizens. By making such accusations, the speaker implicitly questions the citizenship, the free and equal status, of the person addressed. Whichever way one looks at it, appeals for civic responsibility retain a paradoxical aspect in almost all situations. Citizenship is the basis on which convictions and appeals between citizens may develop. Rarely ever can this basis itself be protected against erosion by way of appeals.

"Colonization of the life-world" is a term used by Jürgen Habermas.⁹ Systems of health care, finance, higher education etcetera require system-conform behaviour from ordinary people in order to be reasonably controllable and to provide their products. If such behaviour is to be relied on, it should be rooted in the life-world of the people involved. Yet, this world often generates standards and behaviour, traditional or not, that do not fit the requirements of modern system-management. Traditional or life-world ethics thus conflict with modern system-ethics. Such a conflict very clearly emerges with environmental issues. For the purpose of preserving the environment, of system-preservation, we are invited by experts on the system to believe their (often inadequately tested) elaborations, and to act accordingly.¹⁰ We are required to do what is necessary for the preservation of systems on which we are dependent for our survival. This is asking for an "empty" ethics, a blank cheque, the concrete interpretation of which may turn out to contradict our deepest convictions. Linking traditionally substantive values to a formal, or at least variable, willingness to conform to system requirements is problematic. It leads to ambiguity in the appeals for civic responsibility. Which kind of civic responsibility is called for? The one that is traditional in content or the one that supports system-steering?

We now turn to the uninterested citizen, the black sheep in the politicians' speeches. Why, actually, would it be wrong for a citizen to be uninterested? Democratic theorizing following the Second World War regarded apathy as something positive. Enthusiastic participation by many, it was said, would easily lead to polarization, ideology, and intolerance. It would make for a totalitarian democracy or result in civil war. Political elites, which were pragmatic and willing to compromise, and relatively inactive and obedient masses were regarded as conditions for a stable democracy. Today, this theory does not offer solutions because the new uninterested citizens, unlike their counterparts in the fifties, do not spontaneously behave "properly", that is, in line with the good citizens. They "misbehave". Whereas apathy used to be regarded as good for democracy, lack of interest is now seen as undermining it.

In their speeches Dutch politicians indicate four major problems, the solution to which, in their view, would be thwarted by citizens' lack of interest:

1. maintaining the law and keeping society governable;
2. mutual care and the preservation of solidarity in the welfare state;
3. political participation and the viability of democracy;
4. participation in employment and the viability of the social market economy.

By fighting lack of interest and by promoting civic responsibility, the politicians hope to contribute to the solution of these problems. Can this be done and is it allowed? First we will consider whether it can be done.

As we saw earlier, there is no longer one source (such as a Christian upbringing) in contemporary society, from which a unified and active citizenry could arise. The ways of learning that lead to the qualities required under the four points above are nowadays relatively unconnected. A person who becomes more helpful does not thereby become more lawabiding or politically active. Extensive political participation leaves too little time for the work and quick decision-making required by the market. Each of the spheres mentioned above, law, care, politics, and employment, has developed its own independence and logic despite their entwinement. An appeal for civic responsibility cannot bring unity here.

If all of these problems cannot be handled simultaneously, can we not take a more modest approach by promoting civic responsibility per area or sector? We might focus on the interest that uninterested citizens have in receiving and maintaining community provisions. Such citizens must be made aware of their interest. Those who are already aware that they have an interest but do not want to pay the price in the form of a contribution, can be made to appreciate their interest by affecting their income or freedom. This way, "free rider's" behaviour would no longer pay off. Administration of justice, providing care, employment mediation, social security provisions would thus become disciplinary institutions. People have to be shown and told how things are, and those who do not want to listen should be made to feel.

In practice, however, very little comes of this. The policy-making bodies remain anonymous to indifferent people and the individual executive civil servant usually has little disciplinary power. He is often threatened by clients and has no leeway to act as he feels appropriate. Disciplinary power only works in situations that occur within total institutions, which encompass many aspects of life. Even prisons and schools no longer work that way today.

The next question we come to is: should a lack of interest be fought as being the opposite of civic responsibility? With regard to the public-political sphere, various positions can be distinguished: slave (will-less follower); citizen (partly giving shape); enemy (undermining); contractor-consumer (taking advantage). From a neo-republican perspective the latter may not be simply rejected and fought against. Citizens have a right to be uninterested. (Although specific obligations in specific situations may overrule this right.) No more

obligations may be imposed on citizens who lack interest than on others. The conditions set for citizens, uninterested or otherwise, are the same.

Is a lack of interest on the part of citizens actually bad? Assuming that it were allowed and could be effective, would it make sense to fight lack of interest? The answer is not straightforward. Lack of interest, ignoring each other, is often a successful way of dealing with plurality. Yet there is more. Allowing lack of interest is essential for the functioning of a free society. People who simply turn away, who take the exit-option, provide important signals on the road of peaceful change in a free society.¹¹ It is not only companies that can learn from the fact that customers walk away; political parties, systems of care and law can as well. A mixture of loyal and uninterested citizens works best here. Those who take the exit-option give a tangible signal, which starts a process of change that is supported by the loyal citizens. Having only loyal citizens results in blindness, having only uninterested citizens in powerlessness.

The acknowledgement of people's freedom not to be interested – to be neither for nor against, but indifferent or simply interested in matters other than citizenship – breaks through the smothering logic of "those who are not for us are against us." Internal contradiction (something is either *a* or *b*) works differently from external contradiction (something is either *a* or non-*a*; but being non-*a* does not entail that it is *b*). The East European communist regimes acted so foolishly, were so stuck, and needed such immense secret services because, among other things, they were caught in the logic of internal contradiction, of friend or foe. In free republics, a similar logic surfaces regularly, but can also be fought freely. For instance, one can refuse to make the choice "for or against Europe", just as one can refuse to choose for "civic responsibility or lack of interest".

Equating lack of interest with lack of civic responsibility is misplaced, not only because a citizen has the right to be uninterested, but also because too many essentially different positions are concealed in the term "lack of interest". We have the free-rider, i.e. the person taking advantage, who is interested in the common cause, but secretly refrains from contributing whenever he has the chance. Then there is the cynic, who can take any position but believes in nothing. And there is the person who has a weak will – a man of good intentions and weak flesh. There are uninterested people who are dedicated to matters other than citizenship and therefore, in their behaviour, do not show a great deal of civic responsibility. And finally, there are real opponents and underminers of the republic. These different types cannot be fought successfully by allowing them to hide behind an undifferentiated screen of uninterested people who are all said to lack civic responsibility.

We have analysed the appeals for more civic responsibility that some Dutch politicians have addressed to their fellow citizens. Their speeches are strong

with respect to morality, but weak with respect to social analysis. They want a society they won't get; a society that is both governable and modelled on an imaginary past. They are not in a position to say what they want to say. They talk as equals from positions of authority. That results in paradoxical communication. They call on individuals to be more responsible, but this cannot result in the unity among citizens that they desire. Either the citizens respond, individually – and their responses are unlikely to form a spontaneous unity; or they sign a blank ethical cheque, to be filled in by experts and rulers – an abdication of responsibility unfitting for citizens.

We are interested in the social sources of vital citizenship. The moral appeals of politicians do not help, except to exemplify pitfalls, i.e. what citizens should not do. Can questions concerning the vitality of citizenship be tackled more successfully if we adopt a different approach to the politicians in positions of authority? By addressing the culture that encompasses individuals rather than the individuals themselves (which only reinforces the individualism that was precisely the problem)? In the next section this route is tried.

3 Naturalizing nationalism

We could consider the views of many non-officeholders (ordinary citizens in public debate, leaders of right-wing groups) and study many encompassing cultures (Christianity, the work ethic). In this section we will focus on intellectuals who have recently advocated forms of nationalism as a basis for citizenship. We suggest that their case is fairly representative of problems encountered by persons other than intellectuals and cultures other than nationalism.

The recent resurgence of nationalist political movements and conflicts has been reflected upon by intellectuals, who for a long time showed no great interest in such an outdated and imaginary phenomenon as nationalism. They describe, study, explain and condone. Quite a few of them have made a change of position that may be characterized as “naturalizing nationalism while simultaneously historicising (de-naturalizing) liberal democracy.” This change of position will be analysed below.

Not long ago the majority of intellectuals regarded nationalism as something constructed, an artefact. It was considered to be dangerous and should be kept firmly in its subaltern place in the political order. Nowadays many intellectuals who write about nationalism regard it as something natural/human, which apart from having vicious elements also has the potential for peaceful cooperation, and which in any case forms an indispensable and central principle of political order.

How has this change of vision come about? It must be said, that the intellectuals, to their credit, openly admit that they have changed positions.

They report a kind of conversion, a moment when they began to see what they could not or would not see earlier. “Looking back, I see that time in the crypt as a moment when I began to change, when some element of respect for the national project began to creep into my feelings, when I understood why land and grave matter and why the nations matter which protect both.”¹² Formerly, the intellectuals tell us, they had, as good liberals, contempt for nationalism. “I both disliked and disbelieved the ambient rhetoric of national decline. It struck me mostly as a suppressed form of imperial nostalgia. [...] But as I have lived here longer, I have come to see that the space for a multi-cultural, multi-racial, post-national cosmopolitanism in Britain was much narrower than I had supposed. [...] In reality, the British are among the most fiercely nationalistic of all peoples.”¹³ Tony Judt writes about the erstwhile historicist critics, both liberals and Marxists, of nationalism: “Nationalism and national identity are taken seriously but not on their own terms, and so they elude understanding.”¹⁴ Now, in 1997, we know better: “If we wish to counter such views we have to begin by acknowledging that they contain a kernel of truth. There *are* incommensurate goals and unresolvable problems, and the unequal and conflicted division of the world into nations and peoples is not about to wither and shrivel or be overcome by goodwill or progress.”¹⁵ To see or not (yet) to see, that seems to be the question. As Paul Scheffer writes: “What those critics [of the new acceptance of nationalism, HvG] don't see is that every society needs to procure for itself some ‘minima moralia’, which consist in more than universal values only.”¹⁶

The vision of those converted intellectuals then, roughly speaking, is that nationalism *is* (is a part of living together, fulfils a basic human need) and is *necessary* (for living together). The question is no longer nationalism or not, for or against. The question is not whether, but only how to give it form or modify it. It makes no sense to ignore or fight against something that is unavoidable and indispensable.

How may we understand this collective, constructive move that “enlightened” intellectuals have made with regard to nationalism? And what notions of social order are implied in their new ways of seeing? Studies by the anthropologist Mary Douglas on self-evidence and “the natural” help us answer these questions.

In every society some things and relations are accepted as self-evident, inviolable and natural. Each culture, as it were, has its own notion of nature and the natural. This usually concerns matters and relations that are so central in the prevailing social and moral order that any doubt about them should be banished. They are stated and repeated, but by no means maintained by reasoning. Their self-evident character is confirmed in the way they are presented. What is natural does not even need argument. Who would argue against nature?

The natural is constructed in such a way that it confirms and supports the social and moral order. The central elements in this order are placed beyond criticism and argument. They are self-evident and natural. He who doubts them is either crazy or an insufficiently informed outsider. Unnatural behaviour is what disturbs the social/moral order and is therefore harmful. What is unnatural should be excluded or imprisoned. Aliens are creatures that break through "natural" classifications. Examples are the centaur who is half man half animal, or persons who are not legal residents in the country but who nevertheless cash in on support or even vote in elections (as happened in Amsterdam in 1994). The natural order should be kept purely natural; both the order of things (ecology) and that of people. Governments too must respect the natural givens in society. When they fail to do this, their policies will be considered ineffective as well as harmful.

From this anthropological point of view changing conceptions of what is natural/unavoidable signal changes in social classifications and order. Let us consider, in light of this, the changing ideas about the naturalness of nationalism. Do we find there the three hallmarks of the natural: (1) repeated presentation of "natural" givens without argument, which (2) support the social-moral order and (3) justify exclusion of what does not fit because of its unnaturalness?

An unargued and repeated insistence about the unavoidability of some form of nationalism was found in some intellectuals' confessions about their conversion. Conversion is not about arguments but rather about an insight that comes from outside or within but certainly from beyond argument. How do intellectuals, who are, after all, specialists in argument, allow themselves to become convinced without argument? As a result of bad argument; a presentation that looks like argument but which, on closer inspection, is not logical. There are four typical ways of doing this.

The first way is the juxtaposition and interchangeable use of terms like "basic human need", "identity", "something to hold on to", "belonging", "group", "tradition" and "nationalism". The suggestion is that we, reader and writer, all know what these terms refer to and what their connection and communality is. In their presentation some kind of community is suggested and imagined.

A second way to avoid argument is to present pressing problems and then, without argument, qualify them as problems of identity. However, not every pressing political problem is a problem of identity. We need to investigate how, in what circumstances, conflicts become conflicts of identity. On holiday in France my Dutch children were playing a game of Risk with some French children. They hardly understood each others language. They played together well, until words exchanged between speakers of one tongue were "heard" by "the others" as a conspiracy to outplay the foreigners. Play then ceased and was replaced by a shouting match between the French and the Dutch.

A third way in which argument can be avoided is to insist that "something" more than laws is needed to make political democracy and the laws themselves work, and then to offer feelings of nationalism as this "something". Indeed the laws need more than themselves to work, they are not self-executing. But what this more involves needs argument and has been widely contested. Candidates have been the division of labour (Durkheim); disciplinary practices (Foucault); the spirit of the laws (Montesquieu); leadership of a lawgiver (Rousseau)¹⁸; and, yes, nationalism. Here too study and argument are needed to determine what principles of order, anchored in feelings and behaviour, achieve and how they can be harnessed in what circumstances.

A fourth way to avoid argument and to naturalize nationalism is by essentialising situated speech. Talk about a national cabinet or about the nation being in peril during a war is perfectly understandable in its context. But it does not necessarily follow that we may study nationalism as an attitude, feeling or essence (as a ghost in the machine, to use Ryle's term).¹⁹ In certain situations the statement "you are an angel" is perfectly comprehensible, but it does not lead to an investigation into the properties of angels. Why should it be otherwise with nationalism?

Naturalization has its benefits. He who can invoke nature has reality on his side. De Schaepdrijver clearly shows this in her analysis of nationalism in Belgium:

The essentialist vision of language groups as by definition nations, and the homogenizing assumption that bilingualism in one area naturally leads to conflicts, acquired the power of self-evidence in the articulated public sphere some time ago. The 'natural evolution', of which Prime Minister Van den Brande spoke, has indeed lost its 'natural' limits, and the political compromise of Sint Michiels is therefore retained on the basis of pragmatism rather than principle. This merely pragmatic foundation enables separatists to paint proponents of even a merely federal Belgium as nostalgic people, and to contrast their 'emotional appeals' with the 'cool reality' of the necessity of separation.²⁰

While nationalism has been naturalized, liberalism is being de-naturalized. How does this work? With the insistence on a historically developed consensus as an indispensable element of a viable political community and as a condition for, or even a core element of, liberalism, the place of liberalism in the world is fundamentally changed. It loses its universal appeal and openness. Liberalism is turned into a historical product and, as a result, is not accessible to all people. The implications of such a coupling of liberalism with a particular historical culture are clearly stated in a newspaper article by the philosopher Herman Philipse: "The inflow of immigrants should, therefore, not be allowed to become too great (also because of overpopulation in our mini-country) and we will have to teach the immigrants the game of democracy and its concomitant public morality with care and love."²¹ Here the implications of the naturalization

of nationalism are stated without further ado: quantitative containment and education of newcomers. Thus nationalism not only ascribes qualities to us, the insiders, but also to them, the outsiders. They are different, lack what we have in common.

What element of the internal moral and social order is protected and expressed by this external attribution of properties to outsiders? In our opinion it is the internal order of useful/superfluous people and materials. In contemporary societies a lot of waste is being produced with great dedication, such as rubbish, which is superfluous matter, and the unemployed, who are superfluous people. These accumulate in mountains of polluted soil and queues of people waiting for their turn. To increase efficiency is "to do more with less" and therefore to get rid of waste. In a social-moral order centered on increasing efficiency, politics is cornered into the role of waste disposal, of ordering the superfluous.

What is usually lacking in the interventions of intellectuals concerning nationalism is content. This is understandable. Each nationalism is supposed to be unique, so what can an individual possibly say about it? In societies that are de facto plural, any attempt to give nationalism a specific content will meet with criticism and thus fail to exemplify the consensus that it purports to have found. That something like nationalism is necessary, unavoidable, and natural is clear, but what its content is and what should be done with dissidents usually remains unclear. What also usually remains hidden is the constructive activity of the intellectuals themselves. Nationalism was and remains a constructed artefact. If it fulfils a human need, it does so in a culturally specific way which involves a culturally specific interpretation or construction of that need. This insight is sometimes forgotten by the new nationalists. Their constructive activities do not thereby cease to exist, but they take place in the dark; unregulated by law, politics and empirical testing. Liberalism recognized the need for order, but rejected means to achieve this that go beyond the law, the constitution and politics. This position was eloquently expressed by justice Jackson of the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Barnette* case.

Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good as well as by evil men. Nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon but at other times and places the ends have been racial or territorial security, support of a dynasty or regime, and particular plans for saving souls. As first and moderate methods to attain unity have failed, those bent on its accomplishment must resort to an ever-increasing severity. As governmental pressure toward unity becomes greater, so strife becomes more bitter as to whose unity it shall be. Probably no deeper division of our people could proceed from any provocation than from finding it necessary to choose what doctrine and whose program public educational officials shall compel youth to unite in

embracing. Ultimate futility of such attempts to compel coherence is the lesson of every such effort from the Roman drive to stamp out Christianity as a disturber of its pagan unity, the Inquisition, as a means to religious and dynastic unity, the Siberian exiles as a means to Russian unity, down to the fast failing efforts of our present totalitarian enemies (1943, HvG). Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard. It seems trite but necessary to say that the First Amendment to our Constitution was designed to avoid these ends by avoiding these beginnings. [...] When they are so harmless to others or to the State as those we deal with here (a refusal to salute the flag, HvG), the price is not too great. But freedom to differ is not limited to things that do not matter much. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the existing order.²²

The intellectuals who naturalize nationalism do not sufficiently appreciate the dangers of their strive for unity and order. They make nationalism acceptable while leaving its content underspecified. Their own brand of nationalism may look peaceful and acceptable, but they remain practically defenceless against objectionable fillers of a theoretically empty shell. They conceive national unity to be an indispensable embedment for citizenship. Believing in this national unity then becomes a primary duty of the citizen. With some exaggeration one could say that, whereas dealing with differences is the point of citizenship for neo-republicans, the point of citizenship for the new nationalists is the cultivation of a feeling of unity that overrides differences.

4 Against consensus

We have now looked at two efforts to understand and restore the social sources of viable political citizenship: the politicians' calls for civic responsibility and the intellectuals' insistence on nationalism as a natural necessity. These efforts were found wanting, empirically and normatively. These social engineers have views of how society works that are steered by their wish that it be orderly and governable. Their leading question is: how should society be for it to be governable? What does not comply with *this* imagined society is ignored or swept aside as unfitting. The political problem of organizing plurality, disturbing differences and conflicts between people, is "solved" by positing its opposite: unity. The moral unity of responsible individuals or the historical unity of the nation. Citizens, whose task it is to deal with harsh differences among themselves, are only admitted as citizens after they have shed their disturbing differences. Such a solution to problems, by denial and exclusion, will not work. Furthermore, it results in poor social analysis and a primitive notion of social order. Primitive because the desired outcome, the unity of reliable order,

is posited as the beginning: consensus. Below we will question the idea, prevalent in these and many other approaches, that consensus is a prerequisite for social and political order.

In the great majority of studies, discourses, and policies that concern the vitality of citizenship, consensus occupies a central place. This is understandable: if people agree they have no reason to quarrel and differ. The idea that by increasing consensus we shall diminish disturbing and disruptive differences, therefore seems logical.

Nevertheless some nagging questions remain. What if people want to differ, even when they agree about many things? What if they search for, or cultivate and create, differences to fight about? And doesn't the idea of a consensual society run counter to liberal principles of freedom and to the insight that resilience usually resides in diversity? Isn't a consensual society a dead society, cut off from its sources of vitality? Many defenders of consensus as a condition of peaceful living together would grant these points and withdraw to a more modest position. They would argue that, in order to differ peacefully about some things, people need to agree about some other things as "basics" or terms of peace. Some consensus is needed. It is a prerequisite for social and political order.

We disagree, even with the more modest position. We think that the statement "some consensus surely is necessary" is either true by definition – an axiom that cannot be proven false – or a statement that can be empirically falsified, that in fact is not always true. Consensus, we have become convinced, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the organization of plurality by citizens in a republic. Why?

If a society is not to fall apart, it must somehow hang together, have parts that fit. When we call this fit "consensus", we seem to make an innocent move. People obviously agree somehow, somewhere, don't they? However, the move is not innocent at all, neither normatively nor empirically. The term consensus suggests a way of seeing and doing things that those involved would recognize as their own. Consensus need not always be explicit and conscious, but when an implicit consensus is pointed out to those involved they should confirm that this is what they participated in. Consensus always has connotations of agreement, of consent. The behaviours of slave and master fit together, but there is no (human) consensus. We cannot conceive that human beings would consent to such a relationship. Or rather, we do not accept such a relationship as human, and therefore consider there to be something wrong with the humaneness of those who do (seem to) consent to such relationships. Thus, the idea that when behaviours fit together this indicates, or must be due to, consensus is untenable. Fit may or may not go hand in hand with consensus.

Even when there is consensus further specification is in order. Is it consensus in values, in lifestyles, in ways of doing things that apply locally (like driving

on the right hand side of the road)? Does consensus stand for uniformity, or for fitting together? The pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together, but the fun of the puzzle is precisely that they are not obviously the same or identical. How deep and permanent is the consensus? Consensus has connotations of permanence and reliability over time, but how deep and permanent does it actually have to be to count as consensus? Not very. When visitors to Amsterdam quarrel with the Dutch, they usually do so in English. There is a consensus to speak this language, but it is neither permanent nor deep. The consensus does not hold in other situations. We have the idea that consensus needs a deep and permanent anchorage – in God, a long history, one's innermost convictions, or whatever. Even when metaphysical foundations have become discredited and unstable, people cling to the idea of an anchorage which corresponds to the deeply felt human need for a home, roots, continuity, and a liveable future. But why should a need, simply because it is deeply felt, have a deep "solution"? However, leaving metaphysical and other certainties behind does not imply that we should embrace arbitrariness and ignore the human need for continuity. The discovery that Dutch is not a universal language, or that Santa Claus does not exist, does not force us to stop speaking Dutch or celebrating Santa Claus' birthday. On the contrary, insight into the contingent character of such matters invites us to care for their preservation.

We may mislocate the source of consensus. When we shake hands, their forms fit. Is this a consensus between hands? Obviously not. It is the will, the consensus, to shake hands that makes the forms fit. This shows that external fit is not necessarily the source or locus of consensus, but rather its result. This insight may, in turn, lead to the equally mistaken assumption that there is always an inner source of consensus that accounts for the external fit. Such an assumption is difficult to refute – when cornered defenders can always switch to another inner source – but it can surely be undermined by considering how things work in the world. Then we quickly see that consensus about values (things we hold dear, deep down inside) is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for peaceful interaction between people. Spouses who agree about a great many values may kill each other (not a sufficient condition, therefore). There are cultures and situations in which "incomprehensible" strangers are received in guest-friendship (not a necessary condition, therefore). The idea that there *must* be a consensus is a requirement of our (way of) thinking, of our grammar (in Wittgenstein's sense). (Just as the impossibility to feel someone else's pain is grammatically determined. Pain that one feels is, by definition, one's own pain.) We always find this requirement confirmed. When people can live together peacefully and communicate, this "must" be due to a minimum of consensus. (For example: when two people dance together, when their movements fit together, this must be due to the common

rhythm that they hear in their heads, to the band that plays with such swinging and contagious conviction. And how is this with sexual intercourse?) What makes us so sure of this "must"? Is it based on experience?²³

In those situations in which people succeed in dealing peacefully with differences, values and principles reveal themselves in their actions. Regardless of whether those values were common before the act(ions), they are apparently common now. A successful interaction constitutes a precedent, offers values and principles for future interactions. This way of formulating things acknowledges that pre-existent values are not always necessary for peaceful interaction and that the interaction itself can create values. However, in our view this way of formulating things still puts too much emphasis on values. It neglects the fact that values and principles, even when firmly established, have to be applied competently and be weighed against conflicting values and principles. It is precisely in times when plurality pops up everywhere that competent handling of conflicts of loyalties and values becomes an indispensable civic virtue. The exercise of this ability also creates precedents, values and principles. These, however, have a meta-character and their application demands situational judgment. They are neither self-evident nor self-executing.

Of course we want a permanent and firm anchorage for institutions that enable us to deal with conflicts peacefully. But no metaphysical anchorage or justification can prevent such meta-institutions themselves becoming objects of primary conflicts in plural societies. Nowadays there is no longer, if there ever was, one substantive formula that binds all members together and deals with such conflicts. Plurality is nowadays not only a practical problem, but pops up everywhere: in metaphysical foundations, in systems of rules, in social fragmentation. There is no longer one rationality, one administration, one national society. Unity is no longer considered a given – a given that we did not always clearly see, but for which we could search together. Unity is now not expected to come from outside (meta) and can neither be found *in* society nor in systems-steering. The recurrent political task of citizens is to achieve unity by themselves.

In many theories consensus is conceived as a necessary condition for citizens acting together in peace. These views are mistaken. Consensus is not a condition, but precisely a problem that citizens have to work on. Consensus is not a precondition, but rather a desired outcome of citizen activities. It is on this point that the neo-republican theory of citizenship differs from other theories.²⁴ Neo-republicans regard the organization of problematic plurality as a central task, whereas many other conceptions opt for a substantive definition of citizenship, the unity of which is the exact denial of plurality, thereby getting around this contemporary problem. Their strategy is to emphasize unity and so reduce plurality until it ceases to be a problem. Neo-republican citizenship, on the other hand, increases competence in dealing with existing plurality.

If citizenship is to be more than an idea, it needs to be embraced and practiced by actual people. The wish to foster commitment to citizenship and civic virtue is understandable and legitimate. But it cannot be fulfilled by postulating the necessity and unavoidability of unity, and by moralizing about it. This is both bad social science and bad politics. Bad social science, because society does not work that way. Bad politics, because it is either ineffective or inimical to the idea of political interaction between a plurality of equal citizens. The appeal to consensus is either too vague or simply wrong. Too vague as long as it remains unclear what it refers to – sameness, fit, acquiescence or consent; in ideas or actual behaviour. It is wrong when it assumes the necessity of a value consensus. No vital modern society works that way. It needs tension, differences, dynamics. The idea that unity of values is essential conflates a desired result with the conditions for producing it. Those conditions are neither permanent nor do they always consist of values. They are in fact variable and often have no connection with values, whether deeply held and shared or not.

When it is said that Holland is a "consensual society", this paints a picture of agreement as a normal and permanent condition of society, of consensus as something given, a starting point. This picture is wrong. It obscures the fact that Dutch people are used to working hard to produce consensus, to transform and define their differences in such a way that all can agree to live with them. Such agreement can be called "consensus". When it is often aimed for and achieved, we may speak of a "consensus society", without however forgetting that this indicates a desirable outcome of citizen interaction and not a precondition.

Why is the consensus assumption so widespread? This may result from the way people conceive of "cultural facts". Cultural facts are facts that would not exist without human agreement – marriage, soccer, puberty, an order, law, money. They are ontologically subjective, because their existence depends on what human subjects do and intend. In this they differ from ontologically objective facts, like a thunderstorm or the moon, which are what they are regardless of what human beings think and do. Ontological subjectivity and objectivity must be distinguished from epistemic subjectivity and objectivity.²⁵ Taste is epistemically subjective, an observation that can be corrected is epistemically objective. Correct use of an established language like English is epistemically objective and ontologically subjective. Cultural facts get their solid objective "hardness" (we cannot change them at will) through the "soft" (culturally and historically variable) activities and interpretations made by human subjects. When these activities and interpretations stop or change, the cultural facts cease to be (what they were). When words cease to be accepted or "counted" as an order by those involved, they cease being an order.

Once this characteristic of cultural facts has been accepted, one is tempted to assume that the facts are based on a consensus in the sense of shared normative

convictions by all those who are involved in the "creation" of those facts. However, their involvement need not be normative at all. People are realistic, they are not going to deny the existence of facts. They stick to the facts, regardless of whether these are "natural" (ontologically objective) or cultural (ontologically subjective). I speak Dutch because that is the language of the country where I live; I use Dutch postage stamps because that is what I need to send a letter. This is not because I have certain values or norms, but because those are the cultural facts here. Through my behaviour I contribute to the continued existence of those cultural facts, but it would be mistaken to see this as consensus on norms and values. Such normative consensus may or may not be there, empirically, among some of the people involved. But as long as the cultural facts are firmly established it is difficult to sort out who acts out of inner conviction and who out of realistic conformism.

This changes when the cultural facts, for whatever reason or through whatever incident, begin to lose their self-evident character. Then earlier motivations are revealed. Those people who previously supported the facts through their actual behaviour out of realism, will now stop doing so. To say that they have then lost or changed values and norms is incorrect, because these had never played a role. Those who valued the cultural facts in question will try to uphold the behaviour that supported them. As will, for a while, those who act out of routine and tradition.

Many people, it seems to us, stick to cultural facts not because they agree with them normatively, but because they are so established that disagreeing makes no sense. It is not consensus, an inner conviction, but realism that motivates them. It is their realism that results in a conformity in behaviour, that we are tempted to interpret as originating from an inner conviction, a consensus.

Notes

1. The text of this speech was published in the journal *Christen Democratische Verkenningen*, November, 1990.
2. E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin, speech on the occasion of the anniversary of the Catholic "Radboudstichting" in 's-Hertogenbosch, June 15, 1991.
3. See for instance "Op zoek naar licht tussen de wolken van een Hollandse zomerlucht", speech made by E. Brinkman, chairman of the CDA parliamentary party, at the CDA meeting of June 1, 1991.
4. Karl Marx, *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: The Viking Press, 1965.
5. *NRC-Handelsblad*, February 27, 1992, p. 9 ("Buitenlandse commentatoren hekelen in koor de vervuiling en onveiligheid op straat in de grote Nederlandse steden ...").

6. "The intertransportability of models *for* and models *of* which symbolic formulation makes possible is the distinctive characteristic of our mentality." Clifford Geertz *The interpretation of cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p.94.
7. Plato, *Gorgias* 515; from *Plato The Collected Dialogues*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
8. Ely Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America*, New York: Basic Books, 1991, p. 146.
9. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Band 2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981, p. 476.
10. Aaron Wildavsky, *But is it true? A citizen's guide to environmental health and safety issues*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
11. Alexander Zinoviev, *The Yawning Heights*, London: The Bodley Head, 1979; Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, and "Négation active et négation passive: essai de sociologie ivanienne", *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 21, pp. 329-49; Albert Hirschmann, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, London: Harvard University Press, 1970.
12. Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and belonging*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, p.93-94.
13. Michael Ignatieff, op. cit., p.168.
14. Tony Judt, "The new old nationalism", *New York Review of Books*, May 26 1994, p.45.
15. Tony Judt, op. cit., p.51.
16. Paul Scheffer, "Nederland als een open deur", *NRC-Handelsblad*, January 1, 1995: "Wat deze critici niet zien is dat elke samenleving zichzelf een minima moralia moet verschaffen, die uit meer dan universele waarden alleen bestaat".
17. Mary Douglas, "Selfevidence", in *Implicit meanings*, London: Routledge, 1975, pp. 276-318.
18. "Je parle des moeurs, des coutumes, et surtout de l'opinion; partie inconnue à nos politiques, mais de laquelle dépend le succès de toutes les autres; partie dont le grand législateur s'occupe en secret, tandis qu'il paroît se borner à des règlements particuliers, qui ne sont que le cintre de la voute, dont les moeurs, plus lentes à naître, forment enfin l'inébranlable clef." *Du contrat social*, book 2, chapter 12.
19. Gilbert Ryle, *The concept of mind*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.
20. Sophie de Schaepdrijver, "België als kunstwerk, of de versplintering van een natiebegrif", *Beleid & maatschappij* 1995, no. 2, p.109-116: "De essentialistische visie op taalgroepen als naties per definitie, en de homogeneïsche vooronderstelling dat tweetaligheid in één gebied vanzelf tot conflicten leidt, hebben in de gearticuleerde openbaarheid al lang de macht van de vanzelfsprekendheid verworven. Hierdoor kent de 'natuurlijke' evolutie van Van den Brande inderdaad geen 'natuurlijke' grenzen meer en blijft het Sint-Michiels-evenwicht eerder op pragmatische dan op principiële grondslag bewaard. Deze slechts pragmatische onderbouwing stelt separatisten in staat om de voorvechters van zelfs een gefederaliseerd België af te schilderen als nostalgici, en hun 'emotionele appels' af te zetten tegen de 'koele realiteit' van de noodzaak tot scheiding." (Translation HvG)

21. NRC-*Handelsblad*, September 8, 1994: "De immigratiestromen zullen dus niet te groot mogen worden (ook al vanwege de overbevolking van ons minilandje) en we zullen de immigranten met zorg en liefde het democratische spel en de bijbehorende publieke moraal moeten leren." (Translation HvG)

22. Justice Jackson in West Virginia state board of education versus Barnette, 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

23. That common codes or meanings should be a condition of communication is refuted by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p.15-21. I found extensive coverage of this matter by Nicholas Rescher. I quote his conclusion: "Consensus is not a criterion of truth is not a standard of value is not an index of moral or ethical appropriateness is not a requisite for cooperation is not a communal imperative for a just social order is not, in and of itself, an appropriate ideal. All in all, our position is a markedly guarded one that downgrades consensus both as a theoretical standard and as a practical requisite. Consensus – so we have seen – is no more than one positive factor that has to be weighed on the scale along with many others. Seen in this light, consensus can be viewed as an inherently limited good much like money. It has the character of being something one would welcome having if it can be secured – in the right way – by fair means and 'at the right price'." (Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: against the demand for consensus*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p.199).

24. See van Gunsteren, H. *Organising plurality: citizenship in post 1989 democracies*, manuscript, Leiden, forthcoming.

25. John Searle, *The construction of social reality*, London: Penguin, 1995, p.8.

Determinants of Social Expenditure in Liberal Democracies: The Post World War II Experience

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Abstract

This article focuses on the major determinants of the amount of, and the change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) apportioned to social expenditure in 18 liberal democracies in the period from the early 1960s to the 1990s. Using multivariate pooled time-series analysis, the article demonstrates that the principal predictors of social expenditure shares are the incumbent political parties, political institutions (above all counter-majoritarian arrangements), regime effects, and socio-economic conditions. Analysis within the context of a dissimilar-cases-design is consistent with these findings.

1 Introduction

This article centres on political and socio-economic determinants of social expenditure in liberal democracies from the 1960s until the 1990s. It thus covers a longer period than analysed to date in the literature.¹ The article explores not only determinants of expansionary social policy, but also determinants of social policy retrenchment (cf. Pierson 1996). Following the Schumpeterian approach to the study of the tax state, expenditure data are examined in order to explore the "machinery" of public policy (Schumpeter 1976: 332). The theoretical interest lies in establishing the major political and socio-economic determinants of the variation in social spending in democratic nations. Within this context, attention will focus particularly on the parties-do-matter-hypothesis (cf. Schmidt 1996) and on political-institutional theories, as recent cross-national studies have suggested that these are of major importance. To what extent do partisan factors, such as the partisan composition of governments, and political-institutional variables, such as a democratic constitution and state structures, or "constitutional structures" (e.g. Huber and Stephens 1993), contribute to a better understanding of the level of, and the change in social spending? To what extent do these variables really matter, when one controls for the effect of key variables from alternative explanations,² such as socio-economic theories on the one hand and incrementalism on the other, statistical problems of pooled timeseries,³ and the impact of a most-similar-cases-design?⁴