

**Charles Tilly.
Trust and Rule.**

Cambridge University Press, 2005, 216 pp.

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Thank goodness that critique can be positive as well as negative! For here is another marvelous volume from Chuck Tilly, adding to and rounding out a larger recent treatise on *Democracy and Contention in Europe, 1650-2000* (2004). One immediate task of a reviewer is simply to encourage colleagues to read the book: it is a sustained, highly integrated analysis of a concept that stands at the heart of current debates written by a major scholar able to draw on an astonishing range of historical examples. Further, the position proposed is original, notably in offering a relational rather than a dispositional view of trust. As the details of the argument are complex, and are best approached through concentrated attention — absolutely necessary as Tilly takes the reader with him in an argument constructed in a series of logical steps — I choose here to highlight particular merits of the book before turning to some negative points. Doubts and worries are expressed in part so that Tilly can have something to get his teeth into when replying. Differently put, the negative points may well be wrong, but we can all learn by seeing Tilly explain why.

Social life without some measure of trust would be impossible, as Durkheim so often stressed. But current understanding tends to go much further, seeing trust as wholly beneficial. There is resonance with — and indeed influence from — Robert Putnam's varied works on social capital, the main thrust of which praises associational life as the bedrock of decent liberal democratic polities. Tilly refreshingly rejects such Candidean optimism. One neat way of making the point was always that the Oklahoman bombers were members of a bowling league. Historical evidence is marshaled to contrast trust networks that survive apart from the state with those that are integrated with it. Kinship groups, mafia organizations, religious sects and terrorist groups are as much a part of Tilly's subject matter as are the civic and voluntary societies that have been the subject of so much empirical research in recent years. An especially attractive element of the book is the detailed attention given to the ways in which trust is created, maintained and lost, particularly as the middle range theorizing involved is set within a framework aware of evolutionary changes to social structure. Very interesting comments are made about democracy. De-democratization can all too easily occur when groups with high levels of trust — militaries, the rich in contemporary America — withdraw from the public sphere; democratization depends upon integrating such groups into public life, albeit such integration must always be incomplete so as to allow the low level conflict which defines liberal democratic life. Tilly worries about the state of public life in the advanced West, noting interestingly that the rise of international civic society groups based on trust may undermine contentious politics within national societies quite as much as does increasing privatization. Finally, he keeps an open mind as to whether Al Qaeda represents a general historical novelty, happily so in my view given increasing evidence that terrorists in the Middle East are much better understood in traditional terms — as national liberators.

Tocqueville has always seemed to me to be the greatest theorist of trust, and I miss his central arguments here — albeit good use is made of Tocqueville's observations on Ireland. For one thing, the first volume of *Democracy in America* contains unduly neglected passages which theorize the key condition which turns associations based on trust from vicious conspiracies to agents of the

public weal. The absence of publicity allows conspiratorial groups to imagine that they represent the whole, with reality only dawning once the light of day is shone on actually existing structures of political support. One sees something like this in Iraq now: many Sunnis, hitherto kept in ignorance, are at last beginning to realize that they are but a minority, thereby mandating bargaining rather than domination. For another, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* is superb on the way in which the legacy of generalized distrust caused by the divide and rule politics of the French kings affected the abertura of 1789:

It was no easy task bringing together fellow citizens who had lived for many centuries aloof from, or even hostile to, each other and teaching them to cooperate in their own affairs. It had been far easier to estrange them than it now was to reunite them, and in so doing France gave the world a memorable example. Yet, when sixty years ago the various classes which under the old order had been isolated units in the social system came once again in touch, it was on their sore spots that they made contact and their first gesture was to fly at each other's throats. Indeed, even today, though class distinctions are no more, the jealousies and antipathies they caused have not died out. (Anchor Books, New York, 1955, p. 107).

My own passion for Tocqueville may be idiosyncratic, but he is cited here so as to make two points against Tilly. First, the character of social movements depends — as he has shown so many times in the past — upon the nature of the political regimes with which they interact. In this new book, the impact of politics — as compared to more structural forces — seems slightly neglected. Second, the pessimism that Tocqueville shows to moments of democratic openings seems to me all-too-often justified. When speaking about Ireland, Tilly is, in contrast, rather too optimistic. Of course, he stresses the violence of Irish history. But the emphasis that he places on successful democratization in the South seems to me to miss one thing, namely the fact that a baseline of democratization was increasing homogeneity, as Protestants assimilated, hid or left. Successful, regulated democratic contention in Europe — we hope that the rest of the world may now sometimes do better — has been assured, with few exceptions, by the creation of nationally homogeneous societies. So it is slightly wrong to talk about the democratization of Ireland, and the role therein played by integrating trust groups: Ireland changed, with the trust of one culture coming to dominate the whole.

A second general point concerns comments at the end about de-democratization. In one sense, there is nothing new in his argument: upper elements in society have often been able to outflank lower orders, and this most certainly has not changed in the contemporary world. But one does one means by upper elements? I am far from being a Marxist but wonder at the rather anaemic 'upper elements', which I invent here for deliberate effect. For one must worry about the general conceptualizing the world in terms of groups based on trust. This is correct, in that solidarities can be of status groups. Weber knew this. But Weber also knew that classes were a significant reality, one whose salience he felt was increasing in late Wilhelmine Germany. Is there not some sense left to the view that capitalism gives certain groups, often based on trust, greater salience than others? Differently put, we should not be so impressed by the real merits of a new approach so as to forget some discoveries that retain merit.

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The reviewer has an especial interest in questions of trust having written about the related topic of civil society, most recently in a reader co-edited with Frank Trentmann on *Civil Society* (Palgrave, 2005). He is currently completing an intellectual biography of Ernest Gellner.

A Grateful Reply

Thank goodness that reviewers sometimes read past the first chapter of the book they are assessing! John Hall offers us a sympathetic appreciation of *Trust and Rule* before raising several relevant questions about the book's implications for the present and future. Precisely because he focuses attention on those implications, however, readers of his vivid review may take away two mistaken impressions of the book's contents. First, the places of democracy and voluntary associations in its argument. *Trust and Rule* came into being because I didn't think my own previous writing on democratization and de-democratization — or anyone else's — dealt adequately with the complexities of trust and distrust. But only one of the book's seven chapters deals directly with democratization, and only two of the book's 161 pages take up voluntary associations as containers, generators, or inhibitors of trust.

The book as a whole examines the different ways that interpersonal networks embodying trust connect with centers of power, and how those connections change. Its theory gives roughly equal attention to evasive conformity, particularistic ties, brokered autonomy, patronage systems, totalitarianism, theocracy, and democracy. Its text lavishes far more attention on that list's earlier forms of connection than on totalitarianism, theocracy, and democracy. Why? Because through most of history members of trust networks who didn't happen to be running states of their own rightly defended their networks from exploitative integration into existing systems of political power, but did so in a variety of different ways. Democracy is a historically rare, and very contingent, set of political arrangements in which people integrate at least some of their trust networks into systems of political power, and set up limits to rulers' exploitation of those networks. Even there, voluntary associations only figure as connectors between trust networks and public politics in the company of trade unions, religious congregations, patron-client chains, and service-providing governmental agencies. If you want to read a book that will confirm your skepticism about civil society as the Great Connector, read *Trust and Rule*.

Second, other people's theories, including Tocqueville's. John Hall's books and essays masterfully rework classic authors to produce contemporary conclusions. Mine don't. *Trust and Rule* signals its general intent through brief discussions of Adam Smith and Margaret Levi. In order to avoid accusations of cowardice, it includes two brief, skeptical sketches of Robert Putnam's analyses. Its footnotes gesture to other relevant theorists as the book unfolds. Close readers will detect the influence of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Barrington Moore Jr. and, yes, Alexis de Tocqueville. But the book proceeds as if readers were mainly concerned to learn how, across large sweeps of history and culture, different kinds of trust networks have connected — or resisted connection — with various systems of rule, not how its arguments relate to previous thought on the subject.

Does this mean that I reject Tocqueville's insights? On the contrary, as my deployment of Tocqueville's observations (rather than his theories) in my analysis of Ireland indicates, I agree that he provides sharp insights into the variable place of everyday associational forms in 19th century

western political life. But in none of his writing, not even the *Old Regime and the French Revolution*, do I find recognition of the enormous space that trust networks occupied in the lives of ordinary people before the 19th century. In the very passage Hall quotes, Tocqueville's reference to citizens "who had lived for many centuries aloof from, or even hostile to, each other" bespeaks just such a misperception.

As for Hall's complaints, we simply disagree about Ireland, perhaps because he sets a very high standard for democracy. Relative to itself before the 1920s and to other western countries, outside of the North, Ireland has come reasonably close to a public life involving broad, equal citizenship, binding consultation of citizens with regard to government affairs, and protection of citizens from arbitrary action by governmental agents. That process did dethrone the previously hegemonic Protestant establishment outside of Ulster, but it by no means expelled Protestants from Irish public or private life.

When it comes to "upper elements," that is Hall's term, not mine; *Trust and Rule* ordinarily uses the term "ruling classes." If Hall means that I have failed to recognize that well-organized dominant social classes often pursue their interests ruthlessly and thereby threaten democracy, he is wrong. On that recurrent threat to democracy, we actually agree.

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