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Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia

JOSEPH BRADLEY

THE CONCEPTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE, as well as of the voluntarily constituted organizations that comprise their institutional core, have reached a crossroads in the theoretical and historical literature.¹ For the past two decades, the influence of Jürgen Habermas, the exhaustion of Marxist categories of analysis, disillusionment with the “vision of the state as the bearer of some moral project,” the claim to space in the public realm of hitherto-excluded groups, and the exhilarating “transitions from authoritarian rule” have sparked the “return of civil

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¹ Like “the state,” its frequent adversary in much of the theoretical discussion, “civil society” is an abstraction. A concept used by political philosophers to explain numerous discrete phenomena, it has nonetheless proved to be very elusive. Civil society may be defined as the associations and institutions, not part of the state, that frame “ordered, nonclandestine, and collective activities.” Philip Nord, “Introduction,” in Nancy Bermeo and Nord, eds., *Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Lanham, Md., 2000), xiv. My understanding of theories of civil society has been informed by Charles Taylor, “Modes of Civil Society,” *Public Culture* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 96; John Keane, ed., *Civil Society and the State* (London, 1988); Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (Princeton, N.J., 1992); and John A. Hall, ed., *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison* (Cambridge, 1995). The public sphere is that communications network of civil society where interests are represented and claims are adjudicated; the discussion of Habermas below spells this out. By association, I have in mind the modern, secular, self-regulating philanthropic, educational, cultural, and learned societies, membership in which was voluntary rather than compulsory or ascribed and that offered new forms of sociability and self-definition. My understanding of associations has been informed by Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Phillips Bradley, ed., 2 vols. (New York, 1945); Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City* (Cambridge, 1989); Thomas Nipperdey, “Verein als soziale Struktur in Deutschland im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert: Eine Fallstudie zur Modernisierung I,” in Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1976), 174–205; Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 1991); David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984); Richard van Dülmen, *The Society of the Enlightenment: The Rise of the Middle Class and Enlightenment Culture in Germany*, Anthony Williams, trans. (Cambridge, 1992); R. J. Morris, “Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780–1850: An Analysis,” *Historical Journal* 26 (1983); and Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford, 1999).

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society” and the positive correlation between the public sphere of civil society and the evolution of liberal or democratic states in scholarship as well as in politics.² In the 1970s and 1980s, East European intellectuals used the concepts of voluntarism and civil society as they sought ways to frame peaceful grassroots efforts to create a “parallel polis” and limit the scope of communist power. In the words of Polish scholar and politician Bronislaw Geremek, “The magic of the word ‘citizen’ in Poland or in Czechoslovakia came from the widespread sense that it referred less to one’s subordination to the state and its laws than to one’s membership in an authentic community, a community whose essence was summed up in the term ‘civil society.’”³ European and American historians have used these concepts as categories of analysis to examine the constitution of individual and group identities, the relationship between the individual and the state, reform movements, the construction of citizenship (especially by those denied it), political culture, and the realms of public and private life. For a while, it seemed that civil society was everywhere, as a “project,” if not already the product, of social, political, and cultural forces.

At the same time, the concepts of civil society and the public sphere, never easy to define in the first place, have been faulted in many national histories and cultural traditions of late for their Western ethnocentricity, basis in individualism and liberalism, and claims to universality. Recent studies have noted the blurred distinction between civil society and the state, the incivility of some civil associations, and the ambiguous relationship between civil society and liberal democracy—observations reinforced by evidence of the growing pains of civil societies in Eastern Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union. Moreover, in the sociology and political theory on the subject, vexing problems of causality frequently make it unclear what is a condition, or prerequisite, for the emergence of civil society and what is a consequence of its existence. Most theories assume that legal guarantees, that is, some form of *Rechtsstaat*, are necessary for the existence of civil society. But since, according to Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, two contemporary theorists, 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 when rights are not guaranteed.⁴ To put it slightly differently, it is difficult to determine whether

² The cited phrases are from Víctor M. Pérez-Díaz, *The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 66–74; and Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore, 1986).

³ Bronislaw Geremek, “Civil Society and the Present Age,” *The Idea of a Civil Society* (Research Triangle Park, N.C., 1992), 11–18. A former Solidarity activist, Geremek was foreign minister of the Republic of Poland from 1997 to 2000. The term “parallel polis” may be traced back to the Czech dissident Vaclav Benda. See Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965–1990*, Paul Wilson, ed. (New York, 1992), 192–93; and Gordon Skilling, ed., *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia* (London, 1981), 75–76. The loosening of communism in Eastern Europe generated considerable civil society literature. See, for example, Zbigniew Rau, “Some Thoughts on Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Lockean Contractarian Approach,” *Political Studies* 35 (1987): 573–92; Rau, ed., *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colo., 1991); David A. Reidy, Jr., “Eastern Europe, Civil Society, and the Real Revolution,” *Praxis International* 12, no. 2 (July 1992): 168–80; and Geremek, “Civil Society Then and Now,” *Journal of Democracy* 3 (April 1992): 3–12.

⁴ Cohen and Arato state, “Civil societies, whatever their form, presuppose a juridical structure, a constitution . . . [C]ivil society exists *only* where there is a juridical guarantee of the reproduction of various spheres in the form of rights.” Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, “Civil Society and Social

any given “civil society” is becoming or established. Although this matter cannot be settled here, it does complicate for the historian the use of civil society as a category of analysis. Finally, victims of a seemingly endless cycle of illiberal regimes, failed civil societies, and failed states, many of the world’s politics pose a challenge to attempts to use civil society as a category.⁵

At present, scholarly inquiry may best be served by case studies that problematize this cycle by examining the building blocks of civil society, especially in those politics where its development has been most contested. Tsarist Russia, commonly regarded as an example of a failed civil society, provides such a case study. The conventional wisdom suggests compelling reasons for the absence or, at best, exceptional weakness of civil society, an autonomous public, and the spirit of association. In the pithy but highly misleading words of Antonio Gramsci, “In Russia the state is everything and civil society is primordial and gelatinous.”⁶ Yet, despite the fact that autocracy was suspicious of an autonomous civil society, in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Russians did create a public sphere and an associational life based on the model of the European enlightenment. Their existence unsettles some assumptions about Russian political culture and an alleged “failed” civil society. How could a civil society and public sphere, as well as thousands of associations, exist under an autocratic government? If the state permitted their existence, were associations then merely lackeys of the imperial regime? How could subjects denied participation in Russia’s governing institutions manage to stake a claim to the scrutiny of public policy? If Russia never had a civil society, as has been claimed, then how do we account for the fact that in the nineteenth century the Russian government regarded it as a formidable foe? In suggesting ways to answer these questions, I propose neither to proclaim recklessly civil society’s success nor to reaffirm its failure. In order to contextualize the Russian case, I shall first give a brief overview of the usage of the concepts of civil society, public sphere, and voluntarism in American and European history. I shall

Theory,” *Thesis Eleven*, no. 21 (1988): 40–64, quote on 42–43 (emphasis in original). Elsewhere, Cohen and Arato partially extricate themselves from this conundrum by observing that “a 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.” See their opus, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 440. The same problem exists in Habermas. See *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, William Rehg, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 368–71.

⁵ Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London, 1996); Yael Tamir, “Revisiting the Civic Sphere,” in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Freedom of Association* (Princeton, N.J., 1998), 214–38; Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Membership and Morals: The Personal Uses of Pluralism in America* (Princeton, 1998); Simone Chambers, “A Critical Theory of Civil Society,” in Chambers and Will Kymlicka, *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society* (Princeton, 2002), 90–110; and Thomas Carothers, “Civil Society: Think Again,” *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1999–2000): 18–29.

⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds. (New York, 1971), 238. See also Norberto Bobbio, “Gramsci and the Concept of Civil Society,” in Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, 73–100. In other words, Russian civil society was just beginning, primitive, shapeless, and amorphous. In the view of Laura Engelstein, Gramsci was both right and wrong. See Engelstein, “The Dream of Civil Society in Tsarist Russia: Law, State, and Religion,” in Bermeo and Nord, *Civil Society*, 23–41. It should be noted that the political philosopher John Gray argues that civil society may exist under many different types of government and that late tsarist Russia was a civil society on the European model. See Gray, “Totalitarianism, Reform and Civil Society,” in Ellen Frankel Paul, ed., *Totalitarianism at the Crossroads* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1990), 100, 109.

then propose that the application of these concepts in Russian history, frequently in efforts to explain the Russian Revolution and its radical outcome, gives us an incomplete understanding of late imperial society. Finally, by examining the phenomenon of voluntary association, I shall present a different perspective of the relationship between state and society, the organization of reform projects, the capacities of individual and group self-definition and initiative, and the commonalities with similar phenomena in Europe.

A STUDY OF FREE ASSOCIATIONS highlights the relationship between civil society and the state in authoritarian regimes. Discussion of this relationship has taken two trajectories. The first, influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas, posits an adversarial relationship. The public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) of civil society, Habermas argued, emerged under royal absolutism in the institutions and practices of market capitalism, the emergence of the bourgeoisie, new forms of urban sociability, and a lively print culture. Its “institutional core is constituted by voluntary unions outside the realm of the state and the economy,” which gave voice to social problems, articulated group interests, thematized public opinion, and attempted to influence the political process. By compelling the state to legitimate itself before public opinion, a voluntarily constituted and self-organized authority acted as a counterweight to authority based on tradition, force, and ritual and enabled modern citizens to govern themselves.⁷ A bold study of the “lived enlightenment” asserts that the makings of civil society were to be found in “the new zone of voluntary associations” that “looked away from the passivity of the subject, toward the activity of the citizen, away from absolutism and oligarchy, toward more representative forms of government.”⁸ In France, the literary public sphere of the *ancien régime* practiced the “reciprocity of equals” based on “a model of friendship that contrasted markedly with the hierarchy of a society of orders and the absolutist state.” In such a “virtual” assembly, the public could imagine that it could supervise the actions of officials, forcing the monarchy, “powerless to forbid public debate,” to “explain, persuade, and seek to win approval”—in short, to be accountable. After the revolution, a statist political culture continued to supervise and regulate French associations until the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ In Germany and Austria,

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 23–27. Habermas responds to critics and also recognizes the importance of voluntary associations in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 454; he incorporates associations into a revised theory of civil society in *Between Facts and Norms*, 355. In his recent works, as Pérez-Díaz points out, civil society and public sphere are nearly synonymous. Víctor Pérez-Díaz, “The Possibility of Civil Society: Traditions, Character and Change,” in Hall, *Civil Society*, 80–109. See also Keane, *Civil Society and the State*, 15–16, 40, 35–72, 169–70; Salvador Giner, “The Withering Away of Civil Society?” *Praxis International* 5 (October 1985): 247–67; Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 7–9; and Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Lydia G. Cochrane, trans. (Durham, N.C., 1991), 17, 21, 27, 30.

⁸ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, 216. See also Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, 2000), 5; Marvin B. Becker, *The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century: A Privileged Moment in the History of England, Scotland, and France* (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 69.

⁹ Chartier, *Cultural Origins*, 17, 21, 30; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History*

because paternalistic authoritarian states maintained that private persons and associations possessed neither the right nor the competence to comment on public affairs, seemingly innocuous activities acquired political implications, and ostensibly apolitical organizations became politicized. By the 1840s, associations—the “institutions of civil society building”—became the training ground for civic engagement in public affairs and a substitute for popular representation in an effort to “unseat the state as the arbiter of the public good.”¹⁰

Yet the public sphere required a certain degree of publicity regarding the “secretive and arbitrary actions of the state” in order to deliberate, as well as the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly that guarantee access to the public arena. Therefore, its existence was everywhere contested, especially outside a small number of polities in Western Europe and North America. Tutelary authoritarian regimes seemed to offer no hope for the development of civil society.¹¹ However, recent research focuses “less on structures than on voluntary action, on the dynamics by which democratic institutions can be made to sprout on the seemingly inhospitable ground of authoritarian rule.”¹² Accordingly, the second trajectory posits an ambivalent relationship between civil society and the state and questions the degree to which the former led a frontal assault on absolutism. On the continent, monarchs enabled, if not purposefully created, civil society in order to encourage and patronize scientific, charitable, and cultural activities that could further national progress and demonstrate their “enlightened” reigns.¹³ In France, civil society and the state became overlapping entities, entwined in a “double helix” of mutuality, and the nineteenth-century state tolerated the existence of myriad

of the French Enlightenment (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), 2, 5, 34; Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 22–24, 37. See also Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), xiii, 61.

¹⁰ Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996), 207–08, 217, 221; Nipperdey, “Verein,” 201; Ian F. McNeely, “The Intelligence Gazette (*Intelligenzblatt*) as a Road Map to Civil Society: Information Networks and Local Dynamism in Germany, 1770s–1840s,” in Frank Trentmann, ed., *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern Germany and British History* (New York, 2000), 151; Michael John, “Associational Life and the Development of Liberalism in Hanover, 1848–1866,” in Konrad H. Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jones, eds., *In Search of a Liberal Germany* (New York, 1990), 161–86; David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York, 1998), 125; Theodore S. Hamerow, *The Social Foundations of German Unification, 1858–1871: Ideas and Institutions* (Princeton, N.J., 1969), 339–58; Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck*, 235–36; and Klaus Tenfelde, “Civil Society and the Middle Classes in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” in Bermeo and Nord, *Civil Society*, 93.

¹¹ The basic rights governing the public sphere are spelled out in *Structural Transformation*, 83. Habermas’s critics argue that even in the “strong public sphere” polities of North America and Western Europe, access to the public sphere is not uniform for all groups. For example, see the essays by Nancy Fraser and Geoff Eley in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. On the European continent, nations have joined the North Atlantic tradition “more recently and in a more fractured and discontinuous way.” Pérez-Díaz, “Possibility of Civil Society,” 81.

¹² Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 6.

¹³ Alf Lüdtke, *Police and State in Prussia*, Pete Burgess, trans. (Cambridge, 1989), xv. In societies as different as France and China, civil society has been regarded as largely a creation of the state. David A. Bell, “The ‘Public Sphere,’ the State, and the World of Law in Eighteenth-Century France,” *French Historical Studies* 17 (Fall 1992): 934, 955; Heath B. Chamberlain, “On the Search for Civil Society in China,” *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (April 1993): 204, 211. See also the articles by Philip C. C. Huang, Mary Backus Rankin, William T. Rowe, Richard Madsen, and Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr., in this special issue of *Modern China* devoted to the public sphere.

societies, some of which existed in a legal limbo.¹⁴ Such was especially true in Germany, where associations as well as other components of civil society aspired to assist, complement, and advise the state in the collection of knowledge and improvement of the natural and human world for the public benefit. "Even the most determined liberals abhorred conflict between the state and civil society and sought not so much the autonomy of civil society from the state, but rather a harmonious collaboration between the two . . . Harmony between the state and civil society was considered the norm, not adversarial relations." Although associations collaborated with the state in many enterprises, "their activities pushed back the boundaries of government by expanding the competence of civil society to define and meet its own problems."¹⁵ The best that can be said at this point is that civil society may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberal democracy; in any event, many different political regimes may recognize its *de facto*, if not *de jure*, existence but never its complete autonomy.¹⁶ Civil society and its institutions do not guarantee a future devoid of political trauma; the development of civil society in *ancien régime* France did not prevent the Terror, and in Germany it did not prevent Nazism and the Holocaust.

It is common to state now that civil society and the public sphere are gendered, and gender analysis provides a useful insight into the way in which the disenfranchised could enter public life through voluntary associations. Theorists and historians have documented the exclusion of women from the public sphere of reason, citizenship, property ownership, and autonomy, especially in revolutionary and republican France.¹⁷ More intriguing for the study of an autocratic regime are ways by which women actually did enter the public sphere despite exclusionary laws or practices.¹⁸ At stake in this historiography is the construction of citizenship. While acknowledging discriminatory practices and the difficulty women faced entering the public sphere, some scholars note that women "cut off from the institutions of power" found voluntary associations to be "engines of collective action." Thus disenfranchised individuals could appear in public, represent them-

¹⁴ Goodman, *Republic*, 1–2. See also Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 22–24, 37.

¹⁵ Daniel McMillan, "Energy, Willpower, and Harmony: On the Problematic Relationship between State and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in Trentmann, *Paradoxes*, 177, 184, 188; and Hull, *Sexuality*, 208. See also Nipperdey, "Verein," 177–78, 190, 196–97; Dülmen, *Society of the Enlightenment*, 66–67.

¹⁶ Martin Whyte, "Urban China: A Civil Society in the Making?" in Arthur L. Rosenbaum, ed., *State and Society in China: Consequences of Reform* (Boulder, Colo., 1992), 77–78, 82.

¹⁷ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford, Calif., 1989), 4, 20; Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in Keane, *Civil Society*, 101–12. For France, see Goodman, *Republic*, 260; and Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 7, 57. Landes's essentialist views of the bourgeois public sphere have been challenged. See the articles by David Bell and Daniel Gordon and the response by Sarah Maza in a special forum in *French Historical Studies* (Fall 1992). For the United States, see Mary P. Ryan, "Civil Society as Democratic Practice: North American Cities during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 567–68; and Rosenblum, *Membership and Morals*, 34. For Britain, see Clark, *British Clubs*, 3, 84, 130, 155, 191, 198, 203; and H. Cunningham, "Leisure and Culture," in F. M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, Vol. 2: *People and Their Environment* (Cambridge, 1990), 295. For Germany, see Dülmen, *Society of the Enlightenment*, 129.

¹⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, 1987).

selves and their projects before their peers, frame public opinion, organize meetings, and hold public authority accountable; they could even assert a claim to represent others.¹⁹ As recent studies of masculinity suggest, men outside the governing elite employed similar strategies for entering the public arena. In the scientific, philosophical, literary, and naturalist societies, built on “the reciprocity of equals,” men of like interests and commitments experienced conviviality, collegiality, and fellowship. Men founded the associations of civil society in order to enjoy the company of their peers, as well as to pursue science and be stewards of culture and thereby become “public somebodies.” Voluntary associations, especially the scientific and learned societies, enabled men to display distinction and gain recognition from others for their experience, talent, expertise, cultural participation, and civic leadership. Membership in associations built “confidence for men to make claims for political representation and power.” From this perspective, the “practitioners of civil society were the overwhelmingly male members of the voluntary associations . . . Insofar as civil society had begun to be actualized, to be lived, these men were civil society, and they thought of themselves as such.”²⁰

Historians and social theorists have long assumed a link between the institutions of civil society and the middle class. In a venerable sociological narrative, market capitalism and the bourgeoisie are the preconditions of civil society and the public sphere.²¹ Yet in much recent work, the role of the middle class, for a long time regarded as a key actor in the civil society drama, has been problematized in European historiography. National narratives nowadays depict a fragmented, “muddled and divided” bourgeoisie, impossible to define economically, whose identity was formed in institutions of civil society such as voluntary associations.²²

¹⁹ Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), xiv–xv, 12, 59, 69–70; Belinda Davis, “Reconsidering Habermas, Gender, and the Public Sphere: The Case of Wilhelmine Germany,” in Geoff Eley, ed., *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997), 397–426; Elisabeth Clemens, “Securing Political Returns to Social Capital: Women’s Associations in the United States, 1880s–1920s,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 637; Ryan, “Civil Society,” 571–72; Vernon Lidtke, *Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1985), 16–17; and Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History* (Urbana, Ill., 1993), 2–3, 120.

²⁰ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 416, 445–46; and Hull, *Sexuality*, 200–01, 214. See also Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 21, 51, 56, 58, 63–64, 69, 86–87, 123; Dianne Sachko Macleod, “Homosexuality and Middle-Class Identity in Early Victorian Patronage of the Arts,” in Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1999), 65; Páll Björnsson, “Making the New Man: Liberal Politics and Associational Life in Leipzig, 1845–1871” (PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1999), 161–63; R. J. Morris, *Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class, Leeds 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990), 397; and Ryan, “Civil Society,” 567–68.

²¹ In *Structural Transformation*, Habermas believed the public sphere to be grounded in class and capitalism. He revised this view in “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 453–54.

²² On America, see Blumin, *Emergence*. On Britain, see Morris, “Voluntary Societies,” 96, 110; John Seed, “‘Commerce and the Liberal Arts’: The Political Economy of Art in Manchester, 1775–1860,” in Janet Wolff and Seed, eds., *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power, and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), 46; Seed, “Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800–50,” in R. J. Morris, ed., *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns* (Leicester, 1986), 141; Clark, *British Clubs*, 12. On France, see Richard Holt, “Social History and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 (1985): 713–26; Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 3, 6–8; Keith Michael Baker, “Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas,” in Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 187.

Indeed, in authoritarian regimes with a fragmentary social structure and a small middle class, associations provided a way outside the state to articulate and realize projects of philanthropy, cultural stewardship, and social reform designed to democratize learning and thereby create an educated citizenry. They also framed the practice of science as a tool for the public good in order to promise practical solutions to a wide range of economic problems and social pathologies.²³ Following the argument of Frank Trentmann, we may state that civil society and voluntary associations should be detached from their “sociological base,” that is, from the bourgeoisie. The hierarchies of value in civil society, commonly attributed to the bourgeoisie, were articulated through voluntary associations by a wide spectrum of liberal landowners, professionals, and government officials. In much recent scholarship, culture trumps capital, and identities trump income; the key markers are not class but education, urbanization, and sensibility.²⁴

The appearance of societies of science in the eighteenth century shows the interplay of these markers and reveals a very complex relationship between cultural institutions, the state, and the individual as well as the meaning of association, especially in absolutist regimes. The vision of a disinterested, autonomous, value-free science, above (and outside) interests, passions, and politics, that proclaimed neutrality and impartial standards in the service of humanity, has been called “heroic” science.²⁵ Collectively practiced in a space, an “imaginary public sphere,” of “alternative value systems,” experimental science, it has been claimed, had “emancipatory potential,” particularly under political absolutism.²⁶ Several historians, perhaps foremost among them Margaret C. Jacob, argue that science of the Enlightenment era was a “most powerful weapon” of intellectuals who wanted to relocate authority away from dynasties, the church, and the state. Because they functioned as self-organized “learned assemblies” that tirelessly emphasized cooperation and collaboration to achieve common, self-defined goals, even ostensibly apolitical learned societies came under the watchful eye of continental authorities,

²³ Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities of German History*, 148–49; David Blackbourn, “The German Bourgeoisie: An Introduction,” in Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans, eds., *The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century* (London, 1991), 11–12; Henry Lowood, *Patriotism, Profit and the Promotion of Science in the German Enlightenment: The Economic and Scientific Societies, 1760–1815* (New York, 1991), 4–5; Michael E. Rose, “Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes,” in Alan J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts, *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester* (Manchester, 1985), 106; Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849–1929* (Chicago, 1982), ix; Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 51, 56, 58, 63, 64, 69, 86.

²⁴ Frank Trentmann, “Introduction: Paradoxes of Civil Society,” in Trentmann, *Paradoxes*, 3, 10. See also Baker, “Defining the Public Sphere,” 187; A. R. H. Baker, “Sound and Fury: The Significance of Musical Societies in Loir-et-Cher during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 12, no. 3 (July 1986): 264; Becker, *Emergence*, 116; Blackbourn, “German Bourgeoisie,” 5; Hull, *Sexuality*, 201, 203; Holt, “Social History,” 7; Bell, “Public Sphere,” 915–16; Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (New York, 1980), 355–61; and Clark, *British Clubs*, 136, 142, 144, 150, 156, 252, 444.

²⁵ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret C. Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994), 29. See also Arnold Thackray, “Natural Knowledge in Cultural Context: The Manchester Mode,” *AHR* 79 (June 1974): 693; Dorinda Outram, *Georges Cuvier: Vocation, Science and Authority in Post-Revolutionary France* (Manchester, 1984): 94, 109–10. Such a “myth of an apolitical science . . . assured for science a claim to constitute a neutral ground and therefore stabilize its status by removing it from the sphere of political conflict.” Outram, *Georges Cuvier*, 109–10.

²⁶ Thackray, “Natural Knowledge,” 686; Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth*, 27.

who feared, rightly, that such associations would be drawn into public affairs.²⁷ Although the practitioners of science were everywhere relatively small in number, societies of science extended their reach and allowed members to apply science for patriotic purposes: the study and investigation of the realm, the creation and diffusion of knowledge, and the improvement of external and internal nature.²⁸ “The appearance of numerous organizations, circles and societies,” Richard van Dülmen asserts, “from the early eighteenth century onwards provided an important focal point of, and forum for, a progressive and reformist discourse and activity.”²⁹ Science societies were in the forefront of a movement to count, classify, record, disseminate, and investigate a wide range of pathologies and participate in a variety of social reform movements, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this way, for example, the poor could be studied and, it was hoped, removed from the state of nature in which they were commonly regarded as living and enter civil society.³⁰

The above can merely touch on a few of the issues in a vast literature stretching across many national historiographies. But for the historian interested in understanding the dynamics of civil society in autocratic polities, certain insights should be suggestive. First, the relationship between civil society and the state is ambiguous. The autonomy of the former is rarely absolute, and the latter may always impose conditions on the activities of the public sphere of civil society. Collaboration and cooperation are just as likely as confrontation to define the relationship, and civil society is more likely to grow in scope when it avoids political activities that directly challenge absolutism. Second, the institutional core of civil society constituted by voluntary associations frequently precedes written constitutions and national representative bodies. Third, associations offer new forms of sociability and self-definition, and, even in authoritarian regimes, many associations are able to define collective goals by means of a variety of “outreach” projects of philanthropy, cultural stewardship, and applied science. Fourth, since the values and practices commonly associated with the middle class are often present in other groups of the population, various social groups may spearhead such projects, and a small “economic” bourgeoisie with little political clout need not spell doom for the appearance of civil society. Finally, recognizing the ways in which civil society is gendered may help us to understand the meaning of public participation in autocratic polities, such as Russia’s, where not just women (or workers) but all groups were deprived of citizenship.

ALTHOUGH THE TERM IS USED, the grammar of “civil society” has not entered Russian historiography. It is easily discounted, not only as a representation of Russian reality but as a category of analysis. The institutional guarantors of civil society

²⁷ Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838–1886* (Cambridge, 1986), 52.

²⁸ Robert Fox, “Learning, Politics and Polite Culture in Provincial France: The Sociétés Savantes in the Nineteenth Century,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 7, nos. 2–3 (1980): 554.

²⁹ Dülmen, *Society of the Enlightenment*, 1–2, 66–67.

³⁰ Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*, 148–49; Rose, “Culture, Philanthropy,” 106; Blackbourn, “German Bourgeoisie,” 11–12. See also Harrison, *Bourgeois Citizen*, 120; McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige*, ix.

canonized in Western political thought—freedom from personal dependence and arbitrary domination, inviolability of person and domicile, property rights and sanctity of contract, the rule of law, and some sort of parliament or assembly of the estates—were certainly not features of the tsarist regime. The same is true of what might be called economic and sociological guarantors: commercial urban centers and a strong middle class. Indeed, although the origins of its particularity are in dispute, Russia is commonly regarded as non-Western and semi-Asiatic. One of Russia's most prominent contemporary historians framed his explanation for the continued appeal of communists and nationalists in post-Soviet Russia by evoking "cultural forces . . . that go to the essential nature of the Russian people. In pre-revolutionary Russia, public awareness was primarily traditional and mythological. The irrational predominated, with pagan and Christian concepts, symbols, and ideals. People lived and acted, led not by reason but by superstition . . . Russia has not escaped totalitarianism before or since 1917, because it has never had a civil society. The state monopolized every activity, and no autonomous society existed apart from its all-pervasive scope . . . An omnipotent state means subjects deprived of initiative."³¹

The atrophy of society, it is commonly argued, was entwined with the hypertrophy of the state in the "double helix" of Russian political culture under the old regime. In nineteenth-century Russia, a juridical, or state, school of history, guided by G. W. Hegel and guiding subsequent generations of historians, regarded the state as the all-powerful artificer of the Russian nation. Not brought into existence by a "contract," the state acts, while a politically immature, passive, and fragmented society is acted upon. A personalized autocracy and officialdom kept society fragmented by preventing "the formation of corps, corporations, or legal entities possessing definite rights and privileges and capable of contesting the authority of the sovereign and his government."³² By the time the ideas of constitutionalism and limited government did emerge in Russia in the early nineteenth century, they were vigorously resisted by autocracy and soon overshadowed by radicalism. A strong state and weak society made "the whole system uniquely vulnerable to revolutionary action," and thus the view of an autocratic political culture elides into an explanation of the Russian Revolution. According to one history of the revolution, in its efforts to strengthen its own power the autocracy had "destroyed or crippled all autonomous institutions . . . as useless or even inimical to its purpose. No middle ground of spontaneous non-governmental public activity was left, alas, to mediate

³¹ Yuri Afanasyev, "Russia's Vicious Circle," *New York Times*, February 28, 1994. (In the last sentence, Afanasyev quotes nineteenth-century populist Nikolai Chernyshevskii.) Admittedly, this is an "op-ed" piece, not a scholarly work. However, the wide dissemination of such ahistorical generalizations makes it all the more important to subject them to scholarly scrutiny.

³² Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (New York, 1984), 66. On Russia's foremost Hegelian, see Gary Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 1828–1866* (Stanford, Calif., 1992), 86–87. On Russia's fragmented social structure, see Gregory Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *AHR* 91 (February 1986): 11–36; Alfred J. Rieber, "The Sedimentary Society," in Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West, eds., *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 343–66; and Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Structures of Society: Imperial Russia's People of Various Ranks* (DeKalb, Ill., 1994); and *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1997).

between an extreme absolutism and anarchy.”³³ Social historians have directed some attention away from the state and officialdom and toward “social forces,” and labor historians have documented the development of a plebeian public sphere. But in the end, most social and labor historians have joined the chorus of historians of the Russian state and institutions in finding either a fragmented society incapable of, and prohibited from, the self-organization necessary to stand up to a tsarist leviathan or a polarized class struggle that provided the “social basis” of revolution in its most extreme form.³⁴ To be sure, historians occasionally concede that by the end of Catherine’s reign, “the blueprint for a civil society in Russia was ready”; by the end of the reign of Alexander I, “the growth of civil society proved to be irreversible.”³⁵ It is more frequently conceded that a civil society “of sufficient size and autonomy to challenge the regime’s monopoly on political authority” emerged by the turn of the twentieth century. But such a tardy civil society is seriously hobbled as a category of analysis: its appearance is all too often seen as a result of national calamity, such as the famine of 1891–1892 or the Revolution of 1905, and its essence is seen as opposition to tsarism.³⁶

Despite the misleading picture of the absence of associations and of an autonomous public, the dominant interpretation of Russian political culture does contain an indisputable truth. Contested by the autocratic state, the very existence of voluntary associations and their works, not to mention civil society and an autonomous public sphere, could not be taken for granted in tsarist Russia. Without question, there were “no effective political constraints” to autocracy, and no one would claim that liberal democracy triumphed in 1917.³⁷ Yet the above story of late imperial Russia is a story of failures, absences, weaknesses, fragmentation, fragility, backwardness, lost opportunities, and tragedy. It is a story of Russian essentialism. It is a story of public action that was ill fated, embryonic, “missing,” “primitive,” “amorphous,” and confrontational. Historians from a variety of historiographical

³³ Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York, 1994), 70; and Theodore Von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? Why Gorbachev? The Rise and Fall of the Soviet System*, 3d edn. (New York, 1993), 17–18. See also Jacob Walkin, *The Rise of Democracy in Pre-revolutionary Russia: Political and Social Institutions under the Last Three Czars* (New York, 1962), 183–84; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 181–82; Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 143.

³⁴ Alfred J. Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982); Thomas C. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia: A Social History of the Moscow Merchants 1855–1905* (Cambridge, 1981); Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, Calif., 1988); Hosking, *Russia*; Leopold Haimson, “The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917,” *Slavic Review* 23, no. 4 (1964–65): 619–42 and 24, no. 1: 1–22; Victoria Bonnell, “Voluntary Associations in Gorbachev’s Reform Program,” in Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus, eds., *The Soviet System in Crisis: A Reader of Western and Soviet Views* (Boulder, Colo., 1991), 151–60; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York, 1997), 15; Harley D. Balzer, ed., *Russia’s Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History* (New York, 1996).

³⁵ Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, 129.

³⁶ Terence Emmons, “The Zemstvo in Historical Perspective,” in Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich, eds., *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge, 1982), 433. See also Emmons, *The Formation of Political Parties and the First National Elections in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 1–5; Von Laue, *Why Lenin?* 59; Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, 89, 183–86; Abraham Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), 77; and Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1996), 162.

³⁷ Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York, 1974), xxi.

schools and political preferences are in remarkable consensus: the story of late imperial Russia is fundamentally a story of what did *not* happen.

It is certainly not my intention to refute the overwhelming evidence of a repressive state or to claim that a strong, stable civil society was secure in imperial Russia, much less to place any formal limits on the scope of tsarist political authority or to defend it in the Gramscian manner. Rather, I propose a change of emphasis from what did not happen to what did. In slighting the development of civil society, most of the above views create an unwarranted sense of historical inevitability and bury other aspects of the Russian past under an authoritarian essentialism that prevents us from drawing an adequate map of nineteenth-century public life. 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 development 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. Moreover, there are signs that Russian historiography is turning away from “declensionism,” that is, from the study of the decline of tsarist Russia as it headed inexorably toward revolution.³⁸ Rather than seek the “social basis” of great confrontations between state and society, historians now are just as likely to study alternative channels for gradualism and reform and to try to explain what kept tsarist Russia together rather than to reaffirm what broke it apart. Work on Russian freemasonry, local and municipal government, charity, liberal academics, professionalization, the press, and popular reading habits, among other topics, helps us to understand more fully how Russian political culture worked—both the constraints and the opportunities.³⁹ If we focus on Russia’s autocratic ways, we emphasize the differences between Russia and the West and accentuate the inevitability of revolution. If, on the other hand, we venture into the less explored terrain of Russia’s emerging civil society, we may find a rather different picture of public life. One thing we are sure to find: voluntary associations, always under the watchful eye, both benevolent and suspicious, of autocracy. A

³⁸ Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), xv–xvi.

³⁹ Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, Ill., 1999), 86; S. Frederick Starr, “Civil Society and the Impediments to Reform,” in William G. Miller, ed., *Toward a More Civil Society? The USSR under Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev* (New York, 1989), 307; Daniel Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850–1900* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 40; W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1990), xvi; Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 111, 231; David Wartenweiler, *Civil Society and Academic Debate in Russia, 1905–1914* (Oxford, 1999); Manfred Hagen, *Die Entfaltung politischer Öffentlichkeit in Russland, 1906–1914* (Wiesbaden, 1982); Christine Ruane, *Gender, Class and the Professionalization of Russian City Teachers, 1860–1914* (Pittsburgh, 1994); Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700–1800* (Princeton, 1985); Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, 1991), 3–4; Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, 1985), xxi; Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley, 1993), 111.

study of voluntary associations will show not only the constraints but also the opportunities for public action; it will also show how efforts to assist the state in bringing progress to the nation led to efforts to limit the scope of state power. Rather than explain the liberal-democratic civil society that Russia clearly did not become, I will try to suggest ways to understand the civil society that it did achieve.⁴⁰

OF ALL THE ELEMENTS that composed or facilitated the development of civil society in Russia—a print culture and the press, the universities, the city councils and the rural zemstvos, the judiciary, economic growth and diversification, urbanization, professionalization, the liberal movement—the most neglected has been the voluntary association.⁴¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, Russia had thousands of voluntary associations. They were everywhere—St. Petersburg and Moscow, the capitals of the non-Russian regions of the empire, the major provincial centers, and even small towns. Their range included learned societies, small-town charitable and agricultural societies, and clubs for recreation and sport. Their rapid growth and ubiquity, of course, help me argue their significance in life and their neglect in history; at the same time, this complicates any attempt to analyze them. I will examine only a selected group of St. Petersburg and Moscow voluntary associations, mainly but not exclusively learned societies. I make no claim that these organizations were typical or representative of all of Russia's associations. But because of their longevity, their formal and legally constituted relationship with the authorities, the paper trail available, their stature, and their public missions, they allow us to problematize associational life under autocracy and to reconstruct the broader social, intellectual, and institutional framework in which associations operated.⁴² I will proceed by examining their contribution to three broad thematic areas of public life—the application of science to the study of productive natural and human resources, the preservation and promotion of the national heritage, and social reform movements. I have chosen these areas not only for their intrinsic interest and importance but for three additional reasons. First, each 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

⁴⁰ I have borrowed this conceit from Mack Walker, who set about to explain the small-town bourgeoisie that Germany did get rather than the strong liberal bourgeoisie that it did not get. See Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate, 1648–1871* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971), 4.

⁴¹ Even a magisterial and exhaustive study of Russian social history neglects associations. B. N. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII-nachalo XX v.): Genezis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem'i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1999).

⁴² Since the societies I am using were headquartered in St. Petersburg and Moscow, provincial associations, let alone those representing the many national minorities in the empire, are beyond the scope of this project. Other types of organizations excluded from this study are royal academies; guilds, corporations, trade associations, cooperatives, and unions (directly involved with the business of making a living); political parties; secret societies and illegal organizations; churches, sects, and other religious associations; and informal organizations, circles, and salons. For the pertinent criteria, see Clark, *British Clubs*, 16; Lowood, *Patriotism*, 24–25; Christiane Eisenberg, “Working-Class and Middle-Class Associations: An Anglo-German Comparison, 1820–1870,” in Jürgen Kocka and Allen Mitchell, eds., *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1993), 153–54; and Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 57–58.

of associations may be identified as archetypal. Third, the archetypal associations span a long chronological period: from the reign of Catherine II at the end of the eighteenth century to those of Alexander III and Nicholas II at the end of the nineteenth. After examining a sampling of Russian associations, it will be possible to judge the contribution of voluntary associations to the development of Russian civil society.

Improvement and progress by means of the application of science to the study of productive natural and human 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, monarchs and private persons founded agricultural societies in the British Isles, France, the German states, and Switzerland.⁴³ Societies sponsored essay competitions and awarded prizes to encourage innovations, created networks of corresponding members, funded and manned expeditions, published journals and treatises, maintained facilities such as botanical gardens and observatories, undertook statistical surveys, and mapped the realm. Such projects created and diffused public knowledge, mobilized volunteers in scientific and “patriotic” enterprises, and created the sense of “participation in a culture of learning.”⁴⁴ Russia was no exception to this phenomenon. 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. At the same time, a few landowners became “enlightened seigneurs” and sought new ideas of estate management. 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,” to create a “climate of opinion in which the nobles might agree to reforms to improve the life of the serfs.” A body designed to study agriculture seemed to be the best institutional mechanism for creating such a “climate of opinion,” and in 1765 was born Russia’s first association, the Free Economic Society.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that the society, while independent of government, benefited from Catherine’s moral and material support. Catherine conferred on the society “separate” patronage and permitted it to use the imperial coat of arms as

⁴³ Lowood, *Patriotism*; Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven, Conn., 1981), 133, 142; and James Arthur Prescott, “The Russian Free Economic Society: Foundation Years,” *Agricultural History* 5, no. 3 (July 1977): 503–12.

⁴⁴ Thackray, “Natural Knowledge,” 683; Clark, *British Clubs*, 271.

⁴⁵ Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), 137. See also David L. Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia: The Panin Party* (New Haven, Conn., 1975), 281; Edgar Melton, “Enlightened Seigniorialism and Its Dilemmas in Serf Russia, 1750–1830,” *Journal of Modern History* 62 (December 1990): 679; Paul Dukes, *Catherine the Great and the Russian Nobility: A Study Based on the Materials of the Legislative Commission of 1767* (London, 1967), 216; Wallace David, “The Conflict between Economic Vision and Economic Reality: The Case of M. M. Shcherbatov,” *Slavonic and East European Review* (January 1989): 45; Roger P. Bartlett, “J. J. Sievers and the Russian Peasantry under Catherine II,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 32, no. 1 (1984): 15–16; Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine*, 133, 142.

well as her own logo, a beehive with the word “useful” (*poleznoe*) curling around it.⁴⁶

During its 150-year existence, the Free Economic Society was governed by a charter or bylaws (*ustav*) drawn up by the society and approved by the government. In addition to stating the goals and scope of the society, as well as rules by which it managed its own affairs, the charter, explicitly or implicitly, granted certain rights and privileges. In an autocratic country, it functioned as a micro-constitution written in the language of representation, which gave associational life autonomous existence and a special meaning. Despite its inevitably close relationship to the government, the Free Economic Society was based on the principles of voluntary association of members, the assembly of private persons, and self-governance. Since the charter became a template for subsequent associations, and since Russian officialdom later threatened to encroach on certain rights and privileges, to abrogate, as it were, this micro-constitution, it would be worthwhile to highlight those features of the charter most jealously defended by the society’s members.⁴⁷

In the first place, the charter was written by the members themselves. They established their own goals, the means to attain them, and internal rules and regulations, hence the society’s name, “free,” independent, possessing its own will (*vol’noe*). To be sure, the charter had to be approved by the government, and there is no doubt that its provisions were constrained by an understanding of what was acceptable. Nevertheless, in drawing up its own rules, the society engaged in the process of self-definition. Second, membership was entirely voluntary. The society had the power to select its own members and thereby create a bond of trust, mutual respect, and sociability in the achievement of common goals. Third, the society constituted its own structure of authority. The highest decision-making body was the general members’ meeting (*obshchee sobranie*). This body elected officers by secret ballot, and the results were not subject to validation by the authorities. A council or board (*sovet*), consisting of a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and chairs of divisions and committees, planned the society’s activities and set the agenda for the general meetings. Fourth, the society could pursue autonomous activity, regulated only by its own rules and regulations and the laws of the land; it did not need government permission for all its activities or authorization to allocate funds. For example, it could create ad hoc committees and commissions as it saw fit, and the various departments and committees had considerable autonomy to set their own agenda. Fifth, the society had privileges regarding censorship, the feature of arbitrary autocracy that so often shackled intellectual life. Like the Academy of Sciences and the universities, the Free Economic Society and

⁴⁶ A. I. Khodnev, *Kratkii obzor stoletnei deiatel’nosti Imperatorskogo Vol’nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva s 1765 do 1865 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1865), 1–4.

⁴⁷ The charters were published in the complete collection of Russian laws, *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* (hereafter, *PSZ*), 27 (1765), no. 12,502; *PSZ*, 2d ser., 34 (1859), no. 34,192; *PSZ* 47 (1872), no. 51,195, as well as in many separate editions. The following discussion is based on nineteenth-century bylaws. I have used *Proekty Ustava Imperatorskogo Vol’nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1913), which compares the 1872 bylaws and two drafts of revised bylaws, as well as *K istorii Vol’nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1907), doc. no. 180. In *Living the Enlightenment*, Margaret Jacob attaches considerable importance to the bylaws of the associations of the Enlightenment in Western Europe.

subsequent learned societies were allowed to censor their own printed matter and import foreign publications duty-free and uncensored. After 1862, all learned societies were exempt from pre-publication censorship. Finally, such privileges gave the Free Economic Society a crucial feature of the public sphere everywhere—publicity.⁴⁸

Like the European science, agricultural, and patriotic societies of the day, the chief goal of the Free Economic Society was the increase and diffusion of useful knowledge.⁴⁹ First and foremost, the society collected, translated, and disseminated foreign advances in agriculture and the arts. Also, it tried to create an institutional framework that would stimulate public interest and encourage such advancements in Russia. Members were to perform experiments, test innovations, and evaluate the results of experiments submitted to the society. Essay competitions, an important component of the public sphere, encouraged the production of knowledge and practical proposals to solve problems. The society was to convey visually the results of Russian and foreign advances through collections, exhibits, museums, and lectures. Finally, the society aimed to increase the amount of information available on local economic conditions, primarily, but not limited to, those of agriculture.⁵⁰ As part of the latter project, it cultivated relationships with other organizations, domestic and foreign, by exchanging publications and by publishing accounts of the activities of other agricultural societies and, later, of the *zemstvos*. Despite obstacles, this effort created considerable enthusiasm, conveyed by A. T. Bolotov, a middling provincial nobleman and improving landlord: “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 for this, 65 questions were appended at the end of this book.”⁵¹

It is beyond the scope of this article to pursue the myriad projects of the Free

⁴⁸ These features of the bylaws were frequently noted in the liberal press. See, for example, a series of reports in the “Iz obshchestvennoi khroniki” section of *Vestnik Evropy*: no. 5 (1896): 434–36; no. 6 (1896): 861–63; no. 6 (1897): 875–76; and no. 10 (1897): 846–48. On censorship, see N. M. Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 5th edn., 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1904–05), 1: 465; and Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906* (Toronto, 1982), 125–26.

⁴⁹ The overall activities of the society may be culled from many different accounts: Khodnev, *Kratkii obzor*; A. I. Khodnev, *Istoriia Imperatorskogo Vol'nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva s 1765 do 1865 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1865); A. N. Beketov, *Istoricheskii ocherk dvadtsatipiatiletnei deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Vol'nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva s 1865 do 1890 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1890); and N. G. Kuliabko-Koretskii, “Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk deiatel'nosti I. V. E. Obshchestva so vremeni ego osnovaniia, preimushchestvenno v dele sobiraniia i razrabotki statisticheskikh svedenii o Rossii i rasprostraneniia znaniia v naselenii,” *Trudy Vol'nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva*, no. 3 (1897): 395–412; Michael Confino, *Domaines et seigneurs en Russie vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle: Etude de structures agraires et de mentalités économiques* (Paris, 1963); V. V. Oreshkin, *Vol'noe ekonomicheskoe obshchestvo v Rossii 1765–1917* (Moscow, 1963); Joan Klobe Pratt, “The Russian Free Economic Society, 1765–1915” (PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1983).

⁵⁰ Discussion of the essay competitions can be found in V. I. Semevskii, *Krest'ianskii vopros v Rossii v XVIII i pervoi polovine XIX veka* (St. Petersburg, 1888), 1: xi, 309–39; Confino, *Domaines*, 202–03, 232–34, 237–51; R. Jones, *Emancipation*, 137–38; Khodnev, *Istoriia*, 366–467; Oreshkin, *Vol'noe ekonomicheskoe obshchestvo*, 59–63; and Roger Bartlett, “‘I.E.’ and the Free Economic Society’s Essay Competition of 1766 on Peasant Property,” *British Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Newsletter*, no. 8 (1980): 58–67.

⁵¹ A. T. Bolotov, *Zhizn' i priklucheniia, 1738–1795*, 3 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), 2: 318; quoted in Dukes, *Catherine the Great and the Russian Nobility*, 99–100. See also Confino, *Domaines*, 38; Pratt, “Russian Free Economic Society,” 36–44; Khodnev, *Istoriia*, 1–94.

Economic Society. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that historians have questioned the sustained commitment of members and the effectiveness of the society's activities; they certainly did not bring about a transformation of Russian agriculture.⁵² Nevertheless, the significance of the Free Economic Society lies less in any particular product it did or did not, could or could not, deliver. 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, a pattern that prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century. The society had imperial patronage, accepted members of the royal family as officeholders, 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 society was called on to assist the government in the study of a variety of problems and in implementation of policy. In this, a "patriotic society for the encouragement of agriculture and the economy in Russia" was fulfilling its patriotic duty. At this point in the development of Russia's voluntary associations, individual societies' goals and state goals were one and the same. Even while the necessity of a close relationship with the government no doubt circumscribed the society's autonomy, until the 1890s there is little evidence that the government systematically compromised the principles of voluntary membership, internal integrity, or autonomous self-management of the society's affairs. By becoming the first public forum for a discussion of and dissemination of views on economic policy, the Free Economic Society sowed the seeds of participatory public dialogue and marked the beginning of a process whereby independent public initiative was sanctioned under autocracy.⁵³ Born in the age of "enlightened despotism," this initiative continued even in the age of the reactionary Nicholas I.

A fascination with the past, spawned by antiquarianism, historicism, and patriotism, spread throughout Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Monarchs and subjects alike assembled artifacts and curiosities, founded museums, and organized societies. Historicism emanating from Germany provided philosophical justification for the study of the customs and ways of life of distinct and cohesive groups of people. Collecting and displaying fueled efforts to seek and record local customs and beliefs, those "fast disappearing ways of life." Learning about one's nation was a form of patriotic public service that shaped a sense of national identity and pride.⁵⁴ Although this obsession with the national heritage has often been portrayed as a longing for an idealized past or as an anti-modern aesthetic retreat, in fact the study of the past expressed an acceptance of progress and an affirmation of the distance traveled to the present. The vehicle that mobilized this study of the past and of the nation was the voluntary association, often, especially on the continent, in conjunction with a government agency,

⁵² Confino, *Domains*, 28–34. It should be noted that the effectiveness of European agricultural societies has also been questioned. Clark, *British Clubs*, 437–40; Kenneth Hudson, *Patriotism with Profit: British Agricultural Societies in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1972), 3, 18, 46–48; Lowood, *Patriotism*, 132–41, 163, 169.

⁵³ Khodnev, *Kratkii obzor*, 1–4; Prescott, "Russian Free Economic Society," 503; Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, 99.

⁵⁴ Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (Oxford, 1989), 97; Blackburn, *Long Nineteenth Century*, 275.

commission, or academy.⁵⁵ As is well known, in the first half of the nineteenth century, educated Russians became obsessed with national identity. In their efforts to emphasize difference, Russians paid Western Europe the ultimate compliment of emulation. The broadening scholarly and public interests in the Russian nation came together in 1845 with the founding of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. Later that year, the newly formed organization drew up a charter, modeled after that of the Royal Geographical Society in London, that sanctioned autonomy in its mission, internal organization, and selection of members and officers.⁵⁶

During the last years of the reign of Nicholas I, such autonomy was by no means guaranteed, and F. P. Litke, admiral, scientist, explorer, and the society's first vice president, viewed the Geographical Society much as a captain would a ship, trying to steer it on a safe course and prevent unforeseen calamities. Although Litke regretted internal bickering over mission statements and organizational issues, such debate among members proceeded openly without any effort of the government to dictate the society's goals.⁵⁷ Indeed, the state was an active collaborator in a mission that valorized the advancement of native science, imperial expansion, and national integration and promoted a community of learning and service to the nation. Like European learned societies of the day, the Geographical Society facilitated scientific research and brought together scientists, scholars, and reform-minded officials to study social and economic questions. Its autonomous 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."⁵⁸ It built a base of empirical data, an ongoing system of questionnaires, and consolidated, coordinated, and disseminated the great amount of private, and seemingly random, collection of geographical information.⁵⁹ Requiring a large number of researchers outside the capital, the questionnaires, for example, generated a constant flow of "important and curious observations" about different localities to

⁵⁵ The literature on this subject is vast, and I have been informed by the following: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 215–51; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (London, 1987); Stocking, ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison, Wis., 1985); Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, 1989); Merrill, *Romance of Victorian Natural History*; Levine, *Amateur and the Professional*; Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading the National Geographic* (Chicago, 1993); and C. Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁵⁶ PSZ, 2d ser., 20 (1845), no. 19,259.

⁵⁷ I. G. Sukhova, "Eshche raz o predystorii Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva," *Izvestiia Vsesoiuznogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, no. 5 (1990): 403–08; L. S. Berg, *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1945), 32–34; *Vospominaniia general-fel'dmarshala grafa Dmitriia Alekseevicha Miliutina 1843–1856* (Moscow, 2000), 139–40.

⁵⁸ P. P. Semenov, *Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, 1845–1895*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1896), 1: 9.

⁵⁹ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian-Shanskii: The Life of a Russian Geographer* (Newtonville, Mass., 1980), 12–13; V. M. Shtein, "Rol' Vsesoiuznogo geograficheskogo obshchestva v razvitiu russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli," *Izvestiia Vsesoiuznogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, nos. 1–2 (1945): 7. It has also recently come to the attention of students of Russian ethnography. See Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845–1855," in Burbank and Ransel, *Imperial Russia*, 108–41.

the society's headquarters in St. Petersburg. According to the silver jubilee report, the society brought "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." It provided a training ground for public or government work: the government reformers of the 1850s and 1860s had all been members of the Geographical Society.⁶⁰

The desire to spread in Russia a love of geography, ethnography, and statistics fulfilled more than a training mission. In the 1840s, the Geographical Society was at the center of a quest for national identity and the leader of a movement to privilege the study of the Russian people.⁶¹ The foundation of the society, and especially the projects of its Ethnographic Division, marked the birth of institutionalized Russian area studies. Like ethnographers in Western Europe, the charter members of the Russian Geographical Society considered it "urgent to preserve for posterity . . . the special features of folk life before it is too late."⁶² In 1847, the society's Ethnographic Division drew up an elaborate program of empirical study based on 7,000 questionnaires sent all over Russia. In the striking metaphor of P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, explorer and long-time secretary of the society, the Russian common people had retained the distinguishing features and original character of the Russian nation as if "buried under the volcanic ash of history."⁶³ In evoking the spirit of community in the past, the society summoned science to validate its sense of community in the present. The society's jubilee histories capture the rosy attitude of the members toward a community voluntarily constituted:

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.

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, as well as "that spiritual bond that binds us all together in the love for our native land."⁶⁴ The community bonded by a study of

⁶⁰ F. R. Osten-Saken, *Dvadsatipiatiletie Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1871), 44; W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb, Ill., 1982), 91-101.

⁶¹ Semenov, *Istoriia*, 2-3; T. A. Lukina, "K istorii osnovanii Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva," *Izvestiia Vsesoiuznogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, no. 6 (1965): 508-10.

⁶² Karl Ernst von Baer, "Ob etnograficheskoi issledovanii voobshche i v Rossii v osobennosti," *Zapiski Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, books 1-2, 2d edn. (1849), 64-81. See also Semenov, *Istoriia*, 1: xvii-xxi, 37-38, 51; Berg, *Vsesoiuznoe*, 33, 146-47; L. M. Saburova, "Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo i etnograficheskie issledovaniia," *Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol'kloristiki i antropologii*, no. 7 (Leningrad, 1977), 6-7; and N. N. Stepanov, "Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo i etnografiia, 1845-1861," *Sovetskaia geografiia*, no. 4 (1946): 187-206.

⁶³ Semenov, *Istoriia*, 1: 51. Semenov here is summarizing an important report to the society by the writer, publisher, and ethnographer, N. I. Nadezhdin.

⁶⁴ Osten-Saken, *Dvadsatipiatiletie*, 44-45. This openness became part of the image of the society propagated by its leaders. Semenov's golden jubilee account of the society repeats, but does not attribute, almost word-for-word the silver jubilee assessment (*Istoriia*, 1: xxiv). Such jubilee editions, of

the nation was soon becoming one bonded by a desire to educate and reform it.

Associations were essential ingredients in movements of reform and cultural stewardship in nineteenth-century Europe and America. At the same time, associations and the activities they sponsored were important in shaping middle-class identities and in developing and reinforcing hierarchies of value, sensibilities, and cultural aspirations.⁶⁵ Particularly important for my purposes here are efforts to provide education, to promote self-improvement and rational leisure as well as a thirst for positive knowledge, and to mobilize the public for reform causes through a variety of projects. Myriad societies sponsored schools, vocational training, and public lectures. They organized congresses, often with the cooperation of governments, that became local, regional or national venues for otherwise-isolated people to come together to discuss matters of common concern.⁶⁶ Museums and exhibitions of natural history, science, and industry celebrated progress, the division of labor, and the dissemination of knowledge; they also demonstrated the cooperation of science, industry, private associations, and governments in service to the public.⁶⁷ By mobilizing new special-interest constituencies and in publicizing a wide variety of causes, associations became a new form of public representation and advocacy, especially in politics lacking national representative institutions or for groups not

course, exaggerate the openness and significance of a learned society. It is important, however, to give voice to such sentiments in order to examine the meaning and self-definition of associations; for this reason, I have used their publications and archives throughout, complemented, when appropriate, by the reports of Russian officialdom.

⁶⁵ Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge, 1981); Blumin, *Emergence*; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Wolff and Seed, *Culture of Capital*; Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*; McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige*; Blackbourn and Evans, *German Bourgeoisie*; Kocka and Mitchell, *Bourgeois Society*. In the meantime, the objects of improvement and reform needed immediate guidance and mediation in the form of civilizing agencies and rational recreation that, it was hoped, would introduce the habits of hard work and thrift, temperance, the elevation of taste, morals, and judgment—in short, the “discipline of culture.”

⁶⁶ Kidd and Roberts, *City, Class and Culture*; Katherine Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie: The Ligue de l'Enseignement and the Origins of the Third Republic, 1866–1885* (Cambridge, 1982); Morris, “Voluntary Societies”; Sanford Elwitt, “Social Reform and Social Order in Late Nineteenth-Century France: The Musée Sociale and Its Friends,” *French Historical Studies* 11 (Spring 1980): 431–51; Donald M. Scott, “The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (March 1980): 791–809; Donald M. Scott, “The Professions That Vanished: Public Lecturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), 12–28; J. N. Hays, “The London Lecturing Empire, 1800–1850,” in Ian Inskter and Jack Morrell, eds., *Metropolis and Province: Science in British Culture, 1780–1850* (London, 1983), 91–119; and R. Hinton Thomas, *Liberalism, Nationalism and the German Intellectuals, 1822–1847: An Analysis of the Academic and Scientific Congresses of the Period* (Cambridge, 1951).

⁶⁷ On the grand nineteenth-century exhibitions and museums, I have been informed by John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, *A Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988* (Westport, Conn., 1990); Robert Rydell, *The Books of the Fairs: Materials about World's Fairs, 1834–1916, in the Smithsonian Institution Library* (Chicago, 1991); Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984); Burton Benedict, ed., *The Anthropology of World's Fairs* (Berkeley, Calif., 1983); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York, 1995); Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto, 1997); and Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*.

otherwise represented, thereby breaking down a sense of powerlessness to shape public policy.

It is a commonplace that the Russian intelligentsia regarded itself as the steward of Russian learning and culture. In the absence of dispersed bourgeois wealth and numerous individual philanthropists, Russian voluntary associations were even more important than their counterparts in the West as the initiators of public outreach and cultural stewardship.⁶⁸ Many Russian associations with a self-conscious public mission to democratize science and learning had their origins in the Era of the Great Reforms during the 1860s, a time of unprecedented state-sanctioned public discussion of government policy, local conditions, and projects for national renewal. To be sure, the government was unwilling to permit any constitutional challenge to autocratic rule, and radicals resented the incompleteness of the reforms and the slowness of change; but for a while at mid-century, a spirit of earnest application of effort for national improvement prevailed. This spirit was perhaps most intense at the universities and among Russian youth. In 1863, a new government charter granted universities more autonomy, including the right to organize their own learned societies. The Ministry of Internal Affairs noted that there was “a general inclination toward the development of associational public activity in all forms and for all kinds of purposes.”⁶⁹

Russian youth believed that the study of science held the key to progress, and the era presented new opportunities to mobilize resources for the pursuit of public science. In 1863, a group of specialists, amateurs, and students affiliated with Moscow University founded the Society of Friends of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography (OLEAE in its Russian initials). Judging the creation of knowledge—theoretical research—already to be the turf of other institutions such as the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, the charter members of OLEAE stated that what Russia needed most was to disseminate a love of science and to nurture young scientists. Russia was deficient not in theoretical knowledge but “in the number of people who can use that knowledge.” In the arresting terminology of the charter members, the goal of OLEAE was the “democratization of knowledge.”⁷⁰ Among the major outreach activities of OLEAE were the Ethnographic Exposition in 1867, the Polytechnical Exposition in 1872, and the creation of the nation’s best-known science museum, the Moscow Polytechnical Museum. In an example of cooperation between associations, the city government, the scientific community, and the general public, the museum sponsored lectures, discussions,

⁶⁸ For more, see Joseph Bradley, “Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture, and *Obshchestvennost’* in Moscow,” in Clowes, Kassow, and West, *Between Tsar and People*, 131–48.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice*, 121. The university charter is in “Obshchii ustav Imperatorskikh Rossiiskikh Universitetov,” *PSZ*, 2d ser., 38 (1863), no. 39,752. See also S. A. Tokarev, *Istoriia russkoi etnografii: Dooktiabr’skii period* (Moscow, 1966), 284; Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861–1917* (Stanford, Calif., 1970), 77.

⁷⁰ *Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii* (hereafter, OLEAE), *Protokoly zasedanii*, no. 1 (Moscow, 1864), cols. 2–3; and no. 27 (Moscow, 1867), cols. 109–10. See also V. V. Bogdanov, “Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii pri Moskovskom gosudarstvennom universitete,” *Uchenye zapiski Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Iubileinaia seriia*, vyp. 53 (1940): 363–64; P. V. Bogdanov, *Piatidesiatiletie Imperatorskogo obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii* (Moscow, 1914), 33; and Tokarev, *Istoriia russkoi etnografii*, 284.

and Sunday tours pitched at workers. By providing meeting halls and auditorium space free of charge to numerous other societies, it became a civic center, contributing substantially not just to the democratization of science and learning but also to civic life and to the goals of the rational use of leisure. (See Figure 1.)⁷¹

The needs of a modern economy, the increasing division of labor, and the specialization of the work force required a greater investment in primary education and in adult and technical training, and associations responded to this need. In 1861, the Free Economic Society created an autonomous division known as the Literacy Committee, which became the nation's most prominent association involved in primary education. When it opened, the officers of the Free Economic Society declared that the society's top priority must be to assist the spread of literacy among the newly emancipated peasants; Russian agriculture could not improve, the argument ran, unless its basic human component, the peasant cultivator, became a literate farmer. The committee organized the free distribution of government-approved textbooks and instructional materials to the nation's primary schools and libraries, and an estimated one million books passed through this network between 1861 and 1895. The committee complemented this distribution network with a publishing venture of its own, thereby becoming an important actor in the effort of educated society to provide an alternative to pulp fiction and to construct a canon of edifying popular literature. To support its wide-ranging activities, the committee relied on in-kind contributions, membership dues, and donations, largely from Russia's business class.⁷² Fund-raising, as well as the consulting services and wide network of correspondents among teachers and even peasants "dispersed all over Russia," created horizontal linkages in the countryside and a reputation of trust and service, what in the Western literature is now called "social capital."⁷³

Among the many Russian associations involved in adult and technical education, the best known and most influential was the Russian Technical Society (RTO in its Russian initials), founded in St. Petersburg in 1866. From the beginning, the membership was heterogeneous; though dominated by the technical intelligentsia, it also included civil servants, military officers, industrialists, and foreigners. By the

⁷¹ OLEAE, *Vserossiiskaia etnograficheskaia vystavka i slavianskii s'ezd* (Moscow, 1867); OLEAE, *Obshchee obozrenie Moskovskoi politekhnicheskoi vystavki* (Moscow, 1872). I discuss the 1872 Exposition in "Science, Technology and the Public at the Moscow Exposition," a paper presented at IREX's Alumni Symposium "Science, Technology and the Public in Russia," at the University of Texas, February 12, 1999, and available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.irex.org/programs/conferences>. Useful introductions to the museum's activities are N. N. Pozdniakov, "Politekhnikeskii muzei i ego nauchno-prosvetitel'noi deiatel'nosti 1872–1917 gg.," *Istoriia muzeinogo dela v SSSR* (Moscow, 1957), 129–58; and *Moskovskii muzei prikladnykh znani: Materialy dlia istorii ustroistva muzeia* (Moscow, 1875).

⁷² The standard history of the Literacy Committee is D. D. Protopopov, *Istoriia S.-Peterburgskogo Komiteta gramotnosti, 1861–1895* (St. Petersburg, 1897), compiled by its secretary. Additional material on the origins and activities of the committee may be found in K. Dikson, *S.-Peterburgskii Komitet gramotnosti: Istoricheskii ocherk, 1861–1911* (St. Petersburg, 1911); I. A. Gorchakov, "Obzor deiatel'nosti Komiteta gramotnosti," *Trudy Vol'nogo ekonomicheskogo obshchestvo*, no. 1 (January–February 1894): 285–99; and P. Shestakov, "Stolichnye komitety gramotnosti," *Russkaia mysl'* (May 1896): 106–24; (June 1896): 107–24; and (October 1896): 91–102. The St. Petersburg Literacy Committee had its counterpart in Moscow, a division of the Moscow Agricultural Society.

⁷³ A. A. Kizevetter, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii: Vospominaniia, 1881–1914* (Moscow, 1997), 165–67.

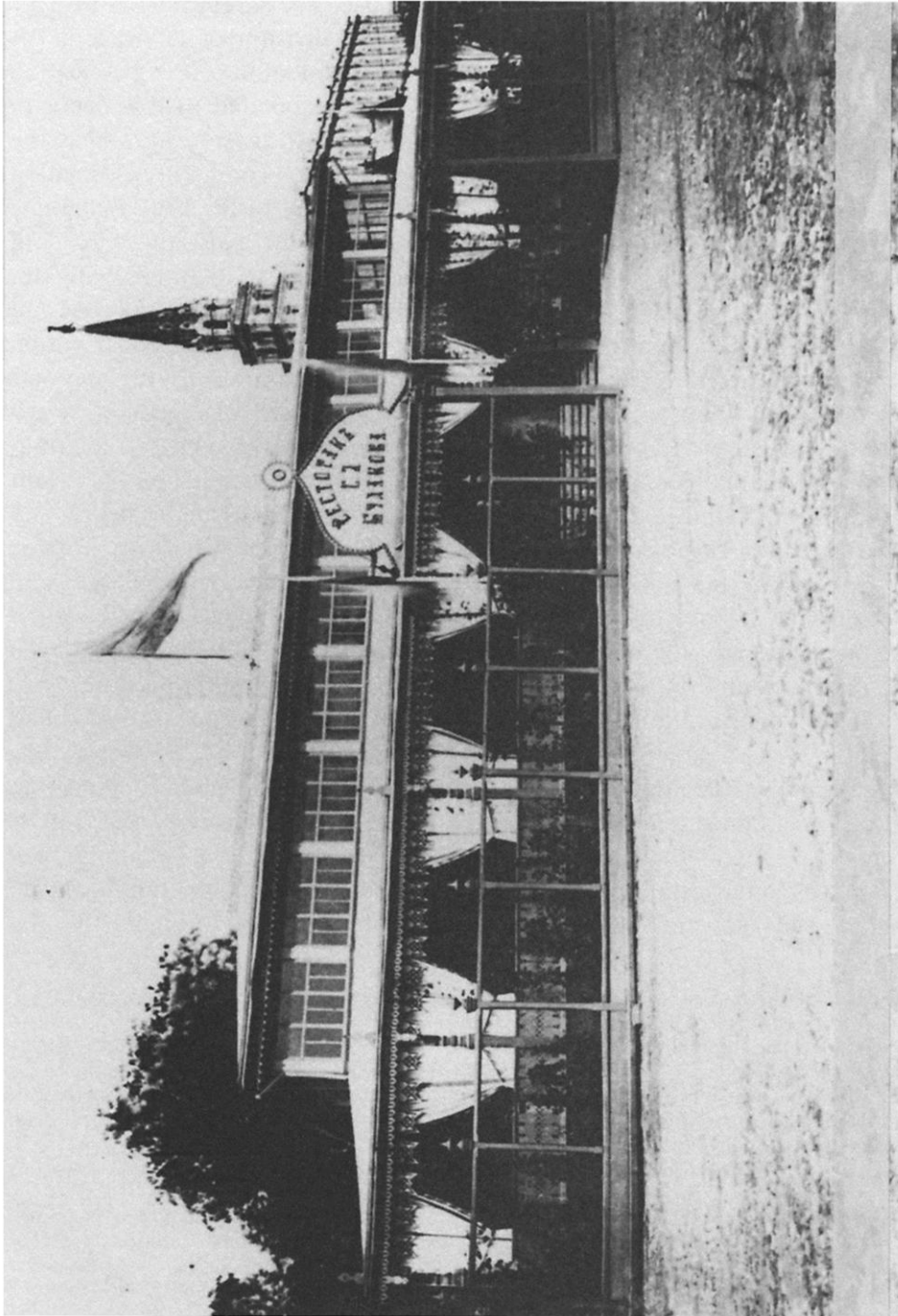


FIGURE 1: One of three restaurants at the Polytechnical Exposition in Moscow in the summer of 1872. The exposition was organized by the Society of Friends of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography and held inside the Kremlin walls and in the adjacent gardens. (One of the Kremlin towers is visible in the background.) More than 750,000 visited the exposition to see 10,000 articles on display, including 2,000 from foreign countries. (Source: Imperatorskoe Obschestvo Liubitelei Estestvoznaniia, Antropologii i Etnografii, *Politekhnicheskaia Vystavka 1872 g.*: *Al'bom Vizov* [Moscow, 1872]). Courtesy of the State Polytechnical Museum, Moscow.

end of the nineteenth century, forty branches were scattered across the Russian Empire; the local branches had considerable autonomy to establish contacts with business, industry, and educational institutions. According to its charter, the RTO's broadly defined mission was to assist the development of Russian technology, to disseminate practical information, and to advance engineering education.⁷⁴ Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the RTO became a national forum for debate of educational policy, largely through the efforts of one of its divisions, the Standing Committee on Technical Education. In order to improve technical training and labor productivity, this committee ran classes for adult workers and schools for workers' children, and sponsored public lectures. To operate schools, acquire classroom space, recruit teachers, develop syllabi, review textbooks, and coordinate instruction required considerable organizational skills. Given that revenue from membership dues, the sale of publications, and government grants did not cover all its activities, the Technical Society had to organize concerts, lectures, and other fund-raisers.⁷⁵ 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 component of cultural stewardship: the rational use of leisure. The RTO was but one of many organizations that sponsored public lectures, a phenomenon of civil society that, in the words of historian A. A. Kizevetter, became "an epidemic" in the 1890s.⁷⁶

Like the many lecture series, periodic national congresses were highly public enterprises organized by a variety of Russian associations. Periodic congresses of scientists and of technical education specialists must suffice for illustration. Modeled after congresses of German scientists and organized by university science societies in different cities of the empire beginning in 1867, the scientific congresses established a precedent for other congresses, in that they conducted their business largely by government-approved rules and procedures of their own making (*polozhenie*). (See Figure 2.) In an address before the first congress of scientists,

⁷⁴ The charter may be found in *PSZ*, 2d ser., 41 (1866), no. 43,219. See also N. N. Gritsenko, *et al.*, *Nauchno-tekhicheskie obshchestva SSSR* (Moscow, 1968); and N. G. Filippov, *Nauchno-tekhicheskie obshchestva v Rossii, 1866–1917* (Moscow, 1976); "Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo tekhnicheskogo obshchestva s ego osnovaniia po pervoe ianvaria 1893 g.," *Zapiski Russkogo tekhnicheskogo obshchestva* 7–8 (1893): 1–20. Other associations whose mission was adult education and technical training were the Society for the Diffusion of Technical Knowledge, the Society to Promote Commercial Education, and the Society of Public Universities. A. E. Gruzinskii, *Tridtsat' let zhizni Uchebnogo dela Obshchestva rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znani* (Moscow, 1902). See also Owen, *Capitalism and Politics*, 162; and Joseph Bradley, "Merchant Moscow after Hours: Voluntary Associations and Leisure," in James L. West, ed., *Merchant Moscow: Images of Russia's Vanished Bourgeoisie* (Princeton, N.J., 1998), 133–46.

⁷⁵ On the efforts of RTO in education, see B. N. Tits, *Ocherk istorii Postoiannoi kommissii po tekhnicheskomu obrazovaniiu pri Imp. Russkom tekhnicheskome obshchestve, 1868–1889* (St. Petersburg, 1889); and N. M. Korol'kov, *Kratkii obzor deiatel'nosti Postoiannoi kommissii po tekhnicheskomu obrazovaniiu* (St. Petersburg, 1912).

⁷⁶ Cited passage from Kizevetter, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 213–14. 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 Moscow Juridical Society, the Society of Public Universities, and the Temperance Society. "Obshchestvo sodeistviia k ustroistvu obshcheobrazovatel'nykh razvlechenii," *Izvestiia Moskovskoi gorodskoi dumy*, pt. 1 (June 1898): 17–18; N. F. Sumtsov, "Organizatsiia obshchestvennykh razvlechenii," *Obrazovanie*, no. 1 (January 1898): 29–43.



FIGURE 2: Participants at the Third All-Russian Congress of Feldshers and Obstetricians in St. Petersburg in 1912. Congresses were an important form of public representation where critical opinion was expressed that the government found increasingly difficult to contain. There were more than 500 district, regional, and national congresses of medicine and public health alone before 1917. The photograph was taken by K. K. Bulla, who photographed all of the most important prerevolutionary academic and professional congresses. Courtesy of the Central State Archive of Documentary Films, Photographs, and Sound Recordings of St. Petersburg.

G. E. Shchurovskii, a professor of geology at Moscow University and president of OLEAE, opined that “Congresses are a moral force, bringing scientists in contact with each other and with society and the mass of the population.” In addition to bringing together scientists from the far corners of the empire, the congresses elevated native science to “a place next to European science,” and promoted science education.⁷⁷ Similarly, a series of congresses of vocational and technical education, organized by the Russian Technical Society beginning in 1889, was convened to acquaint the public with the state of Russian technical education and to study “the conditions for its proper organization.” Believing that the congresses would energize, facilitate, and coordinate a multitude of private and public efforts to improve technical education and promote private initiative, the organizers encouraged public input into the program.⁷⁸ Congresses and the myriad public meetings provided forums, in the provinces as well as in Moscow and St. Petersburg, for public debate on a wide range of national policy issues, many of which, such as corporal punishment, universal public education, and government economic policy, were highly controversial.

These efforts to inform and mobilize the public fanned controversy and alarmed an autocratic government that for a long time had nurtured and supported the activities of associations. By the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between government and more and more associations became politicized and confrontational. The Literacy Committee allegedly used its “vast network of public libraries, reading rooms, and public lectures” and its claim to a voice in public policy, “to turn public education into a weapon of anti-government propaganda.”⁷⁹ One high-profile case at the turn of the century provides an excellent example of a contested public sphere. In the 1890s, the Free Economic Society was forced to curtail its public activities under mounting government complaints that it had opened its meetings to the public and overstepped the bounds of its charter.⁸⁰ A memorandum of the Political Police of December 8, 1897, contended that the meetings of the Free Economic Society had “turned into a parliament which debates publicly, always before great crowds, absolutely all issues of government internal policy.” “There is no possibility of objective discussion, or if it starts, it is quickly turned into an anti-government meeting,” a “political demonstration.” The

⁷⁷ Cited passages quoted in B. E. Raikov, *Grigorii Efimovich Shchurovskii: Uchenyi, naturalist i prosvetitel'* (Moscow, 1965), 61; and A. V. Pogozhev, *Dvadsatipiatiletie estestvenno-nauchnykh s"ezdov v Rossii, 1861–1886* (Moscow, 1887), vi. See also *Izvestiia o s"ezde estestvoispytatelei v Kieve s 11-go po 18-e iunია 1861 goda* (Kiev, 1861), vii.

⁷⁸ A. G. Nebol'sin, “Ob ustroistve periodicheskikh vystavok i s"ezdov po tekhnicheskomu i professional'nomu obrazovaniiu,” *Trudy s"ezda russkikh deiatelei po tekhnicheskomu i professional'nomu obrazovaniiu v Rossii: Doklady na obshchikh sobraniakh otdelenii* (St. Petersburg, 1890), 3.

⁷⁹ “Sekretnaia svodka Departamenta Politsii dlia Glavnogo Upravleniia General'nogo Shtaba ob uvelicheniem chisla oppozitsionno-nastroennykh elementov sredi chlenov Vol'nogo ekonomicheskogo obshchestva v sviazi s rostom revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v 1904–1905 gg.,” *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv* (St. Petersburg), fond 91, opis' 1, delo 664 (1904–1905), listy 1–3.

⁸⁰ I discuss this case in “The Politicization of Public Life: The Case of the Free Economic Society, 1890–1900,” a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Denver (November 2000). The source base is a paper trail of reports, correspondence, and memoranda in the files of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Department of Police, and the Free Economic Society itself in St. Petersburg and Moscow archives.

memorandum ended by the arresting claim that “no underground organization has done as much to spread anti-government ideas as has the Free Economic Society.”⁸¹

IT SHOULD BE READILY APPARENT THAT the institutional core of civil society—the network of associations in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other major cities—was rapidly growing in imperial Russia. To be sure, compared to Western Europe and North America, in a vast and far less urban empire this network was less dense, and the number of members per capita was decidedly smaller. But associations were too important to be dismissed by the imperial government then or by historians today. What, then, was the meaning of Russia’s associations and its emerging civil society? As British sociologist Keith Tester suggests, the most important question is not whether civil society has existed, or exists, among a particular people, whether it is strong or weak, or which institutions it possesses or lacks—important as these questions are—but why people operate as if it had meaning.⁸² It did have meaning in its day, and that meaning reveals much about Russia’s allegedly “traditional and mythological” public life and about an omnipotent state that allegedly created “subjects deprived of initiative.”

Although scholars often emphasize the differences between Russia and “the West,” the experience of Russian associations suggests many similarities. Russia’s associations were able to promote and pursue the same goals as their counterparts in Europe and North America. Within the unavoidable constraints of autocratic power, Russian associations were by and large self-defined, self-organized, and self-managed bodies offering a free, that is, not coercive, sociability. Their charters, the “founding document,” as they were repeatedly called, contained certain state-sanctioned privileges and immunities. Through associations, entrepreneurs, government officials, and professionals—almost exclusively men—presented typical nineteenth-century themes, language, projects, and hierarchies of value, 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, a belief in science and progress, and cultural stewardship. As elsewhere, outreach activity aspired to “enlarge the mind,” improve taste, and “make better citizens.” Programs of adult education aimed at nothing less than “the democratization of knowledge,” “the leveling of social classes,” and “the breaking of all barriers between people.”⁸³ The many projects—meetings and public lectures, publications, school administration, fund-raising—demonstrated extensive outreach as well as the organizational talents and the suppleness wanting in the cumbersome Russian bureaucracy.

⁸¹ “Zapiska po Otdeleniiu okhraneniia obshchestvennoi bezopasnosti i poriadka v stolitse,” Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter, GARF), fond 102, deloproizvodstvo 4 (1907), delo 133, listy 38–40 verso. In a similar vein is “Kratkaia kharakteristika revoliutsionnoi deiatel’nosti prosvetitel’nykh obshchestv,” GARF, f. 102, Osobyi Otdel (1906, pt. 2), d. 194, pt. 2, l. 266.

⁸² Keith Tester, *Civil Society* (London, 1992), 1–2.

⁸³ V. Storozhev, “Po povodu otcheta Moskovskoi Komissii domashnego chteniia,” *Obrazovanie* 3 (1897): 75. The “absence of ranks” (*nesoslovnyi kharakter*) in the meetings and other activities became an almost formulaic observation of Russian associational life. See, for example, descriptions of meetings of the Moscow Archaeological Society in T. I. Vzdornov, *Istoriia otkrytiia i izucheniiia russkoi srednevekovoi zhivopisi XIX v.* (Moscow, 1986), 140.

Indeed, to a great degree, Russian officialdom nurtured associations precisely for their organizational talents, as well as for their advancement of progress and national well-being. Despite the story of conflict between state and society that pervades much of the historical literature, as it pervaded the mutual perception of the antagonists at the time, a great degree of cooperation and collaboration existed between officialdom and Russian associations. From the end of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian state did much to create civil society by sanctioning the creation and operation of private associations. As in Europe, state subsidies, royal patronage, and the presence of government officials and even members of the imperial family on association boards fostered the crossover between official and unofficial realms. For more than a century, the government found it quite useful to have the learned societies apply knowledge, in a dispassionate way, to social and economic problems; to collect, analyze, and publish data; and even to make policy recommendations, of course only when asked to do so. For this reason, the government was willing to concede the societies considerable latitude for the autonomous management of their own affairs and even allow them to hold public meetings. To many members, associations presented an opportunity for a pragmatic, advantageous reciprocal relationship with the imperial government. Many associations assiduously cultivated an ethos of earnest service and usefulness in order to gain prestige and patronage for their projects. Russian associations often regarded their goals and those of the state as mutual—national progress and betterment through study, improvement, and mobilization of productive human and natural resources.

In pursuing these goals, associations became the vehicle by which educated Russians learned about society and communicated with each other. In a huge empire whose polity was built on vertical linkages to and from the autocrat that isolated its subjects, public meetings brought speakers and audiences in contact with each other and, by being reported in the societies' publications as well as in the press, with the broader educated society, both metropolitan and provincial. The projects of associations thereby established horizontal linkages that bypassed the Russian government, further underscoring their autonomy. By emphasizing change and progress, associations and their projects fostered a public awareness of a changing world, of history. This, in turn, raised consciousness and accorded an opportunity for special-interest constituencies of men to enter the public arena, to subject their missions to public scrutiny, and to be stewards of culture. Associations and their enterprises promoted that sense of public duty and civic pride that had been missing from Russian national life.⁸⁴ By mobilizing the public in the language

⁸⁴ Such rhetoric was pervasive. The minutes of the meetings of the planning committee of the Polytechnical Exposition of 1872 provide one example among many. See A. P. Bogdanov and I. Beliaev, "O tseli i kharaktere politekhnicheskoi vystavki," and Viktor Della-Vos, "Po povodu politekhnicheskoi vystavki," in the minutes of the meeting of OLEAE, August 29, 1868, in *Politekhnicheskaiia vystavka: Protokoly zasedanii*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1869), 18–23; "Protokol chastnogo sobraniia chlenov Komiteta po ustroistvu Politekhnicheskoi vystavki 17go oktiabria 1870 g.," in *Politekhnicheskaiia vystavka: Protokoly zasedaniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1871), 7–11. One can also find it in the newspaper coverage. See two stories about the closing of the exposition and about the final report of the exposition submitted to OLEAE in *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, no. 272 (October 1, 1872): 1–2; and no. 304 (December 1, 1872): 3–4.

of representation before both peers and power, associations collectively claimed to represent the nation, through publicity, policy initiatives, and petitions, to the Russian government.⁸⁵

Thus to represent the nation in the review and formulation of state policy jeopardized the precarious mutuality between officialdom and associations and gave furtive legitimacy to anti-government views. By the end of the nineteenth century, many, though by no means all, associations wanted the government to sanction a broader scope of activity, thus raising the threat of a vast archipelago of unauthorized and unscrutinized public initiative. Continued government tutelage only created more resentment and fostered an adversarial relationship. Regarding the review and formulation of national policy to be entering the arena of politics, a territory beyond the scope and competence of private associations, officialdom tried to suppress discussion of sensitive topics. Although historians have rightly identified certain major national crises—the famine of 1891–1892, events leading up to the Revolution of 1905, for example—as galvanizing public action in a spirit of opposition to the government, the organizational framework for such public assertiveness was already in place. Overcoming the fear of the authorities, and convening “parliaments,” as meetings were often called in the press, associations such as the Free Economic Society and the Russian Technical Society gained in esteem, authority, and trust among the educated population, gains that came at the government’s expense. Thus associations demonstrated what public life could be, even under autocracy, and why this public life was threatening to the authorities. They created and assiduously cultivated the spaces of initiative and autonomy where the capacity of citizenship could appear. However, politicization and contestation in these spaces at the turn of the twentieth century made the public sphere, like the state itself, vulnerable to attack, and a rapidly developing civil society was soon hijacked by revolutionaries for the purposes of its own destruction.

If the capacity of citizenship could sprout on the inhospitable ground of autocratic rule, could the Russian experience—and, in particular, its experience in association—enrich theories of civil society? Under tutelary autocratic authority, the emergence of civil society was not a consequence of the inviolability of person and domicile, property rights, and the rule of law, as is often theorized in the Western tradition, but was in advance of, or concurrent with, such limitations in the scope of state power. In freely constituted and publicly validated associations, educated Russians acted as if they were in civil society. Sanctioned by the state itself, associations become the leading edge in the emergence of a dynamic civil society. Russian associations help explain the cooperation between state and civil society, the social basis of liberalism and reform movements, and the eventual struggle against political absolutism. Through associations, individuals took initiative, acquired social identities, formed interest groups, framed policy issues, and mobilized public opinion. Voluntary associations created spaces where rights could

⁸⁵ Examples of such mediation can be found in Pogozhev, *Dvadtsatipiatiletie*, 142, 149, 151, 170, 171. I pursue this at greater length in “Russia’s Parliament of Public Opinion: Association, Assembly and the Autocracy, 1906–1914,” in Theodore Taranovski, ed., *Reform in Modern Russian History: Progress or Cycle?* (Cambridge, 1995), 212–36.

be asserted and defended and claims could be mediated. Their charters were micro-constitutions written in the language of representation. That language defined a legal relationship with authority, articulated collective goals, conferred certain rights and privileges, and set rules for self-management of affairs. Under autocracy, voluntary associations not only gave civil society meaning, they made an essential contribution to the process by which Russian subjects were becoming citizens.

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