

**Losing our religion: sources of solidarity in pluralist settings**

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## **Declaration**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of Goldsmiths, University of London is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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## **Abstract**

For the last thirty years a quiet revolution has been taking place in political theory. Starting in theology and philosophy, and making its way through history and sociology to politics, policy and practice, this disparate movement has slowly adopted the title of post-liberalism. Although difficult to encapsulate in a single argument, the central idea of post-liberalism is that political theory has, over the course of the last four centuries, slowly but surely become dominated by liberalism, neglecting ideas of the good in favour of an abstract respect for plurality. This theory has apparently infiltrated politics, policy and practice, leaving these unable to inspire feelings of solidarity or collective action.

The aim of this thesis is to explore these ideas both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, it places post-liberal ideas into dialogue with anthropologies and sociologies of religion, of the state, and of capitalism, with special attention to research engaged with how these categories influence ideas of the good. Empirically, it undertakes a multiple case-study ethnography of civic action groups working in London. The cases are chosen on the basis of their representing key policy paradigms for social solidarity in the post-war era: Christian, secular, multi-faith and post-secular.

The thesis concludes by offering an alternative framework, in which religion sits as a subset, for developing shared ideas of the good deliberatively and inclusively, so as to not only respect but thrive on plurality.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For the last thirty years a quiet revolution has been taking place in political theory. Starting in theology and philosophy, and making its way through history and sociology to politics, policy and practice, this disparate movement has slowly adopted the title of post-liberalism. Although difficult to encapsulate in a single argument, the central idea of post-liberalism is that political theory has, over the course of the last four centuries, slowly but surely become dominated by liberalism, neglecting ideas of the good in favour of an abstract respect for plurality. This theory has apparently infiltrated politics, policy and practice, leaving these unable to inspire feelings of solidarity or collective action. What is perceived as public has slowly reduced as notions of political and social responsibility are increasingly regarded as private matters. Two monolithic conceptual mechanisms have arisen to fill the vacuum, to redirect private citizens towards public duty: the state and the market, each with their own contractual logic. So prevalent has this binary become that it is almost impossible to conceive of a reduction in one without an increase in the other. By way of resolving this stalemate, post-liberals propose to return to the theoretical moment at which ideas of the good were undermined, and to slowly work from theory through to politics, policy and practice, reawakening our sense of solidarity, and reinvigorating collective action.

Post-liberalism sits well with broader shifts in society and economics and, partly as a result, has had a significant and growing impact on politics, policy and practice. It has been suggested, for instance, that the UK, Europe and Australia are becoming post-secular (Habermas 2008). This return of religion

ostensibly seems conducive to the reinvigoration of ideas of the good. Once having been perceived as in decline, religion has a renewed visibility, requiring of a reimagining of the public sphere (Habermas 2006; Dinham 2014). A similarly significant shift has been seen in social and economic policy, with the post-war socially democratic consensus giving way to a neoliberal consensus, with rhetoric concerning the importance of public services giving way to rhetoric concerning individual property (Judt 2010). This shift has been reinforced by policy interest in localism and empowered communities. Against this backdrop, in the UK, post-liberalism has influenced the rise of two cross-dressing political movements perceived as eschewing left-right, state-market dichotomies: Red Tory and Blue Labour. Post-liberalism has had a significant impact on policy through the work of think-tanks Respublica, Demos and IPPR. And post-liberalism is slowly finding its way into community development, through the work of Maurice Glasman at Queen Mary, University of London and at London Citizens, and through the work of Together for the Common Good.

Notwithstanding this apparent timeliness, a number of problems arise from post-liberalism's emergent impact. First, what is meant by "ideas of the good", indeed whether this phrase means anything at all in the contemporary context, is deeply contentious. It needs to be recalled that the moment in history post-liberals hark back to is a time of Christian hegemony. It is questionable whether this ideal has any relevance in contexts that are simultaneously Christian, secular and religiously plural (Weller 2006). Not only is it contentious to suggest that Christianity has anything unique to contribute

to secular contexts, which may exhibit their own ideals, hopes and aspirations that inspire public duty (Woodhead 2012); but it is also problematic to suggest that Christianity can frame religiously plural contexts.

Despite its apparent equivalence to the post-liberal, nor does the post-secular necessarily present a shift back to older ways of thinking. Instead, as I suggest in more detail further along in the introduction, the post-secular, if it is a useful category at all, might be nothing more than an increased awareness of religion on account of the rise of radical Islam, and the potential contribution of particular religions to public service delivery (Weller 2006; Beckford 2012). Any new settlement is thus unlikely to result in a fundamental upheaval of secular assumptions, and far more likely to result in a secular public sphere's improving its religious literacy so as to better accommodate religious diversity. If ideas of the good are to be revived, they will also have to be reimagined in a way that respects this complexity.

The second issue is that depending on what we mean by ideas of the good, whether or not they are in decline, or even relevant, is deeply contentious. Coming from a theological position, post-liberalism offers a particular understanding of what is missing, with a deep emphasis on moral narratives and voluntary commitment, which might not be recognised by everybody. The good, especially understood as the common good, is a widely used phrase outside of theological contexts, and may refer to nothing more than the seeking of common interests in diverse communities (Gilbert 2012). Moreover, sociologists often call into question whether ideas of the good

represent anything other than delusional justifications for actions that have been predetermined by the structures within which they find themselves: religion, class, gender (Laidlaw 2013). Meanwhile, evolutionary biologists and economists have been developing theories of rational choice that controversially suggest all actions are determined by a cost-benefit analysis. If ideas of the good are to be revived, they will have to demonstrate their added value in this altered context.

All this contention is extremely problematic, since it suggests that politics, policy and practice might be formulated on the basis of ideas that potentially do not resonate with the wider public, and which fail to accurately reflect what is out there to resource politics, policies and practices to make them viable. At worst, the result will be a new cultural hegemony, in which people are forced to participate in institutions from which they are ideologically alienated, if they wish to be involved in constructing ideas of the good. Less dramatically, it may lead to the further alienation of large swathes of the population, to whom ideas of the good do not make sense. Huge amounts of time and money could be wasted trying to understand why it is that politics, policies and practices are not gaining any traction. Perhaps least dramatically of all, the result may simply be that post-liberalism only appeals to a particular type of Christian. It would be inappropriate, as well as a shame, if such an effective analysis of our current situation could not be opened up to generate renewal outside of the Christian context, to society as a whole.

So the key questions of this thesis emerge: what role, if any, do ideas of the good play in cultivating social solidarity in pluralist settings? How are these ideas reified through rituals and practices that transform senses of political and social responsibility? And within these are many smaller questions: Does it differ from religious to nonreligious people? Does it differ between religious identities? If ideas do play an important role, what kind of ideas would they have to be in pluralist settings?

The thesis opens with a comprehensive and critical review of post-liberalism: first, as it emerges in theology and philosophy; then, as it is reified through politics, policy and practice. The thesis then turns to scrutinise the key questions against two criteria: First, it theoretically dissects post-liberalism in terms of its components. Second, it undertakes a multiple case study ethnography of four organisations seeking to develop social solidarity in a context of all faiths and none, with the aim of understanding the complex ways in which theology, ideology, and material factors combine to bring about social action between people of apparently very different beliefs. Each organisation is situated in London, widely regarded as one of the most diverse cities in the world.

In Chapter 2, the discussion of post-liberalism seeks to establish a framework that can be theoretically and empirically explored. Developing such a framework is an extraordinarily difficult task, indeed almost the work of a doctoral thesis in itself, since on the one hand, post-liberalism has not at all emerged as a movement, but rather as an *ex post facto* label to apply to a

number of disparate and conflicting ideas; and on the other hand, post-liberal theory tends to be written as genealogy, and so is not easy to translate into theories for exploration. The result is that the framework provided can only ever be general, and there will always be exceptions. Even taking the small set of thinkers that I will explore in detail, Charles Taylor, Alisdair MacIntyre and John Milbank, there are a number of important conflicts. Still, a cut off has to be made somewhere in the process of rendering ideas amenable to empirical study. It next seeks to give that framework practical reality, by demonstrating how it has influenced particular politics, policy and practice. Of particular importance in developing this framework is the post-liberal stress on ideas of the good, which are deemed to designate but also be constructed by a community. I develop a post-liberal idea of community which designates a group of people bound through shared narratives and associated practices, and who engage in the process of performing these narratives and practices for their own sake, rather than doing so on account of instrumental factors such as the calculation that what is good for the community is good for them as individuals.

Having thus outlined post-liberalism in terms of its theological and philosophical roots and in terms of how its ideas are beginning to play out in politics, policy and practice, the literature review turns to outline and critically assess the fundamental meanings and mechanisms by which the post-liberal vision appears to be undermined.

Chapter 3 challenges post-liberalism at its most fundamental level; namely, its contention that the loss of ideas of the good causes the demise of social solidarity. It questions whether ideas of the good have really been lost with secularisation. It questions whether ideas of the good are even required to establish social solidarity. And it questions whether new ideas are not anyway on the horizon, which avoid the implication in some of the literature that recovering the good depends upon a revalorisation of Christianity – a standpoint which, as already suggested, would likely be inappropriate and unworkable in any religiously plural context. It will do all of this by putting post-liberalism into dialogue with anthropological and sociological studies of religion and its influence on ideas of the good.

My review of the literature on social theory reveals a dichotomy between idealism and materialism. Idealism sees ideas as fundamental in shaping history and human action, whereas materialism sees material factors such as wealth and power as primary. Revealing this dichotomy, and noting the shift from the former to the latter, provides support for the post-liberal view. Yet in reality of course, the dichotomy is false, and people tend to be motivated by a number of intertwining factors, thus the post-liberal view is also challenged.

This challenge might be complicated by the possibility that post-liberalism is idealism with a twist. It often seems to assert not that ideas *are* what motivate people, but that they are what *ought* to motivate people. From this perspective, it is of little consequence to suggest that people are primarily motivated by material factors. Post-liberals are making a normative claim that

things ought to be different. Yet this point notwithstanding, calling for people to be motivated by ideas of the good is senseless if that call does not reflect what is ontologically possible, or socially useful.

The post-liberal claim that the loss of ideas of the good has led to a decline in social solidarity is also challenged against developments in the anthropology and sociology of religion. While much of this research recognises the important role that religion plays in cultivating social solidarity (Durkheim 1915/2008; Bellah 1967; Alexander 2006; Lynch 2012; Baker 2013). But some of this theory regards this function as transferable to other, perhaps secular framings, while still other theory confirms this possibility, suggesting that ideas of the good never really went away, but rather changed; from Christian to secular, and subsequently to being both these and religiously plural simultaneously (Woodhead 2012; Weller 2006). As these shifts play out in politics, policy and practice, a complicated picture is offered whereby a reformed secular state remains as arbitrator and commissioner of religious and nonreligious ideas and practices of social solidarity (Dinham 2009; Dinham et al. 2009).

When it comes to religion, the politics, policy and practice landscape is particularly muddled regarding the idealism-materialism dichotomy. On the one hand politicians and policy makers develop grand narratives such as multi-culturalism and multi-faithism, or inter-culturalism and inter-faithism, which they seek to reify through institutions. And practitioners such as those associated with David Ford's Cambridge Interfaith Programme or the

Christian Muslim Forum advocate scriptural reasoning as a process of developing relationships across difference. On the other hand, actors operating within these grand narratives provided by politics and policy, such as David Barclay, place much greater stress on actions and relationships (Barclay 2013). But again, suggesting there is a dichotomy can be misleading, as empirical work will show, and Paulo Freire has suggested that the point is not to eschew ideas of the good altogether, but rather to ensure that such ideas are formed inductively and at the grassroots.

An alternative way of theorising the renewed visibility of religion in secular contexts is the post-secular (Beckford 2012). Post-secular theory has a lot of traction at the moment, because of a two-part principle. On the one hand, the secular idea of principled distance from any particular idea of the good appears to be the only viable model in an increasingly religiously plural landscape. But on the other hand, notwithstanding this caveat, as a result of events like 9/11 and 7/7, as well as the obvious role that religion has to play in the public sphere, most obviously in terms of welfare service delivery and cohesion, but also in terms of greater spiritual and moral awareness, religion is unavoidably back on the agenda (Dinham 2009; Dinham and Francis 2015).

Yet the post-secular is also problematic. Notwithstanding the implicit agreement between post-liberalism and post-secular theory, since the latter seems to revalorise the place of ideas of the good in establishing social solidarity, it might be suggested that there is a post-secular paradox: Taking a secular perspective, post-secularists nonetheless recognises the role that

religion plays in the public sphere. I explain this paradox by distinguishing between the post-secular and post-secularism.

Finally, I move on to discuss ideas such as sacred sociology, religious literacy and interstitial space theory, which are presented as a kind of synthesis between post-liberalism and secular and post-secular social theories. These ideas begin to pave the way towards reconciling the importance of ideas of the good in developing social solidarity, with the significantly changing landscape of belief.

So I discuss in turn secular, post-secular and sacred social theory. The discussion will demonstrate that in fact, post-liberalism can find significant and wide-ranging support for its analysis, but with a number of caveats: from opening up the theology to include alternative discourses, to being aware of the advantages of secular and materialist approaches.

Chapter 4 focuses on statism. Post-liberalism suggests that the turn from religious ideas of the good to secular ideas, from idealist to materialist, created a vacuum which needed to be filled by the state. Through legislation, the state creates a rigid social contract. And through incentive, punishment, and welfare, the state manipulates us to act in the interests of this social contract.

Post-liberals suggest that a situation in which communities and organisations act in the interest of solidarity voluntarily, without being forced to, and without

requiring state support, is intrinsically more desirable than other options. Voluntarism is more desirable than legislation, since it reflects moral actions undertaken for moral reasons, rather than because they are to our advantage (Taylor 1992: 60; MacIntyre 1981/2007: 156, 188, 236; Milbank 2009). Communities looking after themselves is considered more desirable than taxation and welfare, since it avoids the alienation of gift exchange and charity, disparages dependency, and tends to promote mutual support and strong relationships (Pally 2011: 24). This idea of community will be explored in relation to anthropological and sociological invocations of community, which suggest a slightly different framing.

Post-liberals moreover suggest that when organisations are co-opted into the state, they are corrupted and or destroyed by the neglect of intrinsic goods in favour of external goods (MacIntyre in Knight 2005: 267). This view has some support amongst political economists (Polanyi 1944/2001; Scruton 1985). Since the state tends to collude with the market, it will always undermine solidarity, both on account of the aims and targets it imposes, and because of the alienation of workers.

Yet there is plenty of other theory to suggest that the state at its very inception is not the enemy of solidarity, but its embodiment (Dinham 2014). This appears to be reinforced by the public sentiment that the state should do certain things because local people are either unable or should not have to do so. There is equally support in discourse amongst the public regarding the privatisation of public services, which suggests that public ownership inspires

solidarity, since only in public ownership can services have a chance of being for the good of all, focused on the intrinsic good of a practice, rather than on profit, and in the service equally of all, irrespective of wealth, age, race, religion or belief, location, or disability (Titmuss 1971/1997). Moreover, it might be suggested that by paying taxes, we are consciously performing solidarity. Similarly, the idea of the state funding or commissioning certain programmes or organisations, may be perceived as developing solidarity in local institutions, as well as being fundamental to sustaining those institutions (Giddens 1998; Skopcol 1996).

Chapter 5 focuses on capitalism. While it is more popular amongst contemporary social theorists to focus on neoliberalism, the focus of this thesis remains the deeper theory associated with capitalism. Partly, this is for the obvious reason that post-liberal theorists themselves designate capitalism as the key area to address. But more deeply, the choice of post-liberals themselves is based on the suggestion that it is necessary to return to the ideological inception of our current problems. From the post-liberal perspective, liberalism and capitalism are the key areas to address, the energy behind the waves as it were, of which neoliberalism is merely the latest manifestation, the white foam of the waves as they crash onto the seashore. Although it acknowledges the idea that capitalism is intended to distribute to each according to desert, post-liberalism takes on both Marxist and neo-Marxist guises, showing concern not only with how capitalism creates material inequality, but also with how it cultivates acquisitiveness, and corrodes relationships. Post-liberalism is concerned with how the state and

the market collude, such that legislation and policy are beholden to business interests, and public goods are submitted to market logic. Its concern with market logic has some roots in concern with inequality, but also rests heavily on its focus on relationships: the relationship of managers to workers, specifically, the alienation of workers from their labour; the relation of individuals to the wider public, specifically, the use of self-interest as a mechanism for increasing productivity; and the relationship between each party in the gift relationship, specifically, the intervention of money.

Chapter 6 commences the second strand through which post-liberal theory is scrutinised, by exploring the methodological challenges associated with moving from theological and philosophical theory, into empirical research. It places special emphasis on the difficulty of moving from normative analyses to research engaged with lived realities in religiously diverse settings. It suggests that this move is complicated, since normative statements may not be considered subject to empirical scrutiny, and any evidence that a normative statement does not realistically reflect people's opinion on the ground, may simply be taken as evidence of how far from the truth people have strayed.

The methodology closes with a short introduction to the structure and format of the findings case studies. Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 look at each case study in turn: Christians on the Left, Hackney Council for Voluntary Service, the Faith-based Regeneration Network, and London Citizens.

Chapter 11 offers discussion points. It takes the reader systematically through the questions arising from chapters 2 to 5, and explains what the findings offered from chapters 7 to 10 can contribute by way of an answer.

Chapter 12 concludes the thesis, by offering a framework for thinking about social solidarity in a pluralist age.

## Chapter 2: Post-liberalism

This section introduces post-liberalism, and provides a framework for analysing its understanding of ideas of the good. It also demonstrates how post-liberalism is made manifest in particular politics, policies and practices. I should begin with the disclaimer that this task is made tough not only because each thinker I associate with the trend has a slightly different perspective, but also because its meaning as it plays out in practice inevitably shifts with time. What I therefore do is to begin by stating the basic argument, then go far wider and deeper, only to return, in the next chapter, to the basic argument, so as to have a shorthand for critique. The intention is that this shorthand will carry with it much baggage, and that the reader, once having taken in this chapter, will be able to also carry that baggage, so as we can move together through the critique.

The basic argument of post-liberalism can be framed quite simply: there was once a clear idea of the good. This idea has been undermined by the rise of liberalism, which is taken as responsible for both statism and capitalism. Liberalism introduces the possibility that on the one hand, there is no single idea of the good, and on the other, even if there were, it would not be possible to agree on it without descending into violence. Liberalism suggests that all must be free to pursue their own idea of the good, and that any public good can only be defined in terms of material improvements spread as widely as possible. I will just refer to this as common wealth for shorthand. Statism acts as a mechanism for simultaneously protecting the individual's right to pursue her own idea of the good, and underwriting common wealth. Capitalism

provides a new mechanism, a hidden hand, which redirects self-interest towards common wealth.

The longer argument is far more complex. Since post-liberalism began in theology, and since its origin impacts on its evolution into other fields, I will begin by offering an account of this origin. This account will remain brief, however, since my key interest is the adoption of post-liberalism into political theology.

Post-liberal theology first emerged through the work of Hans Willhelm Frei and George Lindbeck at Yale Divinity School. Both scholars critiqued the colonising of theology by a liberal ideology rooted in the enlightenment, which insisted on the possibility of a tradition-independent rationality based on logic and empirical evidence, and the relegation to a matter of individual preference anything that could not be so evidenced (Hunsinger 2003: 51; Michener 2013: 2). With the spread of this ideology into theology, the latter had largely fallen into two camps: what Hunsinger characterises as the evangelical and the liberal - although proponents of each might beg to differ at this characterisation (Hunsinger 2003: 44). With the broad use of the term evangelical, Hunsinger intends those that take a literalist approach to theology, often justifying 'faith commitments and propositions using the methods and suppositions of the rational and empirical' (Michener 2013: 2). By liberals, he intends those that seek to identify a universal religious experience grounded in psychological or sociological processes, of which Christianity is just one manifestation. From this perspective, scripture is to be

read metaphorically. Against both of these positions, post-liberal theologians cast Christianity as an internally coherent narrative or set of narratives that cannot be interpreted but only undermined by methods grounded in different ontologies. The Christian narrative is unique, and the interpretation of this narrative must be situated in terms of the needs and struggles of a particular community as it evolves through time, providing a basis for holding one another to account and undertaking shared action (Hauerwas 1984).

Given its focus on internally coherent narrative, and community-based interpretation, much of post-liberal thought is aimed at changing either theological thinking generally, or else particular churches (Hauerwas 1984). But a few thinkers within the post-liberal school aim to speak beyond theology and the church to society as a whole. These authors critique the dominance of supposedly tradition-independent rational discourses, of empiricism and individualism in secular societies, and press instead for a revalorisation of narrative generally, and of a Christian narrative in particular, which is seen as key to social solidarity.

To provide further context for understanding these thinkers, it is useful to touch upon political theology, the discipline in which their work sits. In particular, it is useful to distinguish political theology from secular political theory. Put simply, political theology is the discipline that works out theological ideas into political ideas, and, in so doing, provides theological justifications and critiques for certain types of politics. In some sense then, we would expect political theology to become less worthwhile as theological concepts

lose their social relevance. But the reality is slightly more complicated than this.

In his *Political Theology* (1922/2006: 36), Carl Schmitt argued that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts'. What Schmitt meant by this is disputed, but we can simplistically say that God is replaced by the state, and the most significant question for humanity then becomes how to be reconciled to one another through the state. Examples of this may include the divine right of kings, whereby theology is used directly to justify political power, or the ideas of socialist thinkers such as Rousseau (Schmitt 1922/2006: 39; 46; 48). Because of this connection, all politics implicitly involves political theology, as the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School were so keen to point out (Mendieta 2005). Politics is deeply implicated in deciding on and participating in which objects, ideas and practices are venerated, and which are not. Because of this, theology proper is important not only as a source of analogous wisdom, as a technical discipline for conceptualising our political situation, but also as a way of offering an alternative by which we are reconciled to one another. So for Schmitt secular political theory is distinct only inasmuch as it is reflexively naive.

With these two accounts in mind, it becomes easier to understand post-liberal political theology as a critique of how pretensions to tradition-independent rationality and the prioritisation of the individual have become reified through the political process. Its key response is the revalorisation of ideas of the

good. While a number of thinkers perhaps justifiably characterised as post-liberal political theologians have come to the fore in recent years (see Bretherton 2015; Turnbull forthcoming 2016), this thesis primarily explores Charles Taylor, Alisdair MacIntyre and John Milbank. Partly, I explore these thinkers because they have the widest academic influence, and so many of my analyses of their work will have implications for other thinkers. More importantly, I explore them because their work has the most significant political and policy influence, as will become clear towards the end of this chapter.

Finally, it is useful to note that the three thinkers can be regarded as sitting on a spectrum from ideationally liberal to ideationally exclusive: On one side sits Charles Taylor, who comes across as rather hopeful that ideas of the good can be rediscovered in a world of all religions and none; next comes Alisdair MacIntyre, who, despite regarding the contemporary world as particularly corrupt, nonetheless, in his reliance on antique thought, sees the possibility of rediscovering ideas of the good in diverse settings; finally comes Milbank, for whom Christianity offers the only idea of the good capable of redeeming society.

But what are these ideas of the good? What are their meanings and mechanisms? I begin by trying to outline this. I then detail how these have supposedly been undermined by liberalism. The following subsections then trace the argument into statism and capitalism.

## Religion lost: from ideas of the good to social contracts

Contra Schmitt, for Charles Taylor secular political theory is conceptually distinct. In his *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor has said that the chief difference between political theology and secular political theory is that for political theology, that which 'makes [a] group of people as they continue over time a common agent...is something which transcends the realm of those common actions this agency engages in', whereas for secular political theory, 'the constituting factor [of common agency] is nothing other than such common action – whether the founding acts have already occurred in the past, or are now coming about is immaterial' (Taylor 2007: 194).

So political theology is just any theory that locates the constituting factor of common agency as prior to and as the reason for common action. Considered in this way, political theology potentially encapsulates, and at the very least is significant in understanding a whole range of political theory, since the constituting factor of common agency could be any number of ideas: God's will; an abstract notion of utopia or human purpose; an ideal such as Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; a biological understanding of function; or whatever. This could include the Platonic notion of *eidos*, the Aristotelian notion of *telos*, or purpose; the Christian notion of *eschaton*, or the day of judgement; the broadly religious notion of millenarianism (Cohn 1957/1993; Worsley 1987); the first Christian and later socialist idea of utopia (Kumar 1991; Sargisson 2004); the Hegelian idea of synthesis (Shanks 1991); Bloch's principle of hope (1954/1995); ideology (Eagleton 1991); Durkheim's notion of the sacred and collective effervescence (Durkheim 1915/2008; Lynch 2012); and most

recently, Scott Atran's notion of Sacred Value Theory as a way of predicting religiously and ideologically motivated action (Atran 2011).

It may be debated whether political theology may include the Badiouian event (Badiou 2006). An example of the event could be May '68, the French Revolution, or Christ's resurrection; it is an occurrence that transcends and subverts any categorisation – indeed it is dissolved in categorisation. The perceiver of the event is inspired to ask how to remain faithful to it. In this sense, the event may be a mythologised understanding of past common action that transcends and informs present and future common action.

Political theology is distinct from secular political theory, which instead places social contracts, agreements and common actions as the foundation of common agency. Examples of this might include things as big and abstract as obeying the law, paying tax, or contributing to the capitalist system, or something as local and tangible as joining in a protest or strike, or digging up a garden.

This particular way of framing post-liberalism offers interesting analytical potential, showing potential disadvantages, and advantages of post-liberalism. In practice, political theology is potentially dangerous. If something transcendent confers belonging to a group, then it may follow that demonstrating allegiance to this norm might become a prerequisite of citizenship, as was the case in the middle ages, when only Christians were considered full citizens. It is exactly this sort of situation that liberalism arises

to avoid. In contrast to this, secular political theory holds that partaking in certain actions confers belonging. It does not matter whether I am a Christian, a Jew a Muslim or whatever – so long as I abide by the law or pay tax.

But political theology may also have its advantages. First, for Taylor

‘democratic societies need a sense of common bonding, common purpose, around certain basic goals, around certain basic principles...Once you get a certain part of the population beginning to believe that when, over there, they’re talking about what’s best, they’re not thinking of us, then you’re getting a situation in which the legitimacy of the society is being called into question’ (Taylor 2011)

So political theology is important for the legitimacy of the state.

Second, if something transcendent confers belonging, then failure to perform certain acts will not automatically exclude an individual or group. For example, we might take the contemporary situation in Britain, where some politicians and newspapers suggest that the failure to contribute to the capitalist system removes certain individuals and groups of the right to receive benefits.

MacIntyre offers a slightly different analysis. For MacIntyre, we have moved along two parallel lines, one philosophical, and the other social. Philosophically we have moved from tradition to universal morality, socially we have moved from collective to individual self-understandings.

MacIntyre explains that:

The moral scheme which forms the historical background to [classical] thought had...a structure which required three elements: untutored human nature, man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos* and the moral precepts which enable him to pass from one state to the other. But the joint effect of the secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism was to eliminate any notion of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*. Since the whole point of ethics – both as a theoretical and a practical discipline – is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a *telos* leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 54).

So MacIntyre sees the distinguishing philosophical shift as being from a tripartite model of 1) humans as they are, moving, via 2) ethics, to 3) humans as they can be; to a bipartite model in which there is supposed to be some relationship between humans as they are naturally observed and the ethical, or what becomes the universal moral, way to live. The Ancient Greek model relies on tradition to describe the most practical ways to move from the first stage to the second. The second relies on calculation of what humans are capable. The result is utter disagreement and the collapse of ethical inquiry

altogether: hence, the social transition from collective to individual self-understandings, which will be touched on in more detail later on.

This notion of a move from tradition to universalism is similar to Taylor's notion of transcendence, and perhaps can be described as deepening that concept, but with two caveats. The first is that

Aristotle takes the *telos* of human life to be *a certain kind of life*; the *telos* is not something to be achieved at some future point, but in the way our whole life is constructed (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 175).

Yet this point itself is complicated. The *telos* remains a transcendent guiding principle, even if it is immanent in the sense of being recognisable and realisable. For MacIntyre 'this scheme is complicated and added to, but not essentially altered, when it is placed within a framework of theistic beliefs' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 53). All that changes is that 'the precepts of ethics now have to be understood not only as teleological injunctions, but also as expressions of a divinely ordained law'; and, specifically for Christianity via Augustine, the notion of the flawed will is introduced (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 53; 175). The *telos* remains the same, but humans are less able to achieve it.

The second caveat is that the universal morals that take the place of transcendence, are to some extent themselves a kind of transcendence. This may be called the paradox of secularisation. MacIntyre explains that tradition is replaced by

the project of constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 52).

Yet these precepts may themselves become transcendent notions towards which we are directed but are flawed in achieving, in which case all that is missing is an ethics of how to get there – it is the second stage, not the third, that is missing. It is suggested that modernity lacks a sense of transcendence, and therefore of becoming. This point will become more significant further down, as I begin to discuss research in the anthropology and sociology of religion.

The distinction MacIntyre would draw between classical transcendence and modern transcendence is threefold: first, because classical ideas of the good are rooted in our function as human beings, they serve as their own motivation: 'man' stands to 'good man' as 'watch' stands to 'good watch' or 'farmer' to 'good farmer within the classical tradition' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 58). What this means is that to do good is to perform one's function correctly as a human being. This is why, for Aristotle, 'the virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 148). Whether we translate *eudaimonia* as 'blessedness, happiness, prosperity' or whatever, the point is that there is a

sense of achievement about being a good person (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 148).

Second, classical transcendence is grounded in a social role. What it takes to be a good man is rooted in one's place within a social system, and tends to be related to contribution (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 133). Universal moral precepts, on the other hand, are unrelated to one's role within a system. Following this analysis, rather than moving from transcendence to immanence, it may be suggested that we have moved from immanence to transcendence. We have moved from a world in which we are guided by our social function, to one in which we are guided by universal precepts, irrespective of role.

The third difference is to do with a distinction between revelation and reason, and is best left until after we have discussed Milbank.

Milbank offers a slightly different analysis still. The major distinction between political theology and secular political theory is one of ontology. Whereas political theology is based on an ontology of goodness or peace, secular political theory is based on an ontology of evil or violence (Milbank 1990/2006: 279-280). Criticising MacIntyre, Milbank says

There emerges to view a hidden thread of continuity between antique reason and modern, secular reason. This thread of continuity is the theme of 'original violence'. Antique thought and politics assumes some naturally given element of chaotic conflict which must be tamed by the

stability and self-identity of reason. Modern thought and politics (most clearly articulated by Nietzsche) assumes that there is only this chaos, which cannot be tamed by an opposing transcendent principle, but can be immanently controlled by subjecting it to rules and giving irresistible power to those rules in the form of market economies and sovereign politics. If one tries, like MacIntyre, to oppose antique thought to modern thought, then the attempt will fail because antique thought – as Plato already saw in *The Sophist* – is deconstructible into ‘modern’ thought: a cosmos including both chaos and reason implies an ultimate principle, the ‘difference’ between the two, which is more than reason, and enshrines a permanent conflict.

Christianity, however, recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalizing reason. Peace no longer depends upon the reduction to the self-identical, but is the sociality of harmonious difference (Milbank 1990/2006: 5).

What this means is that political theology holds people to be fundamentally good and therefore capable of achieving solidarity without descending into violence. There is an element of trust in people. Secular political theory on the other hand, is based on the notion that, left to their own devices, people would descend into violence. It follows that people must be restrained and manipulated so as to bring the best out of them (Milbank 2013).

There are clear comparisons between Taylor, MacIntyre and Milbank. This is for two reasons. First, the ontology of peace may be understood as an aspect of the idea that confers belonging. Believing in the goodness of people might be what defines us as a group. Yet also, in a more complicated but also more significant way, possessing an ontology of peace may be seen as a prerequisite for believing in the possibility of people coming to agreement over the nature of that transcendent something by which they are defined as a group – over what it is. It is exactly the lack of such an ontology, or rather the possession of its polar opposite, an ontology of violence, that supposedly makes the use of transcendent ideas impossible.

What is most interesting to note in Milbank is that his distinction is not merely between a classical or medieval model, which stresses transcendence or tradition, and a modern secular model, which stresses common action, perhaps underpinned by universal moral precepts. Instead, by suggesting that we have moved from an ontology of peace to an ontology of violence, Milbank is indicating that underpinning both models is an irrational element: a belief in the goodness or badness of mankind. This helps us to understand a third distinction then, between classical and secular transcendence. It also deepens the paradox of secularisation, since following Milbank's logic, not only has the secular world merely replaced one transcendence with another, but it has not even replaced irrationality with rationality – just one set of beliefs with another. In this case, the only difference between classical and medieval and modern secular self-understandings is that the former was more aware of the beliefs by which it was guided.

It is this stress on the fundamental irrationality at the heart of our ontological self-understanding, which, as the foregoing has suggested, impacts so substantially on our social self-understanding and ability to act, that places Milbank as a neo-Thomist. Reason can only take us so far; the rest is faith. This turns us to a discussion of whether we can and, if so, how to choose transcendence. Perhaps the ideas that guide us are so ingrained that they are a skin rather than a sweater (Furlong and Marsh 2002). If this is true, the prospects for philosophy and theology are alarming, though we might draw a distinction between choice and conversion.

Before moving on it is worth presenting a challenge to all of the above. All are lacking any empirical grounding. Even to the extent that they study history, they are really only studying the history of (some elite's) ideas. Taylor at least attempts to ground his thinking in social realities. Not only is he convinced that ideas and material factors complexly intertwine to make up history, but his work is focused not simply on ideas but on their impact on the lives of ordinary people (Taylor 2007: 212). But it is just this value that should lead one to consider empirical exploration key.

On the contrary, MacIntyre, expresses the importance of historical idealism quite readily. His whole point is that

The roots of some of the problems which now engage the specialised attention of academic philosophers and the roots of some of the

problems central to our everyday social and practical lives are one and the same (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 36).

Milbank vocalises the same principles as Taylor, seeing his task as ‘reading theories in the light of their practical tendencies’ (Milbank: 2014: 1). But he renders this task implausible by asserting that

‘it is possible to take a short cut to locating this isomorphism [between theory and practice] by looking at specifically ‘political philosophy’ or ‘political theory’...political thought is taken to be a level of writing that begins to disclose a concealed, more ultimate ‘context’ that is itself theoretical as much as practical (Milbank: 2014: 2-3).

Milbank is here advocating a kind of textual analysis whereby political philosophy is treated as a primary source for understanding something even deeper; namely, the hidden ontology that shapes the writing. This is no doubt a valid task, and there is no reason to dismiss Milbank’s work on this basis. But two points are worth making. First, if the aim is to “disclose a concealed, more ultimate ‘context’” of politics, why is there no systematic engagement with the latter? Instead, the work can only be said to be uncovering a context that post-liberals have read *into* the wider atmospheric shift in literature. Second, there is quite a leap from the critique of political philosophy, to an attempt at real politics and policy, with no exploration of whether and how the ideas he either criticises or advocates play out on the ground. It is critically

filling this gap that this thesis advocates and makes an exploratory first attempt at.

Taylor, MacIntyre and Milbank seek to show that at the heart of our social and political problems are deeper philosophical problems that can be traced back hundreds of years. The next step is to take this back in the reverse direction, seeking to understand whether and how those philosophical problems play out in the real social and political world, as well as whether their solutions make sense to that world.

### **Which transcendence? Who decides?**

The foregoing suggested that Taylor's model was useful for distinguishing classical and Christian social self-understandings from modern secular self-understandings, the one valorising shared notions of transcendence as conferring group status, the other giving up on the possibility of such notions, and focusing on immanent mechanisms. But it also challenged this model, by suggesting that there nonetheless appeared to be an overriding similarity between the two self-understandings, since both were guided by a kind of transcendence.

In some sense, there is always transcendence, since there must be some pre-political grounds on which we legitimise politics and policy decisions. This point is extremely problematic, given, as has been suggested and as will be discussed more in the next chapter, that the modern withdrawal from

transcendence as a means of common agency is in large part derived from transcendence's tendency to ideologically exclude certain groups and people in the face of differing perspectives; that is, in the face of diversity. With these points established, it becomes possible to draw a slightly different distinction between classical and modern secular social self-understandings, namely, whether, and if so, how, we can choose between different notions of transcendence. Are they chosen or thrust upon us? If they are chosen, how are they chosen? The question is especially pressing if we consider the idea that we are always doing the choosing in diverse settings, which, due to the simple sociological, or even biological fact of diversity, are always themselves thrust upon us. These questions are so important because they impinge on what we take to be the role of religious language, or of deep commitments more generally, in the public sphere. Again, each thinker develops his ideas in contradistinction to liberal theory.

Guido Vanheeswijck has explained that Taylor holds that 'fundamental conceptions of the self, other, and world are necessary and unavoidable for an adequately reflective discussion on ethical and political life' (Vanheeswijck 2014: 5). In this sense, there can be no choosing between the transcendent ideas that guide us, since this would assume some other realm that transcends this, in which we can stand as neutral arbiters. But this fact does not render difference between commitments interminable. For Taylor, the correct approach is

‘to be aware that [our deep commitments] always remain contestable and liable to revision...In other words, Taylor rejects any form of ‘strong ontology’ in favour of what Stephen K. White, defines as ‘weak ontology’(Vanheeswijck 2014: 5).

This idea of weak ontology is important because, if we can be aware of our own commitments being just one option among many, there is no need to choose one transcendence over another, or to stand outside of transcendences. Instead, we simply seek, through pragmatic discussion, a Rawlsian overlapping consensus of ideals, the justification of which depends on different arguments for different people:

A Christian or Muslim, for example, may justify fundamental rights by invoking the idea that every human being is a child of God, a Kantian rationalist that each individual is a rational being, a utilitarian that everyone is entitled to the highest form of happiness, etc. (Vanheeswijck 2014: 3-4).

As Taylor himself acknowledges, the weak ontology, or to put it simply, the magnanimity, required for one to accept that only those commitments that fit within the overlapping consensus are legitimate, is itself dependent on living within what Taylor calls the modern moral order (Taylor 2011: 46). In this order, cosmic-religious legitimacy is replaced by the idea of society ‘as existing for the protection and mutual benefit of its (equal) members’ (Taylor 2011: 46). Here Taylor seems to go against his earlier distinction between

political theology and secular political theory, suggesting that for moderns there are *ideas* of liberty, equality and fraternity that confer common agency: 'democratic societies are organised not necessarily around a "civil religion,"...but certainly around a strong philosophy of civility' (Taylor 2011: 46).

But perhaps Taylor is not going back on himself. Instead, it can be suggested that Taylor sees the current difference between political theology and secular political theory as one whereby the former uses cosmic-religious notions to underpin politics, whereas the latter has no such deeper grounding. But, as a supporter of secularity's openness to other positions, he is offering a way for the latter to learn from political theology without undermining, and indeed actually bolstering, its core ideals. It is not that secular political theory is *inherently* incapable of developing a deeper grounding, just that it has tended to neglect such a grounding.

Milbank takes exception with Taylor here. He suggests that Taylor proclaims "the end of religious history", based on 'an irreducible religious pluralism stretching into the long-term future' (Milbank 2013b: 81). Conversely, Milbank thinks it conceivable that

If Christian catholicity collapsed because of an entirely contingent deconvivialisation of its character in the Latin West (the Illich thesis), then how can one be sure a recovery of conviviality does not have the

power to restore a lost universalism of Christian belief and practice?

(Milbank 2013b: 81)

I will explain the preferred solution of Milbank in a moment. Before this, it is useful to elucidate MacIntyre's position, which again seems to sit between Taylor and Milbank. Like Taylor, MacIntyre offers ways of engaging with other traditions. When seeking to engage with another tradition, one must learn it well enough to translate it; that is, like the anthropologist, one must

Come to understand what it is to think in the terms prescribed by that particular rival tradition, to learn how to think as if one were a convinced adherent of that rival tradition. To do this requires the exercise of a capacity for philosophical imagination that is often lacking (MacIntyre 1981/2007: xiii).

Whereas Taylor suggests that one need not understand another tradition in order to achieve agreement, but rather have enough magnanimity to discover an overlapping consensus justified differently by different traditions, MacIntyre indicates the reality will be more challenging than this, requiring complex debate and perhaps a component of multilingualism. And he offers anthropology as the best way to understand and critique another tradition. Again, like Taylor, this implies that a kind of magnanimity is required to recognise that another tradition is worth engaging with.

But like Milbank, MacIntyre seems to think it is possible, even desirable, for one tradition to win. As he has put it himself:

I see no value in community as such – many types of community are nastily oppressive...the best type of human life, that in which the tradition of the virtues is most adequately embodied, is lived by those engaged in constructing and sustaining forms of community directed towards the achievement of those common goods without which the ultimate human good cannot be achieved (MacIntyre 1981/2007: xiv).

Now, this becomes complicated when we scrutinise the means by which one tradition may win over another. MacIntyre explains that

When the adherents of a tradition are able through such acts of imagination and questioning to interrogate some particular rival tradition, it is always possible that they may be able to conclude, indeed that they may be compelled to conclude, that it is only from the standpoint of their own tradition that the difficulties of that rival tradition can be adequately understood and overcome. It is only if the central theses of their own tradition are true and its arguments sound, that this rival tradition can be expected to encounter just those difficulties that it has encountered and that its lack of conceptual, normative, and other resources to deal with these difficulties can be explained. So it is possible for one such tradition to defeat another in respect of the adequacy of its claims to truth and to rational justification, even though there are no neutral standards

available by appeal to which *any* rational agent whatsoever could determine which tradition is superior to which. (MacIntyre 1981/2007: xiii)

So we recognise, by anthropologically entering another tradition, that its resources are not apt to respond to particular ethical or political problems. And this recognition is pragmatic. We see the failures of one tradition against the successes of another, rather than judging each against some neutral standards. But Milbank nonetheless takes issue with MacIntyre for fundamentally suggesting that 'tradition-governed inquiry in general is rational' (Milbank 1990/2006: 262).

Inherent to MacIntyre's description of how traditions learn from and win over one another, is a dialectical notion of progress. Conversely, for Milbank, 'the only possible response to nihilism is to affirm one's allegiance to a particular tradition, and derive an ontology from the implicit assumptions of its narrative forms' (Milbank 1990/2006: 262).

As already mentioned, Milbank is a neo-Thomist, meaning revelation, or what those unfamiliar with Christian theology might prefer to call irrational commitments or creativity or inspiration, always underscores rational argument, which is merely the means by which such commitments are made intelligible and applicable. What this means then is that although Milbank asserts Christianity provides the best narrative, he by no means thinks there is a rational standard by which to irrefutably justify this decision, indeed, he

does not even think we can choose which narrative we adopt. For Milbank, there is only conversion.

What all this stands against is a rationalist position of the likes of Rawls or Habermas. Although at different levels within the public sphere, Rawls and Habermas both require of us the ability to distinguish between commitments, and to make arguments on purely rational grounds, that is, to adopt arguments that are conceivably acceptable by anyone. But this point implies two things: first, secular argument is not itself rooted in some irrational commitments – a point which Milbank makes it his life work to refute; second, that it is plausible for people to leave their transcendent ideals to one side.

It is not the place of the literature review to demonstrate the viability of one theory over any of the others. But, once again, it is possible to provide a critique of all of the above on the basis of their idealism. Simply by theorising the best formula for deciding on transcendence, the rest of the work is merely to inspire or coerce people to adopt these practices. The theory has little or no grounding in empirical realities of how people act on the ground. Are they capable of Taylor-esque weak ontology? Is there any sense in which we can really know our ontological commitments well enough to be pragmatic about them, or, is it the case that the concepts that fundamentally dictate the way we understand the world, because they are so fundamental, cannot be analysed? Are people capable of MacIntyre's translation? Or, as Milbank suggests, is it really plausible or fair to imagine one narrative winning over all the others? Perhaps Rawls and Habermas are right after all, and it is possible

to simply leave one's faith at the door? Does Vanantwerpen have the right idea, in seeking to create interstitial places in which people feel the pull of the open space? Or perhaps we need the kind of religious literacy put forward by Dinham? Asking these questions empirically is a key point of this thesis.

Of course, this task is especially difficult given the interdisciplinary approach I am taking. Theologians, especially those with an eye for history, are liable to say that whatever I find should in no way mitigate their positions, since theirs is a theory of what should be, not what is, and this attitude will be bolstered by an insistence that things once upon a time were as they insist they should now be. Social scientists on the other hand, will claim that I am providing a literature review that verges on the theological, and which is too broad to be explored in any complexity in the qualitative manner I am going to. They will challenge whether my questions can be operationalized, my findings generalised. Ultimately I must reject both positions. To theologians, I say that unless their theory can be made relevant for a particular people at a particular time, even if only as ideals towards which real people feel themselves directed, they are worthless. To social scientists, I say that I do not wish to treat my findings as generalisable. One may explore the meanings and mechanisms attributed to ideas of the good in Chicago or Mumbai, one hundred years ago or today, and the results will be completely different. For reasons already offered in the introduction, I am interested in the UK, and specifically London, in the contemporary context. What I do hope is that my findings can be generalised to theories, which themselves can be explored further in other settings.

## Religion regained: Post-liberal transcendence

Post-liberalism holds some idea of transcendence key. Each thinker has a slightly different way in which to advance their particular idea of transcendence, and how to put it into dialogue with other ideas. But what, in particular, is their idea? By way of answering this question, the following section will draw on earlier discussion to provide a theoretical conclusion. It will then critically assess how the theory plays out in politics, policy and practice.

Charles Taylor's idea is broad and inclusive. Taylor divides the world into 'the acknowledgers of transcendence' and 'secular humanists', and further divides the former into inclusivists and reactionaries (Taylor 1999: 29). For Taylor, as an inclusivist, we require transcendence in order to avoid descent into a purely human idea of success, which often deifies particular qualities. But this transcendence must fundamentally be based on liberty and equality. Again, Taylor calls for a strong philosophy of civility.

As has already been indicated above, MacIntyre's idea of transcendence is rooted in the abstract idea of the good life, where 'the good life...is the life spent in seeking for the good life' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 219) What this actually means in practice is best broken into three concepts: the virtues, the unity of a human life, and the concept of a tradition.

Although the virtues ultimately aim at the *telos*, since the telos is not something to be achieved at some future point, but rather is to be realized in the way that we live, so the virtues are not 'good works', which, when built up over time, grant us the right to the telos. Instead, the acting out of the virtues *is*, to some extent, the achievement of the telos (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 149).

MacIntyre speaks of an 'attempt to envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate *telos*' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 204). What MacIntyre means is that a whole life must be considered, both in order to emphasise that virtues are not particular to certain types of practice, but rather should be applied throughout life, and in fact are often to the detriment of success in a particular practice; and to emphasise the idea of life as a journey in which virtues are developed. This journey is not merely personal:

We place the agent's intentions, I have suggested, in causal and temporal order with reference to their role in his or her history; and we also place them with reference to their role in the history of the setting or settings to which they belong (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 208).

So the virtue of somebody's actions are to be judged with reference to their place within the overall intention of that person's life, itself to be judged with reference to its place within the overall history of the setting(s) to which that person belongs.

MacIntyre asserts that life is always conceived in narrative form, hence all ideas of the good life must be told in terms of narrative (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 216). The key then, to this unity of a life, is narrative, or the narratives that constitute our tradition: the stories we tell of our own lives, within a community, within a history.

There perhaps seems something internally problematic about MacIntyre's position: he explains that he sees no value in community as such, but only in a community that is directed towards the good life. But it turns out that the good life is nothing other than the search for this life within a community. Yet MacIntyre's argument is that his idea is very different from the contemporary use of the term community, which may refer merely to a geographical space in which multifarious individuals living unreflective and distinct lives reside (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 156).

Of course, for Milbank, MacIntyre's distinction is not enough. MacIntyre's reliance on antique thought, with its opposition between reason and chaos, ultimately allows for a descent into chaos. In terms of community, the search for a good over against individual wills, will eventually descend into recognition of the latter alone. Instead, Milbank wants to positively promote an idea of community that is grounded in life experience.

To explain, it helps to return to the question of transcendence and immanence. What Milbank suggests is that whereas other axial religions, and

to some extent Platonism is included, clearly subordinated the personal and immanent to the impersonal transcendent, Christianity rendered the immanent itself transcendent: 'As Ivan Illich pointed out, the New Testament does not say "love strangers" but "render all as kin"' (Milbank 2013b: 69). Love becomes the transcendent grounds of common agency, cutting across all other difference. And this idea will turn out to have a deeply practical significance for Milbank and his followers, in their discussion of cooperation between conflicting stakeholders.

### **Post-liberal politics, policy and practice**

The last section introduced what a post-liberal idea of transcendence might look like, and it concluded by pointing to the practical implications, suggesting that each of the thinkers stressed the importance of the community of shared ideas, language and practice. The point of this section is to explore how these ideas have in fact played out in reality, in terms of politics, policy and practice. This will be scrutinised in terms of statism, individualism and capitalism.

Once again, Taylor and Milbank provide two ends of a post-liberal spectrum, with MacIntyre sitting quite neatly between them. In conversation with Taylor, he has suggested to me that his thought cannot be easily extended in to a general view of politics, since how the ideas play out will depend on the setting (Taylor 2014). This point notwithstanding, it is possible to draw out general themes.

Post-liberals regard the shift from shared ideas of transcendence to social contracts as made manifest in, but also extended by the concepts of statism, individualism and capitalism. The specific story told by each thinker differs slightly, but the general picture is that, in the wake of the European Wars of Religion, a pessimistic mood develops in which it is considered no longer possible to have shared ideas of the good. Instead, the good is characterised by irreducible plurality. The result is that other mechanisms need to be harnessed in order to inculcate solidarity.

Charles Taylor's reading of secularisation stresses the shift in our collective self-understanding from shared ideas of the good to social contracts. In this process, his worry is that these artificial mechanisms regarded as inculcating solidarity may tend towards instrumental reason that crowds out the intrinsic value of inclusive politics. The most important thinkers for Taylor are Grotius and Locke, for whom natural laws must be rationally worked out and applied. Why?

They needed a firm underpinning for an agreed public order. [This philosophy] was born in the midst of bitter and violent inter-confessional strife. One of the most important things it was meant to offer was a basis for rational agreement on the foundations of political life, beyond and in spite of confessional differences (Taylor 2007: 127).

It soon followed that a state must be required to uphold these natural laws.

Grotius followed Lipsius, developing a full theory not only of obedience to the state, but of international law, which was meant to be valid across the confessional divide (Taylor 2007: 127).

So the shift is very quick from rooting collective self-understanding in Natural Law, to social contract underwritten by the state. This idea extends further under Rousseau, for whom the love of self must be harmonised with the love of society. This harmonisation has to be enforced by the state, and 'the egoist becomes identified as traitor' (Taylor 2007: 204).

Taylor recognises the evolution of state as harmoniser. He also suggests that once shared ideas of the good no longer define the scope of politics, instrumental reason follows: 'Once society no longer has a sacred structure, once social arrangements and modes of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in a sense up for grabs' (Taylor 1992: 5). The result is that 'a bureaucrat, in spite of his personal insight, may be forced by the rules under which he operates to make a decision he knows to be against humanity and good sense' (*sic.*) (Taylor 1992: 7).

Finally, because of this roll of the state as harmoniser and instrumentaliser, Taylor suggests, in line with Tocqueville, that people lose democratic control:

The danger is not actual despotic control but fragmentation - that is, a people increasingly less capable of forming a common purpose and carrying it out. Fragmentation arises when people come to see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less

bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances. They may indeed feel linked in common projects with some others, but these come more to be partial groupings rather than the whole society: for instance, a local community, an ethnic minority, the adherents of some religion or ideology, the promoters of some special interest (Taylor 1992: 112-113).

As shall be discussed in chapter 4, this idea connects with theories of the post-political, whereby people no longer see the worth of engaging with ideologies through conventional political structures, but rather seek consensus at the local level.

Like the other thinkers, Taylor tends to regard individualism as arising earlier than statism. For Taylor Descartes marks the beginning of a new self-understanding. Descartes is seen as providing the theoretical framework for the 'buffered self', for whom 'the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind', which includes other people, institutions, and cultural and religious influences (Taylor 2007: 38; see also Taylor 1989: 143-158). As a result of this ability to mute external influences, this buffered self also has 'confidence in its own powers of moral ordering' (Taylor 2007: 27).

Taylor recognises the importance of this achievement:

individualism also names what many people consider the finest

achievement of modern civilization. We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors couldn't control. And these rights are generally defended by our legal systems. In principle, people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them (Taylor 1992: 2).

Yet Taylor also sees a number of worrying developments. The first is that already mentioned, namely, the undermining of the common good. Linked to this is the difficulty of criticizing certain behaviours, especially selfish behaviours: 'everyone has the right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value.' (Taylor 2001: 14). The result of this relativism may well involve 'a shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self' (Taylor 1992: 14).

So what Taylor wants to balance is on the one hand the promise of modernity which finds greatest expression in Romanticism and Nietzschean philosophy, that everyone has the right, if not the duty, to be true to themselves; and on the other hand, the political worry that people 'will prefer to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life, as long as the government of the day produces the means to these satisfactions and distributes them widely' (Taylor 1992: 9).

Partly Taylor adopts a neo-Aristotelian stance here; he is against both statism and individualism for the same reason, namely, that he sees public engagement as an end in itself (Taylor 1992: 109-122). But Taylor also sees public engagement as an important means of responding to the gross inequalities of capitalism.

As with the rise of the state, Taylor in a sense sees capitalism as an inevitable consequence of secularization, since with the loss of the possibility of shared ideas, some kind of mechanism is required for harmonizing individual and collective interest. What is interesting about capitalism, however, is that whereas the state is an artificial mechanism for inculcating harmony, capitalism is based in the idea that 'harmony is...already there' (Taylor 2007: 130). According to this view 'human life is designed so as to produce mutual benefit' (Taylor 2007: 177). Taylor sees this view as exemplified in Adam Smith's work, both in the notion of the hidden hand, and in the conjecture that inequality inspires aspiration in the disadvantaged.

An early essay by Taylor, still as a burgeoning young scholar at Oxford, displays a distinct antipathy towards this way of thinking. In *What's Wrong with Capitalism?*, Taylor decries 'the inhuman priorities' of capitalism evidenced in its failure to uphold public goods (Taylor 1960: 11).

For many readers, his aversion to capitalism would seem to put Taylor in an odd place, since he is against both the state and the market. Yet this aversion to *both* left liberal (the state) *and* right liberal (the market) solutions is the

defining characteristic of post-liberalism, which instead promotes the common good. For Taylor this attitude is already clear in *What's Wrong with Capitalism?*, in which he states:

The only way that we can really get our priorities right is to do away with the dominating influence of the profit system, and to put in its place a system primarily based on common ownership...Certainly it is true that, given common ownership (*not* state monopoly), we shall have to experiment with different forms of control, so as to draw upon the social responsibilities of people...We do not want to replace capitalism by yet another form of paternal bureaucracy. ... But before us stand the inhuman priorities of capitalism: the *only* political question is how we can understand and change them in order to achieve an enlargement of freedom and responsibility, and a greater control by people over the society in which they live (Taylor 1960: 11).

In later life, Taylor urges that simply attacking the state, individualism, or capitalism, is helpless.

Some people have wanted to draw from these analyses the conclusion that we are utterly helpless in the face of such forces, or at least helpless unless we totally dismantle the institutional structures under which we have been operating for the last centuries - that is, the market and the state. This aspiration seems so unrealizable today that it amounts to declaring us helpless (Taylor 1992: 8).

Indeed, Taylor makes clear that he is not even against statism, individualism or capitalism *per se*, not against, that is, their influence in certain areas.

Governing a contemporary society is continually recreating a balance between requirements that tend to undercut each other, constantly finding creative new solutions as the old equilibria become stultifying. There can never be in the nature of the case a definitive solution. (Taylor 1992: 111).

This ambivalence is what makes Taylor's work so engaging, yet also what makes him most susceptible to accusations that his work is susceptible to political manipulation. As with all post-liberals, the question becomes one of where the philosophy actually lands in politics, policy and practice. Would Taylor be satisfied with an Anthony Giddens and British New Labour style 'Third Way'? What about the Conservative-led Coalition's Big Society? Answering questions like these becomes the focus of chapter 4.

Although MacIntyre does not have direct impact on politics or policy, Kelvin Knight, a world-leading expert on MacIntyre, has demonstrated that MacIntyre's philosophy is both anti-statist and anti-market. Central to MacIntyre's philosophy is the notion of a practice directed towards intrinsic goods.

The danger posed by state and corporate institutions is that they will

'corrupt' practices by reducing them to the position of means to the end of accumulating power and wealth. Such is the status of practices and practitioners under capitalism. So subordinated, individuals are denied opportunities to cooperatively pursue and sustain goods of excellence, subjected to institutionalized demoralization, and encouraged to believe that social interaction can comprise nothing other than a competitive struggle over zero-sum, external goods (Knight 2005: 264).

MacIntyre is against the state because it actually tends to collude with the international market, seeking to create a skilled but dispensable labour force. This is why, says MacIntyre, by cooperating with the social democratic project, the trade unions were doomed to fail:

If trade unions made it their only goal to work for betterment within the confines imposed by capitalism and parliamentary democracy, the outcome would be a movement towards first the domestication and then the destruction of effective trade union power (MacIntyre in Knight 2005: 267).

Because of his opposition to individualism, it could be argued that the kind of vision MacIntyre has outlined for politics is brought to completion in the welfare state. Yet MacIntyre insists that such a state supports the interests 'not of workers, but of managers' (MacIntyre in Knight 2005: 267). MacIntyre similarly claims that a 'commitment to a way of life structured by a free market economy is a commitment to an individualism as corrosive as that of

liberalism' (MacIntyre 1981/2007: xv).

MacIntyre cannot imagine a macro-politics capable of embodying his ideals in the contemporary world as it currently stands:

It is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of such parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages. Nonetheless certain parallels there are. A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman imperium and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that imperium. What they set themselves to achieve instead- often not recognizing fully what they were doing- was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not

waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 263).

The kind of politics MacIntyre promotes is best reflected in communities of practice, that, in the modern world of state and market dominance, often become communities of resistance. In terms of the UK, good examples are the Luddites of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the miners of the 1980s. MacIntyre does have visions of universal education also, since he believes that the education of all would inevitably lead to the overthrow of the current system. It is best to remember that his focus on small communities is a product of his time:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 263).

Macro-politics is so far from recognising MacIntyre's ideals that it is best to focus on cultivating them in local communities.

Milbank sounds quite similar to MacIntyre. Speaking of Augustine he says:

Through his new definition of a *populus* and his denial that the political, coercive community truly realizes a *res publica*, Augustine allows us to

see many forms of 'the social' beyond the political, and also implies that the political is necessarily imperfectly social, because it contains elements of compulsion and of mere compromise. True society implies consensus, agreement in desire and harmony amongst its members (Milbank 1990/2006: 406).

Yet he more radically grounds this ideal in the church, continuing: 'and this is exactly (as Augustine reiterates again and again) what the Church begins to provide, and that in which salvation, the restoration of being, consists' (Milbank 1990/2006: 406).

Whereas Taylor, perhaps in spite of his Christianity, his liberal and open outlook, and MacIntyre, perhaps despite his Christianity, are not willing to openly advocate the church, Milbank sees it as fundamental.

John Milbank's work has an impact in a number of forms, not least via the Red Tory movement – specifically in the form of Respublica, of which Milbank is the Chair of Trustees, and whose director, Phillip Blonde is a former student of John Milbank, and which states that it is 'founded on the principles of a post-liberal vision of the future which moves beyond the traditional political dichotomies of left and right, and which prioritise the need to recover the language and practice of the common good' (Respublica 2014).

Another key impact of post-liberalism is on the Blue Labour movement, whose progenitor Maurice Glasman is a former colleague of Alisdair MacIntyre, as

well as also being a former student of John Milbank. Glasman is thought to have the ear of a number of key thinkers in the Labour Party, not least Jon Cruddas MP, Director of the Labour Policy Review for the 2015 election. Glasman is currently overseeing the development of a new “think-and-do” tank known as the *Common Good Foundation*, which develops projects in which multiple stakeholders with different interests come together to develop a common enterprise.

As suggested in the introduction, despite its impact, post-liberalism has little grounding in empirical research. This deficiency has arguably been carried over into the research of post-liberal think-tanks too. Although there appears to be an instinctive recognition amongst the think-tanks, that using theology will be exclusive and will make for bad press, this recognition actually seems to intensify rather than assuage the problem, since although theology takes a backseat, no significant attention is paid to the meanings and mechanisms that will take its place (See Stacey forthcoming 2016).

To some extent, his very involvement with institutions that interact with the mechanisms of national politics and policy would suggest that Milbank appreciates dialogue with the state. Moreover, Milbank’s stress on loving all as kin might be conceived as supporting the creation of the welfare state. In line with the vision of William Temple, who coined the term ‘welfare state’, it could be suggested that the transfer of care from the church to the state is the best way to ensure the universalisation of love, by guaranteeing that all get an equal service irrespective of geographical location, gender, race, religion, or

disability. This would be in line with my earlier suggestion that transcendence could provide a more materially inclusive politics.

In fact, Milbank tends to work with the state only to open up policy to less statist tendencies. He sees the state as dehumanising welfare, in some sense alienating it from its natural grounding in personal acts of charity. Moreover, post-liberals have tended to call for a turn towards contribution-based welfare. This concept suggests that people's duty to contribute is contingent on their seeing others do the same. It also suggests, in line with neo-liberal thinking, that individuals should be responsible for themselves.

In terms of Red Tory and Blue Labour, there is a clear emphasis on the dismantling of the state in favour of pursuits that rely on, and, in so doing, cultivate the common good. Red Tory, insofar as it is manifest in the works of Respublica, for instance, has advocated opening up the state in the form of its support for the Sustainable Communities Act 2010, and the Localism Act 2011, the Social Value Act 2013, each of which seeks to hand powers to communities, ensuring that they have the space for and the power to work for a common good. But the question arises, is the simple provision of space and power for the common good enough? What meanings and mechanisms are required to inspire people to act in the name of the common good? Respublica has itself questioned why there was not more enthusiasm for the Localism Act, and this disappointment is evidenced in articles such as *The Localism Act: One Year On* and *One Year On: Registered providers' response to localism*, and subsequent research such as *Acting On Localism*

(Blonde 2012; Respublica 2013; Respublica 2013b).

In the face of a receding state, it is hoped that individuals will rise to the challenge – be drawn out of their self-referential spheres and into their communities. Starting with Housing Associations as the best response, the most recent focus from ResPublica is on the Church of England (Noyes and Julian 2014). This latter response is particularly worrying, since it is questionable whether the church has either the ideological or the material resources to cultivate stronger communities. Not only do we now live in a world that is complexly Christian, plural and secular, but also the church has little money and a dwindling register of support consisting primarily of old women. As Adam Dinham puts it, it is questionable enough whether Christianity is really relevant for people today, ‘even if the old ladies could live forever’ (Dinham 2014).

Glasman instead stresses the role of community organisations such as London Citizens, Movement for Change and faith groups around the country. His hope is that such organisations can bring people into their communities by demonstrating the strength of relational power.

Milbank is equally critical of the market, though he would be at pains to stress an opposition not to markets *per se*, but to capitalism.

Adam Smith’s economist contemporaries in Naples and Milan tried to revive the civil economy and they thought that when you bought meat

from your butcher you *did* do so partly out of benevolence, because he was you're your friend and you needed his shop still to be there (Milbank 2014b).

Inspired by Marcel Mauss, Milbank pushes for a gift economy. What this means in practice is difficult to pin down, however. Both Blonde and Glasman want to 'remoralise the economy' (Glasman 2010). But the approaches are very different. Blonde wants to do this by extending capital to everybody, in some sense reversing Marx's alienation effect by turning workers into owners, by encouraging businesses to adopt mutual-ownership models (Julian 2013). Blonde seeks to encourage take up of these ideas by economic argument, tax incentives, and sheer impact. He still relies on market forces. Glasman, on the other hand, fundamentally mistrusts states and markets, and wishes to use civic pressure to push for higher wages for workers. In this sense, he wishes to push for the common good not only in outcome, but also in method. But Glasman also sees the state as stepping in where civic pressure fails.

Perhaps the best way to regard the work of Blonde and Glasman, is not as fundamentally rejecting market and state, but as seeing the institutions as instrumentally valuable in bringing about the common good, as opposed to treating the common good as worthwhile only insofar as it is good for the market or the good as defined by the state. But the problem remains that both thinkers try to move directly from theory to politics and policy, without considering empirically what meanings and mechanisms can actually inspire people to collectively explore and work in the interests of the common good in

diverse settings.

Post-liberalism provides an appealing dream of an ideal community, in which people are fundamentally good, despite their many faults, and are capable of collectively exploring and working towards the common good. These people do not need to be manipulated by legislation from the state, or by self-interest. Indeed, such interventions actually tend to undermine the idea of community. Instead, grounded in the insights of ancient philosophy and theology, people can work together. This dream seems especially appealing given the alternative that has been painted, of disparate and selfish individuals cooperating only because they are bound by a social contract, which is reinforced by state legislation and market incentive. As soon as the social contract breaks down, so will the common good. This philosophy appears especially relevant today, as we hear arguments from politicians and the media to make welfare more contribution based, and to make the NHS subscription based. But it is questionable whether these really are the dominant views of our time, and, even if they are, whether this results from a decline in our philosophical-theological heritage, and even if it does, whether that same heritage can be simplistically revalorised in today's very different context. The following chapters will explore this critique in more detail.

## **Chapter 3: Religion lost? Ideological transformation of the public sphere or democratisation of self-understanding?**

Chapter 2 put forward three rival but intertwining ideas of post-liberalism, from theology to politics, policy and practice. It placed secularisation at the heart of post-liberal thinking. Although three varying views of secularisation were provided, for the purpose of this chapter it will suffice to describe secularisation as the process whereby people lost confidence in the possibility of a shared idea of the good, a purpose by which politics was underpinned and towards which it was guided. Instead, shared purpose is replaced by social contract. There is no common goal, but only a common set of rules within which we each pursue our own good. Unless and until this ideological shift is reversed, the common good can only be enacted in peculiar communities. This chapter will question whether there has really been a decline in shared ideas of the good, whether it matters, and what other responses there have been.

### **The ideological transformation of the public sphere**

I will not rehearse the arguments for the ideological transformation of the public sphere presented by post-liberal theorists. Ample attention is paid to this in their own works, and in the previous chapter, and any short summary would not do it justice. Instead, what I will do here is to explore whether and how their genealogy can be said to have correlates in the world of politics, policy and practice.

To start with, it is clear that at a certain point in European history, shared ideas of the good were fundamental to political self-understanding, and that engaging in these ideas was a prerequisite of belonging in the community.

In ancient Athens, where the axial revolution took place in the form of the polis, ideas of the good and the communities from which they arose were entirely integrated (Jaspers 1953/2010). H.D.F. Kitto has explained that in translating polis, we run into difficulty. It has often been described as city-state, despite being neither big enough to be a city, nor impersonal enough to be a state. In Greek literature, polis is used to refer both to the government of a particular area, and to the people of that area. The government and the people are, in some sense, one thing: 'Polis'...may mean as much as 'the whole communal life of the people, political, cultural, moral – even economic' (Kitto 1951/1991: 75). The Athenian polis in particular stood out as exceptional, since its government was particularly synonymous with its people via the notion of democracy: they were directly implicated in its formation. It is in the context of such a polis, that Aristotle suggests that life outside of the polis is not a fully human life.

There are problems with this vision, both in theory and in practice. Theoretically speaking, only certain people can become fully involved in the polis. For Plato this is severely limited to those that undergo a rigorous education. For Aristotle it is limited to free men.

In practice it is worth asking just how strong the sense of solidarity was, why it was so, and whether it can or should be emulated today. Kitto has suggested that the sense of solidarity was so strong in Ancient Athens that people simply did not understand themselves as individuals. Those who did not take part in public life were regarded as oddities (Kitto 1951/1991: 72-73):

In the winning of his livelihood he was essentially individualist: in the filling of his life he was essentially 'communist'. Religion, art, games, the discussion of things – all these were needs of life that could be fully satisfied only through the polis – not, as with us, through voluntary associations of like-minded people, or through *entrepreneurs* appealing to individuals (this partly explains the difference between greek drama and the modern cinema)...Moreover he wanted to play his own part in running the affairs of the community (Kitto 1951/1991: 78).

Why it should be that the Greeks were so prone to collectivity is hard to imagine. In some sense, Kitto seems to suggest that there is something about the Greek personality that made Greeks prone to collectivity.

But there are also specific factors that seem to contribute to notions of collectivity: religion, self-understanding, and population size. In terms of religion, Kitto has suggested that gods were depicted as keeping order by punishing those that wrong the polis (Kitto 1951/1991: 75). In terms of self-understanding, the Greeks saw themselves as part of an extended family: 'the polis was a living community, based on kinship, real or assumed – a kind of

extended family, turning as much as possible of life into family life' (Kitto 1951/1991: 78). In terms of population size, the Greeks kept their polis deliberately small so that everybody could be involved:

We may perhaps record an imaginary conversation between an ancient greek and a member of the atheniaum [an exclusive London club]. The member regrets the lack of political sense shown by the greeks. The greek replies 'how many clubs are there in London?' the member, as a guess, says about five hundred. The greek then says, 'now if all these combined, what splendid premises they could build. They could have a club-house as big as hyde park'. 'but', says the member, 'that would no longer be a club'. 'precisely', says the greek, 'and a polis as big as yours is no longer a polis'. (Kitto 1951/1991: 79)

With the rise of Rome things changed. The idea of religion underpinning the polis as a space in which wrongs are punished remains, as does the desire for the polis to be an extended family. But Richter has shown that the idea of the polis is also hugely expanded to incorporate people across multiple religions and ethnicities:

"'Roman' is not the name of a city but of a common kin group...-and this kin group is not one among many, but a compensation...for all the others...[as though] the whole inhabited world...had become a single city (Aristides in Richter 2011: 3).

The idea being invoked is one of a universal community – ‘a unified, homogenous whole composed of a diversity of parts’ (Richter 2011: 4). This aspect is important since it begins to open up the idea of the polis to include more people.

It is well known that this universalism was carried into Christendom, wherein Christianity, with its centre in Rome, was to dominate European culture: providing the ideas and practices by which people should be judged.

In Athens, Rome and Christendom, there was a clear idea of the good. Kitto provides a clear explanation of why this is important to recover:

The Greeks thought of the polis as an active, formative thing, training the minds and characters of the citizens; we think of it as a piece of machinery for the production of safety and convenience. The training in virtue, which the medieval state left to the church, and which the polis made its own concern, the modern state leaves to god knows what (Kitto 1951/1991: 75).

Kitto here is pointing to the question that defines social theory: if not by the polis, or the church, how shall our society be conceived and structured, and how will its citizens be formed?

R.W Southern has said that...

The identification of the church with the whole of organized society is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the middle ages from earlier and later periods of history. At its widest limits it is a feature of European history from the fourth to the eighteenth century – from Constantine to Voltaire. In theory, during the whole of this period only orthodox and obedient believers could enjoy the full rights of citizenship. (Southern 1970: 16)

Theory is the point of course, for in practice 'the medieval church was...less than a state because the forces of coercion were not ultimately within its control (Ibid: 21). Still, legal coercion enforced by secular rulers was the chief method by which religious and ideological unity was ensured. This mode of conduct, carried as it was throughout the Middle Ages, was still present, and because still present, very much under challenge, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Taylor has shown that missionary zeal associated with the period was a matter of ensuring collective salvation. Much like the missionaries associated with colonization, clerics of the early Middle Ages sought to bring the true religion to European peasants. Unity was enforced through law, punishment and education (Taylor 2007).

The first change for this model was the Reformation, which ostensibly allowed people to practice their own faith in their own way. Prior to the Reformation and even more so after, small allowances began to be made in law, in education and everyday life. But neither the confessional split, nor the later

Enlightenment, which deemed to place a burden of scientific proof upon religion, as well as to sow the seeds of self-autonomy, were to change the manner by which successive political regimes cultivated solidarity. Well after Locke had insisted on religious freedom and Kant had preached on the means to break free from tutelage, the French and Russian revolutions were to use murderous systems of law and punishment, complemented by aggressive attempts at public education. 'They accepted', Alexander has said, 'as a historical inevitability that these struggles depended upon coercion and violence'; their goal was to replace an oppressive form of state power with one directed toward a different end that makes use of similar means (Alexander 2006: 214). Though the ideas and the people changed, the manner by which ideas were disseminated remained largely the same.

The second shift is the move from the countryside to towns. Ferdinand Tonnies distinguished two types of social arrangement, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* loosely translates to community, that is, 'small-scale, kinship and neighbourhood-based' social arrangements; and *Gesellschaft* to civil society, or large-scale, competitive, market 'societies' (Harris 2001: i). Tonnies believed that community was organic, characterised by instinctive bonds, whereas civil society was mechanical, characterised by contract and rational calculation. Notwithstanding exceptions to the rule, he associated the former with children, women and rural settings, and the latter with adults, men in particular, and urban settings. It was therefore the case, in Tonnies opinion, that community had slowly declined with the rise of modernity, especially with the rise of capitalism, and was somewhat difficult to

stop, as towns grew ever larger in population.

Yet Brint suggests that Tonnies is too dogmatic in his articulation of community:

Tonnies' tendency was to see community relations as highly focused on members of the community itself and as thoroughly noninstrumental in character. These assumptions seem unrealistic and unhelpful in an age of mass transportation and communication, geographic and social mobility, and cross-cutting social worlds...my definition requires only that these relations be based *primarily* on affect, loyalty, shared values, or personal involvement (Brint 2015: 9)

It is possible to amend Brint's critique: the problem is not over-idealising community, but rather failing to see opportunities for its flourishing in modernity. The problem is that Tonnies fixes his idea too much in specific settings, the Greek polis, medieval city-states and rural communities, suggesting that as we move into more complex, urban societies, a sense of solidarity cannot be maintained. Essentially, Tonnies seems atavistic. Joan Aldous has shown that this is the basis of the critique offered by Durkheim (Aldous et al. 1972).

A further criticism is offered by Brint (2015). Having suggested Tonnies is too idealistic, Brint later implies that Tonnies own attempts to realise community in the modern context, by organising labour, would themselves have failed to

meet his theoretical standards, since organised labour is ultimately based on the self-interest of multifarious individuals. Tonnies was apparently too idealistic in theory, and not idealistic enough in practice. For those seeking such idealism, this latter criticism seems problematic.

An important lesson from Tonnies is that the subtraction story of a shift from shared ideas to social contracts is perhaps too simplistic. There are a couple of key countervailing ideas. The first is Benedict Anderson's theorisation of imagined communities constructed with the rise of the nation-state. The implication of this study is twofold: that there is an implicit recognition that contract on its own is insufficient, and it is possible to respond to this fact with an idea of community more appropriate to the modern world (Anderson 1983/2006). This idea continues to be invoked in various settings today (Bellah 1967; Lynch 2012). In the UK context, this has centred around the monarchy and the flag. This point will be explored further in the section on statism. The second countervailing idea comes from the recent work of Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell (2013), who have demonstrated that ideas of kinship, for instance, whether real or perceived, may still today influence community, and even macro political and economic structures.

### **The importance of ideas**

As discussed in the previous chapter, an important premise of post-liberal theory is that ideas about association have lost a richness over the centuries.

For Taylor, there is a loss of a deeper grounding; for MacIntyre, the loss of an ethical journey; and for Milbank, the loss of faith in one another.

The last section established that although some of this richness has indeed been lost in favour of individual autonomy, different forms of bond may have emerged. This section explores how important this loss really is, while continuing to highlight new and different ideas of community. Social theorists have from early on regarded a religious grounding as fundamental, and have tried to understand the unique contribution of these structures so as to protect them. The loss of religion, and the question of what will take its place, might be considered the impetus for much of the early anthropological and sociological studies of religion, dominating the thought of all of its founding figures: Comte, Durkheim, Weber, Parsons.

This fascination resulted in a striking ambivalence. Comte, at the same time as celebrating the end of a theological grounding of politics, nonetheless felt it important to replace what had been lost:

Comte claimed that society had moved from a theological stage, to a metaphysical stage, and in his time was passing into a positivist, or scientific stage, wherein social scientific facts would dictate policy. Yet Comte also imagined a religion of humanity, whereby priests would be replaced by social scientists. Comte's later interest in a religion of humanity suggests that he was worried about the possibility of a secular society's losing the kinds of cohesive function associated with the church

(Stacey forthcoming 2016).

Durkheim similarly stressed that religion provided a central cohesive function in society, but nonetheless felt that this function could be replaced. Durkheim distinguishes between the religious and the sacred. He suggests that religion is “a set of rituals and practices with respect to sacred things”, where “sacred things” are non-negotiable categories opposed to the profane (Durkheim 1915/2008: 37). By distinguishing between these Durkheim paves the way to the idea that while religion may decline, sacred forms will nonetheless survive to provide a social glue. The sacred is inextricably bound up with the social for Durkheim. He develops a process known as collective effervescence, whereby one’s presence in a crowd lifts one out of oneself, subsuming one’s identity into that of the crowd. Phillip Mellor and Chris Shilling have said of collective effervescence that it “is the very essence of the sacred and of society itself” such that “society would die along with the sacred” and “individuals would succumb to an egoistic absorption, if this effervescent sociality was not experienced” (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 53). Olaveson has suggested that a similar idea to collective effervescence finds expression in Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas* (Olaveson 2001; Turner 1974; 1979). Referencing Turner, Olaveson (2001: 104) has summarised *communitas* as

“human beings stripped of status role characteristics – people ‘just as they are,’ getting through to each other...” The experience of *communitas* is also usually a “deep” or intense one, and belongs in the intuitive or emotional realm, as opposed to the rational one.

Collective effervescence and *communitas* are the means by which the individual becomes emotionally connected with and dissolved into the group.

Yet by designating *communitas* as 'human beings stripped of status role', Olaveson suggests that Turner is offering a complicated picture of *communitas*, whereby rather than simplistically supporting structural elements, *communitas* is taken as simultaneously reinforcing and challenging structure, providing the emotional energy that underscores solidarity, but also being rooted in anti-structural sentiments. The result is that while organisations can seek to harness *communitas*, they do so at the risk of undermining hierarchy (Olaveson 2001: 104). Olaveson further stresses that Turner's *communitas* is at its strongest when it is spontaneous, thus the very attempt to harness or construct *communitas* can only ever produce a diluted equivalent (Olaveson 2001: 105).

Secular social theory has thus always had an ambivalent relationship with religion. John Milbank's fundamental criticism of such theory is that it tends to reduce the religious to the social. What is held sacred is no longer of any particular importance – only that it strengthens social bonds. The reduction of the sacred to the social is ethically precarious, since it does not matter what ideas are used to promote solidarity; these might be anything from the idea of a master race, to the principle of equality; to the notion of self-responsibility. Milbank also finds the focus on the individual as uniquely problematic: in this case the good "is no more than the universal abstraction of all the individual particular wills, who merely will their own freedom of life and property"

(Milbank 1990/2006: 163). One might suggest that a community cannot be authentic if it suppresses self-autonomous expression, yet Milbank would suggest that he is not against self-autonomy – just against it as the sole aim of society.

Notwithstanding the unfortunate way in which it is made manifest, Durkheim's reading of the sacred would seem to lend support to the post-liberal call for shared ideas of the good. The importance of sacred ideas in providing social glue and enabling collective action has remained a key theme in social theory long after Durkheim, being explored in numerous ways. This trend has been divided into "right" and "left", and "pure" and "impure", but given the ambiguity of the first two categories, and the vagueness of the latter two, it is perhaps better to use "conservative-constructive" and "rebellious-subversive" (Richman 2002: 114; Lynch 2012: 19). The first trend includes Weber, Eliad, Parsons, Bellah, Alexander, and Bloch. In this trend either the sacred, ideology or value are deemed to play a role in binding society together. The second trend includes thinkers such as Bataille and Caillois, and focuses on the role of the sacred in subverting hegemony.

Within the first trend, Maurice Bloch's work is worthy of special attention, since it supports much of the post-liberal analysis. Bloch develops a distinction between the transcendental and transactional social. The transcendental social is the sphere in which idealized social roles and virtues are imagined. The transactional social is the sphere of biological fact and self-interested, rational action. The transcendental social develops as a deliberate

negation of the world as it is, making roles extend over time, and postulating ideal behaviours, rituals and relationships. By negating the world in this way, the transcendental social provides people with the possibility of imagining a different world, and of transforming the world as it is (Bloch 2010). Bloch suggests that in moments in history where the transcendental social is separated from the political, it springs up in the form of religion, and competition ensues for the control of behaviour. Building on this distinction in a recent lecture series, Bloch began to develop a critique of secularism, as a system which denies the ontological status of the transcendental social. The result is not only competition between various religions and the state for the control of behaviour, but also of a state that fails to acknowledge its own imaginative function. Rather than thereby ridding itself of the transcendental social, the state exercises its control of behaviour in arbitrary and instrumental ways. This critique is extended to capitalism, wherein, it might be suggested, the transcendental social and the transactional social converge, such that the imagined future is none other than one in which self-interested, rational actors compete over finite resources (Bloch 2013).

We might also include in the first tradition Anderson's notion of imagined communities. For Anderson, imagined communities can be constructed around the idea of nation that creates a sense of solidarity between people even if they never meet in person: 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1983/2006: 6). Marj Mayo has discussed how this same idea can develop around race (Mayo 2000: 39), while Tiryakian has spoken of the religious dimension of imagined communities (Tiryakian 2011).

Kenneth Wald, Adam Silverman and Kevin Fridy (2005) have drawn on Weber to stress that all social action takes place within a value-structure. Scott Atran (2011) has demonstrated that sacred beliefs can, and do, subvert and defy rational calculation. Chris Baker focuses on religion, revealing its ability to develop a strong sense of belonging and becoming (Baker 2013: 357-361). The prevalence of studies of this kind lends support to MacIntyre's suggestion that modernity is characterised by the loss of telos, and thereby a sense of a better way of living towards which we people are aiming.

Chris Baker's research is particularly illuminating in this regard. Drawing on the theory of both Durkheim and Putnam and Campbell, Baker's emphasis is on exploring how theologies spread across a group and from thought into action. Baker pinpoints three categories for study: belonging, becoming and participation.

Baker subdivides belonging into three further categories:

sociality (shared social and religious events); feelings of bondedness (empathy); structures of support that are particularly effective when people are going through stressful or difficult times (solidarity). (Baker 2013: 357)

The sense of belonging derived from membership of a religious organisation is shown to encourage members through a process of becoming. The particular nature of becoming depends on the religion in question. Amongst

Buddhists, Baker observes ‘internal discipline that sees the acquiring of virtues, such as compassion, patience, and openness, as a long and dedicated process of spiritual and physical “denial”’ (Baker 2013: 360). Amongst Muslims, Baker observes the external demands of the Koran, and the expectation to live up to those demands. Amongst Christians, he observes the energy derived from worship and liturgy (Baker 2013: 361).

Together, belonging and becoming provide the impetus for participation in public life, whereby religious actors carry out their values for the benefit of the wider public.

Perhaps fitting slightly better with the second trend, Christian Smith focuses on sacred transcendence to reveal a similar notion of becoming. He suggests that sacred transcendence is powerful because humans are “meaning-craving creatures” for whom “meaning is not automatically and immediately available” (Smith 1996: 5). Smith lists a number of categories that make sacred transcendence a powerful social force:

- Legitimation for protest rooted in the ultimate or sacred
- Moral imperatives for love, justice, peace, freedom, equity
- Powerfully motivating icons, rituals, songs, testimonies, oratory
- Ideologies demanding self-discipline, sacrifice, altruism
- Legitimation of organisational and strategic-tactical flexibility

(Smith 1996: 9-12)

Thus far, the literature on the sacred would appear to fit quite neatly within a broader, secular political paradigm. To recognise the force of sacred ideas as they manifest themselves in political behaviours is not to recognise their transformative potential for our broader political self-understanding. Even where sacred ideas can be seen to operate in a secular outlook, still to recognise the sacred as an analytic lens for understanding our ideals is not necessarily to challenge those ideals. Over the last five years however, research into the post-secular has suggested that religious ideas can be drawn on to regenerate contemporary politics. Jürgen Habermas (2010) has suggested that liberal democracies need to reconnect with religious wisdom in order to rediscover deeper ideas of what politics is for, and to challenge the dominance of state and market. Adam Dinham (2014) has extended this idea, suggesting that religions can provide 'alternative logics' that reawaken politics and reengage citizens.

These points notwithstanding, research into the post-secular does not by any means unproblematically endorse post-liberalism. As the foremost thinker on the subject, it is worth noting that Habermas' work is particularly ambivalent. Habermas' earlier work has widely been interpreted as advocating an exclusionary idea of the public sphere that casts religion as irrational and potentially subversive (Mendieta 2002: 11). Although this reading is somewhat narrow given Habermas' deep reflection on Durkheim regarding the role of religion in underscoring public morality, still he claims that in a secularised society 'only a universalistic morality can retain its obligatory character' (Habermas 1987: 49-80; 90). This universalistic morality is developed by

means of a methodological atheism that prioritises rational argument and empirical evidence, with religious arguments only justified insofar as they are themselves rationalised (Habermas 1987: 89; Mendieta 2002: 12). This approach can be seen to carry over into his later work, such that despite his reflections on the post-secular, despite even his 'awareness' that something is 'missing' from an exclusively secular public sphere, still his solution always amounts to the same ideal of a universal, rational language (Habermas 2008; Habermas 2010). In this light, the only real difference between the older and later Habermas is that his later work shrinks the realm to which his ideal applies. Guido Vanheeswijck observes in the later Habermas a distinguishing between a formal and informal public sphere, with the former applying solely to law-making, and the latter encompassing welfare provision and civil society, and suggests that Habermas is an exclusivist regarding the formal public sphere, but an inclusivist regarding the informal public sphere. From this perspective, research into the post-secular can be said to represent a post-secular paradox, aiming merely to, from a secular perspective, acknowledge religions' role in society. This perspective offers no space for reimagining the public sphere, but only for recolonising religions into a predefined ideology.

Although he does not point to this paradox himself, it goes some way to explaining it is perhaps Jim Beckford's dissatisfaction with the post-secular, which he insists connotes nothing new. For Beckford, the renewed interest in religion is less to do with recognising alternative ideas of the public sphere,

and more to do with radical Islam and the potential contribution of particular religions to public service delivery (Beckford 2012).

This public policy interest in religion points to another key problem with the post-secular from a post-liberal perspective: since the former does not fundamentally challenge the secular, nor can it challenge the dominance of state and market as means of inculcating solidarity. Instead, this renewed interest can be read in light of a neoliberal shift away from the state and towards the market. Religions are to become key players in the mixed economy of welfare. Religions, Dinham explains, are understood ‘as “containers” of staff, buildings, volunteers, networks, values and skills which can be “harnessed” in key community domains’ (Dinham 2011: 526).

There are other uses of the post-secular, however, which seem to fit far more neatly with the post-liberal agenda. A few researchers are beginning to use the term post-secular rapprochement to identify collaborative efforts between religious and nonreligious civic actors (Beaumont & Baker 2011; Cloke & Beaumont 2013; Williams 2015). Although these authors tend to draw on Habermas’ more recent writing, they also draw on the thought of post-liberal thinkers such as Milbank and Blond, employing theory in interesting ways that open up new avenues for understanding the role of religion. Cloke and Beaumont in particular draw on Habermas’ idea of ‘crossover narratives’ to indicate spaces in which religious and secular narratives converge, and suggest that spaces are emerging for ‘reflexive openness to religious narrative’ (Cloke & Beaumont 2013: 19). Williams’ work shows that religious

and nonreligious actors are equally capable of creatively adopting one another's discourses, as well as embracing the contribution of those discourses. By acknowledging that 'different ethical precepts performatively elicit distinct affective registers' religious and nonreligious actors are able to 'recognise the salience of beliefs-in-action' (Williams 2015: 199). I suggest that this new way of interpreting the post-secular can be used to take Habermas beyond Habermas, demonstrating that a universal, rational language is not only unnecessary but also unhelpful, in that it forecloses the imaginative contribution provided by different religious and nonreligious perspectives.

This same body of research has equally emphasised the role of post-secular attitudes in challenging neoliberal discourses. Williams (2015) explores how religious motivations have been used to challenge neoliberal forms of governance in drug rehabilitation programmes, pointing out that the Christian notion of *caritas*, for example, had been employed to keep shelters open for longer than funding would otherwise permit, to understand patients as people, and to recognise that individual self-responsibility alone could not account for the path to addiction.

This second trend in post-secular thinking thus seems to lend support to the post-liberal perspective. Yet the concept of the post-liberal may still stand out for two reasons. The first, somewhat ironic given its strong Christian legacy, is that using the term post-liberal may provide ways of reimagining the public sphere that move beyond religion/secular binaries. The second is that it offers

the reimagining a clear normative agenda, rendering it less susceptible to the whims of particular researchers: it asserts the possibility of shared ideas of the good over the liberal claim of irreducible plurality; and it uses this claim to specifically challenge the dominance of state and market.

With reference to the first point, post-liberalism still has much to learn from the anthropology and sociology of religion. Most important of these is the trend away from the study of religious dogma, and towards the study of identity. As I have explained elsewhere:

Since we last paid attention to religion, much has changed, and even if Christendom once were ideal, which is very doubtful, once that mould has been lifted, the clay unavoidably takes on a very different shape, so that seeking to bring the same mould back down potentially cuts off entire archipelagos of beautiful thought.

In terms of Christian belief, research suggests a number of significant changes. Grace Davie tells us that contemporary belief can be defined as belief without belonging, so that we may call ourselves Christian, but we no longer attend church. Daniele Hervieu-Leger twists this idea, suggesting that instead we belong without believing: we identify with Christianity but we do not believe in God. Abby Day observes a socially performative “belief in belonging”, whereby people do not have faith in any particular dogma, but in one another, and so perform a shared identity.

In each of these the literature appears to point towards a Durkheimian faith, devoid of any constructed or predictable ideas or practices. Perhaps a more challenging concept still comes from Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, who predict a trend away from dogmatic, homogenous forms of religious practice, and towards more spiritual and introspective ideas. In this sense, religion might only serve to inspire social action if doing so corresponds with a sense of self-actualization (Stacey forthcoming 2016).

And this is to look at Christian belief alone. It ignores the decline in that belief, and the rise, mainly due to immigration, of other religions. If post-liberals are to celebrate the increased awareness of the importance of religion, they must do so with the caveat that religion has significantly changed since we last paid attention.

### **Different kinds of ideas**

One manner in which post-liberalism can begin to engage with the diversity of current religious and ideological belief is by engaging with other sociological and policy perspectives that have developed to provide an appropriate metanarrative for a diverse context. In the following I summarise these positions briefly. I should concede that my summary tends to simplify and compartmentalise a history that in fact has far more overlaps than there is the space to do justice to here.

Actually, until very recently, far more recently than many recognise, the overarching narrative for UK politics, policy and practice was still Christian. Looking at the work of Prochaska (2006) and Bowpitt (2007), Dinham (2012: 274; 2014) has suggested that even as the welfare state nationalised welfare in the post-war era, it was nonetheless Christian principles that guided them in their mission, and Christian discourses that were used to convince the church to hand over resources.

But by the late 60s, the changed academic understanding and public perception begins to catch up with the policy, and Dinham observes a '*deliberate* marginalisation of religious socialization', with, for example, the consolidation of 'social work as a competitor to faith-based philanthropy' (Dinham 2012: 273; 274). The Christian paradigm seems to be replaced by a secular paradigm.

In the 1980s, in a neoliberal context of a shrinking state and the need to cultivate a mixed economy of welfare, interest in religion returns. In this context "faith groups" are seen 'as "containers" of staff, buildings, volunteers, networks, values and skills which can be "harnessed" in key community domains' (Dinham 2011: 1).

This theme continues into the 90s and 00s, with the emergence in particular of the multi-cultural and multi-faith paradigms. Yet following the Oldham riots of 2001, these paradigms were criticised for facilitating the emergence of

areas with multiple, conflicting and untrusting communities, or what the subsequent Cattle Report called “parallel lives” (Cattle 2001).

In response to the perceived fragmentary nature of the multi-faith approach, an interfaith paradigm emerged: ‘something more committed to a stronger sense of the whole, in terms of such things as societal cohesion and national citizenship’ (Cattle 2012: 38). Yet, as Adam Dinham has made clear, both multi-faith and interfaith fail to recognise another issue; namely, that there is and can be no multi-faith or interfaith theology, meaning that the faith aspect is lost.

Given the frustration with finding a new paradigm, David Barclay has suggested that a metanarrative approach should be dropped altogether. Although contemporary approaches demonstrate an authentic desire to build unity across diversity, Barclay has said that they rely on

‘trickle down’ theory of social change in which the only people whose thinking or practice is worth altering are those intellectual and political elites with the power to alter funding patterns or decisions about different kinds of representation. (Barclay 2013: 17)

According to Barclay, rather than orthodoxy, we need to think about orthopraxy, right doing.

Barclay's intervention is reminiscent of my critique of post-liberalism towards the end of chapter 2. The problem with this approach is that it ignores the importance of specific value structures as ways of inspiring action and resisting liberal hegemony. This point is implicitly recognised by British Prime Minister David Cameron, who, in 2011, claimed "state multiculturalism" had "allowed the weakening of our collective identity" (Cameron 2011). Cameron has addressed this lack of collective identity by asserting that Britain is a Christian country and adding, "we should not be afraid to say so" (Cameron 2014). Yet conversely, the risk of this approach can be seen in the Near Neighbours programme, which funds the Church of England to engage in interfaith community development. The Church of England is treated *de facto* as the arbiter of good community activism.

It is important to recognise that since we last paid attention, the religious landscape has irrevocably changed, and narratives that might have inspired social solidarity in the 1950s may not do the same job today. It is important to recognise that any metanarrative may be exclusive. Yet to give up on metanarrative altogether is to suggest that traditional structures do not play a role in imparting and distributing social justice.

Paulo Freire suggests that rather than eschewing ideas of the good altogether, the point is to ensure that these ideas are developed inclusively at the grassroots. According to Freire, all revolutions heretofore, despite having the emancipation of the people as a key objective, have always focused on taking the means of control first, and educating the people second. But this is

only to mirror hierarchical oppression. Instead, claims Friere, the only way to influence a true revolution is to educate people from the bottom up. Through a process of what Freire calls conscientisation, it is held that individuals can come to critically engage with the world of their own accord (1996).

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored post-liberalism's lament of a lost religion in terms of historical developments, sociological relevance, and policy approaches. It concluded, respectively, that while perhaps ideas of the good had been lost, sporadic ideas of shared value could still be seen to influence some areas of politics and economy, and that where it did not have such influence, there nonetheless appeared to be evidence of the potential for such influence; that while ideas of the good were important, it was not possible to simply recover the same beliefs and practices around which people were once united; and that other approaches had suffered a failure of imagination in responding.

## Chapter 4: Statism

As chapter 2 explains, the post-liberal argument goes that with the loss of shared ideas of the good, it becomes necessary to inculcate a strong state that keeps the peace and ensures the welfare of its citizens. Both of these tendencies undermine the idea of humans as inherently political. The latter especially requires raising taxes to provide services. Post-liberals regard such redistribution as alienating the benefactor from the act of giving, thus undermining public duty, as well as acting as an unnecessary crutch to the receiver. This chapter explores these points historically, sociologically, and in terms of policy.

### The rise of leviathan and the fall of humanity

The primary question to ask historically is whether and why the church is overtaken by the state as the primary institution through which people are reconciled to one another. Related to this is the question of whether local forms of decision making more generally give way to centralised decisions.

Post-liberals argue that during the European Wars of Religion, in response to interminable conflict, a philosophy emerges that assumes not only is there no idea of the good, but that anyway people cannot collectively agree on the good without descending into violence. In its place, a rationally calculated social contract emerges, which prioritises the individual pursuit of material advantages, and which gives supreme authority to the state in the protection of this priority. Hence it is said that the state holds a monopoly on violence

(Weber 1919/2005). What is important to question is whether this emergent philosophy has any parallel in political reality. Monica Toft et al. demonstrate this parallel. They claim that 'premodern relationships between religious and political actors tended to involve significant mutual dependence for the sake of overall social order' with religious actors providing the ideological legitimacy, and political actors the financial and military strength (Toft et al. 2012: 52; 54). In the early-modern period, however, 'power shifted decisively in the direction of the state', much encouraged by the rise of political philosophies extolling the importance of security (Toft et al. 2012: 58-60). Most significantly, the Treaty of Westphalia made religion an issue of national sovereignty (Toft et al. 2012: 63). From the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, relying on literature often expressed 'in biblical and orthodox terms', the religious authority was increasingly subordinated to political authority, a trend that was consolidated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Toft et al. 2012: 65).

Eventually this takeover is extended to the provision of services. Frank Prochaska shows that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of social services were provided by the churches or by friendship societies, underscored by, and promulgating a shared spirit of association (Prochaska 2006: 9). But in the context of Fabianism, an extension of social scientific positivism, which suggested social scientific bureaucracy could solve social ills, and of wartime planning from 1939-45, charity came to be seen as outmoded (Prochaska 2006: 152). According to Prochaska, the dominance of the state continued even into the neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher:

While British governments of both right and left enlist the citizen volunteer when it suits them, they have rarely had much regard for charitable independence, in part because voluntary campaigners openly criticise government policy (Prochaska 2006: 163).

Prochaska adds that even where more recent emphasis on voluntary association has been authentic, because the rise of the state undermined religious and voluntary organisations, there was no spirit of association left from which to draw:

The New Right, with its reversion to the language of the minimal state and the need for voluntary endeavour, echoed sentiments that had been little commended since the heyday of Victorian liberalism.<sup>47</sup> But such sentiments were being voiced in a world that had lost its Christian underpinnings. Thatcher's millionaires, unlike the Colmans, Rathbones, or Cadburys of the past, had other things to spend their money on than their fellow citizens (Prochaska 2006: 161).

Indeed, Prochaska claims that by the late 1940s, 'with collectivism in the ascendant, the payment of taxes had become the primary civic duty' (Prochaska 2006: 149).

The post-liberal story of a rising leviathan then, seems to have real purchase in sociological studies of the relationship between the state and ideas of the good. The state first displaces religion by establishing its own

legitimacy on contractual grounds. It then challenges the legitimacy of religious activities in the civil sphere, which it first supplements, then either replaces or co-opts. In the process, religion loses its social significance, and its cultural capacity to motivate social action. The result is that even where bureaucrats now awaken to the idea of social action as integral to human flourishing, if the state is removed, it may be confronted by a lack of appetite.

Yet the picture of the state being portrayed is one of a monolith undermining what it means to be human must be balanced against views of the state as building a shared spirit of association. Such a discussion provides the focus of the next section.

### **The importance of the state**

The last section demonstrated that there has been a clear rise in the state. This section will explore whether the rise of the state should be considered as undermining a shared spirit of association, or if in fact the state can be seen as embodying this ideal.

Perhaps the best theoretical defence of the state can be found in Hegel. Hegelian dialectics, though very much disputed as to their form, are universally acknowledged as a system wherein ideas shape history. A form of dialectic can be perceived in Hegel's understanding of the relationship between the individual, family, civil society and the state. The individual's

relation to the family is one of selflessness and solidarity: 'In the family the particularity of each individual tends to be absorbed into the social unit' (Redding 2014: 51). But the individual's relation to others in the market place is one of selfishness and competition. The role of the state is to create a synthesis of the two positions; that is, to have selfishness and solidarity at once, helping the individual to be absorbed into the social unit. He imagines this will happen through state regulation, law and punishment, and the institution of organised labour. The harmonious ideal that results, Hegel calls the *Sittlichkeit*, or "ethical life".

Hegel seems to offer a fair challenge to the state as undermining community. Yet John Milbank has said that since he concedes the naturalness and inevitability of selfishness, and, as a result, the necessity of an overbearing state, Hegel's can only ever be 'a pseudo-*Sittlichkeit*' (Milbank 1990/2006: 168). This is because any pretension of genuine reconciliation is always undergirded by self-interest:

Personal striving is really in the interest of collective purpose, and yet Hegel *defines* this collective purpose precisely in terms of the making to coincide of public and private interest (Milbank 1990/2006: 171)

In other words, although one's own individual work is directed towards the interest of the collective, this is at the very best self-deception, since the only way one could have been persuaded to act in the collective interest, was to be convinced that so doing was ultimately in ones self-interest. Hegel 'traces the

origins of human society to individual self-seeking, which eventually gives rise to laws which merely protect established power' (Milbank 1990/2006: 170). This reading of Hegel is confirmed by Kanykey Jailobaeva, and by Krishan Kumar: 'the individual comes to understand that 'he wills his ends only in willing universal ends'' (Kumar in Jailobaeva 2007: 5). Because human self-interest is ultimately unavoidable, because self-deception can never be complete, the true *Sittlichkeit* can never be achieved, and so instead one requires the over-bearing regulation of the state, hence, Hegel's stress on law and punishment. One might argue then, that Hegel does see the inherent value of community – only he does not believe it to be achievable. Yet for Milbank the point is that due to Hegel's pessimistic view of human nature, his idea of community is always already undermined. If ideas do shape behaviour, then the reification of Hegelianism risks undermining community from within, by treating it as an enterprise for serving self-interest.

It is worth noting however, that the critique of Hegel is reliant on perceiving the state as enforcer. This attitude perhaps changes if we regard the state from the perspective of Richard Titmuss, for whom taxation and redistribution is a beautiful and efficient means through which a whole nation can enter into a process of gift exchange (Titmuss 1971/1997). Yet Alisdair MacIntyre has denigrated this position as legitimating the interests 'not of workers, but of managers and technocrats' (MacIntyre in Knight 2005: 267). Still, Titmuss favourably draws on MacIntyre's work, and thus was presumably aware of his reservations (Titmuss 1971/1997: 261). Seeking to avoid a crude endorsement of statist utilitarianism, Titmuss advocates a symbiotic

relationship between the state as administrator and individuals as voluntary suppliers. MacIntyre's point holds however, since there is little regard for the empowering of people. Prochaska can help to elaborate this point:

As Max Weber pointed out, 'bureaucracy inevitably accompanies modern mass democracy in contrast to the democratic self-government of small homogeneous units'. In compensation for the decline of rival sources of democracy, politicians and social commentators sought to replace the sense of community, which people had built up in the past out of family life and self-governing local institutions, with a sense of national community, built out of central bureaucratic structures and party politics. In passing social legislation, government acted in the name of freedom, progress, and social justice. The beauty of such abstractions perhaps blinded the public to the dangers of overburdening the state. Despite the warnings of the liberal economist Frederick Hayek and others, there was relatively little public debate over the insensitivity of central government to the periphery. It was not a strong current in political discourse to argue that effective social reform might come from below, from local institutions that derived their energy and legitimacy from openness to the immediate needs of individuals and communities. The more the government expanded its role into areas that were formerly the responsibility of families and voluntary institutions, the more it reduced the scope for individual service and social interaction (Prochaska 2006: 163).

As the bureaucratic state expands and co-opts, it slowly undermines social action. Yet at this point it is important that post-liberals do not undermine their own project. Aggression against the state, especially in the absence of particular ideologies or institutions to support as an alternative, might easily be read in line with the neoliberal critique of political institutions on the grounds that they inhibit freedom.

Moreover, even if this point is addressed, three fundamental points remain. The first is concern regarding what is known as the postcode lottery. The welfare state was initially set up in response to enormous gaps in welfare provision, in terms of both quantity and quality. The second concern is that in a globalised world, in which companies may have more wealth than states, it is nonetheless only states, and collections of states, that have the power to confront such companies and to stand up for social justice. The third concern is research suggesting that the state plays a key role in founding, sustaining and supporting social action. Research from Theda Skopcol in the US has argued that 'organized civil society in the United States has never flourished apart from active government', which 'nurtured and rewarded voluntary associations' (Skopcol 1996).

The state is constantly in danger of co-opting and undermining social action. But it is also the only institution big enough to provide universal services, stand up to big companies, and support struggling voluntary associations.

## Different states

While the preceding sections have traced the rise of an ostensibly monolithic state, unaware of or uninterested in the importance of social action, there have actually been a number of key initiatives from UK government over the last fifty years which grapple with deep ideas of human flourishing. It is important that post-liberals engage with these projects, since although they have had many problems, or perhaps because they have, they are able to contribute vital information as to how to take the project forwards. In the following I shall summarise a number of such projects during the post-war, big state period.

The late 1960s and 1970s was a time of reawakening to the shortcomings of the state. 1968 was a year of “revolt, rebellion and reaction throughout the world” (Pople in Ledwith 2005: 11). Although such rebellion was often more focused on race, capitalism and war than on statism, it may have influenced self-reflection on the part of the establishment as a whole. 1968 also saw the publication of the Gulbenkian Report, which recognised that “participation in decision-making about every aspect of life is of fundamental importance to human flourishing” (Dinham 2014). 1969 saw the introduction of the Community Development Projects (CPD) “amidst the emergent crisis in social democracy and the perceived threat of disaffection and dissent” (Shaw 2003: 362). Although these projects drew on the a-structural “cycle of transmitted deprivation” theory with the intention of lifting families and areas out of poverty, project workers were given enough freedom to “reject this reactionary theory in favour of radical/structural Marxist analyses of discrimination”

(Ledwith 2005: 11). This shift was best observed in the publication of *Gilding the Ghetto* (CDP 1977) and *In and Against the State* (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1979), which claimed that the government ignored the structural causes of deprivation such as “bad housing conditions, redundancies, lay-offs, and low wages” and that “state welfare workers were locked into a set of social relations that operated against working class interests by ‘protecting capital from our strength’” (CDP 1977: 4; Shaw 2003: 363). With government unable to control the narrative of CPDs, funding was withdrawn.

Dinham suggests that this cycle was repeated in the 1990s and 2000s with New Labour’s New Deal for Communities (NDC). In an indicative article entitled *Empowered or Over-powered?*, Dinham suggests that NDC placed too many constraints on communities:

the prescription of general floor targets and the speed of development required is undermining the community development commitment to empowerment at local people’s pace and causing a sense of exclusion amongst local people from the programme (Dinham 2005: 309).

Again, even the best-intentioned policy can struggle to hand over the kind of power local people require for a sense of ownership.

Similarly, the Big Society agenda, which was introduced by the Conservative part of the Coalition government, suggested a renewed interest in the ability of

local people to take control of their own lives. Yet not only has the Big Society failed to produce organisations willing to make structural criticisms, but also it has been perceived as a cover for structural changes in terms of reduced social spending.

A major outcome of the Big Society was the commissioning of a community organisation to develop local capacity. While this commission was widely expected to be secured by London Citizens, it went to a new umbrella organization named Locality. Bunyan explains that:

over the course of the tendering process and since the decision was made about the organization deemed best equipped to spearhead the community organizing initiative, there would appear to have been a significant shift in emphasis in terms of the style and approach that is to be adopted (Bunyan 2013: 129).

He suggests that

there is a danger that the initiative as currently conceived will perpetuate unhelpful narratives and assumptions about the nature of poor and disadvantaged communities and fail to politicize such communities in building collective power capable of challenging the existing order (Bunyan 2013: 131).

Each of these attempts to cede power from government to local communities has led to a recoiling. What states often fail to grasp is the paradox at the heart of how community development workers often wish to operate: in and against the state. By co-opting voluntary activities, states fail to appreciate the importance of self-determination in the process of social action.

## Conclusion

This chapter opened with a discussion of the post-liberal idea of the state as arising out of a lack of confidence in people to negotiate ideas of the good peacefully, resulting in a material idea of wellbeing protected by the state, which has a monopoly on violence. It explored sociological literature, and found that both mistrust and materialism could be traced into the decline of religion and the rise of the state as the primary deliverer of welfare. The final section demonstrated that there had been numerous post-war policy attempts to empower communities, but that measures had always been somewhat perfunctory, with dwindling attention to developing a shared spirit of association.

## Chapter 5: Capitalism

This chapter focuses on capitalism. Although it acknowledges the idea that capitalism is intended to distribute to each according to desert, post-liberalism takes on both Marxist and neo-Marxist guises, showing concern with how capitalism creates inequality, cultivates acquisitiveness, and corrodes relationships. Post-liberalism is concerned with how the state and the market collude, such that legislation and policy are beholden to business interests, and public goods are submitted to market logic. Its concern with market logic has some roots in concern with inequality, but also rests heavily on its focus on relationships: the relationship of managers to workers, specifically, the alienation of workers from their labour; the relation of individuals to the wider public, specifically, the use of self-interest as a mechanism for increasing productivity; and the relationship between each party in the gift relationship, specifically, the intervention of money.

The post-liberal argument treats the rise of the state and of capitalism as two sides of the same coin; left and right liberalism. Just as the loss of ideas of the good leads left liberals to argue for a strong state to reconcile people to one another, so it encourages right liberals to argue that people can only be reconciled to one another through the market. These philosophies also collude. As explained in the chapter 2, in the absence of ideas of the good, the good life becomes materialist: it is about self-preservation. This leads the way to equate the good life with economic growth. Finally, the argument emerges that by all acting in their own economic interest, each tends to promote the good of others. Since both left and right liberalism are concerned

with the protection of the wellbeing of individuals, it follows that the state must protect the property rights of individuals. But since certain individuals do not merely produce enough for their survival, but wish to flourish, it follows that they must seek to make a profit from their activity, which is good, because it encourages economic growth. So greed is good. And since in order to make a profit, individuals must sell their property, it follows that others must be encouraged to purchase that property. So acquisitiveness is good. And finally, because competition between producers for the loyalty of consumers tends to drive up quality and drive down prices, competition is good.

Post-liberals are thus concerned not only with the structural inequality that capitalism creates, but with the self-interested behaviours it encourages, since each of these tend to undermine solidarity. On top of all of this, post-liberals are concerned with the argument that each of these qualities is natural; hence when they are legislated against or prohibited, it is the human's natural freedom that is being undermined.

This chapter asks whether capitalism has indeed produced these effects, whether it matters, and what kinds of responses are appropriate.

### **The rise of capitalism**

The purpose of this section is to explore whether and how religion is replaced by the market as the means by which people are reconciled to one another,

especially exploring whether and how market logics infiltrate beyond the market itself into other spheres.

Karl Polanyi and Marcel Mauss have both suggested that pre-modern and non-western economies are hard for the modern westerner to understand:

It is on this one negative point that modern ethnographers agree: the absence of the motive of gain; the absence of the principle of laboring for remuneration; the absence of the principle of least effort; and, especially, the absence of any separate and distinct institution based on economic motives. But how, then, is order in production and distribution ensured?

The answer is provided in the main by two principles of behavior not primarily associated with economics: *reciprocity* and *redistribution* (Polanyi 1944/2001: 47)

Whereas pre-modern economies were, and non-western economies continue to be, predominantly organised by reciprocity, modern, capitalist societies are dominated by the profit-motive. Pre-modern and non-western societies thus demonstrate that reciprocity is no less natural than greed, acquisitiveness and competitiveness. Contra Polanyi, actually debate continues in anthropology as to whether or not non-Western economies are in fact grounded in self-interest. (Parry 1986). Yet what these debates demonstrate is that economy and society may be grounded in a very different idea of self-interest, in which

reward is not based merely on profit, nor necessarily even on material improvement, but also on spiritual improvement. These debates moreover show that ideology has determinative impact on the kinds of reward and return people expect for their actions (Parry 1986: 467). In this sense, no economic theory can claim authority over what is natural.

Given the importance of ideology, less disputed is Polanyi's contention that a market economy cannot exist of its own accord. Rather, a market economy requires a culture that can support it:

Once the economic system is organized in separate institutions, based on specific motives and conferring a special status, society must be shaped in such a manner as to allow that system to function according to its own laws. This is the meaning of the familiar assertion that a market economy can function only in a market society (Polanyi 1944/2001: 57).

The process Polanyi is describing is that of hegemony: the dominant system requires a culture that sustains it. This culture must be inculcated.

Polanyi was reflecting on the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, making the case for a more collectivist society. As suggested in chapter 3, Polanyi's was a popular stance in the post-war period. But from 1979 onwards, under successive Thatcherite and New Labour governments, the market economy and society spread exponentially.

Margaret Thatcher dramatically decreased the top rate of income tax, weakened trade unions, privatised state-owned industries, renounced the aim for full employment, and sold social houses to their tenants. John Major privatised the railway industry. In the 1990s, this philosophy crossed party divides, with Tony Blair bringing privatisation into the NHS. Moreover, within sectors that seemed impervious to full-scale privatisation, Major and Blair instituted managerial reforms:

Out of a perception that public services remained inflexible, bureaucratic and often of poor quality, the aim was to drive up productivity. In the development in the 1990s of “quasi-markets” in health, for example, with purchaser/provider splits, and compulsory competitive tendering, the state in effect became the sponsor and champion of market activity in public services (Mayo & Moore 2002: 1).

As Polanyi foresaw, economics alone were not enough. For Thatcher, ‘economics are the method; the object is to change the soul.’ Thatcher was seeking to change culture, creating a more independent, self-responsible society or, as she put it, ‘there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women’ (Thatcher 1987).

The capitalist logic has spread to all places and all spheres in recent years. In the context of the US and UK, Michael Sandel (2012) explains how we have moved beyond a market economy to a market society, in which everything is

up for sale. Sandel, explains that beliefs in goods held to have some deeper, public value are underwritten by egalitarian practices. But in a market society, such goods are undermined by their commodification. Sandel takes the example of the right, in the US and UK, to attend parliamentary hearings, free of charge on first come, first served basis. He traces how this principle has been corrupted by the emergence of paid queuing services, whereby those with enough money can pay somebody else to queue for them. Sandel explains that not only does this logic ignore that some are unable to pay, but also the principle of paying itself undermines the good by turning it into a commodity.

While older societies have demonstrated that economies can be underwritten by principles of reciprocity, it would seem that capitalist logic has come to dominate not only the Western economy but also Western society. Yet there are a number of issues to be explored.

First, it is important to deal with post-liberals' claim that both the state and the market have got stronger over the last few centuries. In the context of the foregoing, it would seem that the market gets stronger at the expense of the state. Looking at this from the other way round, the state has often been fundamental in taming the market. Yet the post-liberal point is that the state and the market collude to provide a binary hegemony: we are forced to choose one or the other. Moreover, under Thatcher the state became more centralised than it ever had been. Thatcher undermined everything in between the state and the individual.

Second, it should be acknowledged that Thatcher's rhetoric, derived from Hayek, had a number of similarities with that of post-liberals. The drastic nature of her methods aside, a key difference lies in the intended outcome: whereas Thatcher's aim was absolute autonomy, the post-liberal aim is solidarity.

Finally, McKinnon and Cannell (2013), and Skeggs (2014) suggest that the principle of reciprocity continues to exist at present, even as capitalist logic appears to have spread across the globe and into all spheres. However, while McKinnon and Cannell and Skeggs offer some much needed ethnographic work into the way that alternative beliefs and practices are employed to resist the spread of capitalist logic, a humble aim shared by this thesis, their data cannot be used to suggest that capitalist logic is not dominant, only that small pockets of resistance remain.

### **What's wrong with capitalism?**

The last section established that capitalist logic had spread beyond the economy proper into a number of other institutions and settings. This section explores whether it matters that capitalist logic should have spread in this way. Special attention is given to asking whether this development includes the socialisation of people towards greed, acquisitiveness and competition.

As with statism, one can imagine a Hegelian argument for capitalism along dialectical lines. Again, we look at the relationship between the individual and certain institutions; this time the family, civil society and the capitalist hidden hand. The relationship of the individual to the family is one of selflessness and solidarity; that to the market place is one of selfishness and competition. But the hidden hand guides this selfish, competitive behaviour towards the benefit of all. So to work hard in one's own interest *is* an act of solidarity. It is this kind of logic that underwrites the rhetoric about the "productive classes" or what Bev Skeggs calls the "subject of value"; that is, one that contributes as a cog within the capitalist system, building GDP (Skeggs 2014).

This kind of argument forms the basis of Durkheim's argument in favour of markets. This is perhaps best seen in his reversed vocabulary with respect to Tonnies. For Tonnies, medieval and rural communities are organic, and urban communities mechanical, whereas for Durkheim it is the other way round. Tonnies sees the use of ideas, symbols and practices to represent and unite a community as organic, but Durkheim sees them as mechanical. Aldous has revealed that this is no accident; rather, the young Durkheim read and reviewed Tonnies *Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft*, and deliberately switched labels in his own *Division of Labour in Society* (Aldous et al. 1972). Yet Durkheim thinks the division of labour can go too far, creating excessive self-interest, competition and corruption. In the preface to the second edition of his *Division of Labour in Society*, he says that because the division of labour can tend towards corruption, certain rules and regulations are required in the economy so as to ensure that behaviour is geared towards the collective

interest:

Neither political society, in its entirety, nor the State can take over this function; economic life, because it is specialized and grows more specialized every day, escapes their competence and their action. An occupational activity can be efficaciously regulated only by a group intimate enough with it to know its functioning, feel all its needs, and able to follow all their variations. The only one that could answer all these conditions is the one formed by all the agents of the same industry, united and organized into a single body. This is what is called the corporation or occupational group. (Durkheim 1893/2014: 5)

Essentially, Durkheim calls for organised labour in the form of guilds and regulatory bodies. What is not clear is whether Durkheim's notion of the occupational group is conceived as the fulfilment of, or as a response to the shortcomings of his so-called organic solidarity.

As with Hegel's argument for the state this system assumes that selfishness is unavoidable, inherent to human nature, and so harnessing such behaviour towards the benefit of all is the only way to conceive of solidarity. Yet the history offered in the previous section suggests that selfishness and competition have only been integral to economy and society for a relatively short period of time, and so might be reversed in just the way a market society has been instilled.

The previous section demonstrated how the capitalist logic undermines public goods. Here I want to focus on how it undermines certain behavioural traits important for maintaining social order. In terms of how harnessing self-interest undermines social order, John Milbank explains that even in a totally capitalist society, solidarity is required at some level:

It turns out that even capitalism needed more cooperation and reciprocity than liberals thought. If you don't trust your colleagues even within your own firm or bank, then a kind of anarchy ensues. To contain that anarchy in private and public corporations – including universities – we get increased top-down impersonal management of individuals. But that kills co-operation, tacit interactive process and creativity. And disgruntled individuals try to exploit the bodies they work for (Milbank 2012: 4).

Richard Titmuss explored this point sociologically, demonstrating the inefficiency and corruption of the American paid blood-donor system, as compared with the British gift-based system (Titmuss 1971/1997). Richard Sennett goes further, demonstrating how the new culture of capitalism undermines long-term virtues such as reciprocity and loyalty (Sennett 1998: 28)

Yet while recognising that acquisitive behaviour is contingent, Deirdre McCloskey nonetheless sees such behaviour as integral to a society interested in substantial growth. While such growth does not necessarily

inculcate solidarity, it creates abundance, which in turn alleviates poverty. As McCloskey explains, she is less interested in inequality than she is in poverty (McCloskey forthcoming 2016). So for McCloskey, some virtues are worth sacrificing in the name of growth.

Notwithstanding McCloskey's point, Robert and Edward Skidelsky (2012) remind us that we have become obsessed with growth. The Skidelskys start by reflecting on John Maynard Keynes's *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* (1930), which suggested that in the not too distant future, around about the period in which we currently find ourselves perhaps, due to developments in technology and productivity, people would be working 'three-hour shifts or a fifteen-hour week' (Keynes 1930: 5). What went wrong? The Skidelsky's claim that Keynes had not accounted for the natural castigation of the good life in favour of a competitive acquisitiveness: we always want as much, or more, than those around us. So while the acquisitiveness begrudgingly accepted by McCloskey may be useful, it can also stifle thoughts about the good life – or the reason we make money in the first place.

Perhaps a more pressing critique is offered by Paul Zak's edited volume (2008), which demonstrates that a capitalist, profit-driven society does not have to be a greedy one. Casebeer's chapter in particular argues that since cooperation has evolved as a socially useful tactic, although free markets do produce greedy, acquisitive and competitive individuals, they just as often produce cooperative individuals. Not only this, but being placed in a free environment, in which one is likely to encounter a capitalist predator, will tend

to incentivise others to band together and cooperate. Perhaps most importantly of all, Casebeer suggests that a market must be free, operating outside the sphere of legislation, in order for individuals to practice virtuous behaviour. This point is important not only from a normative perspective, that is, if an action is not freely undertaken, it cannot be described as moral; but also from a practical perspective: no bureaucracy can ever be so perfect as to preside over all spaces of economy and society. At some point, we must rely on the morality of people.

The foregoing discussion suggests that a balance is required, either shared between society as a whole or within each individual, between the desire to produce enough and having the headspace to recognise that growth is always growth *for* something, for a certain way of life – not an end in itself. It also makes clear that a capitalist society is not necessarily antipathetic to this balanced outcome.

### **Different capitalisms**

Notwithstanding the importance of the foregoing critiques of capitalism, it is worth pointing out that these critiques do not necessarily apply in all recognisably capitalist situations. What is monolithically described as capitalism has actually emerged in numerous ways in different places.

Perhaps the foremost work on the diversity within recognisably capitalist nations is Hall and Soskice's edited volume *Varieties of Capitalism* (2001),

which explains that there are vast differences between the way an economy like that of Germany works, a coordinated market economy, and the way that of the UK works, a liberal market economy. The clearest example of this difference is given in Culpepper's chapter on professional development. In Germany a sense of loyalty on the part of the worker for a particular company means that a lot of money can be invested in professional development. In the UK however, rather than developing staff, companies will tend to create redundancies and employ new staff. Culpepper suggests that this shift is largely down to a culture of cooperation reinforced through trade unions.

For the purposes of this thesis Hall and Soskice's work demonstrates that capitalism on its own does not necessarily undermine solidarity. Rather, a culture of profit seeking, short-term self-interest and mistrust are the deciding factors. Solidarity may be undermined by certain economic circumstances and industrial relations, but equally, developing a culture of solidarity may be a necessary prerequisite of bringing about more favourable economic circumstances.

## Conclusion

This chapter opened by exploring post-liberal ideas of capitalism as arising out of the need for a mechanism by which self-interested people could be reconciled towards the creation of common wealth. Post-liberals suggested that this logic in fact further undermined a shared spirit of association. The chapter went on to see how anthropologists and sociologists of capitalism had

traced the rise of capitalist logic to dominate not only economic but also social thinking. It moreover explored literature that revealed the ways in which capitalist logic could undermine reciprocity, the inherent good of an object or ritual, long-term thinking, and loyalty. But the chapter also explored literature that suggested a capitalist society is merely a free society, and that while some choose competition, others choose cooperation, in the form of trade unions. It went on to suggest that there are varieties of capitalism, and that while some forms may undermine a shared spirit of association, others may very much rely on this spirit. It closed with a question, asking whether it was possible to turn economic thinking on its head, so that rather than economic conditions influencing levels of association, cultivating a shared spirit of association might be the first step to implementing regulation.

## Chapter 6: Methodology

This thesis opened by introducing post-liberalism, which focuses on ideas of the good as conceptually prior to common agency, and suggests that focus on ideas of the good has been lost with the rise of liberal democracy, which has instead focused on hegemonic systems of reconciliation, namely, the state and the market. My central research questions became, what role, if any, do ideas of the good play in cultivating solidarity and collective action in pluralist settings? How are these ideas reified through particular rituals and practices? Chapter 2 introduces post-liberalism in detail, from theory to politics, policy and practice. Chapter 3 begins the engagement of post-liberalism with research engaged with lived realities. It demonstrates that while shared ideas of the good are a useful component for civic engagement, what these ideas might look like in a pluralist society is problematic. Chapters 4 and 5 questioned whether the rise of the state and the market was really such a bad thing for civic engagement. This section explores and maps out the methodological criteria for engaging with these questions empirically.

I begin by exploring ontology and epistemology. This is deemed an important place to start because there are deep divisions between theology and philosophy, especially those aspects I am concerned with, and research engaged with lived realities. I then go through a number of steps designed to resolve this tension, with the aim of carrying out research that is at once respectful of the insights of theology and philosophy, and engages with lived realities.

## Theology through lived realities: ontology and epistemology

*It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of – namely, the confession of its author, and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir* (Nietzsche 1868/2000: §6)

*All preconceptions must be eradicated* (Durkheim 1893/2014: 31).

The two quotes above are indicative of a central conflict between theology and philosophy, especially those strands engaged with in this thesis, and social science, which is steeped in a different ontological understanding of the world. In the following I will introduce a range of ideas elucidating this point across a spectrum from those that deem ontological differences irreconcilable, to those that see an issue that may be overcome. Although my own approach is not social scientific, this tension is important to explore since the critics of social science I discuss often intend their critique to encompass any research engaged with lived realities.

At the first extreme is Michel Henry, for whom the truth of life is not revealed in any form of theoretical, let alone empirical investigation, since the truth of life is that which is revealed to us through first-person living, whereas the truth of Western theory generally, and of scientific thinking in particular, is that of spatially and behaviourally defined objects. For Henry, we understand less and less about life the more we understand and focus on observable phenomena (Henry 2002: 36-42). According to Henry's account, the first-person, confessional disclosure of experience can be the only one that has

any relevance to life. Any other method ends up instrumentalising life in terms of something else.

Milbank sees a similar conflict as having undermined theology:

Theology has frequently sought to borrow from elsewhere a fundamental account of society or history, and then to see what theological insights will cohere with it. But it has been shown that no such fundamental account, in the sense of something neutral, rational and universal, is really available. It is theology itself that will have to provide its own account of the final causes at work in human history, on the basis of its own particular, and historically specific faith (Milbank 1990/2006: 382).

Taking a postmodern approach, Milbank suggests that although social science regards itself as a “neutral, rational, universal” account of the world, in fact, like all accounts, it is shaped by a particular ontological perspective. Every rationality is steeped in some tradition, and theology is as good a tradition as any other.

David Ford disagrees with Milbank’s stark conflict between theology and social science, editing a volume in which a chapter describes Milbank’s approach as ‘despairing postmodern quasi-fundamentalism’ (Ford 2013: 711). But Ford nonetheless expresses similar reservations of his own.

It might equally be suggested that different rationalities reside in different *moral* traditions. Some arguments may express normative ideals that are not necessarily amenable to proof or disproof. The question arises as to whether we can support or refute moral ideas on the grounds that they are not observed. How do we decide what is good? Is it the aggregation of multifarious individual desires?

Charles Taylor explains that theology and social science display very different models of truth (2014). He distinguishes between the Hobbes-Locke-Condorcet, or instrumental-designative model of truth, and the Hamann-Herder-Humboldt, or expressive-enactive model of truth – what might be more broadly considered the correspondence and creative models. The first model is that which leads to Frege and logical positivism, consisting of a literalist, scientific language in which all words and truths correspond to either a logical or an empirically observable reality. The second model is a metaphorical, poetic model that is aware of the constitutive power of language: language can intervene to change reality. Language is constitutive of reality and shapes the world it describes. So for example, it would make a difference whether policy makers emphasised “community” or “social capital” when commissioning services.

Finally, at the other end of this spectrum, Grace Davie has suggested that amongst a number of social scientists “religion is still perceived as a ‘problem’”, which, “in order to be better managed...must be thoroughly researched” (Davie 2015: 233). This is an idea I have developed elsewhere,

in which I demonstrate that much of this research succumbs to a postsecular paradox, whereby religion is recognised as having returned, or perhaps as having never left, and as having a crucial role to play in the public sphere, but yet is not understood on its own terms (Stacey forthcoming 2016).

Davie explains at length from whence these problems arose:

The answer all too often lies in a persistent – and at times damaging – reluctance on the part of sociology and other social sciences to admit that to be seriously religious is indeed compatible with being fully modern. Despite everything, the combination remains a sticking point. In many ways this is hardly surprising: most of the disciplines in question have emerged more or less directly from the European Enlightenment, implying that they are underpinned by a markedly secular philosophy of social science. As Jürgen Habermas and Hans Joas inferred, from the nineteenth century onwards it was simply assumed that modernization would bring about secularization. The fact, moreover, that these disciplines expanded exponentially in the 1960s is no coincidence (see p. 32): social science thrived on the secular assumptions of this decade and is reluctant to give them up. Unpicking connections as deep-seated as these will not be easy. It will require the disciplines in question to rethink the foundations of their respective fields of study, in order to accommodate fully the implications of religion and religious issues in their analyses of modern societies. This, moreover,

means accepting religion as it is, not as we would like it to be (Davie 2015: 234).

Davie goes on to suggest that anthropologists, and implicitly ethnographers, are perhaps less subject to this prejudice than other social scientists because “researchers who ‘live’ in the field (in whatever capacity and in whatever kind of society) are more likely to display a respect for their subjects and the lifestyles they embrace” (Davie 2015: 233).

Whichever end of the spectrum we start at, each of these ideas points to a fallacy at the heart of exploring theological ideas through social science. The first is quite comfortable modelling itself on a truth of revelation, of faith or of confession. Here truth, and the language through which it is conveyed, is seen as something creative that intervenes in the world to provide an ontological rupture. The latter regards itself as putting faith and confession to one side in order to develop a body of evidence. Language is not creative but rather corresponds to facts in the world.

### **Ethnographical political theology: research strategy and design**

Notwithstanding the importance of this conflict set up between theology and social science, it is important to note that it relies partly on an out-dated construction of the latter. While it is true that for Durkheim, preconceptions had to be eradicated, the second half of the last century saw researchers engaged with lived realities become aware that preconceptions are

unavoidable (Geertz 1973; Winch 1958). Not only are ontologies implicit in the way that we relate to the world, forming a habitus, but values are central to one's entire research project (Du Bois 1979; Flyvbjerg 2001: pp.53-65; Longino 1990). In the following, I explain this trajectory, before offering my own resolution: by becoming what I call ethnographic political theology.

The kind of social scientific thinking critiqued in the previous section sounds very close to objectivism, which suggests that 'there is or must be some permanent, a historical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness' (Bernstein 1983: 8). In the world of natural science, objectivism is not all that controversial; most of us accept that there is a physical world of molecules which can be said to exist independently of the people perceiving those molecules, even if 20<sup>th</sup> century science has shown that the behaviour of molecules can alter according to the way they are perceived. But for the social sciences, objectivism claims that social facts such as belief exist independently of social actors. What this might mean for my purposes is that ideas of the good are always independently operating in some form or another, shaping the way that people carry out their lives irrespective of whether or not they are aware.

Ontological objectivism often lends to empirical realism, a position based on the idea that something can only be said to exist if it can be directly observed; and these two ontological positions combined lend to epistemological positivism, which, though diverse (Halfpenny 2015: 11-12), can be

summarised as claiming that social facts can be identified and measured without reference to how those facts are perceived by social actors. Taking belief as an example, renowned positivist Richard Dawkins recently gauged how many self-ascribed Christians could in fact be called “Christian” when scrutinised in terms of observable verbal responses to questions of dogma (Dawkins 2011). Dawkins’ study was controversial because plenty of people consider themselves Christian today without reference to dogma (Day 2011; Woodhead 2012). Even to say one “has faith” or “believes” may mean entirely different things to two different people. Abby Day has shown that faith may even have nothing to do with propositional belief whereby something is posited as existing, and to pose questions in this way is to impose a Christian framework that participants feel forced to accept or reject without being afforded the possibility of nuance (Day 2011).

The astute reader will have noticed a potential pitfall for my own research here. For since post-liberal arguments, given their deep historical, philosophical and theological background, even in the form of “ideas of the good”, are difficult to convey, I may have to seek more accessible proxies to explore with my respondents. But ultimately this course of action risks assuming that the notion “ideas of the good” has a reality of which my respondents need not be aware and against which their actions can be scrutinised. I risk giving “ideas of the good” what Lynch calls ontological status, or what in terms of the foregoing might better be called objective status, or independent reality, and subsequently seeking for the ways these become manifest. Lynch distinguishes between ontological theories and

cultural sociological theories. He suggests that Durkheim gives the sacred ontological status, imbuing it with a reality that must be reckoned with. If the sacred exists as a mode through which humans perceive their relationship to the world and each other, then it must be explored and even cultivated. Lynch himself suggests that giving the sacred ontological status creates unnecessary controversy. He prefers to treat the sacred as an analytic lens for understanding the way that certain forces gain non-negotiable status in society. Lynch suggests that while in any given time and place, the sacred may appear as a non-negotiable category through which the world is made meaningful, in reality sacred things are always historically contingent (Lynch 2012: 25). Lynch's strategy does not necessitate a neutral attitude towards the sacred. He still sees it as a fecund and functionally important way of focusing shared purpose. I will follow Lynch since I have no need to prove or disprove the ontological reality of ideas of the good in order to explore their relevance as a category.

Thus far, the post-liberal concern with social science seems to hold. Yet since the early days of social science, an entirely different approach known loosely as constructionism has emerged. Constructionism holds that 'our knowledge of the world...is not derived from the nature of the world as it really is' but 'through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life...especially language' (Burr 2015: 4-5). Constructionists pay attention to the way that realities change over time according to the way that they are interpreted by social actors. Constructionism is typically adopted by those seeking to explore the way realities are constructed: in literature, magazines

or in speeches and conversations. Ontological constructionism lends to interpretivism, which argues that in any given social action, 'external forces that have no meaning for those involved in that social action' are far less important than the ideas and understandings the social actors themselves put forward (Bryman 2004: 13). This would suggest that rather than putting ideas of the good into more accessible proxies, I should be avoiding ideas of the good altogether, instead seeing what social actors themselves put forward. This too creates difficulties, however, because ideas of the good have been theoretically important in framing the problems I have discussed. To deny this framing would be to deny the relevance of a theological critique out of hand. There must be a compromise.

Constructionism also lends to phenomenology, which in the world of social research might be described as the study of the way people come to terms with their own existence. The famous motto of phenomenology passed on from Husserl is 'back to the things themselves'. But how this is to be done is complicated and the cause of great disagreement. There are two strands primarily in this debate. The first, Husserlian strand, which might be called the *epoche* or bracketing strand, criticises the amount of preconceptions that remain in scientific investigation and seeks ways of systematically uncovering the way we perceive things in order to better bracket out preconceptions and thereby study the things themselves with a greater level of value neutrality. In essence, the standard of value neutrality is good, but science has not yet lived up to its own standard. The other, Heideggarian strand sees preconceptions as inescapable and instead seeks to describe what it is like to be embodied in

a world with certain preconceptions, of which values are one such preconception. Ultimately, this latter strand seeks to understand what can be known to exist and the limits of knowledge given certain preconceptions. So in terms of the current discussion, rather than seeking a greater level of value neutrality, it seeks a greater understanding of values. It is this latter strand which makes its way via Alfred Schutz into social science:

The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men [sic], living their daily life within the social world. (Schutz 1962: 59)

As human beings we are constantly constructing meanings. The point of social science is to understand and give voice to those meanings. This idea is so useful to me because while I have found in post-liberalism a useful way of describing a problem, I do not wish to *test* for post-liberalism's relevance. Rather, post-liberalism provides a useful theoretical way of discussing the kind of meanings I am looking for.

Phenomenology is also relevant because by insisting that it is impossible to simply bracket out our values, it encourages us to explore avenues for being honest about our values, as well as considering whether or not we are imposing our values upon our respondents. Bryman explains that values can infringe upon every aspect of research:

- choice of research area;
- formulation of research question;
- choice of method;
- formulation of research design and data collection techniques;
- implementation of data collection;
- analysis of data;
- conclusions

(Bryman 2004: 21-22)

So values cannot be overcome. The trick instead, continues Bryman, is to be 'prepared to forewarn readers of their biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced the subsequent findings' (Bryman 2004: 22) So we learn from phenomenology a dual process: first, of being aware of the importance of the self-articulated conceptions of our respondents; second of how our own preconceptions will influence the way that we interpret what our respondents say. As shall be discussed in more detail later, this latter point affects not only how honest the researcher must be with her readers, but also how honest she must be with her respondents.

So while I am not happy with the idea of imposing my critique upon respondents, since I do believe they have new information to offer, I nonetheless hold that there may be theoretical ideas, or the absence of such ideas, that underpin people's actions that they may not be aware of or may not articulate in the same way themselves, and these theoretical ideas can be placed into dialogue with the meanings people themselves offer in order to provide a fuller understanding of their actions. One framework that is useful for taking this ontological and epistemological position into a practice is critical realism.

Critical realism developed as discipline through the theoretical works of Roy Bhaskar (1979, 1986; for an overview see Gorski 2013). Beginning with the natural sciences, Bhaskar's aim was to simultaneously challenge both positivism and constructionism. Bhaskar suggested that positivists take too simplistic a view of cause and effect, with the result that they assume they can make predictions about the future. By contrast, Bhaskar contends that causal mechanisms in the natural world occur in open systems, meaning that they are constantly interacting with other 'countervailing (and sometimes complementary) mechanisms', with the result that rather than predicting outcomes, we can only ever observe tendencies (Houston 2001: 850). On the other hand, Bhaskar equally criticises reactions against positivism in the form. Too often theorists commit an epistemic fallacy, whereby epistemology and ontology are conflated: put simply, for Bhaskar, just because there is no

objectively predictable reality, does not mean there is no such thing as an objective, perception-independent reality.

Bhaskar's criticisms become even more prominent in the social sciences. Houston explains that 'society, even more than the natural world, comprises a range of systems, "in which there are many structures operating simultaneously, some reinforcing and some contradicting each other"' (Porter in Houston 2001: 851). Yet notwithstanding the unpredictability of these multiple systems, Bhaskar remains hesitant regarding constructionism, which he suggests neglects systems altogether in its excessive prioritisation of discourse. Rees and Gatenby (2014: 136) propose that 'human action is conceived as both enabled and constrained by social structures, but [that] this action in turn reproduces or transforms those structures'.

What Bhaskar envisages then, is a dialogue between the explanatory theories provided by the researcher, and the lived experience provided by the research participant. According to Bryman...

...Critical realists accept that the categories they employ to understand reality are likely to be provisional...that there is a distinction between the objects that are the focus of their enquiries and the terms they use to describe, account for and understand it. Secondly, by implication, critical realists unlike positivists are perfectly content to admit into their explanations theoretical terms that are not directly amenable to observation...For critical realists it is acceptable that generative

mechanisms are not directly observable since they are admissible on the grounds that their effects are observable (Bryman 2004: 12).

So what makes critical realism critical is the idea that although a generative mechanism, in my case ideas of the good or their lack, may be admissible on the grounds I observe its effects, still I accept “ideas of the good” is a provisional concept and seek to give as much weight as possible to the explanations of respondents, even to the extent that they confound ideas of the good altogether.

I want to add to this a few thoughts on the hermeneutic approach. Hermeneutics is ancient Greek for ‘interpret’. It began as a discipline in theology as a way of interpreting Biblical text. Today social scientists often take a wide berth to their understanding of ‘text’, allowing it to include pictures, events and people (Ricoeur 1991). Hermeneutics has three broad strands. The first is that of Dilthey, which claims that in order to understand a text it is necessary to understand the political, social and economic circumstances in which it was written (Dilthey 1989: 82). The second is that of Derrida, for whom ‘what we get when we read a text is not an objective account of *logos* or even what the author really meant, but our present interpretation or understanding of the text itself’ (Derrida quoted in Ozmon and Craver 2007: 368). The third stance is between these two; the central idea is that the reader and text inform one another. It is the last strand that is of particular significance to my research. I am using a generative mechanism, namely ideas of the good, which is very much associated with the Platonic, if not the

Christian specifically. But exploring as I do in a nuanced religious and non-religious setting, my respondents are of a number of different religious backgrounds, or of no religion at all, and all the spaces in between. It is therefore important that I allow my framework to inform but also be informed by my respondents.

In this way I begin to answer Taylor's epistemological concerns. The framing of my research is not just tested for correspondence, but the ideas themselves become interventions. I pose the framings to people and seek to gauge their reaction. In turn, their answers shape my framing.

As Davie recommends, I bring all of this to life through ethnography. I immerse myself in the ontology and the practices of those I am exploring with the intention of providing a confessional account that is true to their experiences, incorporates my own perspectives as an outsider engaged reflexively, and engages with lived realities. Special emphasis is placed on the theoretical and experiential learning processes I go through in order to take on the ontology, and these are conveyed to the reader.

It also needs to be remembered that the importance of an ethnographic approach, especially when one is seeking to get inside an ontological framework to reveal the understandings of those within it, is that most of the time as human beings we are acting on a first-order level: we act instinctively and routinely rather than reflexively. What this means is that people can give unreliable accounts of the acts that are most meaningful to them. They may

even forget to recount them to researchers, let alone to explain why they do them. “Because I always have” and “not sure” can be disappointing responses for researchers dealing with only interviews or questionnaires, whereas for ethnographers they are only the beginning. Beyond this, we may not even know what questions to ask unless and until we have shared experiences with participants (Westby 1990).

The ethnographic focus is vital to drawing on phenomenological and hermeneutic insights. The most important point here is that ethnography can accept and move beyond the limitations of observation. Ethnography can accept that some components of life can only be revealed through the self-revelation of living. It is only by becoming a participant, and allowing things to be revealed to me as a living person, that I can begin to understand what it is like to be involved in the organisations I study (Madden 2010: 136; Turner 2001: 52).

I use a multiple case-study ethnography design, which combines a standard case-study design with a comparative design. When choosing a case-study approach, it is important to be sure of why one is choosing a case. One may for instance choose cases on the basis that they present challenges, contradictions or new information. Because I have an initial generative mechanism which I challenge and build on, I chose to seek exemplifying cases, which are chosen...

...not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered. (Bryman 2004: 51)

I chose to work with organisations that exemplify the key post-war policy paradigms for solidarity discussed in Chapter 2: Christian, secular, multi-faith and post-secular. Each case acts as a theoretical sample of the paradigms I have paid theoretical attention to (Eisenhardt 1989: 537). While the organisations I chose did not perfectly cohere to these categories, which anyway themselves are blurred and overlap, using these paradigmatic categories provided a useful starting place for discussion.

One of the most interesting aspects of exploring multiple groups in their attempt to navigate plurality is that I myself was forced through such a process of navigation, not only within each group, but also in moving from one group to the next. Based on the idea introduced in the previous section of immersing myself in the ontology of the groups that I explore, the practices of the participants, I attempted to straddle multiple positions, seeking to give equal respect and understanding to all.

My own movements from one group to the next challenged various frameworks: should I seek to remain aloof and neutral? This seems impossible given my aim of becoming immersed in the ontology and practices. Perhaps I would have to practice what VanAntwerpen calls “interstitiality”, living in the space between various ontologies, allowing myself to fluidly move

from one to the other (VanAntwerpen 2014). One might even suggest that all of this research is reliant on my own position as someone who is in search of meaning, yet unable to cross an imagined threshold from nonfaith to faith.

The research strategy also involves a consideration of reliability and validity. There are a number of approaches to reliability and validity in qualitative research, two broad interpretations of which I shall briefly discuss before confirming my own position. I take these positions from Bryman (2004: 273-280). The first interpretation seeks to adapt the understanding of reliability and validity in quantitative research. This means accepting the ideas of external and internal reliability, as well as external and internal validity.

External reliability is to do with the extent to which a piece of research can be replicated. This is an especially difficult criterion in qualitative research for two reasons. First, in qualitative research, rather than creating contained experiments in which variables can be controlled, we are studying real people in the real world which inevitably changes according to time and place. Second, because qualitative research heavily involves the biases and personality of the researcher, replicability is limited to the extent that biases and personality can be replicated.

Internal validity is also to do with whether the researcher's observations are valid indicators of the theory he or she produces. LeCompte and Goetz argue that internal validity is actually a strength in qualitative research since 'the prolonged participation in the social life of a group over a long period of time

allows the researcher to ensure a high level of congruence between concepts and observations' (Bryman 2004: 273).

One way of understanding internal validity is to do with there being agreement between two researchers involved in the same project. Although this criterion is slightly less problematic, still, since qualitative research is grounded in the belief that all realities are at least in part constructions of the beholders, any amount of agreement between researchers will be socially constructed. For example, in other research undertaken as part of a team, upon writing up interviews and undertaking a coding process, it is necessary agree on the categories that are most important. Sometimes this is a process of expanding meanings so that differing codes can be brought together. At other times one of the researchers will have to compromise and accept that their code does not work. While one tries to be as generous as possible, often the process becomes one of conflict management with clear winners and losers.

External validity is to do with the extent to which findings can be generalised to a wider setting. LeCompte and Goetz argue that external validity presents real problems for qualitative researchers 'because of their tendency to employ case studies and small samples' (Bryman 2004: 273). Dinham on the other hand says that it is possible to generalise 'not to populations but to theories' (Dinham 2000: 169). I will explain further down how Dinham's view has influenced my own.

The second approach I will discuss is one in which reliability and validity are dropped in favour of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Scott in Bryman 2004: 273).

Ensuring the credibility of research is to do with feeding back results to participants. This can be especially difficult from my own critical realist position since, as an academic, even in the world of politics one can receive an aura of irrefutability in terms of the concepts one employs. The important idea then is feeding back results in a way that is accessible to respondents. This fits well with the phenomenological hermeneutic approach outlined above, according to which I am participating in experiences, and subsequently triangulating my experiences and understandings with my participants, and engaging in an ongoing dialogue. Another way of ensuring credibility is to triangulate findings. As will be discussed in more detail below, as well as examining points across multiple cases, I will be simultaneously using document analysis, field notes and interviews.

Transferability is to do with whether findings can be transferred to other milieux. Because my research is designed as a multiple-case study, I was able to evaluate transferability as I moved from one case to another.

Dependability is to do with whether or not appropriate steps have been taken in the formulation of a question, the choice of methods and the choice of respondents. It is common when research involves a number of respondents for each respondent to test another's dependability. In the case of my

research I have tried to use my methodology to detail a journey from immature and unstructured empirical explorations around general research questions to the formulation of a specific research question with a clearly constructed methodology. It is therefore each reader that evaluates dependability.

Because qualitative research recognises and even explicitly rejects objectivity, it is nonetheless important to have a means of ensuring the researcher is not imposing his or her view upon respondents, hence we discuss confirmability instead. It is again for each reader to judge confirmability.

The final criteria is authenticity. It is worth mentioning that authenticity originates out of the phenomenological movement. In part it is do with deconstructing one's received biases and understandings so as to unleash one's deepest self. But it is also to do with deconstructing one's received biases and understandings so as to explore others without imposing one's viewpoint. Bryman divides authenticity into five criteria: Fairness, which is to do with representing a wide array of viewpoints within the setting one studies. This helps to avoid both championing those respondents whose beliefs correspond with those of the researcher and the over-representation of the loudest voice. Ontological authenticity is concerned with helping respondents arrive at a better self-understanding. Educative authenticity is to do with improving understanding between respondents. Catalytic and tactical authenticity require that the research leads to action on the part of

respondents; and that the research empowers respondents to take such action.

My own research will try to integrate all criteria. I will treat the quantitative measures of evaluation as a means of considering the use of my research to other researchers, while taking the qualitative measures as a means of ensuring that my research is true to those I research.

### **Hangin' round: access, role, exploratory sampling**

I have said that my research is going to be based on multiple cases. Partly because I already have quite a specific research question, and partly because the number of cases I wish to explore means I was constrained by time, I undertook what is known as a micro, focused or short-term ethnography in which I combine documentary analysis, participant observation and interviews to provide an abundance of data in a relatively short period of time (Knoblauch 2005; Pink & Morgan 2013). Ethnography is originally derived from anthropology, whereby one becomes totally immersed in a culture over a period of many years, making sense of respondents' practices in terms of their social and linguistic milieu. One may enter into the society with little or no questions, instead taking various notes and only years later bringing those notes together into a piece of research (Hannerz 2003: 202). Micro-ethnography instead is the practice of immersing oneself in a culture or organisation in order to answer a question that has already been wholly or in part formulated. The researcher will already tend to have noticed that a

particular culture or organisation seems to exhibit behaviour that may provide an interesting response to her research question or a resolution to her research problem. Micro ethnography also has implications for method, since 'the ethnographer seeks to implicate her or himself at the center of the action, right from the start, and engages participants in the project with this intention clearly stated' (Pink & Morgan 2013: 355). As suggested in the previous section with reference to ethnography generally, it is also particularly important in micro-ethnography that the researcher triangulates between her own experiences and those of participants. As micro ethnographers we must...

...make correspondences between the experiences of research participants and our own (see the study of Okely 1994). In doing so the technique of drawing from past experiences to understand the principles of what participants are seeking to achieve offers a means of creating bridges between their and the ethnographer's experiences (Pink and Morgan 2013: 356).

Although micro-ethnography is not as time-consuming as ethnography proper, it nonetheless shares a lot of problems, as well as raising a few of its own. In the following I shall discuss problems of access, role and sampling.

Access is a problem for all ethnographers. Being welcomed into a group or organisation that is relevant to one's research problem can be extremely difficult. Especially when one is exploring controversial questions of religion or

ideology, some groups may either not wish to be of service or may not want to share their views for fear of being reflected in a negative light. It is partly for this reason that I have to substitute talk of secularisation and of ideas of the good for proxies.

One way of avoiding issues of initial access is to be covert. Yet covert research is widely regarded as unethical today (Spicker 2011). Despite potential problems associated with being overt, there are some real practical advantages. For one thing, if one is overt then one will have the freedom to take notes without rendering respondents excessively suspicious. Secondly, one may be able to rely on respondents to assist in the research process, especially in finding key informants and in deliberately showing the researcher what they find important. This ability to involve respondents in the research is not simply of practical advantage. In fact it speaks to the main methodological and ethical reason I try to be as overt as I conveniently can be without undermining my research agenda. The methodological reason is that as a critical realist, I am putting forward a generative mechanism which will not necessarily be directly amenable to observation, but nonetheless want that mechanism to be challenged and explored by my respondents. By being overt I can be clear about my agenda and its limitations. The ethical point is rooted in the authenticity of my research. Understanding and finding a resolution to my research problem is what I want to do with my life. And since the problem is deeply rooted in the lack of belonging that results from liberalism, a lack of belonging of which I am myself aware, a response can only be through

building a shared vision with those I work. The means must match the intended end.

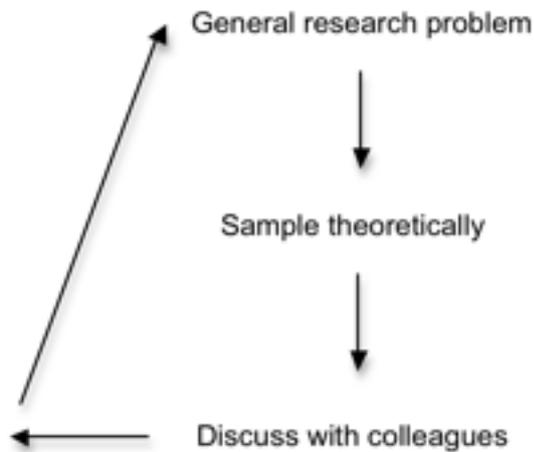
My role as a researcher was as a complete participant with two caveats. The first is that I could only be as immersed as organisations allowed me to be. One issue that I saw arising was that respondents may not wish me to be fully integrated because they might lose control of what I had access to. Another was that knowing my position as a researcher, respondents may never be fully capable of relating to me as a colleague: and this not only because they might want to avoid saying certain things, but also because they might try to gain productivity out of me as a researcher. The other caveat is that I would have to avoid 'going native', which is when a researcher becomes so immersed in their social setting that they begin to adopt the ideas and practices of those around them. The chief risk of going native is that 'the ethnographer can lose sight of his or her position as a researcher' and therefore lose the ability to make balanced judgements (Bryman 2004: 302). Going native is an especial risk for me because a) in seeking to be a complete participant I will aim to be as immersed as possible and b) on a more personal level, because my research problem is authentically linked to a problem that I wish to solve, the organisations I will be studying will often end up being organisations with which I am interested in working in the future. I will have to put this to one side in order to reliably explore the advantages and disadvantages of these organisations. A related problem to going native is losing the ability to describe an organisation as if from the outside. In order

not to lose the outsider's perspective I kept journal entries from the outset, observing how my language and understanding changed over time.

So my role was between complete participant and participant observer. An issue that arose out of this role is to what extent I would be an active and to what extent a passive researcher. Clearly not only the organisations but I myself want to take an active part. I have already said that when working with private and community organisations, it is likely that managers will feel their time is being wasted if they are not getting work out of me, whether as a researcher or consultant or simply as an odd-body assistant. In order to gain access it was therefore important to take on an active role. But I have also said that since these organisations are responding to my research problem, and since that research problem is what I am deeply passionate about, it was only natural that I would be inspired to take an active role. It was therefore important that I balanced this enthusiasm with the need to maintain a balanced approach.

As to choosing organisations to work with, this has been a long and arduous process that the reader can only be introduced to. My approach involved a rudimentary form of theoretical sampling that I call exploratory theoretical sampling whereby my research problem itself took shape in the course of undertaking voluntary work with a number of organisations that seemed to be responding to the wider problems I discuss. The form this model took is perhaps best explained in Figure 1.

Figure 1



A figure representing the process of exploratory theoretical sampling.

The way that this exploratory theoretical sampling worked was by starting from my initial research problem, and looking out for organisations and people that were responding to the same or similar problems in the real world. Upon working with and speaking to these organisations and people, I returned to the research problem, trying to refine the problem in light of what I have learnt. Bev Skeggs has called this “hanging around”; it is a process whereby my problem becomes refined as I slowly begin to understand more about what is out there in the real world, what kind of problems are articulated and what kind of responses are provided (Skeggs 1997: 22). It is also a process whereby my hanging round, my presence, creates a sense of familiarity, and so groups and people become comfortable enough to allow me in as a researcher and, hopefully and eventually, stop thinking of me only as a researcher but as a friend and confidante.

I began by explaining my research to academics, politicians and political activists, and asking around whether these people knew of other groups or people: a rather simple process of snowballing. I soon heard of a couple of groups that might be worth paying attention to.

This rudimentary exploratory process eventually led me to a more advanced form of theoretical sampling and research methods. I sought exemplary cases from each one of these trends. I looked at groups seeking to cultivate civic engagement representing the four key paradigms of the post-war period: Christian, secular, multi-faith and post-secular. This way I involved cases that both exemplify and challenge my assumptions. Equally, I wanted these groups to have mixed practices with regard to conventional and nonconventional politics, and various attitudes towards capitalism. I chose to work with the Christian Socialist Movement, Hackney Council for Voluntary Service, the Faith-based Regeneration Network and London Citizens. Of course no group will sit perfectly within the typological trend I have set out. But each fits closely enough to the category to produce interesting findings. Working with these movements will allow me to explore whether, and how, ideas of the good are used to cultivate civic engagement in pluralist settings.

I combine document analysis with participant observation, and a particular style of interview to understand the values that motivate leaders and volunteers to undertake particular practices, as well as the methods they use to include and engage the wider public.

I opted to work with the following groups: The Christian Socialist Movement (CSM), a think-tank situated within Labour Party Headquarters and comprising a membership of 41 Members of Parliament and almost two thousand members of the public; Hackney Council for Voluntary Service (HCVS), an intermediary organization between government and grassroots activists with no religious affiliation. The Faith-based Regeneration Network (FbRN), a multi-faith intermediary organization between government and grassroots faith-based activists; and London Citizens (LC), a broad-based community organisation with a membership of over one hundred institutions across London.

For CSM, the process was relatively simple. It was clear that we shared similar aims. This was great because the parity in values meant that I would be able to explore how minds steeped in similar theory outworked that theory into political practice in a pluralist setting. I presented my research and asked “what can I do for you so that you will let me follow you around and understand your methods?” This was also a great way of ensuring that my research remained relevant. I was told that in return for research work for CSM, I could record their methods and practices as well as interviewing members where I saw fit. My work with CSM got me quite a bit of attention in the closed but small world of Westminster politics and gave me *quid pro quo* method of access to be quite appealing for other organizations.

I got to know HCVS when discussing my research with an academic and community activist colleague. I expressed my frustration concerning my inability to find a group that could not be considered religious or nonreligious in any sense of the word: not mono-faith, not multi-faith, not implicitly religious, and not secular. I wanted a group that made no reference to religion in what they did, and which on the surface displayed no quasi-religious activities. My colleague being just such a person that had no understanding whatsoever of why religion could possibly be involved in social action, provided a number of organisations that he worked with. I settled on Councils of Voluntary Service, because they seemed to fit best with my research problem. I got in touch with a few organisations. HCVS seemed most welcoming, having hosted researchers in the past, although they were confused and concerned about the obvious religious angle of my research. In a word, they were perfect.

Although there were other options, FbRN was the only organisation which had from the outset been focused on drawing on the strength of multiple faith groups to bring about social change. I started work with FbRN suggesting that I would write short case studies of affiliated faith groups while I slowly got to know the work of the organisation.

My strategy of offering research services did not help me with LC, who were far more interested in what they called relational power, the ability to bring the money of an institution, the passion of mobilising more institutions, and a volume of people substantial enough to fill events. I contacted LC who

requested my help in getting my own institution, Goldsmiths, to become a pledging member. I was sent to organizing training in the hope that I could make this happen. This distressed me greatly. Not only is Goldsmiths an hour from where I live by train, but I also felt used as a go-between without being given any point of reference with which to understand what I was doing or why I was doing it. As a busy person, I felt my needs had not been considered. I believed in the goals of LC but felt alienated from getting a route in. Then it occurred to me; partly what I should be doing is documenting my struggle to be involved.

Summer 2011 passed with riots beginning in my local area and spreading throughout the UK. Again government “cuts” but also disillusionment with conventional politics played big in the media. London Citizens advertised for a position leading a listening campaign focusing on Tottenham where the riots began. I applied, got the position and explained my intentions: I wanted to do their research in return for the possibility of understanding and recording their methods and motives.

During this six month campaign my understanding of methods emerged. As well as getting first-hand experience of methods planning, data gathering, coding and analysis, and one-to-ones, I realized that the best way to understand how various intermediary groups operated was to work with them, record my thoughts and to interview key players whenever I failed to understand certain actions.

## Listening to others' stories: the practice of research

I spent four to six months with each group (for details see Appendix 1), depending on a combination of the time required to become trusted and for data saturation. I also returned to each group intermittently to assist in the process of comparison. Document analysis was triangulated with participant observation and interviews. I kept detailed field notes of what I myself and those around me were doing. Since I was aiming to be between a complete participant and a participant observer, there were difficulties in taking detailed notes without interrupting work. I therefore found brief moments to take myself away and scribble notes, whilst using lunch breaks and the end of the working day to record what happened in more detail. Field notes sought to involve deep reflections on the extent to which I am motivated by the values and practices the leaders put forward, as well as how comfortable I felt being involved in work 'rituals', especially where those 'rituals' are informed by religious and/or ideological beliefs. Other notes were based on more in-the-moment descriptions of how respondents react to the values and practices put forward by their leaders.

Mine is a form of participant observation that recognises the inability to create the kind of value neutrality required for social distance. David Downes and Paul Rock have said that those interested in participant observation believe that 'social behaviour cannot be understood unless it is personally experienced' (Downes & Rock 2003: 30). A real advantage of participant observation then, is that I adopted the practices and listened to the justifications of those I studied.

My research took a leaf out of both Community Development and Community Organising. I integrated these into a model of participant observation that enabled me to understand my respondents and their motivations in depth.

From Community Development, I draw on the involvement of respondents in researching themselves, providing me with deep theoretical answers to their situations so that I do not have to impose my own framework onto their situation. I clearly have a theological and ideological position: I believe that we need to reengage with teleological questions about where we are from and where we are going in order to overcome instrumentalism. But this does not mean I need to impose my own solutions upon the respondent. So long as I am open about my feelings, I hope that respondents will be open about theirs.

Involving respondents in researching themselves is also a matter of social justice. Since part of my critique of liberalism is its imposing agendas upon people as opposed to providing them with the critical tools to bring about solutions to their own problems, it was important that I involved people in the conclusions I reached. This made for interesting research since more than merely asking probing questions, I was challenging people to face up to the constraining theoretical ideas I have theoretically explored.

From Community Organising I took the notion of one-to-ones. One-to ones are “an exercise in hearing each other’s stories, and finding out what we each care about” and are so important as a tool in research seeking to overcome

instrumentalism since “because contemporary society does not allow people time to listen to others’ stories, their hopes and fears – at least not outside a narrow circle of friends and family - we have lost the habit that would have been natural to previous generations” (Iveriegh 2010: 57).

Simply, the idea is that one sits opposite the person that they want to involve in their research and asks them deep, probing questions about why they do what they do. According to the rules of one-to-ones, abstract answers about the importance of what they do for wider society are not acceptable, The challenge is to understand the individual suffering and hope that brought the respondent to where they are. This particular aspect is precarious for me as a researcher, since ignoring moral justifications is to take a Nietzschean or Foucauldian stance to one’s participants, thus foregoing conclusions about motivations. What I did instead then, was to ensure that I gave my own story in terms of both moral and personal motivation, but left participants open to offer their own responses. In this way I hope to create a safe space that was welcoming to, but not demanding of personal stories.

According to one-to-ones, the best way to open respondents up is to open oneself up to one’s respondents. This part of the research is important in its own right since it builds a relationship of trust between the researcher and the participant, draws them onto an equal footing.

The aim of interviews with leaders was to see if their behaviour is corroborated by their words, and to gauge where within my typological

framework leaders' values and life experiences place them and whether they see themselves as overcoming the same problems I have identified. I also sought to understand what primarily they believe to motivate their own volunteers and clients to be involved in their work. But notwithstanding the importance of the relatively unstructured nature of one-to-ones, because my research design is multiple-case study, it was important that there was at least a rudimentary structure to my interviews in order to allow 'cross-case comparability' (Bryman 2004: 324). What I therefore did was have a list of areas I wanted to cover.

In practice my interviews took place as follows:

- Explain my research topic in detail
- Ask how the respondent ended up in this organisation.
- Ask the respondent what kind of vision or set of values they are trying to implement.
- Ask what problems they see themselves as responding to.
- Ask what gets in the way of doing a good job.
- Ask how they encourage others to get involved.

So the research is a threefold process whereby I use document analysis to explore where the organisation sits in relation to my research question. I then audit the organisation, exploring the extent to which shared ideas of the good play a role in cultivating civic engagement, and whether those ideas or their

absence are practicable and inclusive. Alongside this, I interview staff in depth to explore how their behaviour fits, or fails to fit, with their words.

## Analysing Data

In terms of document analysis, J. Scott has set out four criteria assessing the quality of documents: Authenticity (is the evidence genuine?), credibility (is the evidence free from error?), representativeness (is the evidence typical?), and meaning (is the evidence comprehensible?) (Bryman 2004: 381). I considered these criteria when reviewing documents to ask whether leaders' values translate into their documents. In the findings chapters, documents used for analysis are referenced formally.

With field notes I took a much deeper and more rigorous approach. I interrogated my own experiences and my take on them. One way that I evaluated the dependability of these entries was to discuss them with colleagues to see if they chimed with their own experiences. So journal entries themselves provided the basis for the production of more data through informal chats. Field notes are referenced as such.

Although I allowed for their own stories to have some influence on the process, interviews with volunteers and clients were primarily coded according to the categories that arose out of interviews with organisational leaders. Interviewees are given pseudonyms. I do not give their real names because I promised anonymity in the hope of getting honest and open

answers. I decided to give them pseudonyms rather than codes because I wanted to bring them to life for the reader.

In sum, the type of data I analysed were documents, field notes and interviews. I always begin by analysing documents. These provided a broad history and context. I then discuss field notes and interviews together. This allows me to bring the field to life, demonstrate my observations as they unfolded, and how these were critically developed in interviews.

In order to evaluate interviews, I inputted them to Nvivo, and combined a narrative approach with coding. Since my approach is critically realist I already had some level of coding in place based on the preliminary framework discussed in Chapters 2 to 5. I explored whether people used political theology or secular political theory, conventionally or unconventionally political and instrumental or non-instrumental discourses. With so much stress on the notion that the way people tell their life-story can express their values, it was also important that I allowed these stories to shape the categories I used to code. Yet the coding process was also iterative, responding to differences that arise between case studies, and to the ways in which discourses confounded my categorisation.

During the conducting and analysing of interviews, I quickly became aware of how important it was to have a keen awareness of theory. I realised that people from different religious and nonreligious backgrounds could use entirely different discourses for talking about very similar things. In particular,

participants appeared to employ common ideational frameworks, as I will elucidate in the discussion of findings.

Analysing interviews was also complicated by the extent to which I involved myself as either a neutral observer or an active partner in the construction of answers. Since I took a critical realist approach, seeking to introduce terms that can be difficult to convey, it was essential that I recognised the important role social construction plays not only in the wording of questions, which I had to alter according to the respondent's knowledge, but also according to the flow of conversation. It was therefore extremely important to be aware, while listening to interviews, of the extent to which I was leading respondents to their answers.

## Ethics

I have indicated that it was difficult to gain access to the organisations I wanted to study without an aspect of *quid pro quo*. Groups that occupy the space between politics and civil society tend to be poorly funded, gaining most funds from either large-scale private donors or small-scale broad-based fundraising. So in order to gain access I had to offer services in return, whether odd jobs or consultancy advice. I have also indicated that the research is as much a journey for myself as it is a disinterestedly construed research question. These two points provide the axis around which questions of ethics revolve. In this subsection I will discuss theoretical difficulties,

leaving detailed discussion of the research tools I will use to overcome these difficulties for the next section.

If being asked to provide services were the only factor, there would be less of a problem. The difficulty arose from the fact that I was being asked to provide my services in a field of work that I was passionate about. I had to undertake jobs in which my own opinion had a significant impact on the way that that work took shape. At other times I was asked into meetings specifically because of the value my opinion as a researcher in this field might add to those meetings. The result is that it became difficult to know when I was wearing my researcher's hat and when my passionate volunteer's hat. This is problematic both because I may risk excessively influencing the field I am studying; and because I will lose the distance required to reliably and authentically record what is happening.

## **Methods**

The problem of maintaining distance described above is compounded when one considers just how unpredictable participant observation can be. Although one plans certain scenarios such as interviews, partly the point of participant observation is to record conduct under the widest range of possible settings, and so it is only natural that situations will arise for which one has little or no preconceived framework by which to ensure researcher integrity. So there is a lot of guesswork involved. Still, the construction of a robust set of methods can help to ensure that one has the necessary tools to think on one's feet and

maintain researcher integrity. Here I describe the specific research tools I used for those scenarios I will facilitate: document analysis, field notes and interviews. I then discuss methods for maintaining reliability, validity credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity in situations that I guessed might arise. Finally, I discuss protocols and attitudes that helped to maintain researcher integrity in unexpected situations.

Gaining access to each organisation involved both informal and formal measures. The informal measures were entirely relational and dependent on the tact and charisma of me as a person. Although I had specific organisations in mind with which I hoped to work, I was also very aware of the closed nature of these organisations and as a result of my need to be always building relational networks, using the members of one organisation to put me in touch with those of another.

But upon gaining access it was equally important to formalise the research process. I handed to the leaders of each organisation a research contract explaining exactly what I intended to do and how. The research contract is essentially a summarised version of the methodology. As well as ensuring that respondents are aware of and therefore not put out by my actions as a researcher, the research contract helps to formalise the process of research. This was especially important in my case because it helped me to keep a researcher's distance.

Upon gaining access to each organisation, the intention was to interview leaders to ascertain what kind values, structure they were seeking to work with and what problems they were seeking to overcome. I gained written consent for these interviews and used a digital voice recorder to record them. The style of the interviews was as relational as possible. Although I used private rooms, I decided it was important to allow each person to decide how they wanted furniture arranged, whether sitting opposite one another across a table, sitting adjacent one another at the corner of a table, or whether doing away with the table altogether. There was always water, tea and coffee and these were collected in as natural a manner as possible. The format of the interview has already been discussed above. I began by explaining the theoretical and emotional story behind my research in the hope of drawing a similar relational and biographical approach to answering from the respondent.

After the documentary analysis and interviews with leaders, I moved on to audit: filling in the gaps of what the documents and interviews with leaders had left out; corroborating what had been said; and assessing how well leader's values and practical intentions transfer into the organisation. I used interviews with workers and volunteers, extensive informal discussions with clients, and my own field notes to do this. Interviews with workers and volunteers were planned and organised in exactly the same way as those with leaders. Informal discussions with clients were slightly different, since I was not always able to get written carried a pen and paper with me to record what had been said as accurately as possible after the event.

How much time I was able to spend undertaking research is one of many factors that differed from one organisation to another. CSM was incredibly useful and relaxed about when I could come in. Formally, I sought to go into their offices one to two days a week as well as attending any events that arose. It was important to be relaxed in this approach because I wanted to see the organisation at as many different times and in as many different situations as possible. HCVS and FbRN, since their intention is more to do with lending guidance and networks to grassroots movements, provided a relaxed environment. LC was more demanding. They asked me to take on the role of a part-time organiser and stressed that this required two or three days a week as well as evenings.

There were also predictable scenarios with each different organisation. The aim of CSM is to get Christians interested in grassroots social action to be equally interested in local and national politics, to get them involved in politics if possible and to support them once they do get involved. Scenarios I could therefore expect were formal teaching and conference attendance, with all the informal networking conversations that these involve, as well as ongoing relational meetings with numerous clients at all stages from the grassroots to the political. In the past I have been asked to speak at formal events, as well as to lend my thoughts and ideas to meetings. Inevitably, this creates conflict for me as a researcher. I aimed to overcome this conflict in two ways. First, by introducing myself and my research according to the same format offered during interview and explaining that I would be writing up what I observed, as

well as reflecting on my own experience; second, by writing up diary entries that reflected on my position, seeking to improve my authenticity and integrity as a researcher. It was assumed that work with HCVS and FbRN would be relatively similar.

With LC the challenge was slightly different. I was myself trained according to the principles of community organising and asked to build relationships with people, undertaking one-to-ones in which I asked what motivated participants and what troubled them, with a mind to organising the community around an issue. In these situations, it was impossible to initially introduce myself as a researcher. The core of maintaining researcher integrity then, was reflexive practice, using diary entries to consider the implications of various conversations, and asking for consent down the line if I wished to directly quote particular respondents. Of course there also arose the ethical issue that I was only organising for the sake of research as opposed to doing so for the sake of the common good. But since my research was aimed at finding the best theoretical ideas and practical techniques for building a common good, this should not be all that problematic. I expect work with Locality to be similar.

As to protocols for unexpected situations, I came up with a list of ideas: I should always offer a written research contract to leaders of organisations; I should always gain written consent for planned interviews. I should always reveal my role as a researcher just as soon as there is enough rapport not to compromise the relationship; I should always get written consent to directly

quote respondents; I should use diary entries as a way of interrogating my authenticity and integrity as a researcher. With these protocols in mind, I move to introduce my findings before, in the next four chapters, discussing the findings from each organisation in detail.

## **From theory to findings**

The first part of the thesis puts insights from political theology into dialogue with research engaged with lived realities in order to produce operationalised ideas that can be empirically explored. This chapter details how these ideas might be explored methodologically. This section reveals how the findings will be discussed. In order to facilitate critical reading of the findings, I recap the insights from political theology, and detail each in turn in terms of its dialogue with research engaged with lived realities, and the contribution of my approach.

The insights are that contemporary politics has lost an articulation of shared ideas of the good through which we understand who we are and towards which we are collectively working, with the result that politics is nothing more than the administration of a social contract; that in the absence of these shared ideas of the good, the state or the market must step in to reconcile people to one another; and that individuals have finally imbibed this ontology, themselves deferring to the state and using the discourse of the market.

Social theory is ambivalent on ideas of the good. This ambivalence is best articulated by Habermas, who on the one hand regards the maintenance of a space for rational-critical debate as fundamental to democracy (Habermas 2006; Habermas 2010, 24), but on the other notices that

practical reason fails to fulfill its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven (Habermas 2010: 19).

And this in contrast to the energy and vigour of religious groups in the public sphere (Habermas 2010, 24). This deep conflict finds expression in two separate strands of research. The first is the empirical exploration of the role of religious and secular arguments and rituals in the public sphere (Taylor 2007; Habermas 2010; Lynch 2012). The second strand explores the special contribution of religious groups, seeking to understand their vitality. This has been explored in terms of the discourses they use (Dinham 2012) and in terms of the conceptual and social constructs they employ (Wood 2002; Smith 1996; Atran 2011; Baker 2013). Finally, it has been explored whether these contributions are unique to religious groups, or if in fact they can be observed in other forms of value-based belonging and action (Francis and Knott 2015; Lynch 2012; Baker 2008; Engelke 2014). This final field of study opens the discussion to ideas outside of the study of religion altogether, such as Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community (Anderson 1983/2006). Of

course these two fields feed into one another, since best practice in the public sphere inevitably impinges on the kind of groups that are supported or sanctioned in civil society; and conversely, if religious or more broadly value-based ways of belonging and acting prove important, then this challenges the practicability of a neutral public sphere.

What I felt this study could uniquely contribute to this debate, is an exploration of the way in which political groups construct solidarity in pluralist settings, and whether and how this differs between religious and secular groups. I felt it was important to spend time with the groups, which inevitably limited my ability to sample and generalise. I suggested that this was a sacrifice worth making, since what was lacking from the research was an interrogation of the social construction of ideas *in relation to observed practices*. While Chris Baker (2013) has asked this question in focus groups, I wanted to see first hand what, if any, difference certain articulations made to belonging and action.

With reference to these observed practices, the second insight is to do with how, in the absence of solidarity, the state or the market become important means of reconciling people to one another. Both of these mechanisms act as poor substitutes for a solidarity that forms the basis of collective identity and action, since they actually undermine these further. I take each of these ideas in turn. In terms of the state, it is suggested that it undermines a sense of collective responsibility. The literature review suggests that while the state has played an important role in the articulation of shared identity and struggle, and

while the state's role has in the past been articulated as bureaucratic enforcer of the general will, the state has also been considered to embody the principles of the common good. While the postwar state in the UK coopted a number of social services, this was done in the name of a Christian common good, and so the state could be seen as embodying an imagined community (Dinham 2014). Prochaska suggests, nonetheless, that this Christian underpinning was soon lost. Dinham and Jackson point out that the disadvantages of a cooptive state have been recognised in policy on numerous occasions throughout the postwar period (Dinham & Jackson 2012). But Prochaska suggests this recognition was "voiced in a world that had lost its Christian underpinnings" and therefore did not have the vitality for social action (Prochaska 2006: 161). Hence the question becomes "how to articulate the values found in a culturally Christian West in a newly post-religious, post-secular, plural context in which Christianity would not be appropriate – at least, not on its own (Dinham 2014).

This study explores the articulations of solidarity, and interprets it with reference to the articulated and observed relationship to the state. Does the absence of a clearly articulated sense of solidarity lead to reliance on the state? If so, does this reliance indicate a failure of imagination, or a failure to galvanise belonging and action? Or can articulation of solidarity be coextensive with an articulation of the state as embodying this solidarity? Can anything identifiable or tangible really be said to be lacking from such an articulation?

In terms of the market, the literature review suggests that it at worst corrodes collective identity, and at best creates a pseudo-sittlichkeit whereby it is recognised that one's self-interest is best served as part of the collective (Milbank 1990/2006: 167). Worse, there are suggestions that capitalism places an iron cage of rationality around pursuits that are articulated well in terms of transcendence, traditions and values, but which are harder to justify in terms of a cost-benefit analysis (Weber 1919/2005: 182). But worse still, being that this theory is reified into real processes, through literature, though discourses of disadvantage, and through policy formation and funding guidelines, the encroachment of this kind of analysis tends to generate ideas of the person, and thereby the kinds of people, that do frame their lives in terms of the pursuit of financial and social capital (Skeggs 2011: 505). The result is supposedly that other, transcendent and relational values, whether these be ideas of what God wants or ideas of equality, are subordinated, and the sense of imagined community, and in its turn real communities and relationships, suffer.

Yet there were other suggestions that capitalist societies are simply open societies, reflecting the will of those that reside within them (Zak et al. 2008). While such societies do produce self-interest and greed, they also produce reactions against these, in the form of cooperatives, trade unions and the like (Durkheim 1893/2014: 5; Aldous et al. 1972). What is more, these more cooperative, long-termist, and virtuous strategies can often be more economically advantageous, as John Lewis's ability to ride the storm of the recession revealed.

This study will finally interpret the articulation of the common good in relation to the market: does the absence of clearly articulated common good lead to a reliance on the market? Again, if so, does this reliance indicate a failure or imagination, or a failure to galvanise belonging and action? Or can articulation of the common good be coextensive with an articulation of the market? Can anything identifiable or tangible really be said to be lacking from such an articulation?

These three sets of questions act as the lens through which I observe the actions of each of the groups theoretically.

On top of this theoretical lens, this chapter explains, there is also a more practical lens impinging on my observations, derived from the sociology of religion in the UK. Two are worth recapping here. The first is a development of Paul Weller's expression of contemporary society as simultaneously Christian, secular and religiously plural, adding that society can now also be observed as being postsecular (Weller 2006: 6). The second is Linda Woodhead's analysis of the way people relate to both religion and politics, and how this has changed over the last sixty years. According to Woodhead, religion and politics are looking less like states and more like markets, with people looking less like citizens with loyalties to particular beliefs, ideologies and dogma, and more like consumers with complex needs, and willing to shop around to fulfil those needs (Woodhead 2014). Without wanting to impose categories upon the groups I observe, the methodology explains that I selected groups

deliberately in order to reflect different positions on this trend. My observations thus begin with the CSM, now Christians on the Left, since this group is best suited to the older idea of religion and politics. I then look at HCVS, a far more secular, but nonetheless statist model, followed by FbRN, which is both multi-faith and more oriented towards empowering distinct communities. Finally, I observe LC, which most closely conforms to a world which is both postsecular and market orientated. These categories will turn out to be somewhat crude as the observations unfold, but I have to start from somewhere.

## Chapter 7: Case Study I: The Christian Socialist Movement

The Christian Socialist Movement (CSM), today called Christians on the Left (CTL), makes an interesting case to explore because its intellectual heritage is coextensive with that of post-liberalism. By tracing the way it works, we can gain a sense of *one* way a post-liberal political theology might be lived out in the contemporary UK; the way that it is articulated by real people working on the frontline to bring about change, the kind of pressures that it faces, and the compromises it has to make.

But a few important caveats. The first is that it would be a mistake to treat either post-liberalism or Christian Socialism as an internally coherent tradition. Second, as will become clear in the forthcoming discussion, there are a number of important distinctions. Finally, being that this is an ethnographic study, the intention is not to suggest that it is representative of how Christian Socialism necessarily or generally reveals itself in the world. Rather, it is intended that exploring in depth how one group has lived out these ideas will contribute to an understanding of how they might be lived out generally.

I begin with a brief context. I then look at the three lenses outlined in the introduction, namely, the constituting factors of common agency, political structures of common agency, and economic structures of common agency.

### Context

Christian Socialism originated in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most fundamental point to make regarding Christian Socialists is that they have almost irreconcilable differences. But we can find some commonality. Edward Norman (1987: 16) has said of the Victorian Christian Socialists that the one thread uniting them all is an aversion to competition. There is also a positive connection; namely, that they all promote social goals such as human dignity, friendship, reciprocity and empowerment. The Victorian Christian Socialists tended to be more interested in changing the way people lived their lives than in policy.

Former leader and member Andrew Bradstock has explained that whereas the commitments of Victorian Christian Socialism were diverse and incoherent, the founding of the CSM had clear and guiding principles. In 1960...

...A new constitution committed CSM members to pray, give and work for Christian unity, international reconciliation, redistribution of wealth, a classless society, world peace with nuclear and general disarmament and 'the common ownership and democratic control of the productive resources of the earth'. Support of these positions placed the movement to the left of mainstream Labour Party thinking, and affiliation to the Party, though discussed, was rejected in favour of 'independence' (Bradstock 2013).

In 1988, the CSM became an affiliate of the Labour Party, which was later consolidated by the taking up of desk space in Labour Party Headquarters.

The movement also sought to broaden its base, moving from being (as one of its documents put it) 'an association of people who accept the fairly precise description of Christian Socialism set out in its statement of aims' to a 'forum for the Christian left'. The new emphasis was to be more on engaging in debate and 'helping Labour to regain the ethical ground' rather than promoting individual policies (Bradstock 2013).

In the 1990s and 2000s the party slowly increased its membership from about five hundred to about two thousand, and the number of MPs affiliated with the movement, from a handful to forty-four, or a tenth of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Yet the broadening of its base to a loosely defined forum does not seem to have helped its influence. The CSM 'vigorously opposed' the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but although a CSM MP tabled an amendment that the case for war had not been made, only eight CSM MPs voted for the amendment (Bradstock 2013). The result was that some CSM members suggested disaffiliating, while a number resigned altogether.

In 2006, the CSM sought to reaffirm its values for a 21<sup>st</sup> century context. The result was the affirmation of the following values:

- We believe that Christian teaching should be reflected in laws and institutions and that the Kingdom of God finds its political expression in democratic socialist policies.
- We believe that all people are created in the image of God. We

all have equal worth and deserve equal opportunities to fulfil our God-given potential whilst exercising personal responsibility.

- We believe in personal freedom, exercised in community with others and embracing civil, social and economic freedom.
- We believe in social justice and that the institutional causes of poverty in, and between, rich and poor countries should be abolished.
- We believe all people are called to common stewardship of the Earth, including its natural resources

(CSM 2006)

In 2013, after a long process of debate, the CSM changed its name to Christians on the Left (CTL), reflecting the broadening of its base.

This short context provides a background for understanding the ideas of CTL. Starting out as an organization with a clear aim to bring the means of production into the control of labourers, the organization has now become an open forum for Christians with a vaguely left-wing agenda. The process has enabled the organization to increase its following, and to be given office space within Labour Party HQ, though has perhaps made its aims harder to define, and its influence on particular MPs and members less predictable.

### **Constituting factor of common agency**

I finished the last section by suggesting that CTL's aims had become harder to define, and its influence less predictable. In this section I seek to understand how the aims are articulated and how these relate to actions. I

begin by explore the role of theology: how it shapes group membership, how it shapes actions, how it shapes politics, and the various strategies engaged for expanding common agency, from value-generalisation, to frame-bridging, to democratic participation in the framing processes. I then discuss the possibility that the role of common agency is not what it first appears to be.

*The reconciliation of all things to the Creator, where people feel they can belong*

On my first visit to CTL, sat in the lobby of the UK Labour Party headquarters, dressed in suit trousers, I felt as though I was awaiting a job interview. A sense of ambition, mixed with schoolboy humour pervaded the faces of the suited men and women passing from the street, through the revolving doors, to the lift. When Paul came down to greet me I got a very different impression. He was wearing shabby suit trousers and an apparently un-ironed shirt. He was smiling warmly. It felt like an odd juxtaposition. Going upstairs, we walked into a modern office space. Windows substitute for walls, wrapping around the entire building, and there are television screens every few meters playing BBC News 24 on loop. A small portion of the desk space in this dynamic office is allotted to the CTL team. The whole setting seemed to epitomise the professionalization of politics. It seemed obvious how CTL inspired interest: they were part of the machine. But this assumption did not sit well with Paul's aura. He seemed to exude kindness. This juxtaposition came out in interview:

**Paul**

...what's the underpinning of why you're calling people to involvement...?

...Pretty simply the underpinning of it is...is...eh...is a theological underpinning actually...and it is a belief that ummm the Christian call is to be a partner in in in the big picture, the mission of God the missio dei, as people write about, that, you know, actually our call is to be part of His mission, which I believe is seeing the restoration, redemption and reconciliation of all things in creation to the creator

Despite being in the centre of political power, this “call” to the “reconciliation of all things in creation to the creator” has a distinct influence on the kind of politics CTL practices. Paul continues:

What I desire it to be is a movement – certainly not a club. Certainly not a political party. But a movement. A support to each other and a space or resource where people can actually grapple with political issues from a theological perspective: so as a support and a resource for Christians who are actually getting involved in the political process...

...[there is] a definite desire to create a sense of belonging. So that's intention in the way that we do our events with the kind of relational space that we try and create in our events, it's the, it's why we try to do the regular emailing, it's also why a lot of my time is spent just having

meetings with people, having coffee, having lunch with people, ummm trying to connect people who I think should meet with each other, a lot of it is absolutely about building that space where people can feel they belong. Often...the usual joke is that it's often quite hard for a Christian to come out, a Christian in a local church to come out and say "yeah I'm a lefty"...but it's also quite hard for a Christian in their local Labour party to come out and say "yeah I'm a Christian". [Laughing] You know so it's like, actually sometimes some of the people involved with us can be, you know experiencing the worst of both worlds

...there is a dynamic that happens when you're campaigning together, when you're working together with a common cause, a lot of bonds are formed... that are, just deeper and more profound than those that would be formed just because we've decided to meet and sit round a table together...that sense of common cause – we all know that from sports teams, or from going on a kind of foreign aid trip or something like that we've gone to a foreign country, we've displaced ourselves slightly so we're in that more liminal space so we're kind of slightly in need of each other that little bit more...it's the difference between community and *communitas*...*communitas* which is a community that is formed ergh where people have a common purpose and a common goal that they're working towards (Interview).

It is worth noting that Paul's theology is reflexively aware: he is not only aware of what he believes in and how those beliefs should play out, but also of how

belief *per se* functions. Paul distinguishes CTL from political parties in that it is supposed to behave as a “resource” which provides members with a “sense of belonging”. This belonging is distinctive in that it is “formed” around a “common purpose”. While Paul’s use of the term “*communitas*” perhaps does not fit with the academic formulation of the term offered by Turner and Olaveson, as discussed in chapter 3, since it fails to recognise the ambivalent relationship between structure and *communitas*, it does seem to correspond to the notion of community or *sittlichkeit* envisaged by John Milbank in his critique of Hegel, as well as the notion of *gemeinschaft* touted by Tonnies. In the following I explore whether and how this ideal plays out in practice.

On the surface at least, Paul’s ideal had clear and practical outworkings. I observed how the majority of CTL time was devoted to providing pastoral care to lonely Christian MPs by “having coffee, having lunch”, to prayer, and to missional community. If a particular member is troubled for whatever reason, small prayer sessions will be held in groups of two or three, in which they pray for the alleviation of one another’s individual concerns. Again, on that very first day, Paul opened up to me about something very personal that his colleague Dave was going through. I was struck by how much was being shared with me, given I had never met Dave. My compassion was assumed. I was trusted implicitly. Later that day, once I was comfortable, Paul and Dave took time out to pray. Taking time out in this way is a regular occurrence.

I later got to observe how the juxtaposition Paul and Dave embody is part of their theological mission. Paul can often be found sitting around the buildings

of Westminster, holding a guitar and quietly chatting with an MP. He has a calming presence. The group also holds monthly prayer meetings. Particular themes come up time and again: not expecting God to demonstrate His power; rejoicing in the signs of heaven that can already be seen in the good works of people; asking for the strength to be selfless and compassionate (Field notes). The prayers mix older psalms with new stories and poems from online sources. The contents of these prayers are also posted online, so that members unable to attend prayer meetings in Westminster can join in from wherever they are.

A strong sense of missional community emerges in these prayer sessions. Meetings are held in the heart of British political life, often in Portcullis House in Westminster. Opened as an extension of the Palace of Westminster in 2001, Portcullis House provides offices to over 200 MPs. When I first walked in as a young researcher, through the police barrier, explaining I had a meeting with an MP, I felt the aura of power, as if I deserved esteem. It did not matter that I was only there as a researcher; I was taken in by my auspicious surroundings, and the sense that somehow I could influence the levers of power. I could read the same aura in those I chatted with; there is a sense of buoyancy, a hunger for influence, and a concomitant tendency to bully those deemed unworthy of power (Field notes). Portcullis House is a space in which I have been privy to numerous backhanded remarks about the intelligence of certain MPs. I have attended numerous policy meetings in which young researchers jostle for the attention of senior researchers and MPs. Yet this very space is also where Paul can be found sitting around in his shabby suit,

saying only encouraging things and holding his guitar, and also where CTL prayer meetings are often held. In this way Paul and CTL live out a contradiction that pulls on the heartstrings of overworked Christian MPs. Not being Christian myself, I have nonetheless felt the power of this prophetic, countercultural presence, divulging very personal information. In the very heart of a culture of fear and mistrust, especially in relation to personal information, Paul provides a space in which people can be human, even if only very briefly. It is against this backdrop that prayer meetings are held. Participants feel drawn to one another through their shared humanity.

Members gather and discuss their ideas, their frustrations with what is becoming of the world, and they strategise about ways of overcoming these problems. This sense of missional community is reinforced by, or perhaps only becomes missional in, lunches, pub trips and speaking events. It is through these informal chatting processes that participants develop theology, discuss what is wrong with the world, and strategise about solutions (Field notes). An intangible sense of community unfolds into practical action. What emerges theologically is simultaneously a sense of breaking beyond the power struggle by getting to know one another as an end in itself, creating a sense of interdependence, but also from this basis, developing a shared responsibility to act in the world.

There is a pressing and an urging of one another resulting in plans for practical action. In my time at CTL I was struck by a form of friendship that I could not recognise anywhere else: with neither basis in a pre-existing

friendship, nor motivation that could be understood through the notion of rational choice, people offered one another their time and energy for personal projects. When I said to one member, Katie, what a strange notion of friendship I had come across, where people offered their time for actions but did not have drinks or dinner together, rather than offering up an explanation as to where her kindness had come from, she replied “come over for dinner” (Field notes). This touches upon Chris Baker’s ideas of belonging and becoming as modes of moral freighting (Baker 2013: 359-363). Members feel supported by their membership of the group, and that worshipful reflection helps them turn inwards, as well as obliging them to turn outwards and behave responsibly in the world. “One’s life is shaped by those with whom you share your religious and spiritual practices on a regular basis” (Baker 2013: 262). I got a strong feeling of this myself in the time I was participating in the work of CTL. I felt inclined to offer my support wherever I could – often far more than I could reasonably manage. This created a cycle of inspiration followed by guilt each time I recalled that my first duty was to the research itself.

Part of this inspiration and guilt was derived not from theological engagement but from a kind of lived evangelism that dropped theology altogether. Dave explained to me that he felt the mission of the organisation could change behaviour indirectly. He explained how, by living a distinctly Christian life, he hoped he could change how others behaved:

We're called ummm I don't wanna get into kind of theology with you too much but we're called in the Bible by, I think it's Peter, I think it's 1 Peter, to to to be distinctively Christian.

...Ummm...you know we're called to be...for example I live in London so I'm not called to be a Londoner, I'm called to be a Christian in London...and to live out that life, to live out that example, so I would hope that in my workplace, in my home life, in my community, I live a life where I'm living a distinctively Christian life and people will kind of see that I'm living in a different way

...And then think, start to think well...you know...why is he living in that w[ay]...or n, you know, is that an example to follow? They don't necessarily have to um then go "Oh, he's living that way because he believes errr Jesus is the Messiah and I should go to church and read into that" ...it's more about actually - how are you living, and can I follow that example? Can I be, kind of, more welcoming to people, more kinda, you know, be more approachable and open. Can I be more friendly, can I be more thoughtful...and just kind of leading that, leading by example.

For Dave this calling to be Christian serves as a kind of lived evangelism, through his behaviour calling others to a certain way of life.

These two forms of theology, the discursive and the lived, behave in a similar way to Baker's understanding of role modelling: they facilitate the shift from

“talking about morals and principles toward an obligation to live out one’s public life in accordance with those principles” (Baker 2013). But more importantly for a group trying to galvanise political change, evangelism is the process of *becoming* a role model. Paul and Dave see themselves as called to live out a life that will influence others to change. One also sees elements of Bloch’s idea of the transcendental social: an imaginary which negates the everyday world is deliberately constructed in order to transform it (Bloch 2010: 8-10).

On one level the notion of reconciling all things to the creator creates a sense of higher purpose, and allows for calm amidst the jostle of Westminster. Yet equally, without having the same beliefs as my participants, I too felt the call to belong to a group who lived out something higher, deeper or set apart from the power struggle around us. As far as I was concerned at least, one did not require belief in the specific good held by the group. But it did require of course, that *something* had to be held higher, deeper or set apart: an idea of a life lived in a certain way. Propositional belief in God is not a necessary prerequisite of belief in a particular idea of the good, nor of a mutual belief between the community and the participant, a belief in belonging, as Day puts it (Day 2012). This recognition led to an odd conversation after an event. I explained to Dave that I was beginning to feel more Christian, but could not call myself one because I did not believe in a God that could intervene in the world. Dave replied: “do you believe that the stories of Jesus Christ can be transformative?” This utterly struck a chord with me. “Yes” I said, almost reverently. “Well isn’t that divine intervention?” (Field notes).

Clearly for my part, as someone that did not assent to their propositional beliefs, I was nonetheless able to draw from the same sense of belonging and becoming. But why had it been so easy for me, why had it felt so right that the stories of Jesus Christ could be transformative? Was I inspired by the theology or the actions? I lingered on this question for days, then weeks, then months and now years. I had heard the theology, and I had *seen* it transform the people at CTL. In my time at the organisation, I had slowly started connecting the two, the theology and the actions together. I had been taken in by the lived evangelism. There was something inspiring about the authenticity.

The fact that Dave and I were speaking in this way after an event is worth noting in itself. I have already said that these informal conversations are where the theology develops. I had become part of the theological process.

Ideas of the good clearly play an important role in inspiring CTL. Equally these ideas of the good played a role in inspiring me. But the beliefs on their own were neither necessary nor sufficient. It was first of all seeing these beliefs authentically lived out in terms of policy and lifestyle that gave them transformative power. But a secondary component, of equal importance was the inclusive way in which those beliefs appeared to be constructed. No matter what any particular member's belief position, they were equally welcome to events and discussion – to shaping a shared theology. This openness notwithstanding, the work of Weller and Dinham already mentioned would suggest that a Christian message alone is impractical for reviving a

shared spirit of association. Partly, perhaps, my openness to the theology was down to my position as an ethnographer, deliberately open to the sway of different ontological perspectives. That it appeals to me does not mean it could appeal to everybody. As chapter 9 well attest, let alone Christianity, others are instantly turned off even by the mention of religion.

*A holistic kingdom theology, where heaven is not an escape-pod*

At first, the emphasis on “reconciling all things to the creator” and of missional community appears to indicate an abstract kind of belonging without any tangible focus on social change. At this point, one recalls the Marxist idea of religion as being an opiate, a distraction from this-worldly justice. In Marx’s own terms:

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to *give up a condition that requires illusions* (Marx 1844/2009: 131).

Yet CTL directly contradicts this statement through its actions. The strong sense of mission discussed in the previous subsection is directed towards social justice. As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the nature of these actions are complicated. On all issues, CTL seeks to simultaneously promote the use of parliament to implement structural change, *and* to promote changes in lifestyle. This explains why the idea of religion as

merely illusory is perhaps the main issue Paul sees himself as confronting. He suggests that his is

a kind of holistic kingdom theology that...where heaven is not an escape pod, where heaven is not this kind of floaty, disembodied place in the sky but actually ummm...the concept of the fusion of heaven and earth into what revelation in scripture calls “the new heavens” and “the new earth” where actually we might describe the sphere, people talk about the sphere of, of, of heaven and the sphere of earth – earth being where ummm things are not perfect as yet and heaven being the place where things are perfect but there being this, at the moment there is kind of, if you imagine a ven-diagram from your maths classes you know the one where there’s this kind of sphere of heaven and the sphere of earth and the space where they do intersect and there’s this beautiful little intersection where there is love and joy and compassion and justice and mercy and you see kind of, you know, we might call it little bits of heaven or what ever you might call it in moments that happen in and out of every day that it’s nice to see them and the belief that there will be a day when those two spheres are actually fused and that is, you know this place of perfection, and that is what we are working towards and we can’t claim to be the soul creators of and Christians talk about demonstrating the kingdom, demonstrating that perfection in the way that we live now and living in expectation of it, living in hope of it. And actually I see that vision motivating people to get involved in a way that maybe an older theology of escape and escapist kind of dispensationalist way of looking at

theology where the kind of, the faith is primarily about buying that escape ticket...er...to get to that other place that disembodied place and that actually the physical place where we dwell now is just gonna burn up, is gonna disintegrate and we need to escape and fly off, which actually doesn't provide any motivation to be involved in the environment in poverty because actually any time spent doing that, number one, the matter here is going to disintegrate anyway right but number two, ummm any time spent doing that would be time you're not spending giving people their escape ticket for heaven so ummm so, it's a belief in the kind of transformation of every dimension of human life so...

Paul talks of "demonstrating the kingdom, demonstrating that perfection in the way that we live now and living in expectation of it, living in hope of it". His voice sounds at its most reverent, deep and emotional when using this language, as though demonstrating the kingdom is his lifeblood. He speaks as an alluring preacher, and pulls on the strings of what little Christian sentiments I have.

One can read in Paul's language a kind of post-Marxist theology that regards involvement in bringing about material change as a key part of being Christian. Paul's ideas almost perfectly replicate MacIntyre's understanding of *telos*. For MacIntyre, while "it is true that the good life which is the *telos* culminates in contemplation of the divine and that therefore...the good life moves to a climax", nonetheless "the *telos* is not something to be achieved at some future point, but in the way our whole life is constructed" (MacIntyre

1981/2007: 175). Alongside this, one might again consider the way that Maurice Bloch describes the transcendental social as a self-consciously irrational imaginary of how the world could be, that negates and thereby transforms the way that we relate to the world (Bloch 2010: 8-10). By constructing a “sphere of heaven” and “sphere of earth”, Paul is able to see “little bits of heaven” in earth, which in turn help him to believe in “a day when those two spheres are actually fused”: he develops “a negation of everyday understanding in order to construct an alternative reality” (Bloch 2010: 9).

Dave has a similar position. He discusses the difficult task of challenging those who believe

that the main focus of their church should be on kingdom, should be on, you know, the second coming, the return. And they should be saving as many Christians as possible so therefore they should be focusing on evangelising, sharing the gospel, being out in the world doing that and they don't want to...shift their focus or spread their focus into other areas (Interview).

CTL are very aware that heaven can be treated as an escape pod. Indeed, it would seem this awareness drives them to convince others to change: “we spend a lot of our time talking to Christians about politics and why they should be involved in politics and we believe politics to be missional”.

A key part of CTL's work is teaching other Christians ways in which the Bible could be interpreted to call for political engagement. Using resources such as *The Poverty and Justice Bible*, an edition of the Bible in which all mentions of social justice have been highlighted, and *The Bible and Politics*, a bullet-point list of all the Biblical calls to engage with politics, the group offers guest lectures at seminaries, encouraging seminarians to engage with politics, and particularly focusing on seminaries known to be ambivalent towards political engagement.

Of special note is the Salvation Army. I was taken along to a regular guest lecture at the seminary, in which Paul and Dave seek to convince training "officers" that involvement in politics is not just acceptable, but missional. While the students were attentive, they were nonetheless ambivalent towards the idea of political engagement. One student mentioned, to the murmuring agreement of a number of others, that Christians should "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Field notes). This touches on the role of a shared narrative also. As discussion unfolded, the two sides of the debate were holding each other to account, drawing from and re-enacting a shared narrative. What was striking about this was that having a shared narrative did not require agreement; it only required that both sides understood the context. As the conversation continued, I felt myself being drawn in, weighing up the different sides, drawing on my own personal stories. Then another thing struck me: once again, without having a propositional belief in God or in Jesus as His son, I was comfortably able to participate in the narrative. As already stated, narrative does not need to be

monolithic or propositionally believed in to provide a shared framework for discussion.

This discursive evangelism is also matched by the lived evangelism previously discussed. This lived evangelism is found in the devotion Paul and Dave offer to their work, while nonetheless finding the time and energy to be committed to loved ones. Despite the glitzy surroundings of Labour Party Headquarters, the work itself barely provides enough income to live on. In a frank conversation with Dave one day, I had the chance to discuss the difficulties of living on a low, part-time salary. He said that one often had to find ways to supplement income (Field notes). Other than these salaries, the organisation is dependent on the hard work of volunteers: from those in official roles, to interns. Alongside this devotion to the work, Paul and Dave devote much of their leisure time to supporting MPs on the campaign trail. “You can’t measure how much it uplifts them” says Paul on the way to one such visit (Field notes). And alongside this, they still seem to create the time to devote to loved ones.

While it is clearly a sweeping generalisation to suggest that religion is a distraction from social justice, it is also clear that religion on its own does not provide an impetus for action. The strategies employed by Paul and Dave show that in fact, theology can be a useful tool in galvanising action, but at the same time, the ambivalence of their audience shows how theology can just as easily turn people away from action. Yet in both positions, it is a particular idea of the good that acts as a guide for action or inaction.

*You don't have to have Christian values, but we all have faiths*

The foregoing suggests that CTL have a clear sense of common agency that inspires belonging and is assertive in its stress on action. Yet one of the most striking things about Paul and Dave is that while their sense of theology is strong, they appear very liberal in their expectations of other people. I have already discussed how this liberality plays out in terms of my inclusion in the group. In this section, I demonstrate that this liberality is not incidental but reflexively constructed. Paul thinks that their ideas, or something similar to them, can be shared by people of all faiths and none:

I think absolutely no you don't have to have Christian values but then also that I don't believe in the phrase you have no beliefs whatsoever, I think we all have beliefs, I think we all have faiths... for folks to say that they're not, that we're not operating out of a belief system, just because they're not operating according to what we might call a more recognised belief system like Christianity you know or Islam that to be put in a separate category to someone whose belief system that's been cobbled together from different things they've been exposed to...and I think that those are both equally belief systems that form their thinking and so I think absolutely you can come to a lot of the same conclusions having come from you know from some quite different roots...(Interview).

There is a clear theological view of seeking to realise moments of heaven on earth by drawing Christians into politics. But people of all faiths and none can share this view. Again Paul is demonstrating a reflexive awareness of his own faith relative to that of others and comfortably broadens the meaning of faith.

The liberality extends beyond religion to political ideas and behaviours too. So for Dave

I personally couldn't be a Christian and a...a...a Tory...I don't think the two...you know ergh...but that's my, that's me personally...I think there's an argument to be said that...that you put kingdom before partisanship and stuff...and that's fine...but me personally...I think those two...the two...the party values and the Christian values are so closely, so similar, that being a Christian socialist is just a very kind of natural progression for me...it makes sense.

Dave was very clear that *for him* being Christian and socialist was very natural, but that he respected others' right to follow different political programmes; an imagined Christian community is invoked that transcends party politics. This idea extends to the practices of CTL too, with a number of public events being organised jointly with the Conservative Christian Fellowship and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. And this liberality even extends into the core of CTL's work: people's involvement in politics. When I asked Paul if it was a duty to be involved in politics, he said...

I mean I'm not sure I'll ever go as far as to say it's your duty...I'm not gonna claim to know that about somebody but you do get an inkling about how somebody is gifted (Interview).

Here the idea of duty, an ethical claim, appears to be dissolved into the idea of gift, a personal, spiritual claim, with the result being that duty cannot be questioned, since it is derived from one's personal relationship with God.

For CTL, the criteria for involvement are very loose. Yet they are perhaps only comfortable in so being because this liberality is offered in the same breath as a wider framing of everyone as having some sort of faith. This idea that "we all have faiths" punctuates the discussion. The imagined community is broadened but the difference of the other is also narrowed. CTL members are suggesting that their identity is *already* shared by everyone.

Alongside this broader framing, however, is a deliberate challenging of the Habermasian distinction between religious and rational argument. For Paul we all have faiths on which we are acting, and so no discursive mode deserves priority over any other. For Paul, it is not the case that ideas of the good have faded in liberal secular societies, just that they have been excluded from, or at least devalued within the public sphere in a way that does not make sense. Moreover, contrary to Taylor, this assertion appears to break through the immanent frame, drawing on a transcendent frame: faith is not one option amongst many; we all have faiths, it is just a question of which one.

This devaluation speaks to another component of the “we all have faiths” assertion; namely, that the difference between religious and nonreligious people is not categorical but reflexive: “for folks to say that they’re not operating out of a belief system, just because they’re not operating according to what we might call a more recognised belief system” is wrong because in fact they are operating out of a “belief system that’s been cobbled together from different things they’ve been exposed to”, only perhaps without recognising this.

*Being upfront and saying that’s where you’re coming from*

Because faith of some kind is ubiquitous, rather than excluding faith from the public sphere, it is deemed important to critically understand, and to be open about one’s faith, since to do so makes one accountable to others.

I think...I think...I think what’s helpful about having a kind of a formed established set of thinking that actually that Christian roots can bring means that there’s kind of...because you’re kind of being upfront and saying that’s where you’re coming from, there’s a bit of er....accountability about it. I see that other folks who share those roots can go “oh interesting, you’re coming from there but you think this...well I think this” (Interview).

What Paul is uncovering here is the way in which a deep tradition can be used to hold others to account. This idea of transparency for accountability directly challenges a Habermasian notion of the formal public sphere as operating on the basis of a neutral language. For Paul, all political positions are derived from beliefs. As Dinham has said, 'nobody starts from nowhere' (Dinham et al. 2009). It is impossible to leave one's beliefs at the door. Thus the only solution is to be open about those beliefs, to link them to wider traditions, and to bring them to the table where they can be challenged.

This idea of transparency for accountability can also be seen as a strategy for building solidarity and the courage of conviction amongst members. For Dave, the important thing about being open about one's beliefs, and creating a sense of community around those beliefs, is that it provides members with the courage of their conviction:

or whether it's just saying, you know, you're not alone...there are plenty of Christians around here..um...and we're happy to, kinda help you speak and stuff and and I know you've previously heard me say it, "putting steel into their spines" a little bit and just giving them a little bit of that extra kind of strength and encouragement and confidence to stand up and say I'm an MP, and I'm a Christian, and this is what I believe (Interview).

This idea of providing MPs with the courage of their conviction is so important to Paul and Dave because in British society, especially at the political level,

MPs seem to imbibe what Dan DeHanas has called “vicarious secularity”, whereby they feel the need to be secular on behalf of the wider population (DeHanas 2014). This disparity is problematic since there are times when Christian values come into direct conflict with secular values.

Yet Dave’s position here is extremely controversial, since it suggests that people from a faith background have a legitimate role in using faith to influence politicians to vote in certain ways. In the case of this group it seems benign because all of their causes are to do with social justice. But it is not too far of a stretch to ask whether abortion might not be an issue of social justice, at which point we are entering into the territory where controversy over religious influence in politics is at its most visceral.

### *Democratic framing*

I was most struck by the idea of simultaneously broadening the base and “being upfront and saying that’s where you’re coming from” when I was asked to be involved in administering questionnaires for the organisation’s change of name from the Christian Socialist Movement to Christians on the Left. Dave put the reason for this name change quite simply: “we are the Christian Socialist Movement and [the people we talk to] don’t see themselves as socialists” (Field notes). On the one hand, this point indicates that the name no longer reflects the wide array of people in the organisation, and so the name must be broadened, but it also demonstrates a desire to have the organisation be honest with itself about its position.

The name change involved a mass campaign, using an open question survey format, asking individual members to explain whether they wanted the name changed, why, and if so, what to. Hundreds of letters poured into the office. Again, Dave says:

the part I've found most fruitful has been the actual, the conversations around we...do we want our name to reflect our values and if so what are our values?

...it's actually been really fruitful because it's making people think what is CSM, what do we stand for, what do we do? (Interview)

The idea is clearly not to simply “rebrand”, offering a broader base that captures the identity of more people, but also to make members critically question their membership. As one member put it: “we’re Christian, but are we socialist? Are we a movement?” (Field notes). This member, both in terms of the sarcastic tone, and in terms of the critical questioning, was broadly representative of the kind of responses received from a number of participants on a number of campaigns. The members wanted to be engaged as part of a movement. Often members felt an inclusive element was lacking, despite the efforts of the management. On another campaign, called the Parallel Policy Review, the group decided to include the wider membership in reviewing Labour Party Policy. We decided that the best way to do this was to have open strategy meetings in London, followed up by interactive online

discussions, both of which I administered. Upon sending out email invitations to these events, a number of responses were from disgruntled members with accusations of everything from my being “Londoncentric” for hosting the meetings in London, to my using “bad grammar”.

While the name change demonstrates a belief that common agency, in terms of who the organisation is and how it perceives itself, transcends and informs common action, just what the constituting factor of common agency is and how it is to be constructed is hard to define in the face of the diversity of religion and ideology in the UK. We see here a complexification of the narrative put forward by Charles Taylor: rather than moving simply from ideas of common agency to common actions, this organisation engages in value-generalisation, rendering its common agency more widely applicable. But more than a mere top-down reinvention of common agency, there is an attempt, with limited success, to inspire members themselves to be engaged in the negotiation of common agency. We thus see evidence of what might be called inclusive meaning formation or framing: a democratic and deliberative process. Since we are talking about the way that the name embodies the ideals of the group, we might describe this as socially constructing the sacred. With this notion of social construction in mind, we can develop Berger’s idea of alienation (Berger 1967). Berger observes a kind of alienation when people fail to recognise that their framing is socially constructed. The sarcasm of members here suggests another type of alienation occurs when members do not feel involved in social construction.

*I don't want to get boxed as a Christian*

I explained in the first subsection that the theology does not merely play out discursively, but also in the values and habits that define ones lifestyle. I suggested that this made it difficult to know whether one was being inspired by the discourse or by the actions, and indeed whether there could be a clear difference between the two. What I did not mention there is the extent to which this lived evangelism might be emblematic of Taylor's immanent frame. People are aware that their ideas are falling into a market place of ideas. And CTL members may be especially aware of the potential toxicity of the Christian message. As Simon, a CTL member and prospective MP put it, even though his faith is integral to his identity...

I don't want to get boxed as a Christian because if I do, that's useless. For that to be my primary badge would make me an irrelevance because it worries people. I've had lots of people who turn off as soon as they hear I'm Christian. Also, if your primary polling card is "I'm a Christian", they've got to ask what does that even mean? It could mean anything. People might hear "fundamentalist" or "you hate gay people" or "abusing boys". Or they remember at school how boring the vicar was. Or being told they can't do certain things because God will hate them for it  
(Interview)

What is more, Simon is painting the worst-case scenario. For some, they simply do not want to talk about theory. Paul feels that endlessly deliberating

about what the constituting factor of common agency should be can get in the way of cultivating a sense of common agency, which is often far better done through common action:

If you look at these interfaith forums where you get people of different faiths, Christians, Jews, Muslims sat down in a room together to agree on...trying to get them to agree on what God wants...you can take hours deliberating and of course they will never agree because they're different faiths...but if you get them working together on a project, digging up a garden, that's where they become friends...it's the same thing, the same thing when you try and get young people together...if you ask young people what they want to do with their evening, do they want to get together in a church and deliberate about God or Marx, or do they want to dig up a garden...its always the garden they go for (Interview).

In this discussion, Paul is suggesting that common agency is located in common action. And his anecdotal evidence suggests that getting together with a common project in mind is far more powerful than deliberating about ideas and trying to find shared ideals.

It seems Paul's point is that while common agency is important, the detail of what they mean often has to be put to one side in order to act. And indeed rather than a sense of common agency, it is often recognition of the virtue of particular acts that brings people together quite incidentally. This act may be as simple as digging up a garden.

## *Conclusion*

Observations of CTL's strategies for negotiating solidarity present a challenge to the post-liberal idea that a transcendently derived common agency is crucial to common action. CTL has a sense of common agency that transcends and informs common action, in prayer, in meetings, and in mission.

Ideas of the sacred did not arise as useful tools for framing what was being said. Instead, Bloch proved useful in explaining how an imaginary is constructed that negates and therefore transforms our relationship with the everyday world. This construction provides belonging with a purpose, and one sees its impact in the lived evangelism or role-modelling of CTL members.

It was suggested that CTL members construct the idea that all have faith, and that this is an inversion of the immanent frame, instead showing that people of faith may tend to construct a transcendent frame in which all have faith and thus all are on an equal footing in the public sphere.

It was suggested that when common agency broadens too much, it undermines the predictability for common action. This points to a gap in discussions of social movement literature, which tends to suggest somewhat simplistically that the wider the appeal of the organisation, the greater its ability to motivate action.

Yet not only was I, without accepting the propositional belief in God, able to feel included, but also CTL members accept that many different faiths can lead to the same outlook as theirs. This begins to point to the possibility that one can be reflexively religious: holding faith with the transformative power of narratives without unreflectively believing in propositions. It also demonstrates the more obvious point that some people of faith are capable of performing this kind of reflexivity themselves.

The name change moreover suggests that rather than simply broadening to seek the lowest common denominator such as “faith”, the constituting factor of common agency can be democratically opened up. The process of social construction itself is empowering.

On top of this, CTL often finds itself putting theology to one side in order to focus on common goals that can be achieved. Contrary to my idea of the transcendent frame, this pragmatism seems to place my practitioners firmly within the immanent frame. These three points taken together, of reflexivity, of democratic social construction, and of putting theology to one side, suggest that CTL operate in a dialectical cycle between transcendent and immanent frames: at one moment constructing temples, at the next breaking down walls to let new people in, and subsequently rebuilding.

Postliberal ideas are thus supported, complicated and challenged by these seeming contradictions in the way CTL lives out its vision. In the next section I

explore how this approach interacts with CTL's attitude towards political structures and their influence on common agency.

### **Political structures and common agency**

The last section suggested that a shared theology of action was extremely important to members of CTL, but that the organisation had undergone a process of value generalisation, such that the particular theology and action involved was very hard to decipher. This section suggest that this vagueness sits uneasily with CTL's approach towards political structures, but that the apparent contradiction leads to innovative practices.

I begin by explaining the emphasis CTL places on conventional politics, or what I call positional power. I then suggest that this stress may be at odds with CTL's influence, and I seek to understand why.

*We can get meetings with fairly senior people in the Labour Party*

In the first section I suggested that despite being housed in Labour Headquarters, with all the associated glamour, CTL manages to carve out a distinctive voice, deliberately juxtaposing itself against the competitive world in which it is situated, negating that world and thereby transforming it. This point notwithstanding, there are also ways in which CTL make use of the power of Westminster.

we can get meetings with fairly senior people in the Labour Party, we're sat in the Leader of the Labour Party's office at the moment

**Tim**

Right

**Dave**

So...as you can imagine, it's fairly easy for us to phone his staff up and get a meeting with him and, you know, talk to him, talk to his advisors, and we do that ummm...we try and...engage in kind of measured conversations around...whatever Christian issues happen to be at the time, I mean they change from...you know, year to year...and, and but also what we do is we spend a lot of time working with Christian MPs, ummm and Christian councillors and Christian magistrates and and try and you know, encourage them and support them in their work...and you know, whether that's just, providing briefing documents and stuff so that they've kind of got, you know, a level of knowledge on on on a given issue...or whether it's just saying, you know, you're not alone...there are plenty of Christians around here..um...and we're happy to, kinda help you speak and stuff and and I know you've previously heard me say it, "putting steel into their spines" a little bit and just giving them a little bit of that extra kind of strength and encouragement and confidence to stand up and say I'm an MP, and I'm a Christian, and this is what I believe

CTL places a lot of emphasis on positional power. It is deemed important to be in Labour Party Headquarters, since it is possible to “get meetings with fairly senior people”, and thereby influence policy making. This power can be seen in its ongoing ability to draw senior MPS and peers, not only to meetings but to public events, from conferences to get-togethers.

This kind of soft power is made most obvious when CTL holds public events in auspicious venues. I have already mentioned that they hold prayer meetings in Portcullis House. Similarly, CTL policy events are often held in Labour Party Headquarters, while public talks are held in key Westminster venues, usually Methodist Central Hall. Holding meetings and events in these locations give CSM an aura of positional power.

This power to meet people and to book exclusive venues, however, does not always translate into power of influence, as has already been indicated in the case of the invasion of Iraq. Similarly, in my time at the organisation, there was a campaign against the proposed suspension of the Sunday Trading Act for the duration of the London Olympic Games. As of the Sunday Trading Act of 1994, while small shops are allowed to open without restriction, stores over 280m<sup>2</sup> are restricted to opening for six hours between the hours of 10am and 6pm. The coalition government intended to suspend this restriction for the period covering the London Olympic Games. In its campaign against the suspension, CTL put together a briefing document and as part of it, I made

personal phone calls to its forty-four MPs, explaining the CTL position and asking for information on which way they would vote. The campaign failed.

The Sunday Trading campaign demonstrates the important role CTL places on legislation in restricting the market so as to ensure common agency. It is assumed that in an entirely free market, people themselves will not be free. Employer pressure and financial pressure will push employees to choose work over leisure.

But perhaps more significantly, the Sunday Trading campaign shows that despite its emphasis on being in Labour Party Headquarters, CTL cannot influence voting even on relatively insignificant issues. As suggested in the previous section, this lack of influence might be related to the value-generalisation the organisation has undergone, leaving it with a membership of people vaguely described as “Christians on the Left”, rather than having a clearly defined purpose. It is not clear what is meant by either “Christian” or “on the Left”, and the voting intentions of MPs are entirely unpredictable.

An odd contradiction seems to be emerging. The last section explored the desire to reconcile all things to the creator; a clear vision around which a strong sense of belonging was created. This vision demanded an orientation towards political engagement. In both cases however, it was accepted that all people have faiths, and that it was plausible for one’s faith to lead in an entirely different political direction. It was moreover suggested that often faith has to be put to one side in order to develop pragmatic relationships. When

we move into an analysis of political structures, a similar contradiction emerges: legislation plays an important role in shaping common agency, but there is no pressure on member MPs to vote for particular legislative agendas.

There are perhaps three ways of understanding these difficulties, one of which can be briefly explored now, the other two of which will be explored in the following subsections. The first is that we must recall the political juxtaposition that CTL embody. They role-model a different kind of politics. As suggested in the previous section, rather than “a club” or “a political party”, they aim to be “a movement” that acts as “a support and a resource for Christians...involved in the political process”.

This politics is inherently contradictory: it is about living out an idea of politics that deliberately negates the everyday world of rational choice. The contradiction is the point. Again, drawing from Bloch, the idea is that living out an imagined community that contradicts the everyday world, it is hoped that the latter will be transformed.

CTL appears to take on what David Graeber calls a “prefigurative” approach, being the change it wants to see. It follows that members are regarded as part of a shared movement, and cannot be treated as instruments in the delivery of policy. Yet it is also worth questioning the extent to which the organisation manages to be a movement, as pointed about by the critical member I referred to in the previous section. Sat at my desk in Labour Party

Headquarters, I certainly felt powerful and influential, but I also felt distant from the kind of politics we were promoting, and the kind of people were supposed to be engaging. As negative conversations between CTL members outside of London and me referred to in the previous section suggest, the location within the centre of traditional power could be counterproductive for engaging people on the ground.

*As Christians we find it quite easy to be the good Samaritan, the harder thing is to go back to the Jericho road to stop anybody else getting mugged*

The second way of understanding the contradiction of prioritising positional power without utilising it is that CTL works to get likeminded people politically engaged, transforming the system from within. Getting Christians involved in politics is perhaps the main drive of CTL. Even when all else is missed, it is this clear aim that interns pick up on (Field notes):

I think a big part of our campaigning is encouraging Christians to think politically and act politically...er...there's a great tradition in the church, there are two things in the church there are probably a great tradition of I think there's a tradition of charity and a great tradition of protest. Umm you look down through the centuries and there's just so many...I won't go into them now for ease of...for speed but you know there's a great tradition of both things. And so I think that sort of DNA is picked up by people in 2012. And we're encouraging people to I guess take the next step beyond charity and beyond protest to actual positive engagement

being involved in making a case and being involved in campaigning within the structures and the systems that actually do form the fabric of the nation...rather than throwing stones, doing the protest thing – much as we're, you know, affirming and advocating the need for protest, we're saying there's an awful of people doing that and an awful lot of people doing the charity thing but as Desmond Tutu famously says we need to not just be pulling the bodies out of the river we need to be going up stream to see who's pushing them in and then once we find out who's putting them in not just to shout about it but to actually be involved in seeing change happen to be part of...to be those who are making law as well as those who are critiquing...

...this...and all of these things...you can bet your life all of these things are going to be decided by people sat around very dull committee room tables and it's going to be far less exciting than actually helping somebody up-close at the grassroots and so there's a...there's a kind of a need to kind of say look, let's affirm the fantastic stuff that people are involved in but say surely for some of you there's a call, there is a possibility that you could be involved a little bit...you know...a little bit back further down the river...to use Tutu's example again (Interview).

This stress on getting Christians involved in politics is not limited to getting them politically engaged.

**Tim**

Okay so in a way it's about trying to build connections between people who are passionate about social justice and the actual people making the laws – would that be fair to say?

**Paul**

Well...it does create that connection...ummm...but I think it's an encouragement for folks to themselves as having the potential to be the people that could be making those laws...

**Tim**

Right..oh okay

**Paul**

...rather than this glass ceiling that people imagine. I don't think it's true just for Christians in the church I think it's true for most of the populace that they do see the political class as a different class...

**Tim**

Yeah

**Paul**

...that our job is to comment, to critique, to read the newspapers, to know who to complain, to vote...

**Tim**

And so when...

**Paul**

...and so that's the kind of glass ceiling of our citizenship rather than thinking there could be either involvement in any kind of intermediary institution or that there could be an involvement in the political process...that they could, they could stand, they could join a political party, they could get involved in research they could, you know...all the different ways they could actually be involved in the in that in the political process...often, either number one don't occur to people or number two they don't feel they've got the tools or the access...

Paul is actively criticising the understanding of the public sphere as merely a place where we engage by reading and thinking about politics. He wants people to consider the many ways in which they can actively engage in the political process.

...so partly what we're trying to do is to give people access, to help people build relationships to do that, to do that relationally and well, and in a way that's hopefully not, not just I guess constrained and...the other 'con' word that I'm trying to think of...eh.....conformed to the main methodology which kind of eh...the political orthodoxy that says you have to do this, you have to do it this way, join the think-tank you know that...I guess that relationship we have in politics now comes from coming through being involved in think-tanks being involved in getting the right jobs the right, in the right places working for MPs being involved in the kind of, in the...the metropolitan bubble. And we're trying to encourage folks who are actually folks who are involved in grassroots working in community and saying to them you are actually best placed to be representing the people you are working with, you have seen problems at first hand, folks who are involved in youth work, community work, work with drug rehabilitation, work with debt counselling, you know

Paul was trying to push that ordinary people could become the elites, and that they would naturally maintain their connections on the ground. Paul clearly sees this process as creating ripples and ruptures in the "dirty game" of professionalised politics.

This idea is epitomised in the Future Candidates scheme, which develops prospective MPs. What Paul's method actually involves, in this and other schemes, is networking with socially active Christians, building relationships with those he feels particularly inspired by, and encouraging them over a

series of meetings to take the next step. A number of Christians active in political campaigning that I met during and after my time with the group, as critical as they may have been about the group's lack of effectiveness elsewhere, nonetheless told me that the group provided their first taste of self-belief (Field notes). Often this was by allowing ordinary people to see that those in power are no more intelligent or talented than they are: getting socially active Christians to recognise that they are up to the task. As Simon, the prospective MP put it, Gary introduced him to MPs and helped him to recognise "I could do that". In my time at the organisation I experienced this same transition. I suggested earlier that when I first visited, I felt like I was awaiting a job interview, such was the lofty professionalism of those surrounding me. My blood pressure rose every time I encountered an MP or special advisor, and I avoided speaking to more senior MPs. But over time, being up-close and personal, thinking about the experience, education, prospects, intelligence and charisma of these MPs and advisors, being privy to negative conversation about them, and being involved in conversations and public meetings with them, I slowly realised that they were human beings, and that I was just as capable of some things as they were. I heard this same story reflected back to me by other CTL members time and again.

Yet despite CTL's best efforts, there remain a number of reasons the people he works with "don't want to be involved politically". Perhaps the strongest deterrent is in the direct sense of fulfilment people derive from living out their theology at the grassroots level:

often the folks who are drawn in that direction are also the folks who...eh...passionately don't wanna stop doing the grassroots work that they're doing...eh...because they see it being fruitful and effective...

**Tim**

Right

**Paul**

...it's, it's, it's, it's you know it's the Good Samaritan example you know I often quote this story, what Martin Luther King said about the story of the Good Samaritan, whereby he said, look, actually, ummm often as Christians we find it quite easy to be the Good Samaritan, there's a kind of, kind of an innate, you hope there's kind of an innate compassion, ummm and there is actually a real buzz from helping somebody in a kind of a hand to hand, face to face kind of way, that immediate connection you have with people...ummm...it...ummm...there's a...ummm....there's a buzz out of that there's a kind of sense, you know, there's a...it's a fulfilling thing...to do, to see somebody be helped out, whether it's just for a day or whether you see somebody actually take steps towards you know more sustainable long-term transformation in their lives, that's a very powerful thing to see and be involved in and by motivating you continue doing it, but he says that the harder thing a lot of the time for Christians and other nonbelievers is to go back to the Jericho Road to

work out how to stop anybody else getting mugged....you know...you might need more cctv cameras, you might need more policing, you might need more security, you know, might be better lighting

Because people are so inspired by the face-to-face work that they do, they do not want to get involved in politics, which inevitably involves bureaucratic work. But there are also more negative views of politics that deter people from getting involved:

...whether that's that they don't agree with everything the party stands for...politics is just a dirty game they're all in it to make...I don't want to be part of that pantomime where I have to check in my brain at the door...like at prime minister's questions. The fact that actually the way that I'm seeing change happen at grassroots level is actually far faster and more effective than anything I could do from a centralised position, a legislative position...

There are a number of facets at work here: whereas individuals may be passionate about single issues, parties are broad and made up of multiple opinions on various issues. Signing up to a party may involve compromising one's integrity. Related to this, politics is seen as a "dirty game" where focus is on personality and power rather than service. Politics is perceived as a place corrupted by the desire to save face in front of the public, as a result of which far too little time is spent making "change happen" on the ground. The final point is about seeing "change happen": not only is politics less effective

than it could be, but one does not get to see the impact of one's work in a relational way; one does not see individual lives improve. On top of this, even people who do want to get involved in politics are often excluded financially, as will be picked up further in the next section.

### *Inwards and outwards*

The final, and perhaps most important point about being in a position of power without utilising it, alongside practising the politics they wish to see and getting more Christians involved in conventional politics, was the notion of facing simultaneously inwards and outwards: inwards by building a sense of missional community within Westminster that can create pressure for change, but also outwards to the wider membership and wider public, seeking to create a similar sense of belonging that can spread across the country, both virtually by using online platforms, and physically by engaging with likeminded people on the ground.

A campaign which illustrates the way they wanted to change the party was Labour Neighbours, which sought to simultaneously reform local parties by turning them from being election winning machines to social action galvanising machines; and to encourage more people to get involved in local party politics. Local party organisers were to change their activity, becoming more like community organisers. Rather than taking centrally devised policies and selling them to constituents, organisers would ask constituents what were

the biggest problems they faced, and encourage them to be involved in formulating a solution. Dave explained:

[The party is] organising more...um...around communities...rather than just being an election winning machine. I mean, it was a very good election winning machine. But people have kind of moved on from that, I think the general population want a bit more than that, we've had the kind of recent loss of trust in politics because politics has become more...professional...

...rather than actually looking at addressing real concerns and problems and issues...ummm, and the party's now moving towards a more issue-based model of not just wanting loads of people to deliver more leaflets because there's an election in May...it's more about kind of year-round campaigning and year-round problem solving

What emerges here is an idea of service irrespective of power, with parties working for local populations, whether or not they are winning elections: 'We need to show that we want to serve people whether or not we are in power' (Field notes). This way of looking at conventional politics, reforming it from within, turning it inside out both by bringing outsiders in, and by shifting the culture of those within to make them focused on collectively solving problems, demonstrates the ways in which critiques of the power of the state and recognition of its necessity might be reconciled. MacIntyre's critique of the power of the state in terms of its tendency to co-opt is dissolved because here

the party behaves more like a community organisation empowering local people and institutions (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 103). Milbank's fear that the state is founded on an ontology of evil is further resolved, because the state becomes a key mechanism for placing public trust in local groups and people.

Labour Neighbours also provides an excellent example of how, notwithstanding internal reform being the main objective, alongside this inward reform, the group also sought to change the behaviour of ordinary people. As a piece of campaign literature explained:

Our nation has seen too much of those who espouse certain policies but whose lifestyles look no different to anyone else. There are also plenty of us who studiously model a different way of living that springs from a different set of values, yet step back from arguing to see those values fleshed out in public policy. Both are required, and to be a movement, you need both (Flannagan 2012).

A good example of this dual model, facing simultaneously inwards to Westminster and outwards to the wider public was their "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is" campaign, which simultaneously pressured Westminster to separate retail and investment banking, and to tax bankers' bonuses; and encouraged ordinary people to change their pensions, investments and bank accounts to more ethical companies.

Ostensibly CTL demonstrates how states can change to simultaneously meet and challenge the shift from citizenship to consumerism, opening up the hierarchical structures to draw new people in, and yet in so doing, encouraging those people to behave like citizens. Yet notwithstanding this optimistic possibility, in reality the Christian social movement was far too small and geographically bound an organisation to bring about any real change.

This is a flaw CTL members recognise themselves:

I think government would be very different if it worked in a more relational way but I don't know...it's difficult to do it, because we can do that on a one-to-one basis, whereas the government has to do that for 70 million people...it's a difficult thing to do...you'd have to have a hell of a lot of civil servants (Interview)

Only by creating networks with other actors on the ground can CTL hope to bring about the kind of changes it wishes to see. And yet, as indicated in the previous section, what stands in the way is CTLs Christianity. In a long discussion with the leader of a major organisation on the ground, it was suggested that they could not work with this movement specifically because of its Christian branding, not because they had any aversion to Christianity, but because it was perceived as a precarious association amongst the wider public, which might make it difficult to galvanise action amongst non-Christians (Field notes).

*Conclusion*

Chapter 2 explains that MacIntyre criticises Tawney's support of a welfare state on the basis that it is in the support of managers, not workers. Yet CTL demonstrates it is possible to simultaneously work with the state while intending to reform it from within. It should be stressed, however, that the ability to reform positional power from within appears questionable given the limited campaign success of CTL, and the lack of direct change which activists crave.

CTL also shows a way of turning power inside out, not only by bringing critics of power into a position of power, themselves developing the leadership potential of socially active people, but also by encouraging those in positions of power to change their political practice, working to empower ordinary people and develop leadership.

Yet this section closes by pointing out that the base is not yet broad enough to galvanise support amongst the wider public. The constituting factor of common agency is in this way deeply implicated in the kind of politics that is viable.

### **Economic context and common agency**

The first section noted a paradox in CTL's underpinning: while it offered a strong theological sense of belonging with a clear call to social action, it was nonetheless open to the place of other theologies and political practices. In

the next section, this paradox is seen to cause problems, since despite its stress on positional power, CTL does not lobby its members. Although potential solutions can be seen in its engagement of Christians, its criteria for membership remains so open that even a very large membership would remain unpredictable in its voting. Finally, it is suggested that these paradoxes can be reconciled in CTL's attempt to turn power inside out, but that even this approach would meet difficulties, since its branding as Christian instantly switches off some.

This section explores how the theological and political interplay with attitudes towards economic structures. It has already been suggested that CTL sees an important role for the state in restricting certain business practices in order to protect certain ideas of community and the family. A brief discussion has also been offered of how the inwards and outwards model is reflected in the Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is campaign, whereby CTL simultaneously lobbied for the legally enforced separation of retail and investment banking *and* encouraged individuals to move their savings to more ethical investors. Here I suggest that notwithstanding a negative attitude towards structural issues associated with capitalism, CTL can be seen to work pragmatically within a capitalist market.

*The focus has been on how much inequality and injustice there is in the way the current economic system works*

Structural issues associated with capitalism act as a key inspiration for those involved in CTL. Fighting against structural issues was perhaps the chief motivation for Dave:

What problems do you see the organisation as responding to?

**Dave**

Ummm...I think inequality is something that we notice quite a lot. It's finding ways to address that inequality. So it might well be um...um...inequality of class, inequality in economic state, the kind of, the most recent stuff, the last couple of years has been, a lot of the focus has been on how much inequality and injustice there is in the way the current economic system works and...how...that focus on greed and the lack of focus on the common good and community has driven...driven us to the way we ended up in 2008 with the banks crashing and people up to their eyes in debt and all that kind of stuff that um...that happened over a number of years and happened because [it is a] fundamentally unfair system and I think that that's the main thing we address, inequality

Similarly for Simon, structural causes of inequality is the reason he entered into politics:

My first choice was working for NGOs on the ground. And then at some point, I worked out where poverty comes from, and that it was largely to

do with the global economic system, which makes some countries rich and some poor, just as the UK makes some places rich and some places poor. So I saw myself as dealing with the consequences of that system. Instead I wanted to get into politics and change that system (Interview).

This structural analysis feeds into a critique of the political system, which is perceived as being at the behest of big money:

you can hide behind the word freedom and actually sometimes freedom means the people with the most money get to say the most

**Tim**

Mmmm

**Paul**

That's actually what it means. Without structures and frameworks...that are designed for the common good, which inevitably involves some sort of regulation which inevitably involves some sort of legislation

**Tim**

Right

## **Paul**

Actually those with the most cash and those with the most clout and those with the most power, tend to win most debates and most, you know, most scenarios.

What is more, this influence of money in politics is hard to fight, since it is usually those with some sort of money in the first place that are able to run for public office:

A lot of those folks do not feel they have the finances or the resources to be involved in politics ...

... it's a kind of very precarious place to be...you don't know if you're going to get a job at the end of the job application process...quite a long job application process. And it's a process that requires a lot of money and a lot of funding to fight a campaign. And it would also potentially mean taking quite a lot of time off work so people would have to work part-time. It's a precarious place and so...and a lot of the folks who are involved in that grassroots work are not being paid in sums that allow them that freedom (Interview).

This financial issue was particularly evident with Simon. Having decided he was called to be an MP, Simon had left his job and fought a number of

elections. Simon, in his forties, had moved out of his home in London and was living with his parents in Sheffield. When not campaigning, he would oscillate between Sheffield and London, one week living with his parents, the next week sleeping on a friend's sofa. And Simon himself was only able to make these sacrifices because he had substantial savings to rely on.

It is worth noticing how CTL's attitude towards positional power directly feeds into and is inspired by their critique of the spread of capitalism. CTL members see a direct link between structural inequality, and the influence of big business at the centre of political power. This power is not only direct, but also indirect in that those who tend to have gained from the economic status quo are also those with the money and time to be politically engaged. The attempt to make Christian social activists politically engaged then, should be read in the context of garnering a shared spirit of association against the spread of capitalist ideology.

CTL's chief campaign against structural inequality is Put your Money Where Your Mouth Is:

we had the campaigning last year called the Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is campaign where, which was in and around encouraging folks to campaign on macro-economic issues in terms of shareholder liability in terms of financial transaction tax, in terms of you know ummm ethical finance in general but also look at what they're doing with their own finances so asking folks to look into credit unions asking folks to the

look into the ethics of the banks they're working with asking folks to look at their own shareholdings to say look are you happy with how your money is being spent. Like one of the strap lines for the campaign was that look quite happy to talk about money being our money when we're giving it to help build new wells in a village in you know in the centre of Africa but then when our money goes to a multinational in Africa to be involved in some exploitative mining practice by a multinational quite suddenly it's not our money anymore...I just give my money to my investment advisor, my financial advisor and you know he does what he thinks is best and it's not my moral responsibility. It's fascinating I think how we create that disconnect between us and our ethics and our money and so we're just trying to recreate that connection and draw the lines between the macroeconomic policy and the micro (Interview).

Campaigning on shareholder liability means seeking to restore the right of consumers to sue shareholders if, by going bust, a company leaves consumers out of pocket. This move is recognised by campaigners as being anti-capitalist, since they admit that limited liability leads to rapid economic growth. Their criticism is to do with how limited liability undermines responsibility, stewardship, and relationships. The organisation thus campaigns to recognise in law the priority of virtue over profit. The financial transaction tax campaign aims to place a tax on the trade of financial products such as stocks and bonds, in order to provide greater funds for social services and international development.

These campaigns are read as being against capitalism in that they prioritise virtue and the common good over profit. People are encouraged to unite and campaign on the basis of Christian or ethical beliefs. The campaigns regarding shareholder liability and the financial transaction tax draw on Biblical arguments about debt and stewardship.

### *Working within the capitalist system*

Notwithstanding this stress on structural change, as made clear in the previous section, Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is is not only a structural campaign but a grassroots one too, encouraging people to move their savings to more ethical investors. In this sense, the organisation is working with the capitalist system, seeking to develop ethical consumerism. Facing outwards to the wider population, people are encouraged to alter their lifestyles to prioritise virtue over profit, moving their money from unethical investors and towards more ethical investors. What is striking here is that it demonstrates the connection between the ethics of companies we deplore, and our own ethics: consumers can only force companies to prioritise virtue over profit if they themselves prioritise virtue over profit, moving their money to more ethical companies which may offer a lower rate of return. As one CTL member put it, the campaign to make individuals move their money draws on the idea in the gospel of Matthew that where one's treasure is, one's heart is (Field notes).

### *Conclusion*

CTL are aware of the importance of “regulation which inevitably leads to some sort of legislation” in order to have as wide an impact as possible. Alongside this focus on legislation, there is an equal focus on ethical consumerism, encouraging more ethical behaviour from both above and below.

All facets of CTL’s campaigns draw on biblical messages to inspire shared action. What emerges here is the importance of drawing on what Durkheim would call mechanic forms of solidarity, based on shared values and traditions, in order to inculcate a sense of organic solidarity, that is solidarity based on reciprocity within a capitalist system.

Yet the failing of this organisation is in its lack of take up, and in the impossibility of knowing what impact they have had: how many of its legislative agendas have in fact been taken up, and how many people have they encouraged to move their money to more ethical banks? Again, this points to issues arising out of the section on politics, namely, the lack of a connection between the beliefs and actions of those at the centre, and the beliefs and actions of those on the ground.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the way that CTL lives out its politics in a paradoxical way: it simultaneously creates a strong sense of community around a broad base of Christianity on the political left, while being open to

the idea that one need not be Christian to land on the left, nor to be on the left to be Christian. One result is a culture of shared becoming, with pressure arriving from the desire to role model a particular way of life, rather than, contra Milbank, from fear of retribution. Yet another result is that the actions of members are largely unpredictable, and one is left questioning what it means to be a member of CTL. Despite Paul's desire to be a movement, rather than a club, the organisation can appear reminiscent of a group whose sole aim is to gather in mutual solidarity.

This unpredictability causes problems for CTL in light of their stress on the importance of legislation for bringing about their worldview. Since a successful legislative agenda depends on galvanising widespread support, amongst not only member MPs, but also the wider membership and the wider public, a clear, united voice seems important. The CTL leadership does not necessarily agree. Yet the second section explains that for CTL leaders, the idea of a united movement, inculcating uniformity to promote a clear legislative agenda is alien from a movement, and closer to the idea of a political party. As a movement, CTL hopes to transcend "the dirty game", instead working for a prefigurative politics, in which a sense of belonging for its own sake is at the centre of political action at all levels. To put this in Blochian terms, there is a transcendent practice of politics to which the transactions involved in political life ought to conform. This inclusive politics similarly influences CTL's facing outwards to the wider public. Rather than rejecting traditional power, CTL seeks to turn traditional power inside out. All of CTL's actions involve not only encouraging those in power to develop leadership skills in ordinary people,

but also encouraging ordinary people to think more politically about their own lifestyles. Yet here it was suggested that CTL suffered an opposite problem to that of having a clearly defined aim; instead, it needed to broaden its appeal beyond Christianity, if not drop “Christian” from its name altogether, in order to galvanise public support.

The final section turns to economic structures. It suggests that the strong focus on the state is largely based on the need for legislation to protect traditional institutions such as the family in the face of big business. It also shows how CTL works with the market, drawing on mechanic solidarity in the guise of biblical narrative to inspire organic solidarity, encouraging consumers to behave more ethically.

CTL demonstrates how a Christian theology can still play a dynamic role in cultivating a spirit of association in a religiously and ideologically diverse world. Around transcendent ideas such as “the reconciliation of all things in creation to the creator”, CTL manages to create a strong sense of belonging, while being open to, and in some cases welcoming of different theological perspectives. More than just including different perspectives, they seek to include people in the process of developing a theology. This point notwithstanding, there are times in which this open theological position, with its strong stress on political *action* encourages CTL to drop theology altogether in order to work towards the common good, such as “digging up a garden”. I suggested that CTL were enveloped in an ongoing dialectic between transcendent and immanent frames.

It might moreover be suggested that when theology is put to one side, common actions still differ from social contracts, since the inspiration to act is theologically derived, rather than reflecting rational choice. This transcendent ideal offers a context for CTL to show a different practice of politics, even at the very centre of traditional power. This transcendent ideal, drawing on a strong biblical tradition, also helps them to inspire political engagement and lifestyle changes, inspiring ordinary people to role model a different way of living.

Unfortunately, no matter how broad the theological message gets, the organisation continues to alienate both some of its own members, and the wider public. Part of the issue is organisational: there is a failure to fully engage all members, to give them a sense of being engaged in the construction of the meanings that shape the organisation and thereby their own lives. But part of the problem is theological: the Christian label itself is alienating. The following chapters will show how difficult it is to frame the constituting factor of common agency without alienating members. Organisations that do not pay any reference to transcendent ideals struggle to create any sense of association. But those organisations that loosely talk about faith, seeking to hold onto what they perceive as a unique take on how to inhabit the world, while hoping that the concept can be loosened to the point of having universal resonance, find themselves facing both problems simultaneously: still not elastic enough to have universal appeal, and too loose to galvanise any substantial support.



## Chapter 8: Case Study II: Hackney Council of Voluntary Service

Hackney Council of Voluntary Service became an important organisation in my study because I was frustrated by my inability to find an organisation that was representative of unreflective unbelief. Much interesting work has been done recently demonstrating how ostensibly secular organisations, such as the National Secular Society or the British Humanist Association, in fact take on very similar formats and focal points to the religions they are rejecting, hence they become defined as “non-religions”, being defined against either a particular religion, or all religions. The result is that it becomes difficult to claim that such organisations, and their methods for developing a spirit of association, are representative of people for whom religion is of no significance: unreflective unbelievers. What I wanted instead was an organisation that simply did not make reference to religion in its activities. I found this characteristic in HCVS during my exploratory sampling.

HCVS is unreligious in that it makes no reference to religion in its founding principles, in its stated aims, or in the vocalised objectives of members of staff. This point notwithstanding, as will be seen in the next section, HCVS is nonetheless founded in and strives for ideals similar to those put forward by postliberals: empowered, virtuous and political communities.

As in the previous chapter, I begin with a brief context of the organisation, before discussing the constituting factor of common agency. I then move on to

explore the perceived relationship between political structures and common agency, and economic context and common agency.

## Context

Colin Rochester has explained that CVSs originated out of the pioneering work of Thomas Hancock Nunn, a Christian social reformer. Hancock's aim was to establish a "broadly based body that would combine the resources of 'all the churches, all the municipal bodies and all the voluntary associations in a given local government area'" (Rochester 2012: 103). CVSs thus spring from the period of Christian associationism lauded by Prochaska, and discussed in more detail in chapter 4 (Prochaska 2006). From their outset CVSs can be regarded as combining the resources of multiple institutions, without prioritising any one in particular. By 1945, Bourdillon suggests, the role was more clearly defined, and additionally had a distinct ideological agenda:

to survey the social needs of the area as a whole, and, where it perceives a gap, to initiate action. Only if no other body can suitably meet the new need should the Council itself take direct action, and where it does so it will be on the understanding that the new activity is to be floated off as an independent organization, or passed over to some other body at the earliest possible moment (Bourdillon in Rochester 2012: 103)

CVSs would act directly where necessary, but prioritised the grassroots action of organisations established in the community, since these encouraged participation amongst ordinary people.

In the decades following the war, however, Prochaska suggests social policy was characterised by secular ideals, wherein redistribution and material equality took priority over "personal service or participatory citizenship" (Prochaska 2006: 152). Prochaska observes a "tendency of post-war prime ministers, sometimes consciously, sometimes not, to undermine the independence of voluntary institutions" (Prochaska 2006: 163). This ideology was imbibed by the wider public, for whom "the payment of taxes had become the primary civic duty" and who, when they do volunteer, do so for reasons of "altruism, filling spare time, or the need for a more imposing CV" (Prochaska 2006: 150; 160). This criticism can be extended to policy discussions relevant to CVSs. Wolfenden, a path-defining report for CVSs in the post-war period, was said to have "little to contribute to the debates about participation or the alienation of so many citizens from the power structures which control them" (Rowe 1978: 491). As a result, CVSs have often risked appearing as the "Council's poodle" (Zammer in Rochester 2012: 108). Moreover, when they have managed to distance themselves from the state, CVSs often fall into a market logic, which emphasises the CVS's "role as a provider of services and reduces its relationship with its members to that of seller and customer" (Rochester 2012: 109).

Without himself showing a distinct research interest in cultivating a spirit of association, Rochester has called for...

recovering some of the original values underlying the work of CVSs and replacing the culture of the market with traditional voluntary sector behaviours...Return to the roots...would involve a greater emphasis on voluntary effort rather than the employment of paid staff...The central thrust of its work would be to facilitate mutual aid and shared learning across the local voluntary and community sector (Rochester 2012: 109).

Unfortunately, there is a neglect of the role of this elusive spirit of association in Rochester's account. In the absence of this spirit, the tendency to drift between the state and the market seems inevitable, unless the organisation itself can frame an imagined community with an associated appeal for volunteers.

### **The constituting factor of common agency**

The last section suggested that in a context of a declining spirit of association, CVSs tend to find themselves swaying between the state and the market, neglecting to develop their own sense of community. This section explores the need for and capacity of HCVS to do this.

*I saw the difference it made in their lives*

At first glance, HCVS has no explicit or implicit religious identity. On my first day in the organisation, when he heard me mention religion, one member told me, with a smile “don’t ask me about religion, I don’t want anything to do with it”, and, when pressed, suggested that religion causes conflict (Field notes). In the absence of any obvious narrative, HCVS seems to epitomise Prochaska’s lament of the loss of religious motivation, and his suggestion that today volunteering is motivated by "altruism, filling spare time, or the need for a more imposing CV" (Prochaska 2006: 171).

All of those working at HCVS were employed staff. Altruism of sorts certainly played a role in some employees’ motivation, although it could not be described as altruism in the strictest sense, since it was embroiled with personal stories of suffering, and the chance of this job coming along rather than another. John, who is of Indian descent, offers a clear picture of how personal suffering could lead to action:

I faced so much discrimination, and so much abuse, on a daily basis, but I didn't know that this was going to happen – it was just a shock. Umm and slowly, over the years, I was there over 26 years, so I became their white, though not so white, but one of their brothers and all this. But what happened was, slowly people that were from minority communities came in, and started talking to me, you know, and I had links to the Commission for Race Equality, the CRE, at that time, because I have members of my family who work for them, so I sort of like started helping

people, whilst I had all these different shops I had a private business and stuff, and I really liked that kind of work because I saw the difference it made in their lives (Interview).

John's personal suffering created a capacity for sympathy that inspired him to help others in his position. His voice noticeably shook when he spoke of being discriminated against. There was a clear sense that he felt he did not belong. So even in this self-referential framing, it is still belonging that is significant. His experience also touches on another aspect that was common to almost all participants, namely, that once one engages in social action, seeing the difference it makes in people's lives becomes its own motivation. In this sense, it seems that social action can be generated through what Aristotle called *hexis*: through the experience of doing good, and of its feeling good, one learns to do good on a regular basis. One becomes trained to derive satisfaction from right action (Aristotle 350 BCE/2009: Book II). Sarah's experience corroborates this idea. As with many participants, my presence in the organisation led to months of reflection for Sarah. Here she reflects on a conversation she had engaged in, inspired earlier conversations:

I said you know "why do you do that? What do you get out of it? Because its days and days and weeks of work, and you're not getting anything out of it." And he said "Because it feels good to do that". He said "because it feels good to give this to people and give them one less thing they need to do." And then we talked about his philosophy and about how everybody does everything because in some way it makes

them feel good about themselves...And I could see that; I think my motivations work along that line. But I also think there's something more to it than just "yeah, it makes me feel good about myself".

**Tim**

I mean aren't there other shorter fixes, easier fixes to making yourself feel good? Like buying clothes and getting drunk?

**Sarah**

[Laughing] Yeah but I think also what Gavin and I were talking about is that it's almost more of a long-term...it's like a better fix. Because it's a long-term, you can see long-term consequences and continue to feel good about what you did.

**Tim**

So does this just mean that there are some people who are better at delayed gratification than others? You know, is it the equivalent of somebody who sleeps around and somebody who sees the advantage of a long-term meaningful relationship? Is that the only difference?

**Sarah**

No. I think that some people learn somehow, whether that be through religion, or whether it be like with me with my family, ummm from as far back as I can remember my family has been active in our community, has done community work and has placed an emphasis on, you know, community action and doing things like volunteering ummm and so I think some people learn to do that, and I remember when I was little I hated doing voluntary work. Like "we're gunna go lay mulch at your school and plant trees" and "No! It's so stupid; it's Saturday, and I don't wanna do this shit and God!" But then, as I got older, you get a certain satisfaction out of that. Like you see, it's some legacy so that you can go and say "Wow, I planted that tree, and now it's a big tree, and it provides shade in the playground, and that's really"...like I can go back to my elementary school and see that ummm and so I think it's a perspective that comes with age. As you get older you realise that the satisfaction...you realise the benefit in long-term work, because you gain enough perspective, you've understood the power of perspective, to look back and say "yes, I did something worthwhile with myself". Some people learn that early on like I did, some people don't learn it for a very long time, or never learn it, and I think that the people that decide to make a career out of voluntary work, are the people who learn that very early on, and who get a strong sense of satisfaction at being able to look back at something there, and that's "something I can be proud of and something people can benefit from". But I think it is, yeah it's definitely long-term making-yourself-feel-good. You can look back for the rest of your life and say "I did that thing, I did a good thing, and look at what I've

done with my life, I at least did that...I was able to make those people happy for at least that instant that they were sitting under that tree"

### **Tim**

So it's almost like seeing a difference in other people; seeing the change you've made, demonstrates there's an impact, you know, that your life makes a difference. That phrase has really come to interest me, this idea of "making a difference". It's not so much an ethical calling as...you know you could hit a car into another car and say "that bump's made a difference".

### **Sarah**

But that phrase has come to mean making a positive difference. When someone says "I made a difference", you assume they mean they made a positive difference, because no one is going to brag about how they made a negative difference. Like "I feel that I made a difference in people's lives", your mind automatically goes "oh you committed genocide, yeah" [laughing], everyone's always like "oh yeah, you maybe sat their kids for a little bit". I don't know why that assumption started. It might just be because it was used so many times in that context.

### **Tim**

So how do we make more people do good?

### **Sarah**

Prove to them that it will make them feel good. That's the easiest way, is to prove to them that it will help them in some way. As much as I want to believe that there is an unselfish motivation for it, the most obvious motivation is that it'll make people feel good about their lives - to do voluntary work. And so the easiest way to make kids, I've done lots of these projects, and the easiest way to make kids do these things, is to make sure they have fun doing it. So if you make a song about them cleaning up their room, then they'll enjoy cleaning their room. If you give them candy because they clean their room, they're going to go and clean their room because they want the candy. Or when you get older and you don't want any candy but you don't want ants in your room, you're going to go and clean your room. That's the easiest way to get people to do something; to give them a reward. And the cheapest reward is just making them feel good about themselves. I really want to believe that there's like a pure, unselfish motive for it. You know, the grace of God or something, but I'm really leaning towards, people want to feel good about themselves. I don't know how selfish, it is selfish but that's another word that's come to mean bad, but I don't think it's a bad kind of selfish. It's not a bad thing for that to be your motivation, because it causes good things.

Sarah demonstrates the complex way in which one may learn that doing good makes one feel good. She says that one's upbringing and environment play an important role in learning this connection, and she says that if we want more people to do good, it is important to cultivate such an environment. Sarah's experience also demonstrates the place of parental guidance in seeing the gratification involved in serving others. It is important to question why a person should feel good from serving others. There appears to be an intrinsic satisfaction derived from this service, and the learning is based on the learner picking up on this intrinsic satisfaction. So there does appear to be some pre-contractual grounds for this contractual behaviour; the happiness is indicative of solidaristic sentiments. But this is only to put the question back a level: why should such behaviour make this person feel good? Is it because the individual harbours an ideal of how one ought to behave, or is it because the behaviour is rewarded or praised?

John and Sarah provide us with a self-referential idea of social action derived from personal suffering, experiential learning and guidance. While there is no imagined community being invoked, nor is the service undertaken as part of a social contract. While these self-referential ideals may have underlying aspects of solidarity, what seems problematic here is that serendipity plays a key role in producing social actors. We are still left to question what kinds of ideas, what kind of culture and what kinds of institutions provide the necessary background for people to feel good as a result of doing good. It is also questionable whether motivating people to serve others on the basis that

“it will make them feel good” is as valuable, from a postliberal perspective, as serving others because it is right.

*Wanting to work towards a more equal society*

Although HCVS seemed void of religion, and staff motivation seemed self-referential, one broad idea provided a point of reference, and permeated a number of areas. Although the notion was not lingering on the tongues of participants, equality slowly emerged as a key inspiration. “Addressing local inequalities” is part of the organisations vision. The HCVS offices are just off of Dalston Kingsland High Street, where the relatively recently arrived, mainly white wealthy digital media “creatives” and university students rub shoulders with far longer-term residents of Turkish and African-Caribbean origin, many for whom English is a second or third language. These subcultures in such close proximity seem to display a microcosmic example of parallel lives: living side by side but separately. The first two groups are of the most privileged in the country, the latter two the most deprived. The employees of HCVS seem to straddle all of these subcultures: a walk through the offices sees white and black, media savvy and computer illiterate, educated to doctoral level and barely to high school level, privileged and deprived all working in a single organisation. Their mere presence is juxtaposition that invokes an imagined world in which all of these subcultures have equal access to the country’s resources. As a local resident, I was struck that HCVS provided my first opportunity in a year of living in the area to speak for an extended period with people of different backgrounds to me. Equality clearly provides a backdrop

for HCVS's activities and, as with CTL's Christianity, its being lived out becomes a source of inspiration. It forms an imagined world towards which the group is striving, by which the present world is held to account, and by which causes are selected.

James told me that "wanting to work towards a more equal society" underpins all of his work, and that "in general it's about doing a job where you hope that you're doing something to make society fairer or equal" (Interview). There is also a correlative frustration with the failure of the world to live up to this equality, so that James sees

lots of examples where it's frustrating that perhaps the progress isn't what you would hope for if you look back to previous decades, you know to decades when I wasn't working in the sector. Or in general, when you're looking at society (Interview).

This idea of equality was not only an abstract inspiration, but also a criteria by which to choose one cause over another in the face of limited resources:

We've...got this quite new Equality and Diversity Working Group...We've had two meetings so far so it's a number of staff here and umm it's now chaired by our board of trustees. So, so far what we've done is we've looked at things we're good at and things we're not so good at, and what we think we can develop. Umm so in terms of what we thought we were good at, I think we were good at working with Bayma communities, we

were good at working with young people, we noticed things such as that our staff, including the board of trustees, is quite diverse without having to make a huge effort to be so, I think generally committed to equality...ummm in terms of what we thought we could do better, we thought we should probably work more with young, white, working class males, because of their very low levels of educational attainment. We should do more around domestic violence, more to support young women, more with LGBT communities, more with disability. What we did is we actually made a list of the areas that we'd like to develop, that will take about 10 years to work through.

Yet if the sense of equality pervades the atmosphere, and occurs to staff when questioned, the meetings in which it plays out are not exactly instances of Bougle's "fiery furnace", forging "new identities and transformed relationships in the sacred fires of collective effervescence" (Mellor and Schilling 1997: 53). Rather, these meetings are procedural endeavours. Equality emerges as a clear and practical tool for assessing the viability of the work being done.

As with CTL's construction of the kingdom of heaven, the interest in equality and its outworking displays aspects of Bloch's transcendental social. The idea of equality forms an imagined ideal, which negates the everyday world and inspires action to transform the latter. Members are inspired by the lack of equality they see in the world. The fact that equality is promoted through an equality and diversity working group also shows the way in which equality as

ritual-cognition is connected to a reified culture. HCVS uses this culture as a reference point for identifying areas for improvement. A culture of equality not only acts as a way of framing inspiration for action, but also provides a reference point for improving actions. Yet these meetings are not opportunities for creatively reflecting on, constructing, consolidating and internalising the organisations' ideals. Instead they are dry and practical affairs.

While the idea of equality has not formed an imagined community in the strict sense of providing a concept through which "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion", nonetheless the participants share an idea of equality, and find themselves critically constructing the idea and working towards it together (Anderson 1983/2006: 7). Equality forms an accepted discourse and there appears to be potential for a shared mission.

### *Unreflective equality*

Notwithstanding the clear potential of the idea of equality, there are nonetheless pitfalls. As the discussion of the equality and diversity working group demonstrates, some of these pitfalls are to do with the fact that equality is not recognised as a mode of the transcendental social; indeed, how could they be, without having such a term available in their lexicon. Because the transcendental social operates without being understood as such, it cannot be reflexively harnessed to motivate solidarity. Other pitfalls are to do with the idea of equality itself.

Because equality is not recognised as a mode of the transcendental social, no practices of belonging are established around it. Attempts are made to flesh out the meaning of equality, and to ensure that it impacts on the choice of campaigns. But a couple of problems are worth noting. The first, already discussed, is that the Equality and Diversity meetings are not taken as opportunities for cultivating a spirit of association. It is a predominantly bureaucratic procedure. Second, further reinforcing its bureaucratic nature, the working group involves only trustees and management. The Equality and Diversity procedure itself undermines the equality of all staff. One can observe a level of alienation in that whereas those in the upper echelons of the organisation are involved in questioning the key notion around which the group is organised, and using it to critically choose, develop and assess actions, while the rest of the group is expected to simply follow.

This alienation becomes evident, occasionally distressingly so, when working with those on the frontline. Staff often suggested their roles were not properly appreciated and that they were not being listened to. One staff member in particular would frequently plead with me: “tell them...tell the management how important this work is” (Field notes).

This alienation also impinges on processes of becoming, since it means there is a lack of clarity when it comes to frontline policy. When I questioned frontline staff about the criteria by which they accept and reject groups, the first answer was always, proudly, “we don’t reject anybody” (Field notes). On

the one hand, this insistence on acceptance once again points to how embedded equality is, but it also demonstrates how vague the idea is. When I suggested that they could not offer help to everybody, since they had limited resources, they could only offer me anecdotal evidence of where a particular group's aims seemed to conflict with best practice.

I was privy to one such case involving a woman who wanted to help African Francophones integrate by teaching their children French. When I discussed this with John afterwards he was flustered: "all the evidence says it's better to teach the first generation English" (Field notes). At the next meeting, the woman convinced John that African Francophones were struggling with English, and that the only way to bridge an emerging generation gap was to teach their children French. It was not clear what principles were being applied to either accept or reject this proposal.

Although equality serves as a source of inspiration, and although it has processes through which it is realised, relatively little time is spent critically reflecting on this idea, thinking about what it means to various members of staff, and cultivating practices that realise these meanings.

The lack of awareness and coherence also manifests in missed opportunities for development. There is little or no attempt to spread the idea of equality to other groups and people, such as to progress and develop the culture:

**Tim**

When you're learning to be a teacher you have to learn how to embed equality and diversity in your lessons. And that doesn't just mean making people aware of it, it means challenging the way people think about it. Does Hackney CVS do any of that kind of equality and diversity awareness or training? In charity organisations or anything like that...

**James**

Ummm I'm sure [some of our staff] do work around umm...even though it's, I don't think it's stand alone training but they will do equalities and diversity and the legislation in terms of making sure that organisations have that awareness and they have those policies and they have those good practices. And they then know how to explain it in funding applications.

What comes across here is that the only way in which equality is spread to external groups is as a means of meeting statutory requirements or applying for funding. Having sat in on sessions with the staff James refers to, I was able to see first hand that staff did not perform as he was "sure" they would. The idea of equality was not treated as a fundamental principle to be discussed and critically explored, but as a bureaucratic procedure to be navigated. People were told to think inclusively, since this was more likely to achieve funding. This procedure undermines the idea of equality, since it suggests that it is good enough to inspire the staff, but need not be passed on

to the groups it works with. It also suggests a discrepancy between the equality that inspires staff and the procedures and practices around equality and diversity derived from legislation. If there are differences here, it would be useful for these to be brought to light and critically explored. As an intermediary between state and grassroots action, HCVS finds itself implementing procedure without fully reflecting on it. Finally, this lack of reflection also means there are no criteria for deciding whether there is correspondence between the values of the organisation and the values and practices of those it seeks to help.

This alienation spills over into a lack of transparency. If the principles on which a group is working are not discussed, they are not thereby rendered neutral, but are simply less accountable. As the discussion with James and work with his junior colleagues indicates, this lack of accountability could easily create real issues when causes are chosen or groups accepted or rejected without clear information as to why.

This lack of transparency was particularly evident when focusing on which group received the most attention, which was often less to do with clear standards, and more to do with the whim of the individual employee, their interests, their knowledge, as well as to the ability of the group to demonstrate need. The result is that, even though all the causes were good causes, ideals and standards give way to arbitrariness and power. The lack of transparency meant that there were really no criteria for exclusion, so notwithstanding the

comments above, in theory at least, HCVS was willing to include groups and people of any kind.

### *Conclusion*

At first, HCVS seemed entirely unreligious, and void of any frameworks reminiscent of religious groups. Staff seemed motivated by personal grievances which inspired a sense of sympathy for others, or because serving others makes them feel good. This created complex issues for the postliberal thesis. On the one hand, there was a clear absence of a shared spirit of association, and motivation was entirely self-referential and therefore precarious. On the other, this shared spirit seemed unnecessary, since individuals were devoting themselves to the common good anyway. Considered from this angle, the only plausible response from post-liberals would be that this new conception of the common good is of a different quality, being based on self-interest.

But considered from a different angle, it became possible to see that the personal suffering of staff was about a feeling of not belonging, and a recognition of the importance of this feeling. Similarly, that offering solidarity to others made members feel good, despite sounding contractual, itself draws on ideas of effervescence and solidarity. It is the feeling of offering one's personal resources to the common good that makes people feel good; there is a bodily response to solidarity.

These factors coalesce around a discourse of equality. This tendency to operate around the idea of equality demonstrates that those that pay no attention to religion may nonetheless act within a frame of values that, unreflectively take on similar functions. Equality showed signs of taking on a ritual cognitive function, having the potential to inspire and organise the group, and to challenge the way they carried out their practices. At the upper levels of the organisation, the idea was critically explored and a kind of missional community formed. On these grounds, it seems inaccurate to suggest we are living in an immanent frame wherein politics is legitimised not by transcendent ideas but by social contracts. It might be more accurate to suggest, as Schilling and Mellor have, that behind seemingly self-referential, contractual behaviour, there are underlying pre-contractual ideas (Mellor & Schilling 1997: 58). Perhaps then, when the old gods die, new ones emerge to replace them.

Yet despite the potential of equality to take on a ritual cognitive function, there were many elements in which the ritual cognitive function had not been realised, and possible contradictions emerged in the way staff carried out their work, selected groups to work with, and developed the capacity of those groups. These points will be explored in more detail in the next section.

If ritual cognitive processes emerge irrespective of our attention to them, it is better that they are out in the open where they can fully inspire belonging and becoming in those inspired, and be challenged by those otherwise inclined. One might take this point further, and suggest that the adage that where old

gods die, new ones emerge to replace them, needs amending. Instead, where old gods die, new gods emerge half-formed and require critical cultivation.

### **Political structures and common agency**

The last section suggested that although HCVS staff displayed a number of motivations for action that apparently made no reference to religion, still their motivations displayed elements of solidarity. It was further suggested that the idea of equality, and the way in which staff were motivated by it, took on a ritual cognitive function, forming an imagined future which negated the present and motivated staff to transform themselves and the world around them. Notwithstanding the potential of equality as a mode of the transcendental social however, it was noted that the idea had not been reflexively treated as such, and so did not create the strong elements of belonging, becoming and participating observed in religious groups by Baker. This section explores whether the absence of a reflexive awareness of the transcendental social impacts on the perceived relationship between political structures and common agency.

#### *Local people to help themselves, literally help themselves*

Employees of HCVS rarely criticised conventional politics or politicians. A strong critique did emerge, however, regarding the cynical use of language associated with community empowerment as an excuse for cuts in funding. In my short time at the organisation, unused desk space, old computers, and

part-time staff made it quite obvious they had experienced setbacks from these cuts. Talk of declining public spaces was a theme of casual conversation. I was told how everything from health services to luncheon clubs were being forced to merge. Institutions that used to serve as hubs of community within walking distance of residents, had now become mere services for delivering needs, to which people had to travel by public transport (Field notes). Governments were perceived as being out of touch with the kind of help and support community groups require. John explains:

a couple of years ago when Big Society happened, and and the whole ethos around that from what I understood was to enable local people to take local action. Okay? To help small number of people helping each other. That was one of the angles of Big Society, okay? Localism. Localism helped to arrive...with a direction. These are government strategies that came out, okay? Perfect because that would give, you know, legitimacy to our work. We will help those groups to sort of sustain services and everything. But no not really: it was like, "yes local people to help themselves, literally help themselves" and not really...get any help from us. If they need help from us then...we'd have to charge them. But then they didn't have any money in the first place (Interview).

John is critical of the way the state uses localism initiatives to remove funding from the infrastructure organisations that provide support to local people. John feels that the situation has been exasperated by the rise of the internet, which he feels is perceived as nullifying the place of infrastructure organisations.

... it's come together with the progression of the IT world and the internet. And, you know, and the misconception of a lot of huge funding bodies that, do we need infrastructure? Because actually community groups, what they need they can get it for themselves...through the internet. Why is there a need for human contact? And they really are questioning whether there's a need for human contact; whether people can just work on, solo, on their own, and just get what they need and get on with it. But obviously communities are...you know obviously the focus for us is a lot of communities whose language is, English is not their first language and they're struggling to sort of actually adapt to this life, and what we do is provide them with the comfort of discussing, negotiating, for me directing them, to specific areas of evidence of why what they're trying to do makes a difference (Interview).

For John, greater localism actually requires funding to develop and sustain people on the ground. From his perspective, infrastructure organisations are not the enemy but the facilitators of local empowerment. Removing infrastructure organisations would proliferate the inequality that already exists, since those with the most advantages already, in terms of IT, administrative, financial and language skills, will be those that are most likely to receive funding. In a number of workshops with John I discovered that the majority of those he met with were extremely passionate about the way they might contribute to their community, but unable to effectively fill in an application form, let alone run a business.

### *Becoming an arm of the Council*

Notwithstanding this critique of government cynicism regarding empowering local communities, John and colleagues also found themselves creatively thinking about how the work of grassroots groups can be presented as fitting in with government frameworks. Sat in surgeries with grassroots community groups, I observed as staff analysed and filtered groups' aims to fit with government frameworks. As both insider and outsider, I felt the frustration of both sides: for the groups, the frustration of having their aims manipulated; for the staff, the frustration of convincing often stubborn activists to change the framing of their actions so as to make them appealing to funders. On the one hand, the changing of a grassroots groups' aims to fit a policy agenda might be regarded as a response to government cynicism, matching this with an equally cynical "camouflage" to fit the policy agenda. On the other hand, the change might be seen as disempowering grassroots groups. This perspective seems to be corroborated when one considers the criteria for acceptance and rejection. Previously I suggested that the criteria were unclear. But in relation to funding, these suddenly became far clearer:

**Tim**

Are there any other reasons that you haven't worked with groups?

**John**

...if it didn't have ummm a clear public benefit...

**Tim**

Okay, and what's the test for that?

**John**

Once again it holds hands with evidence: about how it's a public benefit. Ummm the Charity Commission has a clear outline of what public benefit means: you know, if you're going to help someone, progress or develop their life,

**Tim**

And they're the guidelines you use?

**John**

Yeah, well yeah they're one of the guidelines that I use

The criteria for exclusion appears to be primarily influenced by funding guidelines set out by the Charity Commission, a non-ministerial government department.

It is worth noting an absence of coherent work going in the opposite direction: critically feeding back up the chain of command to shape the vision being constructed, the problems being defined, and the policies being developed. As an intermediary organisation, HCVS seems to spend far more time mediating government policies downwards than it does mediating local concerns upwards. The only direct mentions of government were to do with how best to serve government, to provide them with the most useful information in relation to the voluntary sector. James explained:

we might have various MPs or people particularly interested from the charity sector so we make sure we produce something that will be useful for them so they can take back to government (Interview)

There is a clear link between the absence of reflection on the kind of community HCVS is seeking to bring about, and the absence of criticism of government policy agendas. The only clear reason offered for this absence by James was “we're afraid to bite the hands that feed us, and play that game in terms of how we're accessing funding” (Interview). This absence of critique might appear to make sense when read in the context that the majority of the organisation's projects were derived from central or local government schemes. In this situation, the organisation becomes susceptible to cooption by the ideology of others. Why a government funds something, what a government funds, who it funds, and the language it uses to shape the context are all ideologically shaped.

Alongside the absence of a clear idea of a community HCVS is seeking to bring about, it was difficult to decipher a bottom line for the organisation; a point beyond which it would not go. The result is the potential to slide into cooption. One example of this is the way that HCVS is slowly taking on more and more the direct delivery of services, an action at odds with the founding principle of CVSs. When I put this to James he entirely disagreed

I don't think that's becoming an arm of the council because it was something that they put out to tender which we bid for against other [organisations] (Interview).

James's response suggests that the organisation avoids becoming an arm of the state by virtue of the fact that the state opens up bids to a market, meaning both that there is an element of choice in that the organisation does not have to bid for the contract, and that there is competition and variety. In terms of the first idea, it must be remembered that choice is being taken within a context of decreasing funds, and so organisations feel forced to apply to deliver projects that are not of their choosing. In terms of competition and variety, this variety is only available to the council, who, by awarding the contract to one organisation, chooses the parameters by which a project is delivered. Yet both of these are minor issues in relation to the larger point that James has missed: the organisation becomes an arm of the state by virtue of its not being involved at the design level: at the level of defining the world it wants to create, the problems it sees, and the solutions required.

Oddly, James recognised this issue later in our discussion, when I asked him about the greatest obstacles the organisation faces, only he saw it as more of an issue with private funders:

I think what frustrates me is a lack of politics in the charity sector; the charity sector is afraid of having a political voice. Sometimes because we're afraid to bite the hands that feed us, and play that game in terms of how we're accessing funding. Funders might be quite mainstream. There was an example from a while ago, someone came up from Birmingham who was, you know, a charity was talking about empowering women. And the funder doesn't want to hear that kind of empowering women language because it's a bit feminist (Interview).

It is worth noting here that there is not only a discrepancy between staff, with some being less equipped to offer a critical stance to funders than others, but also in the statements of one member of staff from one moment to the next. Both of these discrepancies are indicative of the lack of a clear idea of the kind of community HCVS is seeking to create.

The lack of a critical stance and the resultant slide into cooption supports the postliberal idea that in the absence of hierarchies of value, hierarchies of power emerge. It also develops it. In the absence of a clearly worked out vision, we end up being susceptible to the values and whims of others, because it is not clear when our own values are being compromised. It is not

that the lack of value makes the cooptive tendency of the state necessary, but that it makes people susceptible to those that wish to coopt their activity. Clearly defined values provide a buffer against cooption.

*Collaborating in the building of the iron cage – the tower-block matriarch*

This lack of a critical stance towards the state and other funders creates a kind of iron cage within which the organisation operates. But this can also have a more unfortunate impact when the organisation itself imbibes the processes and imposes them on other, smaller community groups, thus collaborating in the building (though still not the design!) of the iron cage. This point was most glaring in a project responding to a case in which a paedophile had taken advantage of his position of authority in a Tenants and Residents Association (TRA). The result was that Hackney Homes commissioned HCVS to list every TRA in the area, and, taking six TRAs every three months, to meet with the board of directors and check that they were following the proper health and safety procedures.

When I went on a walk-along for one of these meetings, I was struck by a sense of deprivation, made the more alarming by its being so close to where I lived. As is often the case in London, in Hackney, within a minute's walk, one can encounter great wealth, great poverty, and everything in-between. Stood outside a community hall beneath a high-rise estate, waiting for the Chair of the TRA, my colleague Kirsten and I were chatting when suddenly small rocks began to hit the ground around us. Although the conversation was slowly

interrupted by tense pauses, we continued, pretending nothing was happening. Then I was hit in the head by a small rock. More shocking than painful, we decided to take shelter under a canopy. When eventually the Chair arrived, an awkward, middle-aged, 5ft 4, 15 stone, tired African-Caribbean woman, Kirsten explained why we were waiting under the canopy. The Chair knew immediately what was going on. She swiftly went round the back of the building, up a flight of external stairs and onto the roof of the community hall and began telling off what turned out to be 10-year old children. These were not her children, but it was clear that she had authority over them - the tower-block matriarch.

By this time, our senior colleague John had arrived. Returning from the roof, the tower-block matriarch introduced herself as Elizabeth as she welcomed the three of us into the community hall. John asked if we could have a quick look around before things were discussed. He noticed there was no health and safety poster on the wall. "We never had one", Elizabeth explained. John looked concerned, and asked if we could get out a table for the meeting. Together we put up a collapsible table, and placed some chairs around it. "We'd better wait for the treasurer to arrive before starting", said John politely, as he sat himself down by the side of Elizabeth. "It's just me", she replied, shrugging. The point was made wryly, suggesting that it was always just her, running the show, and that she was aware others ought to be involved. One sensed a confrontational atmosphere brewing. John asked if it would be possible to arrange another meeting when the treasurer could be present.

Learning that this would be difficult, again, he furrowed his brow, and decided to move on.

John took out a list of procedures that TRAs were supposed to follow for hosting community events. He began by asking Elizabeth if she had a list of attendees for past events. She shifted in her chair and her eyes seemed to ask “are you serious?” But it was clear John would not be capitulating by relaxing his matter-of-fact gaze. In a sense he was stuck in a bind. These were the rules that Hackney Homes had listed. There had been no negotiation process regarding what the rules should be. But if the point of this process was to empower community activists such as Elizabeth, it was not having the desired effect. Rather, she looked increasingly like a child who had not done her homework.

“When you have events, who’s at the door?”, asked John kindly.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, when you have events, is there someone at the door with a list of who’s invited

and checking names of people who come in?”

“No”, chuckled Elizabeth.

“Well in the future, you will need someone to be at the door at events”, said John with a tone that was friendly, but almost patronising.

“But if we manage to get other adults to come down, they’re going to want to come into the party – not stand at the door” (Field notes).

The conversation continued in this way as John progressed through his list, through the absence or presence of first aid kits, a petty cash float, a safe, criminal record checks and more. On about two thirds of the list, Elizabeth was found to be lacking, and was asked to confirm that she would have these items and procedures in place by the next time John visited. After about 30 minutes, we folded up the table and left a demoralised Elizabeth to lock the hall.

As we walked out, I asked if this was a common experience. John said that it was, and explained that in almost every TRA he visited, responsibility for maintaining community activities was the burden of just one, usually female, enthusiast. He did not mention that his work might be overburdening the one person in the community willing to give what little time she had. Again, there appeared to be a lack of appreciation for the implications of equality. This whole experience was so striking because John himself experienced alienation when managers imposed views upon him. Now he was unwittingly stifling local activists in the same way.

When I interviewed her after a number of other such trips, Kirsten said:

I don't think it's useful, that's the thing. First of all, it's almost an impossible task. And that's an issue because it means it's just never gonna get done. And I just think that, yeah it makes sense to have them, in case something is happening. You know, if God forbid a child is hurt at a community event, you know these policies would be in place to refer

to. But the question is, how seriously really do you think the management committee is going to take these policies? You know, I think, just from talking to them, that they're all earnest people that want to help, but they're all working forty hours a week, plus kids, plus their own lives, and so more likely than that these policies are going to be filed away somewhere and never looked at again.

I saw one of the TRAs, I don't know what the word is for it but basically ummm okay you're not implementing these policies, you're not cooperating...we're going to take your community hall, and shut down your TRA - and they did (Interview).

The response to a crisis was to implement a heavily bureaucratic project that residents had not the time or energy to follow, with the result that some simply gave up and consequently were closed down. This process demonstrates the way in which statism can emerge as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As soon as the state takes on any level of responsibility, it becomes accountable. This accountability then becomes in itself an impetus for greater state control, since if the state is accountable for issues that arise, it must do all that it can to ensure that issues do not arise.

What is most striking is that no effort was made by the organisation to take on the commission to audit TRAs in a critical way, perhaps using the commission to both deliver what the council wanted *and* develop the capacity of TRAs. These projects indicate the unwitting construction of an iron cage, which

places parameters around some activities, and obstacles in the way of others. The organisation enables the construction of this iron cage, since it is able to reach communities that the state otherwise could not.

It is worth mentioning that despite the absence of critique, a number of other activities provided clear channels for grassroots groups to shape the way problems were understood, policies devised, and solutions offered, even if they were not recognised by the staff as playing this role. One program aiming to improve the opportunities of young black men involved fresh analysis and policy design in conjunction with the local council. The second related to Stop and Search, the authority given to UK police to stop and search citizens on the basis of suspicion. Stop and Search is widely believed to disproportionately target black young men. In response the organisation worked with young black men in the locale to develop awareness of this disproportionate targeting. In particular, the group developed a DVD to be used in the training of new officers. This program involves local residents in the design and delivery of policy. This is a good example of the real localism employees hoped for, as distinct from both the cooptive approach, and the “literally help themselves” approach.

Yet without a clear idea of the kind of community HCVS is seeking to create, and the kind of political practices it associates with such a community, some campaigns are entirely defined by the state, while others demonstrate an inspiring combination of cooperation, critique and empowerment, and how many campaigns fit each profile is somewhat arbitrary.

So far it seems clear that a number of issues derive from the way in which this infrastructure organisation is funded. Because it is beholden to the state for its funds, it becomes an arm of the state. With respect to this, it is worth pointing out that in fact a number of other funding avenues were available and being explored. James mused:

...I dunno I mean it's kind of interesting how well the charity sector's positioned I think is quite interesting in comparison to where local authorities are positioned now and where they're going to be positioned in the future as they experience more and more cuts. I think actually the charity sector in many ways is in a better position than local authorities. Right because you're going to receive central funding rather than via the local authority, is that...when can get local authority funding, central funding, lottery funding, you know we can apply for funding from lots of different pots (Interview).

The idea is that by being available to multiple funders, the organisation is free to pick and choose from those that fit with its vision. But another way of looking at this is that the organisation is pulled in a lot of different directions, each with its own ideological agenda, and so it becomes harder and harder for the organisation to give a clear message about its vision without losing money.

### *Conclusion*

Set up to empower local communities, HCVS is limited by its inability to draw on or cultivate its own spirit of association. Without its own sources of revenue, and without volunteers, it becomes an agent of the state. As the ideology of the state shifts, so do the practices of the organisation. This is not to say that the shift is easy for staff. For managers, there was a strong sense of responsibility to keep staff in work. And for staff themselves, there was an ongoing struggle for motivation, with one staff member in particular constantly threatening to leave the organisation (Field notes).

Equally, without a clearly worked out vision with obvious implications for practice, and without opportunities for developing such a vision, there is little reflection on how the organisation's structural position can be used to sustain its own vision, how its vision can be used to challenge and ask awkward questions to authority, and what kind of work to take on, and what kind of work to reject. HCVS thus not only does not develop its own spirit of association, either externally or internally, but also finds itself susceptible to cooption by others' ideologies. Without a clear idea of what is sacred, what is of fundamental importance, what counts as a red line, it becomes very hard to decipher when a line has been crossed.

### **Economic context and common agency**

The first section explained that while HCVS staff showed a number of secular motivations for action, the idea of equality held preambles of a transcendental

social basis for action whereby an imagined future is used to negate and transform the present. Notwithstanding this potential however, the ritual-cognitive mode had not been recognised or fleshed out, and its potential was not exploited. The next section explained that in the absence of a clear and fleshed out vision, HCVS found itself not only susceptible to cooption by the state, thus becoming imprisoned in an iron cage of bureaucracy, but also itself participating in the construction of this cage, placing parameters around grassroots groups without seeking to empower them. While this trend by no means defined all of the organisation's activities, that it had made its way in to certain areas relatively unchallenged suggests that the scope of its influence is arbitrary and no clear line is being drawn as to what constitutes a compromise of HCVS's values.

This section continues the exploration of HCVS's vision and how it impacts on its understanding of the economic context of common agency. The postliberal position would be that just as it has descended into cooption by the state, HCVS should be equally vulnerable to coercion by the market. I seek to question this assumption.

*I'd prefer a more equal society where professionals are rewarded perhaps according to how they contribute to society*

HCVS's existence from the outset being based primarily on government grants demonstrates that its function is not considered to be naturally occurring in a capitalist system. This point is confirmed by the fact that as

funding dries up, and the organisation is forced to get money from private funders, from commissioned service delivery, and from selling services, the function changes. Organisational practice shifts from that of the state to that of the market.

Yet whereas I observed an absence of critique regarding the state, HCVS staff were quite comfortable critiquing and critically assessing their place within a capitalist system, and the way that this impacted on a spirit of association.

None of the staff have salaries in the highest tax bracket. And living in the same area as I do, I am well aware of the difficulties of getting by. The majority of salary goes on mortgage, if one is lucky enough to own a home, or rent if not, and bills. If one has children, the cost of living can be more difficult still. James, who had formerly worked in the private sector, suggests that the system itself is unfair:

**Tim**

So why are you okay to take the kind of pay-cut to work in a charity?

**James**

Well I don't know if I'd even say that I am okay with the fact that in general the charity sector earns less...I'd prefer a more equal society

where professionals are rewarded perhaps according to how they contribute to society, whether it's teachers or medics or nurses or the charity sector in comparison to people in the corporate sector, ummm but in terms of the reality of how society is, I'd prefer to work in the not-for-profit sector as it's something I'm motivated by in terms of the fact that it ties in with the kind of belief systems I have, rather than take the higher salary and be less motivated

James envisages a society of each according to her contribution to society, conceived in terms of helping people, rather than each according to the price allocated by a market. Capitalism clearly has a strong impact on the charity sector; the low wages associated with the sector put a number of people off working in it. Even for those that do work in the sector, it is often the case that they have worked in business beforehand, seeking to make enough money to live on before joining the charity sector. This was most obvious in John, who drove a 20-year-old Mercedes, which had clearly once been top of the range, but for which now only the faded hood ornament indicated its former glory. John told me:

I had a private business for 26 years, and umm, and I did fairly well. I could afford to work in the voluntary sector and get paid very little. But that's fine, and actually some years ago when I worked for umm a London wide organisation like an infrastructure of infrastructure, so how we are infrastructure for small community groups who then have direct links with grassroots or residents, there is another level above us that we

can go for help, and I used to work for them. And we found, we did a piece of research because there was a huge turnover of people in my position. So we did an analysis of all the people across the 33 London boroughs, and where they came from, and they were all about my age, and they had previous careers that they'd, they'd done for like 20 years or something, and then came into the voluntary sector. And one of the questions was why they didn't come into the sector in the first place and they said they have to pursue a career ummm and it's only after finding out that it actually didn't work, you know? And they couldn't afford to come into the voluntary sector because the voluntary sector is so less that umm you have to experience life and what's more worthy, money or the knowledge and the ability to sort of work to make change (Interview).

There appear to be two factors at work here. On the one hand, having worked in the private sector previously creates a financial buffer, allowing people to live a comfortable life with a relatively low income. On the other hand, people awaken to the idea of a more worthy life lived working to make a change, and then make the transition into social engaged work. Sarah, who had been working in the organisation for just a few months to gain experience, similarly felt she would probably have to work somewhere else first:

Like realistically when I'm done with my masters, I'm going to be in debt, and student loans and I'm going to need to be in a job that's paying me enough to kind of establish myself and get out of...I don't wanna be in debt for years and years and years, so I'll need to have an eye on salary,

uuuh and if that means taking a job that I'm not all that interested in for the first few years, just to establish myself, then...idealistically thinking, I'd like to hop straight into something like HCVS, but I don't know how realistic that is. Because if I did that I would not be able to support myself; with the kind of money I'd be making from that, I would have to move back in with my parents, and kind of work to pay off my loans from there. It would take a lot longer (Interview).

A number of the staff at HCVS find themselves playing the capitalist system: they need to earn enough money from jobs they are less interested in before they can afford to take jobs in the charity sector. As James suggested, for the most part they get by with the energy provided by the knowledge they are working in something they believe in.

### *Rolling back the tide*

Despite staff criticism of capitalism, HCVS does not represent an attempt to alter structural conditions. James wondered if the present structural arrangements would ever change. He felt that inequality worked for those in power

I see society as being so unfair globally, and so unequal globally, and I think for example about the arms trade or the amount of money invested in the arms trade, in war, and I think about what the charity sector can do in response. I suppose what I'm saying is that if you look at global

capitalism, and what that entails in terms of inequality, then I suppose I don't really see the impetus for the government to change that; I think they like the status quo, I think they like the global North being powerful, I think they want to protect the unreachable American dream, I don't think they want equality for developing countries (Interview).

There is an air of resignation in James's tone: "I don't really see the impetus for the government to change that". This resignation is perhaps linked to HCVS' relationship to capitalism; it does not campaign to change structural conditions, but rather deals with the impact of those conditions. The main work of HCVS is to assist social enterprises in getting off the ground. The result of this neglect of structural conditions is a King Midas effect, whereby the organisation is forever rolling back the tide: they are working with the effects of inequality, while structural conditions continue to produce new problems. They are seeking to gain as wide as possible an opportunity in a society that remains unequal and divided in outcome.

### *Rolling with the tide*

Since HCVS is not tackling structural arrangements, when those arrangements shift, so to do the practices of the organisation itself. In the context of my time at the organisation, there was a shift towards neoliberal governance, as a result, I observed the slow adoption of capitalist practices. The most obvious creep towards the adoption of capitalist practices is the move towards selling services that had previously been free. These services

were regarded as fundamental to the HCVS's role in empowering grassroots groups. The kinds of groups and people that came into the offices were obviously disadvantaged themselves: often poorly dressed, under or overweight, lacking in sufficient language skills, lacking in the kind of flare and discourse associated with success: they were the most motivated members of the most disadvantaged groups, seeking help to establish enterprises that could serve those groups. And they needed a lot of help, often more than John himself appeared capable of offering. When money from public funds failed to materialise, these individuals often gave up their own money. The suggestion then, that these individuals could afford to pay for training, was an anathema to John.

**Tim**

Are there services you've provided before that you are now providing for money? That would have been for free...

**John**

Not yet. We're about to.

**Tim**

What, what are they?

**John**

Ummm this kind of surgery, type, direct-access. And we're gunna start charging for all the training courses that we do.

**Tim**

How do you feel about that?

**John**

I don't like it. Ummm. I don't like it because it's going to already cause problems that can't afford anything anyway. And the community groups that are...or the number of people coming together to deliver services, they're already working...a lot of them already work and this is something that they do on the side. Okay? So now they're going to have to find the money to do this effectively, whereas...the way this country's going or anywhere at the moment, you know how, people are just, they're not even talking to each other, you know leading these isolated...isolation is massive, you know? Statistics show that so many people are living on their own and they're not communicating and they're not living within a support structure. And this is just gunna get worse. So it's fuelling that I fear. You know, and really when these people, these individuals who work anyway, and then come together, and make things, areas where they live, their work, a little bit better, that could be supported by funding,

you know? Then they can gladly forget about it. Ummm and concentrate on what they're doing. And like what's happened here is that our concentration's gone on to generating income, to sustain some of the work that's needed. And the level of time that's devoted to generating income that enables us to do the work is getting greater, and the time that's spent working with community groups, and the concentration on actually enabling change, is, is lessening, because we have to sustain...and then they say "well why don't you just stop, and don't do it?" Because of the time you're using to generate your income, maybe it's not even needed, and they'll find a way. I dunno. Obviously the results won't be immediate. It'll be a number of years (Interview).

John demonstrates a deep emotional struggle with the shift towards capitalist practices. In the face of his failure to convince senior management that this shift will compromise the principles of the organisation, John is "always thinking that I'm gunna leave". I have already referred to how staff get by with low incomes on the energy provided by the knowledge they are working in something they believe in. But, as explained in the previous section, when political climates change so to do the practices on the ground. In these moments, the belief system is shaken, and staff become far more conscious of their sacrifices, as if the black and white romance suddenly turns to colour, and the inadequacy of the material objects surrounding them becomes clear. In moments such as these John would suggest that he simply could not "afford to go on like this" (Field notes). The room would feel uncomfortable, as we each began to notice signs of deprivation. I would remember in these

moments that , like those he is helping, John too is a motivated individual from a disadvantaged group. Despite this discomfort however, John was not leaving. He still felt tied to his initial motivations for joining HCVS, especially as these were recalled with each new service user, even if he knew these motivations were being compromised in practice.

Yet managers see good reasons for operating more like a business. James tells me:

I think some people think...my gut feeling is that some people think we need to be a bit more business savvy, and maybe it's not necessarily a bad thing because it will maybe improve quality...

...It's always been a bit of a difficult thing so sometimes with free training for example, people don't always appreciate that... when there was free [training], people might, you might get 20 people who book onto the training but then only 10 people show up on the day because it's not any financial loss to them, so it's a bit of shame: the finance becomes so dominant in the relationship (Interview).

Organisations can feel like they are wasting money if those they are trying to help choose not to show up. They figure that by charging money they will be tying their beneficiaries into a contract and incentivising them to show up. Having this capitalist logic at work on the front line ensures that services are not wasted.

This difference between frontline staff and managers suggests that face to face contact with deprivation creates an awareness of the negative consequences of charging for services.

### *Conclusion*

A number of HCVS staff are critical of capitalist inequality, yet rather than directly challenging the system, they think of ways of working with it. This may mean accumulating a little private wealth before coming to work in charity, it may mean focusing on the symptoms of inequality, or it may mean changing the practices of the organisation itself so that rather than being provided for free, services are sold. While some staff were extremely critical and uncomfortable with this change, even threatening to leave, the management itself seemed comfortable with the shift, even suggesting that the introduction of charges would ensure greater responsibility on the part of those that register. There is a lack of recognition here that the nature of the community being created changes with the economic context. What was a gift becomes a supply for a demand. In this context, community is something that develops in a contractual, supply and demand relationship.

Yet as in the previous section, it needs to be remembered that there are pre-contractual grounds for these contractual behaviours. Frontline staff are not primarily motivated by holding onto a job, even if this need has come to shape their practice. Managers do not offer services *because* these make money,

but rather feel forced to charge for them on account of limited funds. Frontline staff and managers alike are motivated by personal grievances, sympathy, their own happiness derived from serving others; they are motivated by equality and by practices associated with this. What is more, they appear for the most part aware of how their motivations are undermined by the adoption of capitalist logic. The problem lies in the fact that even as they are aware of these influences, they are not challenging them. This leads to a much broader question about why it is that we can be fully conscious of our values being undermined and yet allow it to happen. Is it the feeling that there is no alternative?

## Conclusion

Ostensibly the reflection on the history of CVSs place them as near representatives of the materialisation and secularisation of social service provision, and of the motivation of volunteers. CVSs are rooted in the work of Christian social reformer Thomas Hancock Nunn in the early years of the 20th century. But in their role as intermediary institutions, CVSs have appeared as products of changes from both above and below. Prochaska characterises postwar social policy as "egalitarian and materialistic", with a tendency to coopt (Prochaska 2006: 160). This was a period in which "an unwitting public was swimming 'into the Great Leviathan's mouth'" (Prochaska 2006: 156). By the 70s "charities were increasingly 'secular and materialist in outlook rather than inspired by the desire to rescue or evangelise'", and more recently "British volunteers cite altruism, filling spare time, or the need for a more

imposing CV as reasons for participation". CVSs have evolved to recognise and harness this change (Prochaska 2006: 170; 171). According to Prochaska, the result is that today "the use of charities to do the government's bidding may be seen as the elusive 'Third Way', a devolved form of government control that turns the intermediary institutions of civil society into agencies of the state through contracts and financial control" (Prochaska 2006: 166).

Ostensibly, HCVS seems to reflect this shift, adopting very similar practices. Motivations were often to do with personal fulfilment or improving a CV. Yet Prochaska's crude depiction of these motivations does not take into account the pre-contractual sources from which they draw. The importance of personal grievances in motivating action sounds self-referential, but this grievance inspires sympathy for others' misfortune, without any obvious narrative underpinning this solidaristic sentiment. Similarly the idea that serving others makes people happy sounds an entirely self-serving motivation, but again this is to ignore that this happiness is derived from solidaristic sentiments. Ignoring these pre-contractual sources is unhelpful, because it distracts us from questioning what kind of moral culture inspires the solidaristic sentiments. Perhaps a Christian spirit of association is indeed declining, but this is not to say that other cultures are not lurking under the surface. In the case of HCVS, this spectre is the idea of equality. It was seen that equality acts as a mode of the transcendental social, providing an imagined future that creates the possibility of critically relating to the material world, working its way into practices.

It is equally worth questioning whether the inability to recognise the generative potential of its own ideational motivations is down to a lack of religious literacy. It was suggested at the beginning of the chapter that members were either hostile to or ignorant of religion. It is possible that this illiteracy shuts down imaginative engagement with the social and political outworkings of religion and ideology. At any rate, if policy is to engage groups like HCVS on the grounds of these outworkings, it seems best to leave loaded words like religion to one side.

Still, there is no obvious awareness of the notion of equality forming an imagined community that can be self-motivating, carving out a life of service irrespective of the state or market. Yet this absence may only be the result of an unawareness of the possibility of conceptualising their own ideas in this way, inclusively constructing them and developing rituals around them. This very real yet underutilised presence of equality suggests that the difference between CTL and HCVS is not necessarily one of category but of potency and reflexivity.

HCVS seemed equally susceptible to becoming an arm of the state or a product of the market. Not only was HCVS taking on government contracts, but also uncritically adopting government policy, as well as in one case imposing local government bureaucracy on other organisations. Very little was seen by way of leadership development. Where skills training was observed, it was treated as a service which would soon be purchased by clients. HCVS

was similarly prone to being shaped from the ground up, with no clear policy as to the kinds of organisations it sought to develop, and operating on a first come, first served basis.

The case of HCVS does not fit neatly with the postliberal critique of the loss of shared transcendent values leading to instrumentalisation, and the assumed necessity of either state or market. While there appeared to be an absence of shared ideas of the good, solidaristic sentiments remained. It did appear that these sentiments drew on the idea of equality, and that the limited way in which this had been drawn out undermined its potency and consistency. But no causal link between HCVS's secularity and its adoption of these tendencies is observed. Perhaps their drifting between state and market was down to a lack of resilience amongst members. But equally, perhaps they lacked creativity, skills of governance, or inspiration. Perhaps their own structural position had become a self-fulfilling prophecy, stifling imagination concerning radical community practice. Of course, the question then emerges as to whether the structural position itself is symptomatic of a secular worldview in which only the state or market can be conceived as constitutive of common agency. Certainly Andrew Rowe argued as long ago as 1978 that CVSs should develop their own ideologies of empowerment, and should rely less on paid staff and more on volunteers, so the need for change is not unprecedented. Why HCVS has not gone this way is uncertain.

## Chapter 9: Case study III: Faith-based Regeneration Network

I became interested in the Department for Communities and Local Government funded Faith-based Regeneration Network because, after a long period of secularisation in policy-making, it represented a renewed interest in the role of religion in the public sphere.

This seemed an interesting case study, since it appeared to offer a measured response to postliberalism in a diverse landscape: it recognised the important role of religion in the public sphere, but saw that simply reviving the old religious landscape was neither practical nor desirable. Instead, FbRN followed the multi-faith paradigm, seeking to include all faiths and none in developing a socially active society.

Once again, this section opens with a short context for the establishing of FbRN. It then seeks to unravel the constituting factor of common agency. And finally, it explores common agency in terms of political structures and economic context.

### Context

Adam Dinham explains that the multi-faith paradigm emerges out of a dual context: on the one hand, a neoliberal context in which faith groups are seen as “repositries of resources – staff, buildings, volunteers, networks, money – which could be deployed to the social good”; on the other, in a post 9/11 and

7/7 context, as potential sources of cohesion or division, depending on how they are engaged (Dinham 2012b: 577).

While it is important to keep these influences in mind, *Face to Face, Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*, the founding document associated with the multi-faith paradigm, demonstrates an awareness of the potential of faith to revive a shared spirit of association, whilst recognising that religion has significantly changed since we last paid attention to its role. Faith groups are seen as providing “leadership in organising their communities to be active” by “linking the development of citizenship to the beliefs and teachings of faith traditions” (DCLG 2008: 2014). Alongside this, the document suggests that “English society is now more diverse than ever before” and acknowledges “diverse stories about the different role of religion and belief in individuals’ every day lives” (ibid 2008: 2013).

Following *Face to Face, Side by Side*, DCLG provided funding to Regional Development Agencies to develop multi-faith networks, as well as to FbRN, which regarded itself as intermediary infrastructure organisation for numerous other bodies.

Dinham questions whether multi-faith organisations are really equipped to play the role of reviving a shared spirit of association, since their tendency is to draw on the good will of faith actors that are already in existence, drawing

especially on those with “openness and readiness already to engage with people different to themselves” (Dinham 2012b: 579). Dinham adds:

In the end, the multifaith paradigm...has no religious creed, buildings, explicit practices, or formal leaders...Multi-faith practices risk constituting a parallel world running alongside ‘real’ faith communities, seeming to respond to policy hopes but unable to bring constituencies of faith with them. To this extent the multi-faith paradigm remains a construct of policy hopefulness. In terms of hope for what, the fit between the vision for a multi-faith society and being a multi-faith body is one in which the New Labour government turns out to have been unambitious anyway – largely limiting its hopes to making efforts to accept there is plurality and preventing people from falling out with each other; and harnessing faith groups to provide services. (Dinham 2012b: 586).

This idea of a lack of a “creed” and “explicit practices”, and the associated inability to “bring constituencies of faith with them” provides a fitting context for the purposes of my research, and a useful place to begin the exploration of FbRN.

### **Constituting factor of common agency**

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the Christian and unreligious social movements act as bookends for a spectrum that includes a number of nuanced positions. This section explores the perspectives provided by

employees in a multifaith social movement, which provides greater opportunity to complicate the ideas.

*Faith as the last bastion of association, bringing constituencies with them*

FbRN's stated aim is to have all faith communities participating fully in civic life. They drew on this goodwill of such communities for their own survival too. When I joined the organisation, they were freely using office space in a converted rectory in Vauxhall. Faith groups are regarded as a last resource of social solidarity in the face of declining institutional affiliation:

...One of the great gaps in our society is the absence of the trade union movement, which, in the 70s, was still very strong. Ummm and which was still a force which could inspire people. It's hard, now, to talk about the Labour movement, the trade union movement, as something that would inspire people. Now, if it exists at all, it's just about protecting certain rights. But not about inspiring people to do, humm, to take action in the world...

...And, you know, an organisation that is imploding at the moment - the cooperative movement. Yeah the cooperative movement inspired people for, what, 200 years? (Interview)

Although the past role of Christianity in developing a shared spirit of association is not acknowledged, like Prochaska, Gary is working out of the

context of a lost impetus for social action, and believes that faith has a role in rediscovering this impetus. This is especially interesting in terms of mechanic-organic solidarity distinction made by Durkheim. For Gary, one must draw on mechanic ideas to develop the organic solidarity associated with trade unions. Gary also thinks policy makers recognise this role. Explaining why DCLG was interested in funding organisations like FbRN, he said:

...I think uuu disenchantment ummm with err other voices in the public...um square, disenchantment with politicians, journalists, with others, and you're looking for, you know, who is there who is talking about public ethics and it...seems to be, well faith communities  
(Interview)

In a manner reminiscent of Campbell and Putnam's research (2010), faith is regarded as the last bastion of social capital, and as having an important role to play in rebuilding it. Faith is also regarded as having the ability to restore public trust in institutions more generally.

Notwithstanding this stress on the importance of faith, the majority of FbRN literature is written from a secular perspective. Faith sounds like a resource, rather than an idea of the good to be explored. Unlike at CTL, where a clear idea of the good was discussed and cultivated amongst members through various activities, developing a sense of belonging, becoming and participation, at FbRN, there was an almost secular separation between ideas of the good, and the actions that needed to be taken. In my time at the

organisation, it was always quite uncomfortable asking how the organisation wanted to transform society, since such an agenda seemed to be perceived as antithetical to the only limited answer that could be given: “all faith communities participating fully in civic life”. I found it constantly surprising that despite being creative, intelligent and critical as individuals, *as employees of FbRN*, there was a collective failure of imagination about what it was they were trying to achieve. For the most part the secular bracketing of ideas of the good and pluralism are perceived as going hand in hand. This begins to feel like a paradox: the role of ideas of the good in cultivating a spirit of belonging, becoming and participation is considered vital to developing a shared spirit of association, even as its role within the organisation itself, in defining its agenda, developing belonging, transforming the public sphere, is relatively neglected.

Just as multi-faith ideas seemed to be absent from literature and practices, so multi-faith ideas may have been on the minds of those at the top, but did not seem to inspire lower level staff. Amongst lower level staff, a number of mono-faith and instrumental motivations can be observed for working with FbRN. Sometimes these monofaith motivations coincide with the mutlifaith ideal, other times they are instrumental and correspond to the structural position of FbRN, but at other times they are entirely at odds with FbRN, and cause problems in terms of staff motivation and loyalty.

Dominic was strongly motivated by his Zoroastrian faith. He claimed that this faith could not be separated from mutlifaith action, since the former demanded

the latter: “it’s not one or the other; it’s part of the whole” (Interview). Yet despite a lot of questioning, Dominic failed to acknowledge a distinction between working with fellow Zoroastrians to engage in multifaith work, and working with a multifaith organisation. As FbRN had lost funding, Dominic would soon be leaving.

The desire to improve the connections between his own faith and government was also an important motivation for Dominic’s joining FbRN.

It was a step up from working in a monofaith community, to branch out into interfaith, to share good practices, to learn, to disseminate knowledge, it’s a two-way process, and another attractive aspect was it was about communicating with government. So that also was a learning curve: not only supplying evidence-based information to government to inform policy, but also learning what government policy was about on this subject (Interview).

From this perspective, the idea of multifaith does not appear to have traditions or narratives of its own that draw members in; rather, multifaith seems to be primarily recognised as a policy paradigm, and an opportunity to develop skills and contacts. This same motivation was reflected in FbRN members, who tended to see the organisation less as a movement than as a resource that might help them acquire skills or funding (Field notes).

Rather than being put down entirely to a shortcoming in the multi-faith idea generally speaking, in part the lack of motivation around multi-faith needs to be put down to a lack of opportunities for developing the concept. Dominic adds:

FbRN has been inspired by people of faith so those values I've mentioned, the people working in it, have already brought, it's not that clearly defined, but the idea of social action is defined because it's there. So it's not that difficult for the trustees. In the end, we're paid staff, so we don't have to be people of faith, and you're implementing the policies set by trustees, or the directors. If you don't like it, you leave. But that is the role of your bosses (Interview).

Dominic's description suggests that the faith component of FbRN is limited to the values formulated by the trustees. Outside of this arena, very little space or time is devoted to the inclusion of others in the development of theology, and no obvious sense of belonging emerges. From my limited time at the organisation, no such opportunities arose, except where these were created by me. By discussing individual's faith motivations, and how these connected up with those of colleagues, and by poking at various ways in which this may or may not create a sense of belonging, I was myself indulging, and drawing participants into, the very processes of meaning and belonging making that I was there to explore.

The absence of these opportunities for meaning and belonging making is especially pronounced when one hears Claire's attitude towards FbRN. For Claire, although she is motivated by her faith to undertake social action, her work in FbRN is not part of that:

I personally have a faith commitment, but I do quite a lot of other things in relation to that, and FbRN is primarily work rather than a faith expression, but there are a lot of other things I do that are a faith expression (Interview).

Yet despite the absence of any clear allegiance to multi-faith theology, Claire does appear to be inspired by the practices associated with multi-faith action:

it has been really interesting for me because a lot of the stuff I've done has been quite monofaith. So it's been interesting to go into an organisation that is resolutely, almost egalitarian faith-wise. There's no sense of priority in terms of faith...

...I really like the way the trustees are really collaborative and cooperative. I think I've learned a lot from that perspective. (Interview).

Although she was not with the organisation for faith reasons, Claire was inspired by certain practices that seemed to represent cooperation across difference.

Despite being inspired to engage in multi-faith work, in the case of Dominic, or mono-faith social action, in the case of Claire, both appeared to be engaged with FbRN on a primarily instrumental level, whether to serve the calling of their own faith, to address the skills deficit of that faith, or simply for the money. This point is underscored by the fact that both were leaving the organisation as funding ran out.

Opportunities for cultivating a sense of belonging were further restricted by the way the organisation worked. Despite having fixed office space, FbRN staff worked primarily remotely. The result was that very little time was spent face-to-face discussing the organisation's values and its shortcomings, as one might expect in an ordinary office environment.

*It's the social change that's the driver for me; not the interfaith encounter*

Gary perceives an important role for faith in restoring a shared spirit of association. While this sentiment is reflected in his colleagues, multifaith generally, and FbRN's ethos specifically, does not appear to inspire that spirit of association. In fact, it is not obvious that developing a multifaith theology is part of FbRN's aim. Like CTL, Gary shows an awareness of the tendency of faith, especially interfaith dialogue, to become focused on discourse and lose sight of action. This perhaps provides a second explanation for the aforementioned absence of faith discourse in FbRN literature. Distinguishing between interfaith and multi-faith, Gary suggests that it is typical for those involved in interfaith to say...

..."no we don't do social action...we do the kind of engagement style theological stuff but we don't do social action" (Interview).

For Gary on the other hand...

...it's the social change that's the driver for me; not the interfaith encounter...it's not necessarily at all for me, that the driver is umm I wanna get to know my Christian neighbour...ummm buuut if we are all passionate about making some kind of change together, then yes I wanna do that with them, but with others as well (Interview).

The stress on social change over any kind of interfaith encounter does not mean that faith does not play a role in the world that FbRN is trying to create; rather, what it highlights is this same social boundary construction exhibited by the CTL against faith as escapology. Again, a post-Marxist analysis has been imbibed whereby those that "don't do social action" are belittled and othered as doing "the kind of engagement style theological stuff". As already suggested in the previous subsection, however, potentially this distancing from interfaith dialogue creates problems of its own, since creating shared narratives might form a basis for shared action. Gary himself demonstrates an awareness of this point further down.

Finally, it is also worth noting that in my time at the organisation very little by way of "doing" social action was observable. I often felt a sense of

awkwardness that as a participant there was very little for my to participate in. When I was offered work, this tended to represent a development made possible by my presence as a skilled researcher. I was no longer exploring FbRN but rather what FbRN might do with a researcher like me.

*Monofaith, multifaith and secular motivation*

Thus far FbRN has appeared to frame its actions in a manner similar to CTL. Yet it has been suggested that FbRN's avoidance of ideas of the good limits its capacity to generate a spirit of association. Notwithstanding this point, FbRN does display a number of creative and interesting strategies for cultivating a spirit of association across difference.

My observations suggest that FbRN staff tended to be simultaneously inspired by their own faith, by multifaith discourses, by what might be called secular sacreds like ideas of social inclusion or equality, and by instrumental motives.

As part of a multifaith organisation, clearly one's individual faith cannot play the same role as it might in a monofaith organisation in calling people to action. This does not, however, rule out the telling of stories particular to one's personal faith; rather it makes the process far more complicated.

when I go into a room full of people uhum, I can talk religion and I can talk, you know, from my own experience, you know, whatever kind of room full of...an organisation, mixed bunch of representatives, you know,

I can talk from a position of someone who's actively involved in a religious [tradition] (Interview).

I asked Gary whether he appealed to stories of his own faith, or tried to find common experiences:

Both. I think it's both. I think, um that's only me so...as I have in this conversation, I talk about specifics, I, my experience, because it's my experience, but I also do have a broader experience, which huum has been through working with people from other faith traditions and people from no faith tradition. Umm and I suppose it's kind of the previous answers in the previous conversations, I reflect my experience that

**Tim**

And is it more helpful, you know, working with people of other faiths or of no faith, to put your faith to one side?

**Gary**

I don't know. You know, what I do, I'm very upfront, I'm very out as a Jew. Even years ago uhuum, when I think the interfaith world was much lower profile, you know I would be, and where, I suppose partly it's forced upon you, when, during the 80s, in the antiapartheid movement, and shelter the homeless charity, had mutlifaith committees, my

recollection of both of those organisations is that what they call their multifaith committee was by and large a dozen Christians and me. And I'm very confident in saying "I'm a Jew" [laughing] so...but that's my way, other people do it in different ways (Interview).

Gary clearly sees his faith as important as a way of starting conversations. It provides him with a narrative context. He draws on his experience "because it's my experience", rather than because it is deemed more worthy than anybody else's. Gary also feels it is important to talk from his own faith position because it is one of the many that has often been excluded in a predominantly Christian culture. Speaking from one's faith position thus both provides a narrative device, a way of explaining one's context, and also gives that faith a stake in the conversation. In some sense, Gary is placing faith in others to understand him from his context, and to translate into their own context those ideas that make sense.

This same translation process can also be seen the other way around. When I spoke to Dominic about different modes of inspiration I had encountered at CTL, I happened to mention bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth as an example:

Yeah I wouldn't say bringing the Kingdom of God on earth but it is parallel ideas to improve the world because in Zoroastrianism, it is in essence that idea, because the idea of Kingdom of God, or as we say heaven, which is light, which is the realm of God where everything's

meant to be perfect, and our idea of God is perfect otherwise we wouldn't be in the business that we are, we're trying to replicate this in the world, so the Zoroastrian world outlook is this: that the physical and spiritual world was created by God, and then it was polluted by evil, and in Zoroastrianism evil is an independent entity; it's not part of God, and the creation was created to assist God to improve the world. So there's an interdependence between the creator which is God, and the creation, especially the human being, to bring together - that's the covenant, it's a partnership, a togetherness, to bring about the change. Without the active participation of human beings, namely by doing good thoughts, good works and good deeds, that wouldn't happen. So the kingdom of God, or in another way the battle between good and evil would not be won by God and by the forces of good if it wasn't for the active participation of human beings doing good (Interview).

This lengthy tract demonstrates the complex way in which Dominic, who believes in multi-faith social action, is capable of hearing language from other faiths and translating them into his own language. This was also the most enthusiastic and animated part of my lengthy interview with Dominic. He *enjoyed* the translation process, since it provided an opportunity to discuss his beliefs at length. I noticed similar enjoyment in work from an interfaith group that FbRN provided meeting rooms for. For many of those involved, the interfaith process was not simply their first opportunity to share their faith with someone of a different faith or none; more than this, it was their first opportunity to explore their own faith and its implications for the way a public

life should be lived. In this sense, the act of translation might not be perceived as an act of oppression. Rather than forcing ideas into a language in which they no longer make sense, it is a creative experience. Perhaps what is important in this regard is not so much the stipulation to translate, but the power relations involved in the translation process. Oppression arises when one feels the need to translate one's faith into a language that undermines that faith, simply in order to receive funding or approval.

It must be acknowledged that this encounter between Dominic and myself was contrived. I was a participant, but also an observer. I was asking questions not as a co-worker but as a researcher. It is thus worth noting again that it is this opportunity to discuss and inclusively develop a shared theology that seems to be lacking. Yet to interpret this as lack is a critically realist claim, since it suggests there are processes at work, or failing to work, of which Dominic himself is either unaware or deliberately dismissive: while Dominic admits there is "very seldom" an opportunity to discuss one's faith, nor does he see FbRN "as an arena for this" (Interview).

The potential for developing a shared spirit of association can be further ascertained by exploring the ability of FbRN employees to make their work relevant to a multi-faith context, one which in reality is intended to include people of all faiths and none. This task is especially difficult because in some sense the umbrella, the multi-faith paradigm, has been developed by policymakers, rather than emerging from the grassroots.

In order to make their individual faith experience more widely relevant, FbRN adopted a number of strategies for constructing imagined communities, or umbrellas, under which a number of people could sit. I identified at least four. The first was value-generalisation. The second was looking for overlapping narratives, like hospitality. The third was secular agendas such as social inclusion. And fourth was the notion of putting a metanarrative to one side in favour of working together practically towards common ends.

The strategy for value-generalisation involved the adoption of a term with a wide appeal, and seeking to broaden this appeal further; namely, faith. Gary tried to open up a wide umbrella around the idea of faith. This meant both being open to minority faiths, and broadening the concept of faith.

For Gary, “who’s a faith, who’s not a faith, who’s allowed in, who’s not allowed to be in...we just don’t get involved with things like that” (Interview). Gary’s approach appears to contradict the Schmittian idea championed by Mouffe that outsiders must be created in order for a political identity to be formed (Schmitt 1922/2006; Mouffe 2007). Instead, the political process is one of bringing the other into the fold. Dominic goes a step further, suggesting that “the interfaith idea is taken for granted” (Interview).

FbRN is very open to and engaged with minority faiths in a way that it acknowledges others are not. Speaking of one group in particular which had a very formal structure of governance, I was told:

Part of it is stuff that we would never get involved with like, who's a faith who's not a faith, who's allowed in, who's not allowed to be in, you know, they've been heavily, over the years, internally lobbied huum that they should accept Pagans, huum Rastafarians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Humanists, hummm and they have resisted it very strongly. So like, the Ahmadiyya they have...they have resisted because...other voices within the Muslim community say "well if they're in, we're out...and you've gotta choose, either them or us" which is...I mean we just don't get involved with things like that so ummm conversations...I had with Mormons recently...precious little doubt Mormons but they're interested in engaging...But I don't have to worry, you know, are they in are they not in? Because we're not, don't have that, kind of representative constitution. If they're interested in doing social action from a faith-based perspective huum or a belief-based perspective and they're not proselytising or huum denigrating any other group then, you know, there's a space for them here (Interview).

While FbRN sees faiths as a last bastion of social solidarity, it nonetheless takes a deliberately ambiguous stance on what faith is. It is clear that being open to all faiths and none is never as easy as it sounds because there are a number of complications and disagreements between and within faith communities, based on theology and power. The mention of forms of governance moreover indicates that liberality is not a mere choice: it has to be written into the way an organisation runs, and often involves ignoring the authority of formal faith representatives in favour of building networks “on a

personal basis". Yet, as will be discussed more in the next section, ignoring the authority of formal faith representatives is precarious, since they tend to be the ones governments are interested in talking to.

In terms of broadening the concept of faith, Gary summarised for me the kind of message he has been trying to give at public events in which faith is not a key element:

it's not just faith people who have a belief system, we all do, you know, sometimes it's explicit, sometimes it might be driven by a faith tradition, sometimes it might be driven by a political understanding of the world, but we all, if we're community workers, trying to do some good, or trying to do something, nearly all of us, either consciously or less consciously, we are motivated by some kind of worldview, ideology or belief-system, and...at the very least we should be honest to ourselves and try and understand what it is for ourselves but much more, to use that in a positive way in the work that we're doing. You know I'm a very proud [laughing] I'm a very "out" Jew (Interview).

In his generalisation of the idea of faith, Gary was also suggesting that honesty about one's faith, and acting upon it were intimately linked. FbRN sees enabling faith and non-faith actors to reflect on their deep commitments as fundamental to being critically aware. Reflecting on one's deep commitments is also part of being socially responsible. In a reflective practice tool they developed, the organisation suggests that "most people operate on a

day-to-day basis” with a “theory-in-use”, which may be “unconscious” and “quite distinct” from our “espoused theory”, that is, “the conscious answer we give when someone asks us what beliefs or ideas shape our work”. They go on to suggest that “without beliefs and ideas our work is groundless” (FbRN 2012). So reflecting on core beliefs is a means of developing what Chris Baker calls belonging and becoming (Baker 2013). Yet, as suggested before, the particular theory on which FbRN bases its actions lacks critical and inclusive engagement.

On top of this lack of reflection, what remains problematic about this value-generalisation around the idea of faith, considered universally, is that, as was evident in the discussion of HCVS, there remains significant hostility towards the idea of faith. While perhaps this hostility can be overcome through education, and the improvement of literacy, the question remains whether it is not more productive to begin in a place that is less contested, and less evocative of prejudicial sentiments. Despite being broad in its interpretation of faith, FbRN is nonetheless seeking to impose an umbrella, rather than inclusively develop shared ideals.

With the umbrella around faith communities constructed, it becomes possible for Gary to draw on his own tradition, and to extrapolate this out to others, and hence a network of overlapping narratives begins to flourish:

And...if you've been saying, so I'm writing, you know, I'm writing this flyer... And one of the concepts, one of the simple things we want to

encourage people to do, is to open their doors, and offer hospitality. Now if I say that to people of a religious tradition, they get that immediately. So there's a kind of code

**Tim**

What will they get specifically sorry?

**Gary**

They get that if you use the word hospitality, it's about engaging with the other, humm, possibly taking risks, humm, doing something that is more than inviting a couple of your mates round for a couple, for a cup of tea. So, you know, within the Jewish tradition, the image that we have, it's a, it's a code or shorthand. When I say the word hospitality to any Jew, or any knowledgeable Jew, their brain will immediately go to the story of Abraham, and the tradition that his tent was open on all sides so that he could welcome strangers coming from all directions. So all I need to do is write the word hospitality and immediately they're going into a mode of thought...it's about strangers, it's about people coming from different directions; it means all other kinds of things more than just the word hospitality. So I think because religious traditions have been used to talking about ideas like this, for hundreds and thousands of years, then there's a certain comfort. Now, I suppose the flip side is that the comfort, when I say comfort what I mean is, a comfort talking about difficult

things...big ideas...so, the flip side is that those big ideas might become ummm fixed. Now some people say that's a good thing, some people might say it's not. I think it's possibly not a good thing if it becomes, uheem rigid. That's my personal take on my tradition and other traditions. And that's where the critique of faith traditions, one of the critiques, is about how rigid they are, how stuck they are in past centuries, umm, how they are unable to take on board contemporary big ideas, like equality (Interview).

For Gary, the word hospitality acts as a repository of memories, ideologies and obligations that can inspire people of certain traditions to act. Hospitality is a common denominator, an overlapping consensus that provides a space for talking about the common good. Looking at this strategy from a universal perspective again, the problem here is that it is questionable just how many words, memories, ideologies and obligations are *already* shared. Although language is being treated as fluid and constructive, the dedication to a particular word such as faith is equally suggestive of that word as corresponding to a reality to which some are unable or unwilling to assent. Equally, one must question whether those logics that are already shared in the public sphere as it is are not simply replicating that sphere rather than transforming it, amplifying the good and the bad alike.

The third umbrella used at FbRN is the idea of social justice. For Gary, not only was social justice his initial inspiration for being involved, but it served as the only grounds on which he excluded other organisations and people. A

group could only be excluded from FbRN if it itself excluded other groups and people.

On top of these creative strategies for broadening the metanarrative, finding overlapping consensuses, and using secular cognates, sits another strategy which eschews metanarrative altogether. This position can be explained by returning to Dominic's intervention regarding FbRN's not being an arena for discussing faith. He continues along similar lines:

That interfaith idea is taken for granted. What you're doing is you are using your faith initiative, but at the same time, like all organisations, there is a structure, an ethos that you're following. Faith or no faith, you are working for an organisation and therefore you are automatically accepting the values of the organisation...

And frankly I don't agree that in interfaith work you should be promoting your faith. Frankly what you're doing is going down the road of proselytising. And that's dangerous because interfaith is based on trust, bonding, bridging and linking. You're initially bonding, and then you're developing trust, and you're coming together to do some work for the common good. But if at the same time you're, let's say you and I are people of two different faiths, or no faith, and let's say I happen to belong to a faith like Zoroastrianism which is one of the world's eight oldest religions going, and you happen to be of another faith and proselytising, frankly to me it's a waste of time: a) I don't need that, I'm quite happy,

and stable in my faith, and part of the interfaith world is about being confident in your own faith so you don't need someone else to tell you why don't you switch over? (Interview)

Multi-faith is not a creed in itself, but rather is taken for granted, and used as a stepping-stone for facilitating the good work of people of faith. Moreover, the multi-faith environment is not an appropriate place to be talking about faith, since to do so risks creating friction within the group. As already stated, what emerges is a paradox whereby those most interested in faith as a last bastion of social solidarity nonetheless fail to find creative ways for faith to reimagine the public sphere.

### *Conclusion*

FbRN has developed a number of strategies for creating an imagined community through which shared action can be taken. Yet it is questionable how strong any of these pull factors could be relative to the strength of one's own tradition. As funding began to run out for Gary, it seemed that his staff slowly left him. They did not give up voluntary work altogether, but returned to their own communities. This seems to reflect a wider trend amongst multi-faith organisations (Dinham 2012b). As I watched this happen, it became apparent that multifaith was not a social movement, a shared theological experiment driving a social change, but a funded project that had run its course. This observation links well with Dinham's (2012b) point that there is no multi-faith religious creed. I would perhaps be less pessimistic, and suggest that while

there is no multifaith religious creed, given the umbrellas constructed by Gary, just one person, it is not inconceivable that a concerted effort from like-minded individuals could drive a movement. Each of Gary's strategies had the potential to be fleshed out and given a greater opportunity to flourish. However, each also requires critical scrutiny. The process of value-generalisation around the concept of faith remains limited, since faith as a term, no matter how broadly conceived in the abstract, can inspire hostility, as reflections from HCVS demonstrated. Similarly, the overlapping consensus sought in ideas like hospitality is limited to terms already agreed upon. It arguably fails to see metanarrative and indeed language itself as a creative process for transformising the world we inhabit. Similarly, using already existing secular narratives like social justice may simply be falling back on words and ideas that already fail to capture the public imagination, and that are anyway contested. Finally, and most strikingly, dropping metanarrative altogether denies the place of ontology and its refication in creative language in reimagining who we are and why we are here. If social actors drop metanarrative, it is worth asking whether they are dropping language too, and again, rather than reimagining the public sphere and its problems, end up seeking to solve problems that have already been defined for them by somebody else. Taken together, all of these potential pitfalls seem to be indicative of an organisation operating within a secular, liberal frame. Where there is difference, it must be put to one side rather than creatively overcome. The organisation draws from traditions that are already present as if they are immutable resources, rather than creatively and inclusively building new narratives. What seems to be lacking from FbRN, ironically, was a creative

process of inclusive ideational construction reified through transformative action.

### **Political structures and common agency**

Thus far it has been suggested that although FbRN arises out of a context in which faith is regarded as a last bastion of association, its staff draw on monofaith, multifaith and secular ideologies both for their own motivation, and to cultivate interest outside of the organisation. I suggest that the multi-faith vision has not been fully realised, and so its ability to cultivate a spirit of association is limited, as can be seen clearly in its inability to retain staff as it loses funding. And I suggest that the multilayered shortcomings are best encapsulated as a focus on tradition as an immutable well to draw from, rather than as a socially constructive process.

In this section, I explore how the multi-faith vision interacts with participants' perceptions of political structures, and the role of these structures in developing common agency. It must be taken into account that FbRN arises out of an agenda of community empowerment, but was funded primarily by regional and national government. This can create an ambivalence on the part of participants that is difficult to navigate.

*The politics of faith-based action in a secular public sphere*

Despite having been government funded, FbRN managed to maintain a faith structure that is entirely at odds with the instinct of secular governments; namely, at odds with the instinct to deal with faiths through designated faith leaders deemed representative of functional constituencies (Dinham 2011). This position has proved useful in maintaining flexibility, but detrimental to maintaining influence.

Referring to another multifaith organisation, Gary explained to me that

...it's got, it's gone more...of the...route of...complicated representational governance, whereas we have stuck with a loose humm form of governance in...all of our trustees are there on a personal basis only. We write into our constitution that there will be trustees from 9 faith traditions...but apart from that they can be anybody, they're not representative of anybody, they're not elected or appointed by their faith traditions in any way which is ummm, which, when we need to lobby ministers, we've discovered is quite a weakness

**Tim**

Because you want to say "this person represents..."

**Gary**

Yeah...or we want to be able to ring up the archbishop and say "come on"...this is what the [other multi-faith organisation] did...and have done in the last few weeks, you know they've rung up the senior members of each...community and said..."look, umm you've now gotta come through for us", but we don't have that direct line so...there's a weakness, but the strength is...we are a flexible organisation that can...pretty much choose to do...what we want to do, within the realms of funding (Interview).

Gary's account demonstrates how establishment prejudice in favour of faith leaders, deemed representative of functional constituencies, can undermine organisations that, rightly according to the literature, reject such structures on the grounds that much of faith is horizontal, and that no single leader can be deemed representative of any given faith (Dinham 2011). In particular, the absence of this relationship with so-called leaders means that it is difficult to lobby government when and where necessary.

Gary's account regarding Ahmadiyya Muslims and Mormons also offers implications for policy making more broadly, in that when organisations begin to operate at regional or national levels, the question of who represents a faith, and which faiths to represent, and how to do this without offending other faiths, actually stifles grassroots innovation for the common good.

The account also offers wider implications still when we extend faith more broadly, as Gary does, to include belief, or perhaps further still, as Gary has

elsewhere in meetings with unreligious groups, to include ideology or values. On the one hand, it seems unfair to those without faith that faith groups should have a privileged place at the table. But if representing a designated faith is organisationally difficult given the fluid nature of belief, then establishing representatives of certain values seems almost unimaginable.

For FbRN, this complication regarding how to represent faith leads to a complex relationship to the state. On the one hand, staff are complicit in accepting and indeed reifying at the grassroots level an idea of the state as secular. On the other hand, a primary function of the organisation is the feeding up to the level of policy the grassroots experiences and struggles of faith-based action in a predominantly secular public sphere.

Gary's attitude towards the state was especially confused. On the one hand, like CTL, he could be seen to regard the state as having an important role in embodying and administering a process of national gift exchange, filtered through the prism of secular equality.

I don't think there's one truth. You know, I'm not - there are some religious people for who that's a very important, central core to their religious belief, and I don't think there is just one truth

**Tim**

So do you think there's some people who can't do interfaith, because of what they believe?

**Gary**

Yeah

**Tim**

But it's just something, what, that the state can't fund? Or, or, or do you think they can?

**Gary**

I think the state funds things that...I mean this is a secularist argument...any organisation that gets funding by the state has to...meet the same criteria...and, if for example, any organisation allows exclusion, and if that organisation is therefore not able to meet that criteria...(Interview).

One can read in Gary's attitude not only the assertion of the state as being the most appropriate arbitrator of which groups should and should not receive funding, but also the expectation of secularity on the part of the state in the way it makes its decisions. A similar perspective was offered by Dominic. When I asked him if it was important for government to cultivate "some sort of faith or values" in order to promote the public good, Dominic replied that "no single faith has a monopoly on good or evil. So the government promoting one faith does get the government into trouble" (Interview). Although numerous discussions saw both come round to the idea of cultivating some sort of faith or values towards the public good, this was not their natural

position. Instead, interest in the multi-faith paradigm seemed to be more to do with social inclusion within a predominantly secular public sphere:

People of faith are human beings, taxpayers, so what is wrong with using a faith based organisation to further civic projects, which is what faith-based action is. Why is it only "secular" bodies can do that? (Interview).

This positioning again points to how FbRN staff, despite having a strong regard for how their individual faith challenges contemporary society, which is regarded as capitalist and individualist, nonetheless are unable or unwilling to see a multi-faith body as collectively challenging these ideas. Here it appears that this is related to the perceived role of the state, and the importance of secularity for the equal treatment of all faiths. The adoption of this principled position with respect to the state and secularity seems precarious, since although the state could embody certain principles, those principles could also act as a prism, misshaping the way that the social landscape is understood. FbRN is itself dependent on state funding, and staff thinking is in line with the current ideology, perhaps lacking a critical and creative voice. Instead, it simply seeks the inclusion of faith groups within this relatively uncritically understood public sphere.

Staff also admired the way the state was able to avoid questions as to the good by deferring such discussions, and the arguments these entail, to the local level. As Claire explained:

When the government was funding FbRN, the idea that they wouldn't fund certain projects unless they were multi-faith, so it was almost about removing any issues about a dominant faith group in a community by saying "sort it out amongst yourselves and then we'll give you the money" (Interview).

By holding money to communities as an incentive, the government is deemed capable of shaping diverse communities towards the discovery of a common good. Yet on this level also, there is no data to suggest that the link between government money and multi-faith cooperation is causal, and it may be that the money attracts groups that are already working within, or at least comfortable with the idea of, a multi-faith framework. It is moreover worth asking, from a post-liberal perspective, whether a community created through financial incentive is indeed a community after all. For Milbank, such a community would constitute a pseudo-sittlichkeit (Milbank 1990/2006: 167). Here a distinction has to be drawn between a common good and common interest. Yet perhaps a further distinction needs to be drawn between money offered for the direct benefit of the recipients, and money offered to facilitate actions for the public good.

This apparent interpolation and cultivation of secularity from the top downwards is nonetheless tempered by an attempt to feed the experiences of faith communities upwards. Prior to my time at the organisation, much work had been done in collaboration with academics to produce documents that

simultaneously challenge policy narratives while providing groups with the opportunity to better understand and work with these narratives. This role was not merely perfunctory. Documents such as *Faith as social capital: connecting or dividing?* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2006) and *Faith based social action and the Inter Faith Framework* (Dinham et al. 2008), developed in conjunction with FbRN, played an integral role in shaping *Face to Face Side by Side* (DCLG 2008), the key policy document for government collaboration with faith groups in community development.

In my time at the organization, this work continued, with Gary asking me to put together case studies of various faith organisations. I was asked to telephone these organisations and ask them what they were trying to achieve, the main challenges they faced and the kinds of resources they needed. Yet part of this work seemed to rely on my own research expertise and communication skills. I was not working with already existing members but rather found myself trying to build relationships with other faith networks. This research also relied heavily on communicating with faith groups that were already visible, and discoverable via the internet. The result was that Christian groups were disproportionately represented.

Placed as it was as an intermediary institution, between state and grassroots, FbRN was able to work with a secular ideology to nonetheless slowly realise the full contribution of faith groups. By collaborating with the academy, it was able to challenge policy narratives by using valid research methods to feed information from the grassroots back to the centre. Far more than HCVS,

FbRN not only made policy accessible to the grassroots, but found ways of feeding the feelings of the grassroots back up the chain of command. Yet it also must be acknowledge that the key role I was asked to take on learning from and developing these networks suggests a lack of attention to this work of feeding information upwards. Another way of putting this point is to ask, who would be doing this job in my absence?

### *Becoming an outsider*

I was unfortunate enough as an emotionally involved participant, and lucky enough as a researcher, to see what happened when this complex relationship with the state reached crisis, as state funding stopped and resources slowly depleted.

It has already been stated that FbRN was seen by staff as responding to a general disenchantment with traditional authority in the public sphere. In part due to the loss of funding, this disenchantment was to some extent shared by staff. Gary himself seemed to have adopted a healthy cynicism in relation to conventional politics, understanding how dependent funding was on the whims of particular governments. He claimed that changes in funding and priorities were almost always derived either from ideology or from religiously illiterate reactions to security threats. He would laugh at how arbitrary the process was for choosing groups and people to work with: it was a question of who knew who, and what kind of taste a particular politician or civil servant had (Field notes).

As already mentioned, these negative remarks towards conventional politics have to be read in the context of Gary's organisation losing its funding. In my time with the organisation, it was losing two of its three staff due to the withdrawal of funding.

These changes brought big challenges to the findings already produced in the previous section. What look like appealing strategies for developing a multi-faith spirit of association, are actually heavily dependent on funding. As the state withdrew funding, rather than a movement which happened to have money, FbRN seemed more like money in search of a movement. As staff left, it was key that as a researcher I explored why there was no impetus to keep pushing forwards in hope of further funds in the future. But this was an uncomfortable process. Discussions, which between staff and myself were usually good-natured and reflective, became short and defensive. Moreover, as a participant observer, this situation was putting a lot of pressure on me to take on work for the organisation. With tremendous feelings of guilt, I had to take a step back and remind myself I was there as a researcher.

### *Beyond the state*

Despite an understandable bitterness at the withdrawal of funding by a new government, Gary also saw the loss of funding as an opportunity:

**Tim**

Were there things that you couldn't do when you were getting er [state] money? That you felt you couldn't do

**Gary**

No I don't think so, I mean kind of, in theory it's kind of, idea that you have to be more diplomatic in your critique of government, when you're getting government money. I think...you might be, you know, we can probably be more experimental...so that's to do with policy issues to do with what we can and can't say for example but...if we're not using government money...then we can do whatever we want, we can do things that may or may not work. Ummm if they don't work then...at the moment at least it's only our own money.

**Tim**

Yeah - okay

**Gary**

And you know there's always a relationship with funders, you know all charities have relationships with funders hum and, so I think there are possibly opportunities and a certain degree of freedom if you're not tied

to one significant funder, whether it's government or it's a charitable trust or... (Interview).

While Gary saw an important role for the state, he nonetheless had discovered the hard way how linked up the state is with the whims of politicians and political parties, who often cease successful programmes simply because they were set up under a predecessor. Gary also thought that the influence of the state may have imposed a kind of iron cage without the organisation realising it, and was therefore optimistic about the freedom of the future. He especially reflected on the ability of the organisation to be more critical of the state, and having a “degree of freedom” in not being solely reliant on the state for funds.

### *Conclusion*

The first section suggested that although multi-faith in intention, a number of staff had distinctly monofaith or even instrumental reasons for working with FbRN. It stated that while FbRN had a number of effective multi-faith strategies for social solidarity, these were always drawing on already existing theologies and practices as resources, without attempting to develop new theologies and practices as a community.

This section has suggested that FbRN had an interesting and innovative relationship with the state, on the one hand sharing in a secular ideology, but on the other seeking to feed up the policy ladder those challenges presented

by faith-based action. Yet on the one hand, this work was reliant on me as a researcher, and drew on work by faith groups that were already visible; and on the other, the organisation itself was so dependent on state funding, that this innovative relationship was also extremely precarious. The loss of state funding was equally revealing of the lack of a spirit of association in the organisation, since, as already stated, when funding was lost, so too were staff.

### **Economic context and common agency**

Like HCVS, FbRN initially came into being at the behest of the state. As with HCVS, this may be taken to reflect the absence of a naturally occurring multi-faith infrastructure organisation within a market society. Yet while FbRN is perhaps not a “naturally occurring” entity in a market society, the removal of state funding has precipitated a shift in language and self-perception that actually better reflects market logic.

*Everything is going to contract, even in areas you might imagine would be better served by nonprofit*

Gary is heavily critical of the way in which government policy has shifted to create a capitalist environment whereby grants, shaped largely by the applicant, are replaced with contracts, shaped largely by the commissioner, and where organisations are forced to compete with one another:

everything goes, everything is going to contracts, often private sector contracts, even in areas that you might imagine would be better served by nonprofit: a social enterprise or a charity. Err and that is clearly ideologically driven, and umm from my perspective, very worrying. Even taking out the kind of party political aspects of it, to put the running of public services into the hands of three or four very large corporations seems to me, a kind of worrying trend...

... I'm very unhappy with the state of play because...what's, I mean, our relationships with central government have been distorted over the last two years by the changing funding relationship. So instead, although they still talk the language of collaboration, that faith communities and faith community organisations collaborate, actually by their kind of drip feeding, and holding out little bits of money here, little bits of money there, what they're creating is a quite small market place, quite a competitive market place, where we are competing against each other. And so organisations that would naturally work together are even quite suspicious of each other, because we're not sure what they're doing in relation to bits of money (Interview).

Before it was suggested that the state positively distorts the market, providing services that otherwise would not occur. Here it is suggested that the state has imbibed a competitive logic, adopting structures of governance that encourage organisations that might otherwise cooperate, to compete. The only policy that has worked in the organisation's favour is the Social Value

Act, which requires that when commissioning contracts, public bodies consider social value as a criteria of selection. Charities hope that this will improve their chances against private companies.

It was not only Gary's faith inspiring him here:

**Tim**

Does that challenge you in your faith?

**Gary**

Well, you see I'm still a bit of both. I'm still a bit of the old fashioned socialist which is not necessarily to do with my faith, and a politically active Jew, uhuum so it's inevitable that I'm looking at a...quite a reactionary government through both lenses so that would be...I'm not saying it's just about how my faith, would make me respond to the current policy climate because I'm not

**Tim**

Just a person of faith

**Gary**

Yeah. You look around at what is happening and you respond...I suppose I respond now, if I look at social...social issues, social problems of poverty, polarisation, injustice, human rights, migration, you know, any number of issues, I suppose my default now, when I think about how I respond to it is through a faith lens. That's my, the way that I respond in practise but my perspective is informed from a whole range of other things as well.

For Gary a socialist ideology played an important role in providing him with a critical position against increasingly capitalist policies. It was this legacy of socialism that Gary drew on – not his own faith, and certainly not any multi-faith theology. Dominic is similarly critical of capitalism. Again, the narrative he uses for explaining what has gone wrong is socialist rather than religious, but he sees an important role for faith. At the end of our interview, just as I was about to turn off the recording device, Dominic was provoked by something to discuss how rampant individualism had become in society:

**Tim**

So how do we overcome individualism?

**Dominic**

That's the challenge. And the challenge is partly to do with the direct relationship between the downfall of the Soviet Union and communism, and the rampant capitalism that's gone. When the Berlin wall came down, and the Soviet Union capitulated, communism was...for the

social democratic governments of Europe...they were mindful that if they gloated their wealth, the masses would have a different option, to go to. Of course, the capitulation of the Soviet Union very clearly indicated not only that these governments who were showing the utopian alternative were actually not only bankrupt but also had done gross evil, and they were discredited. Democracy was the alternative. And although democracy has got a long way to go, it's still in my book the better alternative. But in the process, and here I'd link it to the US ethos, with individualism, materialism and capitalism, which is now a universal value. That has created rampant disregard of the have-nots. That the reason people have not is because they're lazy, incompetent, whatever. It's your fault. to a degree it's a shared responsibility. Think of it with something as simple as a phone. It started off as a good thing. A mode of communication. But now you've got the ipad. But you don't need to be shouting down your damn phone in public space, on a bus.

Similarly to Gary, we see a clear discourse around the loss of a socialist alternative, not of faith, as precipitating individualism. I went on to press Dominic directly on the role of faith in overcoming individualism:

**Tim**

So what role does faith play?

**Dominic**

Social responsibility. On a micro level it's a battle between good and evil, or bad, or naughty. What you're doing is naughty. People just don't care, because we all want to live in our space. And it's partly a symptom of the internet, social media, whereby...there's a good side and a negative side. The good side is it offers tremendous communication. But there's a negative in that people are just in their own bubble. By beginning to tackle the symptoms, we're beginning to tackle the wider issues. Things like housing. It used to be a roof over your head rather than an investment. And faith has something to do with it. But the faith leaders today have to speak out. But the risk is they'll be perceived as petty and be ridiculed.

While it is a socialist narrative, specifically the decline of that narrative, that provides the context for the rise of individualism, in a society without a socialist alternative, faiths are seen as playing an interventionist educational role to remind people of public responsibility. Faith groups are deemed well equipped to make such interventions because of their clear distinction between good and evil, not simply as an abstract device, but as a distinction with practical implications for how a life should be lived on a daily basis.

### *Adopting a capitalist logic*

Although Gary is extremely critical of cuts, his attitude towards state funding is ambivalent. As indicated in the previous section, Gary anticipates an interesting future, and suggests the organisation could potentially “become

more of a front line involved directly in or with community organisations rather than the sort of behind the scenes resource that we have been” (Interview). Moreover, Gary suggests that there are some things the organisation can do without money. When setting up the organisation in the first place, there was...

...a strong view amongst most of the people round the table that...until we got funding, there was a limit to what we could do. And I was the minority there...I will take...all the credit uhuuh for saying we got kick back from a particular government fund and you know "oh we'll have to wait another year" and I said "we don't, we can just do stuff...huum we're all connected with our own organisations, we've all got resources even though we're currently not paying anybody, ummm and so we organised a conference...(Interview).

From this perspective, developing a network of people with ideas is more important than receiving state funding, which is regarded as an added bonus. Yet the discussion of undertaking activities to get the organisation off the ground in expectation of funding is one thing, while what to do in the absence of any obvious sources of funding is quite different. When discussing the future, Gary began to sound more like a social entrepreneur.

Inevitably it's worrying. It is worrying because you know, specifically for us, but also for other organisations, faith organisations, and other nonfaith infrastructure, specialist agencies like us, that had some say

with some kind of government agency, these are more or less drying up. Then the question becomes, do any of these organisations, do we, fill a niche, and I think we do, so if one source of funding has come to an end, of course it's worrying...but at the same time there are of course interesting opportunities. The question is, could we become more of a front line involved directly in or with community organisations rather than the sort of behind the scenes resource that we have been. And yes we could, and so could other organisations in a similar sort of boat, but there is an issue about whether we have enough time to actually keep us going through a kind of transition (Interview).

As with HCVS, when state funding dries up, Gary turns towards the language of the market. He suggests that the organisation needs to “fill a niche” which funders will be attracted to. In this context, community becomes an answer to a need that has been identified in society.

### *Conclusion*

Even where they are extremely critical of capitalism and the spread of capitalist logic into all areas of government policy, organisations have to be willing to negotiate a capitalist system if they wish to be successful in contemporary society. FbRN demonstrates that even those with a strong socialist background can find some area of agreement with an agenda of government cuts, whether this is found in the simple point that community work does not necessarily require money, or in the turn to capitalist logic in

thinking about the organisation's survival. Strikingly, it is this socialist narrative that is key – not a mono-faith or multi-faith narrative. Faiths do, however, play a role in defending public values in a context in which socialism does not exist as an alternative. In his turn towards capitalist language, Gary demonstrates an ability to step outside of state dependency, and begin work on his own terms, but also perhaps demonstrates the absence of a multi-faith theology that is able to offer a clear vision of what the public sphere ought to be like, to draw in members around that vision, and to inspire association. Without funding, there are no internal resources to draw from.

## Conclusion

FbRN emerges out of the triple context of wanting to reduce the state and empower communities; of recognising the role of faith in activating communities; and of understanding that since we last paid attention, the religious landscape has changed. FbRN staff find themselves simultaneously motivated by multifaith, monofaith, secular sacred and instrumental principles. Ultimately, however, the connection between the multi-faith and the mono-faith appears to be precarious, and the ability to retain members is dependent on funding.

When it came to political and economic structures, the absence of a clearly worked out religious creed left the organisation reliant on the charisma of Gary to retain and employ new volunteers. The result of this was a heavy dependence on the state and, when the state began to withdraw, the market.

Although FbRN is yet to draw in private funding, Gary is already adopting the language of the market, referring to the kind of gap that the organisation might fill.

Considering the ease with which the organisation turned to this language of social entrepreneurship, it becomes questionable whether there is any significant difference between a secular organisation like HCVS, and a multi-faith organisation like FbRN. This point is all the more significant given that it was socialist narratives rather than faith narratives that were employed to criticise capitalism. Whereas an organisation like CTL has a relatively clear vision that inspires a fee-paying membership, both HCVS and FbRN are lacking in a reflexive awareness of the ideas that drive them, have fairly limited ways in which those ideas are reified in practices that cultivate belonging, have no fee-paying members, and easily sway between different structural logics.

## Chapter 10: Case study IV: London Citizens

I was interested to work with London Citizens because without being read in post-liberal political theology, and without any particular religious creed, they nonetheless seemed to fit with the post-liberal ideals of developing a shared spirit of association outside of the state, and working creatively against both government and big business, within the marketplace. I knew that working with London Citizens would present interesting tensions between the post-liberal critique and the lived experience of activists.

Once again, I begin with a context, and then reflect on the constituting factor of common agency. I then explore how these factors feed into the understanding of political structures and economic context.

### Context

In the 1930s, as a student at the University of Chicago, Saul Alinsky became angered by the poverty of certain districts surrounding the university. He became instrumental in organising the multiple conflicting groups into a community organisation, collectively struggling against the institutions that were the structural cause of their oppression. The organisations he established were broad-based and dues-based. Being broad-based means that they were made up of a combination of religious and secular community leaders, while being dues-based means that all funding for the organisations comes from members themselves. It is believed that being broad-based recognises the multiplicity of interests in a given community, and allows for

maximum relational power. Being dues-based helps to guarantee independence, as well as give each dues-paying member both a stake and an interest, which together combine to provide an impetus for action.

By working with any organisation with relational power in the community, from churches and mosques to schools and trade unions, community organisations can be seen as very early adopters of a post-secular orientation to the world. From this perspective, London Citizens provides a good case study for critically exploring the notion of the post-secular as discussed in chapter 3. This orientation was carried over to the UK in 1996 when London Citizens was formed. Today, London Citizens is often criticised for its excessive favouring of faith groups. Secular organisations feel themselves to be left out.

Since 1996, London Citizens has worked to reweave the fabric of civil society, by which they mean that

if you want to look at society in three sectors, or three cultures, private, public and civil society, it's the civil society which is under-organised, less powerful, missed out in terms of big decisions, so our primary purpose is to organise in the civil society sector, especially in areas that are disengaged and disadvantaged from political and economic success, and to allow that sector to have greater political influence as the other sectors (Interview).

Ostensibly LC's aim is to coextensive with that of rebuilding a shared spirit of association. Yet LC is very adept at working "with the world as it is" (Field notes). The employees and volunteers are trained to understand that without power, they cannot act, and to see themselves, in the absence of positional or financial power, as building relational power.

In 2010, however, London Citizens bid for a large state contract to roll-out community organising across the country, suggesting that its independence from the state is negotiable. Similarly, London Citizens perceives itself as distinct from the market, although it often takes grants from big business.

### **Constituting factor of common agency**

This section explores how LC aims to reweave the fabric of civil society, and the different factors this involves. It reflects both on the personal motivation of staff, and the methods used for recruiting volunteers.

#### *I've never been one for values*

Similarly to HCVS, LC staff tended to draw on much more secular, personal reasons for social action. Partly this was shaped by the way the organisation itself trained employees and volunteers to reveal their stories: not in terms of beliefs about the way the world should be, but in terms of a personal struggle. Staff are trained through what is known as a "one to one"; a 15 minute conversation in which organisers reveal a great deal about their own

motivation in order to induce their conversational partner to do the same. It is hoped that this process will reveal the partner's self-interests, reconnecting them with their own motivation, as well as opening them to persuasion.

When I asked Chris about what kind of values inspired him to do his work, he deliberately challenged the idea that speaking of "values" was useful, and turned the conversation back to some moving one-to-one style reflections:

I've never been one for values as they exist in particular words. I'm not someone who has the five values that they live with. The experiences I've had which are meaningful to me, and connect to what I understand of London Citizens, are experiences that, you know, growing up err...the massive gulf between the environments, the chances and the choices, the quality of life that different friends of mine had from different sides of the divide. So some of those friends were growing up in a council estate in Clapham Junction, on the 15th floor, with a single parent Mum who worked all the time, and a younger sister that they cared for. And they went to a school where sometimes the classes were so disrupted that you couldn't really learn. But they really wanted to learn, you know, he was a conscientious student, good footballer, but, you know, for him to make a success of himself in academia was taking a super-human effort on his part, to balance all the things that he had to balance. And then, I think of other friends I had, who were growing up in a 2 million pound mansion house in Dulwich village, and they went to a private school, and when they turned 17 they got bought a car, and if they were selling weed

they were doing it out of that car to kids with very little risk to themselves. They didn't really care about school that much, but they did well because school was always set up for them to do very well in. And their parents were very supportive, and that's...and that's just life. And that's just the way things are, that's the way things are everywhere, you know, you look from one school to another and that massive gap that people have in their opportunities, you know, you want everyone to have all the opportunities, you know, it's not that it's bad for somebody to have all these opportunities, but it's a lie if you say that success in your life is all about how hard you work and how clever you are. And that's a lie, and there's a massive gap in the way that someone like Adam, and then someone like Elliot, the two people I knew, had the chances they had ahead of them. But that's what, so I guess you could say, yeah that's equality, I believe in equality, I believe in equality of opportunity, you know, those things. But those words aren't particularly...I don't hold them up, it's more the experiences (Interview).

Emily similarly drew on personal stories, yet drew on religion as a reference point to explain her position:

I didn't grow up Christian, but my parents both did. And they both as kids went to Sunday school. My parents grew up in the 60s, when you did go to Sunday school because it was much more common. So my parents have a very strong set of values, but they don't praise or credit them as Christian values, but you can see a strong Christian ethos in both of

them. My Dad grew up working class in Ealing and became an academic. He's strong Labour; really believes in justice and equality and both my parents would shout at the TV whenever Margaret Thatcher came on or John Major. The politics where Britain has an opportunity for all, and your background doesn't determine your future, and where the rich pay their taxes and the poor should be supported. It was also a kind of pull yourselves up by your bootstraps; my Mum is very much in the kind of newer vein of people who are fed up with the welfare state, that think people should be given the opportunity to just get on and do things, it's certain taxes and bureaucracy that stops them, the right of individuals to go out and do stuff but that they still need to enable that. That's the kind of background I have, and I still feel those things very strongly, but I don't have a manifesto of my ideas (Interview).

Whereas Chris's inspiration appears to be derived from seeing injustice amongst his friends, Emily was very much inspired by her parents and a couple of teachers. In both cases one feels a sense of the precariousness or arbitrariness of the inspiration: if it weren't for seeing injustice first hand, or for having these role models, Chris and Emily might not have become involved in social action. Without a strong value-based culture, it seems one has to experience injustice or else be strongly influenced by role models in order to be involved in social action. There is a deficit at the societal level, even if this is not experienced at the level of the passionate and engaged individual. This does not mean that the culture has to be religious. As has already been mentioned above, whereas some unreligious actors have found themselves

inspired by the notion of doing good for the sake of doing good, others generalise concepts such as “equality” or “faith” to include people of all faiths and none.

As well as drawing on these personal stories, perhaps partly as a result of imbibing the idea of working with the world as it is, LC staff displayed a readiness to discuss their inspiration in terms of power and prestige:

My Dad is a really great mathematician, so he could have gone into actuarial work, banking work, but he chose to stick with academia because he saw that as more rewarding. So we had a crap car and went on holidays in Cornwall, and growing up, values weren't placed on money; value was placed on performance and status, but not necessarily on financial reward for your status and I think the interesting thing [with LC] is you have the opportunity to have a lot of status: so I have the opportunity tonight to be going to dinner with Andy Burnham because of the work I've been doing [with LC], and I'm not sure if I was working in the city, if I would be invited to dinner with someone as significant as the Shadow Minister. And actually I do have those opportunities [with LC], and so we have the opportunity with a lot of high-level people and with people who are struggling.

Again, having the kind of parents that encourage status over financial reward proves important. Yet what is significant here is the willingness to talk about

status at all. Status derived from good work acts as a genuine inspiration to keep going in the job.

In a sense, it seems there is a willingness to talk about what MacIntyre would call external rewards, and as a result, clear ways of motivating actors *in the world as it is* emerge. Yet these factors cannot be considered entirely instrumentally. The substitution of performance and status within a community over financial reward is not merely the swapping of one external reward for another, since the value and status are derived from aspects that are intrinsic to the practice of organising itself. To put this simply, the work itself is rewarding.

*Taking the world as it is, to the world as it should be*

Despite being very open about their this-worldly motivations, like HCVS, LC organisers had ideas and practices that could be interpreted, if not as a kind of theology, as a mode of the transcendental social. Unlike HCVS, however, indeed perhaps more so than FbRN also, LC organisers had a clear understanding of how the transcendental social was employed; namely, both as an ideal, deeply held, and as a tool, used in a manner that is deliberate and instrumental. This can be observed in the way that LC trains its volunteers. LC organisers spoke inspiringly of “taking the world as it is to the world as it should be” (Field notes). This worked as a core concept for bringing various people together. Thus far it has been suggested comparing CTL with HCVS and FbRN, that the richer the umbrella, the better it serves as

inspiration. Yet both in terms of the particularly diverse communities LC serves, and in terms of generating “small, winnable goals” it is deemed important that the vision of the world as it could be is undefined. I asked Chris:

this idea of taking the world as it is, to the world as it should be, but what does that mean, what is that world that could be, and are we all thinking about the same world?

**Chris**

Definitely not. We're not all thinking about the same world. I don't know if we're even thinking about a world. Because we've not experienced that world. I mean it's the way I think about it. I mean what we do, on the training, is to say, everyone think about the way you think the world should be, and some words that are associated with that world. And they tell you some words and they tend to say things like peace, justice, love, equality, happiness - those kind of things.

And sometimes they say "argument" or a few other things you're not expecting. But we've run that course a hundred or more times and those are the same words that come up. So you can get some commonality in terms of some words, but I think it's probably easier to agree when something's just wrong, than it is to paint a picture of the world as it should be. You know to paint that picture with any kind of texture or detail becomes quite hard in the context [of LC]. Because beyond those

statements of "people wouldn't be killing each other", or "there wouldn't be huge discrepancies of wealth", or "people would be happy", "families would be together"...But I think if you were to paint with any kind of detail or texture it would become quite difficult because their reference point, they tend to be using certain religions, certain texts, certain ideologies perhaps, that they subscribe to, and they're lifting those words, lifting some of those abstractions I suppose, to offer something towards the common idea of what the world should be. And so [at LC], while we do talk about the world as it is and the world as it should be, the way we actually move people towards action together, is to find stories that are clearly unjust. And those stories as they're told by the one who's suffering them, everyone feels them in their gut. And they respond in a way to say "that's unjust" and "we'll do something about that together with you". So we often find ourselves motivating around challenging injustice, and then we come up with a reasonable, winnable, statement or goal. We come up with a reasonable goal which is a good thing, a step in the right direction, a step towards the world as it should be. But it's not the world as it should be. We don't, after hearing the injustice go, "right that's the injustice, now, what's the world as it should be, we're gonna fight for that". Because the idea is a pragmatic, winnable change. So you think: that's the story of injustice, that's not the way the world should be, but what we're going to come up with together, is better than that. And that's what we're going to fight for and win. I wonder if we did try and...[fight towards the world as it should be], it'd be a bit of a barrier to progress. If we heard the world of injustice and

thought "what's the way the world really should be"? If poverty wages is the problem, what's the way the world really should be? Well, everyone should earn enough to do whatever they want. What do you mean whatever they want? You know, it'd become difficult. But if you just say they should have enough to live...that's good. So that concept, the world as it should be, in organising, we use it in a kind of complex way. And we don't organise around it: we ask people to consider it, and we ask people to articulate it a bit, and we kind of use it to show this diverse group of people that there's enough in common in the way the world should be that they can act together (Interview).

For LC, the idea of the world as it should be is used as a creative first step to encourage a diverse group of people to recognise that they share broad ideas in common. But within this broad framework, this loose concept of the world as it should be, the majority of their work is closer to Gary's notion of dropping the metanarrative in favour of jointly recognising clear moments of injustice.

Chris also offers us insight into how the transcendental social operates. The idea is not to imagine a perfect world, see blockages that inhibit that world from becoming, and then simply step from the imperfect world to the perfect one. More than this, to fully define the world as it should be, would be counterproductive, leading to interminable discussions and to an overinflated sense of the task ahead. Rather, the vision of the world as it should be acts as a device for taking small steps away from unjust situations and towards slightly more just situations.

Even as an outsider, I found myself drawn in, and giving far more time to London Citizens than was required as a researcher. I was drawn in by the sense of working towards the world as it should be through small winnable goals, and of having a positive presence in the community. I became so embroiled in the activities of the organisation that I would forget my role as researcher. Partly, this was because I simply had neither time nor energy, after what could be a fourteen-hour working day, trudging the streets, walking or running, motivating new volunteers, analysing data, pressuring those in power, to also go home and write up what I was doing. Yet to explain my behaviour in this way is only to put the question one step back: why was I putting in so much more time than I needed to? Reflecting back now, I was taken up in a whirlwind. As an atheist, I had found my religion, and it was called LC, its theology - "taking the world as it is, to the world as it could be". As an outsider, it instantly embedded me in a community, both the immediate missional community of my fellow organisers, and that of North London. Like others I took pride in the difficulty the work created for relationships and for normal modern life. There was not time for dinner with family; there was not time to take in a show. A strong sense of us and them was created, but "they" were not the enemy; they were the unfortunate ones who had not yet felt the zest for organising. I felt absorbed in Aristotle's idea of humans as *zoon politikon*, the political animal, and that a life without politics, broadly understood, was a life half lived.

Today, looking back, I cannot imagine where that person has gone. I have not, like the anthropologists of yesteryear, had the separation of continents and a great voyage to separate me from this other world. Only a mask I had always worn: that of the researcher. And yet there is a great sense of loss as though I have been torn away. I justify the absence by telling myself that I was never an organiser but a researcher. Those closest to me derive most satisfaction from the very “me-time” that London Citizens seeks to challenge. Being involved would require letting go of these people.

So what drew me in so strongly? Perhaps to some extent I wanted a job. More pressing was the event. The London riots played a big part in awakening me to the duty to be involved in the community. But most important was the search for religion implicit in this entire research project. I was sucked in by the idea of taking the world as it is to the world as it could be.

This desire for meaningful engagement with the world seemed to be shared by all of those working at LC. This desire had been captured at early enough an age, usually at around twenty-one, towards the end of university, when people were stepping into the wider world in hope of finding a meaningful career path.

*Being clear about beliefs and holding to account*

London Citizens saw building the capacity to talk about beliefs as core to building the resources necessary for shared action. Moreover, having others open up about their core beliefs and the personal struggles, their “self-interest” as they would put it, giving away just how ready they are to work with the world as it is, is perceived as fundamental to creating shared responsibility, since it provides a bargaining chip - something personal that can be used to hold an organisation or individual to account. Rather than putting our values to one side in order to achieve a universally agreeable language, as Habermas would advocate, LC treat values as the means by which people hold each other to account, as fits neatly with MacIntyre’s analysis (MacIntyre 1981/2007: 217-218).

This holding to account is seen most effectively when in any particular campaign, the key powerbroker is identified. The group will identify that person and draw a stickman. They then write around the stickman all of the interests they perceive that person as having, and begin bouncing ideas about which interest they can use to their advantage. In one case, when trying to persuade a major educational institution to increase the pay of its cleaners, they went back to the founding articles of the institution and found that, unbeknownst to the current leaders, there was a principle of being the change it wished to see in the country by raising the living standards of all employees. This founding article was used to hold the current leaders to account (Field notes).

*The mythology of individuals*

This stress on taking the world as it is to the world as it should be is reified through a practice of hero worship and storytelling. In my time at LC, a number of key individuals were given hero status, from self-identifying community organisers like Saul Alinsky, Ed Chambers and Barack Obama, to great people of history such as Mahatma Ghandi or Martin Luther King. Hero status was cultivated through discussion of these figures, of their many sacrifices or their meteoric rise to positions of status or power. These figures and their deeds would be discussed on journeys to and from meetings, and sometimes their biographies would be handed from one member of staff to another, as a prize for hard work, as a birthday or Christmas present, or simply as a gesture of goodwill.

This recognition of hero status attributed became reflexive when organisers sought to recruit Jews, Christians or Muslims as dues-paying members. Organisers would mention Jesus Christ or the Prophet Muhammad as heroic organisers, thereby helping people of faith to understand the similarities between LC's work and their own.

Heroic status was also cultivated by, and attributed to, people working at present. Organisers would tell stories of their prowess, with one telling me how he managed to recruit four dues-paying members in one afternoon, having recently completed a pub lunch (Field notes). More frequently, organisers would talk of their sacrifice: their inability to see friends, the many

hours they had worked without pay, the fact that they were giving up their weekends.

The attribution of hero status to heroic figures demonstrates the way in which the organising ideal is reified into excitement regarding particular individuals. Awareness of this process is demonstrated in the organisation's ability to construct great religious figures as similarly heroic community organisers. The cultivation of hero status amongst present staff demonstrates the ability of the process to transform behaviour in the present.

### *Conclusion*

Like HCVS, LC draws on a range of secular motivations, including the satisfaction of the work itself. But this motivation is enhanced by reference to "taking the world as it is, to the world as it could be", which acts as a mode of the transcendental social, transforming organisers and thereby the world they work in. Without explicitly drawing on any particular tradition, LC is nonetheless able to create a strong sense of missional community. Part of the strength came from the recognition that drawing out the detail of the world they are trying to create is not only difficult in a diverse context, but also counterproductive anyway, since the world they are trying to create is so different from the world as it is that organisers fear people will lose focus on small, winnable goals. A religion without dogma, LC's manner of operating is perhaps better suited to the world as it is, at least as detailed by Linda Woodhead, in which people may be interested in a sense of purpose, but do

not want guidance (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Woodhead 2012). Being open about one's beliefs is valued insofar as it facilitates understanding and the ability to work together towards a common good. Without needing to draw on the narratives of any particular religion, LC displays all the strengths of Baker's ideas of belonging and becoming, even drawing in members of particular and varied religious traditions (2013). It is not just that organisers are aware of the socially constructed nature of the transcendental social, but that they deliberately and reflexively engage in the construction of the transcendental social to create a sense of shared mission.

### **Political structures and common agency**

The last section suggested that without drawing on any particular religious tradition, LC is able to reflexively draw on the idea of "taking the world as it is to the world as it should be", to motivate organisers and volunteers alike. This concept is deliberately open, both because it can thereby draw in people of very diverse beliefs, and because giving it too much detail creates a false sense of hope that the world as it should be is achievable, inevitably leading to disappointment.

Yet while the concept of the world as it should be is not clearly fleshed out, LC has a strong idea of how it should be achieved. As this section will show, in terms of political structures, LC is critical of the state, which tends to draw power to a few positions and people. Instead, it sees itself as developing association outside of the state. LC often regards the state as one of its

greatest opponents. Still, without betraying this position, LC does often find itself working with the state for particular campaigns.

*What I thought being involved with politics was about: community, people, making an impact.*

Perhaps the single idea all organisers share in common as to the world as it should be is that of a world in which all are engaged in a purer practice of politics. Employees often stress how disillusioned they are with conventional politics, which includes local and university politics, and how they have found a home at LC for the politics they grew up imagining. Emily explains:

I went along to one meeting and the group of people there were just so off-putting. They were interested in talking about all the MPs that they knew, and how they were all related to an MP, and their Dad was an MP, and I'd never even met an MP before, you know, I'd read about it in a text book at school, I didn't have any connections. I just found the whole thing not what I was expecting and not really about people or change, it was about elite stuff, and I just couldn't really get involved. I then set thinking about "well what do I enjoy and do I want to be involved with?" And an opportunity came up that was about going to Uganda to do voluntary work over the summer holiday. You had to raise your own money, and then do a three-month placement. I decided that that sounded so much more in line with what I thought being involved with politics was about: community, people, making an impact. I applied for a

place, I raised some money and I went to Uganda and I was really sold on international development. Now I look back, the particular organisation I worked with was very good. They had a sustainable model of development, focused on putting the community first, so the project was led by the community in which we were living; they devised the project because the idea was the best way to sustain a project was if they had ownership: really good things I see now in terms of organising models. I then came back certain that I wanted to do International Development. I did a Masters at SOAS in International Development and Economics, and I thought "how do I get a job, do I want to work for the UN, do I want to work for the civil service?" And at the time my Mum was banging on and on about how there's no need for me to go to Africa, what a waste of money and air miles: I grew up in South Wales and my Mum was a journalist, and when I was a kid we'd be driving our little Nissan Micra up into the valleys and she was reporting on the impact of closing the mines on families, where people were ripping up the floorboards to burn firewood because it was so cold, they couldn't afford heating, and she was telling me to understand you didn't need to go away. And genuinely to shut her up, I went "fine I will volunteer in London" (Interview).

Eventually this story led to joining LC. Emily had always been politically engaged, but was turned off by what conventional politics turned out to be like. Emily was seeking to start from what she perceived as a purer form of politics, involving "community, people, making an impact".

*It just felt right; it was politics as it should be done*

This aversion to conventional politics does not mean LC ignores conventional politics altogether. In fact, some of the organisations biggest and most inspiring campaigns deliberately involve and challenge politicians.

The experience that comes to mind is of the 2004 mayoral assembly, where there were a couple of thousand people from London Citizens there, and Ken Livingstone and Steven Norris were contesting the election, and I was just blown away because it just felt right; it was politics as it should be done, it was people whose voices that you don't normally hear in public political life speaking out meaningfully about the things that they cared about, and decision makers, the mayoral candidates, the professional politicians were responding to them with some kind of balance of power, giving them yes or no answers. And it was whooping and cheering, and it was a very diverse hall, and it felt like London, felt like the way things ought to be (Interview).

These meetings are often cited as the events that draw people in. Why these events have such an impact is complicated, but worth exploring since it reflects the wider reason the organisation as a whole has such a strong impact. The first point is clearly a matter of power: people are very disillusioned with conventional politics and politicians, and see them as dodging questions and out of touch with ordinary people. Having the power to

bring politicians into a room and force them to answer difficult questions “with some kind of balance of power” imbues those present with an aura of power: more so than journalists, more so even than leaders of opposite parties, these ordinary people have created the pressure that is inducing a politician to give a straight answer. Whereas CTL sees its role as opening up conventional power, the LC sees its role as challenging power. This attitude can cause difficulties. Emily recalls...

...we could not get a relationship with [a particular] council...and basically ended up, someone that used to work on the council, got her to find out what's the blockage, and she basically came back and said there's been a real problem with the way they felt we'd conducted [ourselves]...

...We'd been treading on a lot of people's toes, we got a lot more press coverage than other people, they didn't like it, and they felt like we were these new dogs in town and we were barking too loud (Interview).

The adversarial and strategic way in which the organisation operates creates a lot of blockages, but they insist that a temporary blockage is far better than being shut out altogether due to the lack of respect that comes with a more convivial approach.

There is perhaps a wider theoretical point here about the use of an agonistic, Schmittian approach to politics. The previous section demonstrated how the

transcendental social is employed as a tool for creating an imagined community. In a similarly instrumental manner, the organisation creates a strong idea of insiders and outsiders, frequently using the phrase “no permanent enemies, no permanent friends”. While this phrase clearly has some positive, pragmatic implications, it also invokes the notion of enmity, suggesting that their method will always involve the construction of an enemy to overcome, as opposed to a stakeholder with which to reach a consensus. In my time with LC, what the strong friend enemy distinction served to do was to create a black and white device for understanding where people stood in relation to causes, helping groups to analyse who needed persuading and who did not, and creating a sense of peer pressure against dissent. What was more problematic was the way in which it cast those that did not feel comfortable challenging the status quo, or even those that see a different approach to the same problem, as outsiders, creating resentment on the part of the in-group, and loneliness on the part of the out-group. A “Lord of the Flies” atmosphere could easily be inculcated, with a culture of fear around dissent. Moreover, the impermanence of the friend/enemy distinction meant one had to be ready at any time to turn against a friend who was causing a blockage. In my time at the organisation there was a constant feeling of adrenaline at the prospect of having to betray a friend, or else of being betrayed or undermined – a feeling confirmed by numerous colleagues, one of whom said of another “she’s all smiles, but she’d kill her grandmother if it meant getting ahead” (Field notes). One might also suggest that if the means is agonistic, the end cannot reflect a community of love. Given the organisation’s stress on the prefigurative principle of being the change it

wants to see, this agonism has precarious implications when extrapolated to wider society.

Yet the other side of the phrase “no permanent enemies, no permanent friends” is that nobody is ever truly a permanent outsider or enemy. So long as one is eventually willing to cooperate, they will be brought into the fold. While LC is often confronting the state, demonstrating its power, once a particular government, local or national, comes round to and commits to implementing an idea or policy, then they must work together as friends.

LC has often worked with local and national government to implement its campaigns. On top of this, LC had gone through a period of potentially being adopted into the state. On coming into power in 2010, the coalition government recognised the important role of community organising by putting together a commission to have community organisations set up in difficult areas across the country. According to the LC, the bid had been “designed for us”, but was later given to a different organisation that “were less controversial”. With hindsight, a senior member of LC suggested, it was probably for the better, since its principles might have been subsumed by and unduly influenced by those of the state.

The second point regarding the strength of these assemblies is to do with seeing difference happen. After listening campaigns that can take a number of months, whereby organisers meet local people and ask them to tell their stories, the people with the most heart-wrenching stories are asked to tell

those stories at these major events. This is what the organisation calls testimony:

The moments where it actually hits is where you see the low-paid worker or the undocumented migrant or the mum who's lost her son to knife crime. You see people that are so close to the pain...to powerlessness. And you see them tell that story to someone right at the top of the hierarchy of power, change. And that just feels good and feels right (Interview).

The point of testimony is twofold. On the one hand, it invokes sympathy in all of those listening, and pressures those in power to respond, thus enabling the next step, which is to make specific demands of those in power. Those in power feel compelled to respond both because of sympathy, and peer pressure. One MP explained in reference to these moments: "the one thing that will get a politician's attention is suffering" (Field notes). Peer pressure is involved because one risks having heard the story of suffering, to turn down subsequent demands would be to risk looking heartless in front of a large and rowdy public audience.

Testimony also develops local leaders. Those that offer testimony are often powerless, oppressed and very meek when they first meet an organiser. Providing testimony is often the culmination of weeks, months, or even years of discussion and confidence building, whereby individuals are invited to campaigns and slowly given a greater sense of responsibility. One such case

was when I convinced a young man at a local mosque to come and speak of his experience of being young and Muslim in a deprived area of London. It took numerous meetings, numerous cups of tea in his local café, to eventually persuade him to give testimony. When finally he agreed, he was so nervous that we decided to write out his statement together (Field notes).

Methods in leadership development are varied. One method is rounds. After each action or event, all those involved in organising the action or event will sit in a circle and take it in turns to say what went well, and what didn't go well. Every member of the circle is given as much time and respect as the next, creating an atmosphere of equality.

The use of rounds links to the third point about what makes these events particularly and organising generally so effective: they are great moments of effervescence, and involve ritual and play. All actions and events involve the incorporation of mass crowds, music and street theatre. The election events are produced to incorporate a vast array of songs or instruments drawing from various religious and cultural traditions. These rituals invoke a sense of unity across diversity. Street events also involve ritual. One project called CitySafe encouraged high street shops and businesses to open their doors to children who felt under threat at any time, to give them a safe place to hide while the police were called. Shops and businesses indicated their support by putting a CitySafe sticker on their window. To celebrate the success of encouraging every shop and business on one street to be involved, the organisation put together an event whereby the high street was closed off to traffic, and

children from the local secondary school held hands in a chain along and across both sides of the high street, forming a circle. Once the circle was created, everyone began to chant “CitySafe” until the sound became deafening, at which point they were ushered towards a podium, where one of the lead organisers and a student that had played an increasingly important role, each gave a short speech telling the story of the struggle. The atmosphere was electric, and one felt a sense of the effervescence, of being lifted out of oneself into the larger group, and of one’s concerns and interests becoming those of the group. Organisers and students alike, with diluted pupils, confirmed this sense of effervescence, describing moments as “sick”, a colloquialism meaning exciting. Events like these are the lifeblood of an organiser, the culmination of weeks, months, even years of work, where they get to see the impact of their struggle. They are the sensual representation of the community she sees herself as organising.

As well as these rituals and performances of equality and unity, there is a strong trickster element in community organising, whereby theatre is used to embarrass and disrupt. This is a form of civil disobedience within the confines of the law. Organisers go outside of political convention to disrupt and create pressure. Amidst one campaign in which the group was failing to get a meeting with the local council, after a series of letters and phone calls, they decided to show up outside the council offices with a desk, one hundred people, and members of the local press. The organiser and the local leaders sat together at the desk and explained that after a number of attempts to arrange a meeting with the council, they assumed the only problem must be a

lack of space; hence they had brought their own desk. Within five minutes they were invited in for a meeting (Field notes).

One final point that underpins all of the others is the idea of people power. The LC offers the following analysis: for those without either positional or financial power, the only answer is people power. Bringing large groups of people together for actions and events is vital to creating peer-pressure, to inspiring new leaders, and to creating a sense of effervescence. This latter point is especially important, since it is indicative of why grassroots organising is so important: only by bringing people together in physical proximity do they feel the pressure and inspiration to take action.

Thus far working within the state, as demonstrated by CTL, seems to have been entirely overshadowed by grassroots work displayed by LC. But a couple of things are worth remembering. The first is that legislative change can never be entirely replaced by grassroots organising. Rather, it is better to think of both as working at once, sometimes side by side, sometimes in opposition. The second issue is that community organising too fails to provide for those that slip through the net. It builds its power by creating relationships with already existing institutions that are able to bring people to actions and events en masse. What it fails to do is create new institutions that bring in new people, expanding the shared spirit of association. To put this another way, community organising does not necessarily provide an answer to the slow decline of institutional affiliation, from parties to trade unions to faith groups, except that through its actions to increase the impact of these institutions, it

may once again galvanise interest in them. The result is that we are still left asking how to engage the disengaged. Chris explains:

Yeah, well the church to grow, rather than shrink, would do well to be a bit more focused on relationships, and maybe a little less focused on hierarchical leadership structures, buildings, insurance policies and so on. Most importantly it should focus on people, relationships, their interests, leadership, extending leadership, control, creativity to a large number of people. And those are tools and those are recommendations that we make to members: whether it's a church or mosque or school or anything else, you need to. So we hope that membership of CUK will help the churches, trade unions, etc. be more relational, and also be more relevant. Because if they listen to their members more, and operate with a greater sense of orientation towards action and leadership development, then that will help them grow and win.

**Tim**

So in some sense you're saying it's not your job to bring in people who have slipped through institutional nets; but to teach institutions to be better at doing that?

**Chris**

It's not my job to find people who've slipped through institutional nets - no. While it would be good for somebody to do that, it's not my job. But it is my job to think creatively about the kinds of institutions we work with (Interview).

Chris suggests that by behaving more like a community organisation, focusing less on positional power and more on relational power, turning power inside out, traditional organisations can begin to grow their membership once again, and thereby catch those that slip through the net. In this sense building a shared spirit of association is not necessarily a matter of building new ideals, or of reforming political structures, but of reforming the focus of those in positions of power.

### *Conclusion*

LC members show themselves to be extremely suspicious of the positional power associated with conventional politics, which may lead to the self-serving manner of politics that alienates the public. Yet rather than turning away from conventional politics altogether, LC recognises the state as a force for change that must be recognised, sometimes to be confronted as an enemy, at others to be cooperated with as a friend. The analysis reflects the idea used ubiquitously amongst organisers, that “power respects power” (Field notes). With this in mind, one must wonder what kind of a relationship would have formed if the organisation had allowed itself to be co-opted by the government in 2010.

Sustaining the grassroots manner of operating ensures that LC continues to perform “politics as it should be”, focused on “community, people, making an impact”. I especially stressed how this grassroots level of organising, culminating in big events is what draws a lot of people in, and acts as a memory that they constantly return to, relived in each subsequent event. The kind of effervescence cultivated at these events draws people in. I also stressed how the grassroots level of organising provides the opportunity for rituals such as rounds that create a sense of unit and equality. Finally, I explained how the build up to these events, and opportunities to perform at them, is a way of developing local leaders. In these ways, the kind of politics that drew in the staff in the first place may continue to draw in others.

I finished on a cautionary note, explaining that working within the state remained important, and that LC itself is limited in its ability to create a shared spirit of association, since it only works with ideas and organisations that already exist and have some power. Still, its method of reforming this power, developing it to focus less on position and more on relationships, might allow this power to turn inside out, becoming unrecognisable from the politics that alienates the public at present.

### **Economic context and common agency**

Thus far it has been suggested that without drawing on any particular tradition, LC is able to cultivate the idea of “taking the world as it is to the

world as it should be” as a mode of the transcendental social which negates the everyday world, and thereby empowers actors to transform it (Field notes). This mode of the transcendental social, very thin in content, is so powerful in a diverse society because it is able to draw in people of very different religious and ideological backgrounds. It is also sensible, since rather than setting up members for disappointment, it allows them to focus on small, winnable goals.

The last section explained how the idea of the world as it should be is reflected in the search amongst LC members for a purer idea of politics, devoid of the self-serving attitudes and bureaucracy associated with conventional politics. While stressing that LC’s relationship with the state was actually quite pragmatic and often convivial, I explained how important it was to maintain a distance, and keep activity at grassroots level, thereby ensuring the kind of effervescence, ritual and leadership development that drew people in initially. I also explained that while they did not work within the state, rather than always antagonising the state, they recognised its power and, like other traditional institutions, hoped to make that power less positional and more relational.

In this section I explore how LC’s ideas interplay with the relationship with the market. I will show that as with the state, LC is heavily critical of the market, and often regards itself as working against big businesses. But again, this oppositional relationship will often give way to behaviours that are more pragmatic and convivial.

*It's a lie if you say that success in your life is all about how hard you work and how clever you are.*

The inequalities of a market society are what inspired Chris to become politically active in the first place:

The experiences I've had which are meaningful to me, and connect to what I understand of this organisation, are experiences that, you know, growing up err...the massive gulf between the environments, the chances and the choices, the quality of life that different friends of mine had from different sides of the divide. So some of those friends were growing up in a council estate in Clapham Junction, on the 15th floor, with a single parent Mum who worked all the time, and a younger sister that they cared for. And they went to a school where sometimes the classes were so disrupted that you couldn't really learn. But they really wanted to learn, you know, he was a conscientious student, good footballer, but, you know, for him to make a success of himself in academia was taking a super-human effort on his part, to balance all the things that he had to balance. And then, I think of other friends I had, who were growing up in a 2 million pound mansion house in Dulwich village, and they went to a private school, and when they turned 17 they got bought a car, and if they were selling weed they were doing it out of that car to kids with very little risk to themselves. They didn't really care about school that much, but they did well because school was always

set up for them to do very well in. And their parents were very supportive, and that's...and that's just life. And that's just the way things are, that's the way things are everywhere, you know, you look from one school to another and that massive gap that people have in their opportunities, you know, you want everyone to have all the opportunities, you know, it's not that it's bad for somebody to have all these opportunities, but it's a lie if you say that success in your life is all about how hard you work and how clever you are. And that's a lie, and there's a massive gap in the way that someone like Adam, and then someone like Elliot, the two people I knew, had the chances they had ahead of them (Interview).

Seeing this “lie” first hand inspired Chris to be involved in politics. He was and continues to be struck by the injustice that a person’s circumstances play defining role in the kind of path one is able to take. Aaron made a similar point to me. Where Aaron organises in deprived areas of East London, it is possible from numerous areas to see the skyscrapers of the Canary Wharf, London’s key banking district, towering overhead. Drawing directly on a story of Saul Alinsky, Aaron told me how he had once taken a group of local people and, pointing at the tallest building in Canary Wharf, had said: “See that? That’s our target”. This marked the beginning of a campaign to encourage the wealthiest companies in Canary Wharf to employ people from deprived areas of East London on a Living Wage (Field notes).

*Could be a banker, could be a lawyer, could be earning three times what he earns at Citizens*

As well as being inspired by the injustice of a capitalist system, LC staff see first hand how this same injustice undermines the ability of people to act against it. Like HCVS staff, LC staff recognise that a market society devalues social action in terms of the wage a person can receive for her labour. The result is that social action is by and large a middle class pursuit, since young people from poorer backgrounds have to earn enough money to support their extended family.

We have one member of staff from East London and he's got a lot of family pressure to be a high earner because he's the eldest his son, his mother relies on him, she doesn't work, he needs to give some of his salary to her, so he took a massive risk by coming to work with Citizens because he's a kid from East London kid, could be, you know, could be a banker, could be a lawyer, could be earning three times what he earns at Citizens (Interview).

While middle class activists may find their earnings supplemented by parents, those from poorer backgrounds not only have to make do without this luxury, but also need to earn enough to support other family members.

*I was calling up bankers*

While LC staff could be extremely critical of the capitalist system, they were very pragmatic about working with the world as it is. LC does not aim to wipe out the market; “they’re not saying we’re going to get rid of them”, as one organiser put it (Interview). Nor was the organisation always fighting against corporations; it often received help from alliances such as Business in the Community (BIC) and the East London Business Alliance (ELBA). On top of this, with its mantra “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies”, the organisation could be fighting against a company one week, and alongside it in a larger campaign on the next week.

I was calling up my friends who were working in banks and persuading them to give these random Zimbabweans work placements so they could keep their skills up. And doing that just made me think this was real, this was politics, this was fun, enjoyable. I had this amazing position where one day I was calling up bankers and the next I was working with refugee and asylum seekers and I thought, this is so joyful (Interview).

This possibility of a strong working relationship with business is demonstrative of the way that capitalist societies can produce cooperative alliances with the interests of the disadvantaged at heart. It requires a lot of pressure, but the point is that it is not impossible.

LC’s methods also appealed to the capitalist world. People power was used to get the attention of corporates, but it was financial arguments that often won

them over. Theo told me that in a campaign for the Living Wage, whereby businesses are encouraged to pay their staff enough to live on that job alone, corporations were told that “the Living Wage is great for business too. It makes employees more productive, makes them spend less time off sick” (Interview). It is moreover worth noting that the LC itself, was funded in part by grants from large businesses

### *A market of their own*

Alongside this pragmatic relationship with business, it is important to note that a large source of LC’s funding comes from “dues”; that is, annual payments from member institutions (Field notes). LC thus operates within a market of its own: they rely on institutions “buying” their services, which they encourage to do using sales tactics that appeal to self-interest. The discourse used to strategise about bringing on members can be described as either cynical, realistic, or rationalised, depending on how one wishes to look at it. The focus is on pitching their work to institutions in terms of that institutions “self-interest”. Theo explains:

It’s quite, I wouldn’t say manipulative, but it’s quite down in the world as it is. To say that is not to say that we are not social animals and we’re not social animals and cannot be altruistic; it’s just that people’s actions are determined by what their own interests are. So sometimes being altruistic is in a person’s self-interest. And that’s not to say if you’re self-interested, that’s a bad thing, because it’s a matter of survival. It sounds

Darwinistic, and if people don't get the context, it seems rather sharp and rather dramatic (Interview).

In one sense it looks as though they are taking the Smithian anthropology for granted, understanding that to operate in the world as it is, they need to start with people's self-interest. Yet two things are worth pointing out. The first point is that the idea of self-interest is extremely broad, and could even include altruism itself. When an indignant vicar in a training session challenged, "well what is my self-interest?", an organiser who knew him and had invited him responded "bringing about the kingdom of God on earth". The vicar sat content (Field notes). The second point is that the invisible hand of Smith suggests that people will fall into relationships of mutual self-interest almost harmoniously, instinctively. But the LC method involves deep reflexive practice, understanding the place of self-interest, analysing "what makes that person tick". The organisation is not necessarily saying that self-interest is the only motivation; they are saying that it is a strong motivation that can be used to bring about change.

Still, one might question whether this creates the kind of pseudo-sittlichkeit already discussed: a community held together only by the self-interest of its individual members. Three questions emerge. First, is this the kind of community we are seeking? Second, what happens when a given individual or institution feels its self-interest is no longer served. Does it occasionally sacrifice its needs for the greater good? Third, what if a small group can

create a community of self-interest that serves them but no one else? In terms of the individuals within the organisation, Theo suggested that:

There was a lot of tension. I don't know if it was because of being run by the idea of self-interest. It might have been the competitive nature of all the people at a young age trying to do well. So there was a competitive aspect to it which sometimes was unhealthy. But at the same time it framed some great leaders within the organisation (Interview).

As an insider, drawn in by the ideas and actions of the organisation, I equally found myself drawn in by the negative aspects, especially competitiveness, and arguments over pay. Theo also suggests that the tension is healthy, since it encourages competitiveness. Theo would tell me about monthly meetings in which organisers would account for the work they had done:

The nature of the competition was: monthly meeting, 20 organisers, you want to be the one to come in with the most institutions, the most one-to-ones, and it's a very, almost harsh culture. Where...it's almost as tough as banking where you're like "these are my numbers". You want to prove to everyone else that you're the best organiser. And the way it was done through monthly meetings, you had to show up and you had to deliver. It wasn't turf-wars but competition to say "I'm the biggest, I'm the best" (Interview).

For Theo at least, the competitive nature of these meetings is exhilarating; it leads to harder work on the part of all of the organisers.

*Working with the world as it is, towards the world as it could be*

Despite these potential shortcomings, the ability of the organisation to recognise the world, in their words, “as it is”, or perhaps, the ability to recognise and work with a particularly powerful component of the way people are motivated, makes the organisation quite successful in bringing about change.

Picking up the very injustices organisers are most critical of, it is possible to see how mutual self-interest is found to bring about change. Emily explained how the enormous inequality one observes in London, especially in North London where she worked, can cause real difficulties for the way the organisation operates. The organisation’s chief strategy is to bring people in various institutions together to fight for a common good, a common cause. But in areas of enormous inequality, she found it extremely difficult to find issues of parity between the rich and the poor. This did not mean that the rich were not sympathetic to the plight of the poor, just that it was hard to find issues of shared interest, issues that aggrieved people from all income strata to a similar degree.

In North London you have a much higher concentration of middle-class people and it's a real challenge for us to identify issues that are about

empathy, not just about sympathy. You know, "oh I'll support the living wage because I think you're poor and I feel sorry for you". And we want to find issues where "I feel burned by this issue and you feel burned by this issue and we can work on it together and we may be from different income groups but this issue affects us the same". And that's really difficult because those issues aren't as common. A lot of our kids aren't really worried about street safety. at some of our institutions in North London because they get picked up from school and dropped off in a car. So we just had in Haringey, Highgate school joined a year ago, a private school, not just a private school but one of the top private schools in the country. You know, I don't know what the annual fees are, like 20 grand a year type thing, per kid. The teachers even joke: we said "we're going to do a listening campaign", and the teachers said "well if you do a listening campaign, the only thing you're going to get back is "my Addison lee cab's late in the morning"". Actually that's probably not true and there's lots and lots of assumptions about each other. So what we've found with a social care campaign, social care for the elderly, is we've been able to bring together care workers, so a lot of migrant women working really hard jobs, really long hours, lots of middle class families who are unable to afford private care, and even if they can afford private care, they still end up with low-paid care workers; families are really struggling to find good quality services for their loved ones. And initially there's a bit of a blame culture around "the staff they don't speak English, they're not trained properly". And actually bringing those people together has been amazing because what we've been able to

hear from both sides is how difficult it is to be a care worker, how much pressure they're under, and also how much they want to provide good care for the families, and how difficulty it is, and why. And that's enabled us to build this really interesting coalition between families of the cared for, and care workers, and now we're starting to relate to care providers and care commissioners, and the campaign is completely across the income spectrum, the class spectrum, the ethnicity spectrum and the religious spectrum (Interview).

LC were also able to use self-interest to encourage those from poorer backgrounds to be involved. One of the triumphs of the organisation is that it convinces young and talented people to forego great worldly pleasures in the name of a higher calling. One organiser explained:

Growing up in East London, knowing people who got done for robbery, fraud, having a mate who got done for murder. Seeing all of those problems and thinking, "I've got an opportunity having gone to a good university to do something about it" (Interview).

As explained in the first section, other motivations act as substitutes for the allure of money. I asked:

Is there something when you got into Citizens that gave you any sense of status? A sense of, in banking you can wear a nice suit cos you've got

lots of money, is there any equivalent to that in organising in terms of power and status?

### **Theo**

Definitely. Particularly as a young person, community organising is in vogue, everybody wants to call themselves a community organiser. To call yourself one for a group that's been doing it the longest, the best and has actually achieved stuff, definitely proud to call myself a community organiser. Even without the financial gains. But you could wear a suit if you wanted! Not Boss, but yeah. And the second point is, as a young person, at one point I was leading eight institutions, representing 10,000 people, working with leaders who'd done it for decades, and working in a team where each one of us had a borough, you felt quite powerful. You could work with these people, they could bring tens of people hundreds of people, and you could go up to someone and say, "we want to do work on the living wages, there's eight leaders representing eight institutions in your borough, representing ten thousand people" (Interview).

Of course, if this is to work, then people really do need to receive status and influence through good work. By recognising the self-interest in status, LC is able to draw dynamic and intelligent individuals like Chris, Emily and Theo away from a place where they could be earning three-times the salary.

## *Conclusion*

LC demonstrates that it is possible to be heavily critical of capitalism, and the inequalities that it leads to, whilst nonetheless recognising that one must work with the structures that be and people as they are in order to bring about change. Its strategies of developing a sense of people power, of using this people power to pressure companies to change, and of helping disparate communities to discover a shared self-interest offer a kind of reflexive Hegelianism or organic solidarity. These community structures perhaps do not naturally form in a diverse capitalist society, but with the conscious-raising activities of devoted organisers, they can be brought into being and thrive.

Yet what is deeply interesting here is that mechanic forms of solidarity are also drawn from in order to reinforce the organic solidarity. Drawing on the first chapter, it becomes possible to see that transcendence, shared values and shared aims are being cultivated, a general and undefined imagined community formed, such as can provide the social imaginary or shared background necessary for agreement on particular issues.

Notwithstanding the successes of this organisation, it is important to take a step back from the grassroots successes of the organisation, and to recognise that this work is only one part of the jigsaw. What the organisation fails to provide is a structural account of inequality.

If one considers that the organisation does not operate in every part of the country, then it very quickly becomes clear how limited will be the change that they bring about. If one next considers that the organisation is working with companies on the basis of a single campaign, again the limitations become glaringly clear. Just because a particular bank is now paying all of its UK staff a living wage, says nothing about what it is paying its staff elsewhere in the world, to say nothing of its wider business ethics, its payment of taxes, and its payment of middle earners in relation to those at the top. Taking an even wider view, pressuring a company to change its behaviour on a particular issue does nothing to reshape the economy so that more money is available for the welfare state, or to restructure the economy to ensure more jobs are available to low-skilled workers.

These multiple issues, too many and varied to explore here, might best be summarised in a metaphor: a drop in the ocean. A campaign on a single issue against the wider trends of a capitalist economy makes very little overall impact.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by suggesting that while on the surface LC staff had no religious affiliation, nonetheless their overarching activity could be identified as having ritual cognitive status. An ideal future is deliberately constructed to negate and transform the world as it is. This ideal is important to construct inclusively so as to offer people of very different backgrounds a reason to

recognise that they share something in common. But to flesh this ideal future out would be to undermine its potential – not only because a number of people would disagree as to what this ideal future looks like, but also because focusing on ideals is to diminish and distract from small, winnable goals.

The ideal of working towards the world as it should be is offered support by the veneration of heroic community organisers of the past and present. This veneration creates links between community organisers and people of faith, with their own gods, prophets and great leaders. Veneration also finds its way into competitive discussion of current organisers, thereby not only inspiring transformation, but also holding to account those that do not appear to work hard enough.

It was suggested that the strength of LC to deliberate, discursively and inclusively develop a strong ideal that is nonetheless very much open to individual interpretation, is suggestive of a kind of consciously socially constructed transcendental social that is nonetheless potentially just as powerful as any religion.

This reflexive outlook neatly ties up with LC's inclusive approach to politics. LC staff had a strong ideal of how politics should be done: not at as a national, bureaucratic level, involving showing off, networking and jostling for status, but disempowering local groups. Rather, politics is a responsibility of all citizens. Politics involves working hard to make a difference in a community in such a way as to empower that community. Politics involves demonstrating

that real change can take place if only they act. It involves huge celebrations of collective effort to bring about change. It is very hard to fulfil these goals at the level of government. On the other hand, LC are willing to work with both national and local government on the basis that it is best to have “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies”.

LC staff were particularly critical of capitalism and its implication that those who are intelligent and who work hard will be successful. They feel that this narrative ignores the structural causes of disadvantage. They are equally critical of the use of material gain to inspire hard work, preferring ideas of power, respect and status. It is worth noting that LC staff are particular good at ignoring the former because they are provided with so many opportunities to experience the latter.

Again, on the basis of “no permanent, friends, no permanent enemies”, LC staff find themselves working with numerous businesses and ethical business alliances. They can also be seen to operate in terms of a capitalist logic of their own: selling their activities on the basis of the self-interest of dues-paying members. It was questioned whether this appeal to self-interest potentially undermines the idea of community at the heart of LC’s work. It was further suggested that internally the organisation was highly competitive, with members showing off about the number of organisations they represented.

## Chapter 11: Discussion

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 introduced a theoretical framework for understanding ideas of solidarity that might have been lost with the rise of liberalism. It provided numerous theoretical questions. In light of these questions, chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 have detailed the way that four separate organisations develop a sense of common agency and action through complex political and economic structures and self-understandings. The aim of this chapter is to answer the earlier questions posed by drawing all of the findings into a theoretical discussion. The first section, on the constituting factor of common agency, provides a far lengthier discussion, reflecting the importance of this theme throughout, while the next two sections provide briefer reflections on the state and the market.

### The constituting factor of common agency in a pluralist society

Chapter 2 introduces post-liberal theory, the main lens of this thesis, which suggests that the loss of an idea of the good for framing politics, policy and practice results in a hierarchy of power, in which material factors are dominant. Only a Christian narrative could restore a sense of public duty. In chapter 3, this idea was problematised in relation to theory in the sociology of religion, which suggests that while some sense of shared narrative is useful in developing belonging, becoming, and shared action, not only is Christianity in decline, but, to the extent that it retains its potency, it is far more spiritual and materialistic than before. By working with various groups Christian and otherwise, all of which were devoted to restoring a sense of public virtue in

some form, I was able to critically assess whether ideas of the good needed to be restored to develop a shared spirit of association, and if so, how this could be achieved in a pluralist context.

*Religion lost? From ideas of the good to inclusively imagined futures*

The data indicate that a number of conclusions can be drawn which suggest a tension between the post-liberal critique and the lived experience discovered in the case studies. While structures of belonging, becoming and participation were important, these not only did not have to be Christian, but also were often best left ideologically undefined, instead being inclusively developed through discussion and practice. In the following, I will draw on the findings to systematically answer questions raised in chapters 2 and 3.

Charles Taylor's suggestion that we are living in an immanent frame appears to be challenged by the use of transcendent ideas by groups across the spectrum from Christian to unreligious: "bringing about the kingdom of God on earth", "equality", "faith" and "the world as it is to the world as it should be". Occupying the centre of the immanent frame, late modernity in the UK, these social movements nonetheless find themselves reaching for ideals that form the context for shared action. Certainly these groups are aware that their particular perspective is just one option amongst many. But the recurring theme that "we all have faiths" suggests that faith is not perceived as one option amongst many but a way of understanding the ontological and epistemological frameworks shared by everybody – people of all faiths and

none. This would imply that to the extent that faith does not have a valid epistemic place in the public sphere, this is because a secular hegemony has distorted our understanding of how convictions are arrived at – not through faith but through reason.

What can be observed amongst these faith-based social actors, however, is a pragmatic turn towards practical, achievable, shared goals. But this step does not indicate a simplistic turning away from transcendence and towards social contracts. Rather it suggests that the common good must be tackled from multiple angles simultaneously: value-generalisation, overlapping narratives, ideas of equality *and* practical common action.

John Milbank's position too is highly suspect. It is clearly correct to suggest the importance of an ontology of peace, of mutual trust for social action. But again, the very fact that this can be observed across all settings despite religious and ideological differences, suggests not only that the attitude is not uniquely Christian, but also that citizens in a liberal society are quite capable of expressing a natural desire to reconcile with people who are different, most clearly through framings of "equality", "inclusion" and socialist narratives.

In the process of relaying the research findings, I began to find Maurice Bloch's term "transcendental social" particularly useful for describing the way that actors conceived of a future which was constructed through the deliberate negation of the world as it is. Yet for three reasons this term seems unhelpful. The first reason is pragmatic. Just as the term religion has proved to be toxic

both in academic discourse and amongst my participants, so too might the notion of transcendence be anathema to some, and so the idea of transcendence having resonance for policy makers seems naïve. The second reason derives from this but is categorical. Transcendence is a culturally specific category that implies a clear binary between the other world and this one, whereas the participants with which I worked may well have been adopting structures similar to transcendence, but which they conceived as purely immanent and achievable in this world, given the right circumstances.

The third reason is analytic. Repeatedly it was observed that the structure of the imagined communities was not static but procedural: the world that actors were working towards was in the future if only people are willing to work towards it. CTL staff lamented theologies that treated heaven as another world, instead stressing that it could be imagined and brought about in this world. HCVS staff were angered by the fact that some elements of equality had not already been achieved. FbRN staff spoke of a heaven that required the work of people. LC staff talked of taking the world as it is to the world as it could be. From this perspective, the notion of imagined communities appears to be reliant on what might be called imagined futures. The term imagined futures is also useful because it implies an active imagining, thus stressing the importance of the social construction process. This notion of imagined futures seems to vindicate MacIntyre's framework of a telos which contemplates the ultimate but which nonetheless has a tangible impact on the way a life is lived, making life a process of ethical development. But the very point that these

structures can be seen to exist, at least to some extent, in unreligious organisations, suggests that there is no need to lament.

What was particularly effective about LC was that it overcame the tendency to treat religion as a special category. Rather, it conceived a clear way of imagining the future, taking the world as it is to the world as it should be, and allowed that faith groups were one very significant subset well-versed in such questions, even if not so well-versed in how to work with the world as it is.

As well as being procedural, it is important to observe that imagined futures are discursive rather than propositional. This resonates with MacIntyre's critique of the loss of story-telling and tradition in ethics as it gives way to an ethics with pretensions to universality – an ethics confirmed by appeals to logic or empiricism. As I have discussed at much greater length elsewhere, what seemed to create the capability for moral action was having the opportunity to construct a moral self through story-telling: for CTL, the telling of Biblical stories, as well as personal journeys; for FbRN and LC, the stories of many faiths, as well as of personal journeys (Stacey forthcoming). It is particularly worth noting in this context that not only was it possible to participate in story-telling without affirming the propositions associated with those stories, but also a propositional morality without associated stories is difficult to live out. In my time at CTL, I was able to participate in story-telling around the prophets and Jesus, and in so doing to cultivate moral aspirations in myself, without believing in God. While at HCVS, despite a clear sense of

equality, the absence of story-telling led to disempowered staff and difficulty in inspiring volunteers.

The prevalence of imagined futures equally demonstrates that contemporary communities are not merely self-interested, or at least not in a short-term, instrumental way. Instead, at least in the few settings I have observed, people continue to organise around ideals of how the world ought to be. This manner of organising is particularly worthy of note in the unreligious organisations. In the absence of religion, people continue to push for ideal worlds and to gather around shared values. In the case of LC especially, its complex techniques for incorporating value deliberation. It is thus not the absence of religion that undermines ideas of the good, but the deliberate avoidance of addressing these ideas on the grounds that doing so is divisive.

Yet LC proves an important case for the opposite argument. The groups depicted here may be considered as consisting of exceptional individuals; that is to say, people who are predisposed to public virtue. We therefore cannot be sure that what applies to these few individuals may equally be applied to society at large; that is to say, those that may not be as predisposed to public virtue. To put this in a somewhat unsophisticated way, just because we know what works for the best, does not mean we know what to do with the rest. It may still be valid to suggest that we need to rediscover a shared narrative such as can inspire public duty. But equally, LC found that in a pluralist society, it was often more effective to organise ordinary people around self-

interest. In this case, people were only engaged insofar as LC's activities helped their cause.

*Who's doing the imagining?*

If discussing ideas of the good proves important, it nonetheless remains the case that doing so effectively and inclusively is difficult in a pluralist setting, as attested by the tendency found in all of the case studies discussed, to avoid discussing ideas of the good at least some of the time.

Taylor put forward a twofold approach to deliberating about ideas of the good in pluralist settings: adopting a position of weak ontology so as to discover an overlapping consensus between different values. This idea of a weak ontology was clearly important in CTL, where Christian Socialism was explicitly stated to be one option amongst many. At HCVS, staff rarely, if ever, discussed ontology, but to call this weak ontology would be an overstatement, and it might better be described as unreflective ontology. At FbRN, weak ontology again proved important, with staff explicitly stating that their individual faith position was one amongst many, as well as placing themselves within a broad category of faith that they felt could be applied equally to any value position. LC were certainly reliant on the weak ontology of their members, and sought to show them that all people had very similar ideas of how the world should be.

As to seeking an overlapping consensus, this idea seems important but insufficient for cultivating solidarity. It was seen that the broader CTL made its message, the less predictable were its members' interests and voting patterns. At HCVS, it could be suggested that there was an implicit consensus around the idea of equality. Yet limited discourses around this idea rendered the cultivation of a duty to act difficult. FbRN created an overlapping consensus around the idea of hospitality, which was believed to be a virtue shared by a number of faiths. Here it was suggested that this consensus was effective, since each individual faith actor was able to draw on her own tradition for inspiration. The limiting factor here was that the range of shared virtues was itself limited. LC perhaps overcame these difficulties by finding an overlapping consensus of self-interest. But here the question arose as to whether this consensus could ever be taken beyond self interest to public duty, as well as whether the shared self-interest of multifarious groups was not nonetheless always against the interest of some other groups.

Adopting Taylor's weak ontology is perhaps a prerequisite of MacIntyre's multilingualism, which proved an effective tool for cultivating solidarity across difference. At CTL, it was Paul and Dave's ability to understand where I was coming from, a position of disbelief, having themselves been on a journey towards faith, that allowed them to speak to me *from my position*. Yet perhaps this fully fluent multilingualism is unnecessary. For MacIntyre the suggestion is that one must be able to fully understand a tradition internally before one can engage in dialogue regarding problems inherent to that tradition. Certainly levels of ignorance regarding certain cultures, made it

difficult to engage with those cultures at HCVS. But both FbRN and LC staff demonstrated that one can with good intention and limited multi-lingualism, engage in discussions regarding political and social problems with people of very different backgrounds.

For Milbank, one ultimately cannot make a rational choice between two traditions, but only choose through conversion, through inspiration. Social actors that embraced this idea proved particularly capable of holding liberal attitudes regarding others faith. Their system was not necessarily internally coherent, was not the only or even necessarily the best path, but it was the one they held faith with.

#### *What kind of future?*

The previous subsections have focused on establishing the importance of imagined futures, and understanding the kind of character traits associated with navigating different imaginings. In this subsection, I draw on the findings to understand the way the future must be imagined in pluralist settings. I do this using Chris Baker's lens, seeking to understand which groups are most effective in cultivating belonging, becoming and participation.

The groups that appeared to be most effective in developing belonging recognised that the building of an imagined future is a socially constructive project in its very nature. CTL struggled with this idea, because it already had such a clear and fleshed out vision of the world it was trying to create, the

result being that they often failed to be inclusive in their practice. HCVS had not grasped the concept of building an imagined future, and while transcendent ideas seemed to be at work in the form of equality, they similarly failed to engage in a socially constructive project. FbRN deliberately shied away from this idea, being far more interested in action, with the potential result that when funding ran out, the individual members returned to their own personal faiths. LC on the other hand, saw social construction as integral to creating social solidarity across difference. While sharing with FbRN an aversion to getting bogged down in theological debate, they nonetheless saw the importance of developing shared ideas of how the world should be before moving to act together.

Peter Berger famously suggested that alienation occurs when people fail to recognise that religious ideas about how we should live are not universal laws of the cosmos, but socially constructed. The data here suggests that a much more profound alienation is at work when people are not included in the social construction. The failure of CTL was in its strategic generalisation of the “Christian” and “socialist”, while FbRN focused on generalising “faith” and “hospitality”. These were strategies implemented from the top down. CTL was far more effective at mobilising its membership when it consulted on what its name should be. Similarly, LC finds that work-shopping the world as it should be facilitates a sense of unity across religious and ideological divides. This is a problem when leaders either fail to include or deliberately exclude certain groups and people, but it is equally problematic when groups, like HCVS, themselves fail to recognise that they are operating out of a belief system, and

find themselves in a muddle about the kind of world they are trying to create, who will be included in the discussion, how this can be reified through particular practices, and what kinds of ideas and practices they will not tolerate.

Transparency about belief turned out to be important across the spectrum, suggesting that a Habermasian approach to the public sphere is not only unworkable, but less liberal, less accountable and less forceful than a public sphere that is open and literate about its beliefs. Neutrality is not only impracticable but less desirable than literacy and inclusion. CTL and FbRN staff insisted that we all have faiths, implying that there can be no epistemic hierarchy.

Perhaps the most striking point observed is that whereas a strong single faith tradition provides a far richer narrative in which to operate, this narrative cannot be made to appeal to everybody in a diverse world. But rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater, it is important to adopt multiple framings, from being open about one's own faith position, to creating a broad umbrella, to draw on elements of numerous traditions, and, most importantly, to being inclusive and open in the construction of all of these. LC especially gives life to the possibility of socially constructing imagined futures in diverse communities. What emerges from the foregoing then, is the question of how to develop social solidarity in a context in which it is very difficult to find agreement over the kind of narrative that should be used.

Turning to this question specifically, my findings suggest that while a shared idea of the good is important in developing belonging, becoming and participation, it is not very practical to draw on a preconceived narrative, such as Christian, socialist, or even faith-based, in a pluralist setting. Partly, this is because words like “Christian”, “socialist” and “faith” were all seen to be problematic for some people. And analysis of FbRN showed that seeking lowest common denominator concepts such as hospitality can only get so far, meaning that the nature of the public sphere is left challenged. Yet when these concepts were broadened to suit as many people as possible, organisations became far less powerful in their ability to galvanise members: what one Christian believes in and is willing to do will inevitably be very different from that of another, let alone what one socialist or one person of faith is willing to do. This presents a challenge to current social movement literature, which seems focused on an idea of the broader, the better.

The broader a narrative becomes, the less it is able to retain what is distinctive. What this means for organisations devoted to public virtue is that they lose their distinctive take on what public virtue is. This dilution of ideals is most obvious when an ideal has become so thin that it cannot motivate volunteers, leaving the organisation dependant on the state or the market. This problem is seen in CTL, where members were unpredictable, and in HCVS and FbRN, where members could not be galvanised in the absence of a payslip. In this context, organisations can be seen to change their focus based on the priorities of public or private funders. This vulnerability to external influence was more pronounced in HCVS, which had no clear guiding

ideal or set of ideals, and which is relatively comfortable with taking on whatever projects it can find funding for, but could also be seen in FbRN, whose staff had strong mono-faith traditions, but which lacked in a unifying narrative of its own.

What emerges then, are two extremes: on the one side are the old traditions, unappealing to the public, but struggling to broaden their criteria of inclusion without losing their identity altogether. On the other side sits a secular approach with no particular interest in developing an ideology with a rallying point, and which leaves itself dependent on the powers that be, with their own ideological agendas.

This idea of two extremes also relates to the Habermasian notion of ensuring that only rational-critical debate, or arguments that are “in principle acceptable to anyone”, are included in the public sphere. While religious ideologies clearly influence the behaviour of certain actors, staff at CTL and FbRN also imbibe and reproduce secular ideals of inclusion and tolerance. Having a religious or ideological position is not mutually exclusive with having an inclusive and tolerant position. This is lucky since, as Dinham points out, “nobody starts from nowhere”; that is, there is no such thing as acting outside of any ideological lens. The question is what kinds of ideology are acceptable. Moreover, HCVS shows that a lack of clear ideological positions can equally lead to influence by others with their own ideological agendas.

This point seems to confirm the idea common amongst neo-Durkheimian sociologists of religion that where old gods die, new ones form to take their place. In this context, it is important to question what kinds of thing we want to hold sacred, and how to cultivate them inclusively. Yet a third key finding that I wish to draw attention to is the point that rather than new gods emerging fully formed, these gods form half-formed with covert and complicated influences. New gods require critical development, both to uncover and avoid undesired aspects, and to inclusively develop desired aspects.

The fourth and final point is that one does not need to be religious to embrace these ideas, as I have tried to demonstrate in my increasing use of the term imagined futures to reflect how an imagined world can create a space for a devoted community beyond the differences that separate people in the everyday world, and which negates and thereby transforms that everyday world.

### **Political structures and common agency in a pluralist society**

The last section concluded by putting forward the idea of imagined futures, as a way of simultaneously recognising plurality, and the power of a shared vision for cultivating solidarity. Chapter 4 explained the post-liberal analysis that the loss of ideas of the good in favour of social contracts concerned with material wellbeing had legitimised the state as the neutral arbiter of that social contract. It further explained that the state displayed co-optive tendencies, since it is rooted in a pessimism as to human nature, our ability to stand in

solidarity with one another. The state thus seeks to bureaucratically manage all political activity from the centre. These arguments were critically explored in relation to literature in social policy, which suggests the reality is far more mixed than this: much literature has been written to suggest that the state can embody principles of solidarity and empowerment. Numerous attempts have been made by governments to empower citizens, and it has been suggested that only where the state is financially and institutionally supportive can communities flourish. These points notwithstanding, it was suggested that even with the best will in the world, the state can display co-optive tendencies in interactions with grassroots community work. This section draws on findings to offer reflections on these ideas.

The first point to note from the findings is that there is no reason to believe that the state is inherently cooptive, nor that its use is indicative of pessimism regarding human nature. Rather, the varied examples of each organisation explored here suggest that it is entirely conceivable to have a synthesis of Tawney's state as embodying and administering a process of national gift exchange, and MacIntyre's vision of empowering pockets of virtuous community. Yet in order to live out this paradox, it is important that there is an ideal for which the state is a mechanism. The state itself cannot become the end, but only the means.

CTL sees the state and the legislative process as playing a key role in the embodying and administering of gift exchange. CTL's Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is and Sunday Trading campaigns emphasised the role of law in

protecting vulnerable people from the market. Yet by working very closely with the state, CTL also demonstrated a tendency to replicate its elitism. This elitism was perhaps assuaged by its dedication to working both inwards and outwards, influencing both politicians and the wider public. Yet CTL's narrative and methods meant its influence over its own membership was questionable, let alone the wider public.

HCVS had a particularly difficult experience with the state: not only being co-opted by it but adopting this co-optive tendency into its own practice. While the state is not necessarily inherently co-optive, in the case of HCVS, local government did prove capable of using money as leverage to shape organisations as it sees fit, and was very quick to do this in response to crises for which it may be held responsible. It was equally observed that HCVS was particularly vulnerable to this pressure due to the lack of an independent vision, and associated membership.

The co-optive power of the state was seen more positively with FbRN. The state played an important role in embodying the collective narrative and associated principles that the wider population expects to be upheld in the public sphere: intolerance towards intolerance and collaboration across difference. Putting aside debates as to whether the state is a carrier of vicarious religion or of vicarious secularity, as the state it may be seen as an important carrier of *whatever imaginings of the future we so choose*, enforcing this negatively through law, as well positively through funding. This function may prove to be more, not less important as people begin to reject

hierarchies. But with the wider populace turning away from traditional authority in droves, the state will also have to be opened up to work with groups on the ground. The most effective organisations were those able to maintain their own agenda. The state may embody a shared narrative, but it has not the people power to cultivate that narrative. It must therefore enable groups on the ground, whose cultivation of independent teleological structures and practices should be encouraged.

LC demonstrated perhaps the most empowered way of working with national and local politicians and governments: always very clear that its aim was to move from the world as it is to the world as it should by empowering civil society, it had varied relationships with the state, from managing contracts, to pragmatically working towards a shared end, to deliberately antagonising and undermining. The strength of LC in relation to the state is in its mantra of having “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies”. LC works against the state when it appears to threaten community initiatives, and with it when it appears to support those initiatives.

### **Economic context and common agency in a pluralist society**

The first section of the chapter constructed the idea of imagined futures as a way of framing solidarity in pluralist settings. The previous section explored briefly explored this idea in relation to politics. This section aims to do the same in relation to economics. Chapter 5 introduced the post-liberal argument that with the loss of ideas of the good and stress on material

wellbeing, capitalist logic arises as the best means of increasing that wellbeing. It does so through cultivating self-interested behaviour which undermines public duty. It then introduced research that gave a more nuanced answer: although capitalist logic had spread to infiltrate a number of inappropriate settings, capitalism was simply a free market, a blank canvas, which could be used for creating cooperative or self-interested behaviours. Based on this theory, I was particularly interested to ask whether instead of imposing economic changes from above, it was possible to change culture and thereby economic practice from below.

The first point worth making is that we clearly see a spread of capitalist logic into the sphere of civic engagement. One can also see capitalist logic in the way that CTL broadened its frame through the name change in order to suit a changing context on the ground. Partly, this is seen in the notion of competitive tendering, whereby organisations like HCVS and FbRN are forced to bid against other organisations for public and private funding in a marketplace. Both HCVS and FbRN were working towards turning some of their most valued services to grassroots organisations into profit-making enterprises, thereby undermining their availability for the most needy activists. And one can equally see capitalist logic in LC's appeal to the self-interest of institutions in seeking to gain their membership fees. To summarise, capitalist logic impacts on framing, funding and fees.

In each case the impact is ambiguous. In framing, following a market logic can increase membership and therefore engagement. But to achieve this success,

ideology is both diluted and fragmented. The message is broadened, say, from Christian socialist, with its deep history and strong policy implications, to Christians on the left. The ability to mobilise action is hampered. The message is fragmented, in that mobilisation around an agenda and strategy give way to mobilisation around issues as they arise.

Competitive tendering can make organisations more dynamic, but it also seems to create either disillusionment, or else an unhealthy lack of critical awareness in relation to ideological agendas being replaced by funding agendas. FbRN felt undermined by this competition, and felt partners turn into rivals. LC staff became more dynamic through competition, but they equally showed signs of anxiety and a willingness to betray one another in order to hold on to their job.

Turning services into profit-making enterprises obviously makes them exclusive. But equally introducing payment was seen as a way of protecting the organisation's funding, as well as acting as an incentive to the beneficiaries, ensuring that they will keep to agreed meeting times.

Marketing around membership fees and the self-interest of institutions or individuals can equally only go so far. At some point organisations have to work critically to develop consensus around shared ideas and shared actions. With this in mind, the following section suggests a possible way of developing social solidarity in capitalist contexts.

## Chapter 12: Conclusions and Implications

This writing was initially inspired by post-liberal critiques of modernity, which claimed that we had given up on ideas of the good. In the face of plurality, it had been decided that politics must become the management and accommodation of difference, and the facilitation of material wellbeing. The state and the market arose as monolithic mechanisms for generating these secure and wealthy societies. Policy concerning the social sphere adopted discourses of cohesion and capital. Public duty was in decline as political and social responsibility seemed limited to paying one's taxes and not directly hurting other people. Yet these critiques were faced with a problem, since it was not obvious how to start talking about *the* good in an increasingly plural society.

My naive hope was to cultivate or else stumble upon a new meta-narrative for solidarity that appealed to people of all faiths and none, left and right. What instead I have stumbled upon is a deliberative method for establishing such a narrative. This I have been calling imagined futures.

The aim of this conclusion is to refocus a thesis that has been engaged in observing lived realities back towards the activist inspiration: given all that has been discussed, what is to be done, and who is going to be doing it? As well as asking these questions theoretically, I speculate as to areas of possible impact.

## Imagined futures

The notion of imagined futures encapsulates a number of ideas developed in the discussion: In terms of religious groups, the importance of embracing a more reflexive approach, asking, how has the future we imagine changed over time, and what factors have influenced it? The inevitability of influence from some religious or ideological position, and the importance of openly and inclusively constructing that position, asking, who is doing the imagining? God? Priests? Laity? In terms of both religious and unreligious groups, the importance of recognising that one does not need to be religious to creatively imagine the future in ways that galvanise solidarity. In the next few subsections, I will begin to flesh out the theory involved in imagined futures. This will inevitably impinge on the kinds of political structures and economic contexts that are favoured, though I shall try to save discussion of these for the next two sections.

I will explore imagined futures in relation to each idea discussed above. I will first look at how religious groups can be more reflexively aware, both making use of what their theological positions can contribute to transform society, and understanding the limits of their theology and recognising the role that other's ideas might play in achieving desired ends. I will then look to how unreligious groups can themselves employ the idea of imagined futures to develop their own core ideals. It was already clear how HCVS staff were instinctively using a discourse of equality that acted as a way of imagining the future. Showing a greater awareness of this tendency, and inclusively and critically developing it, could help the production of a sense of common agency applicable to people

of all faiths and none. I draw on the work of LC to suggest that this model of the transcendental social can be developed without reference to any particular tradition. Finally, I will explore how, adopting this model, diverse traditions can easily be drawn into a metanarrative of belonging and becoming that simultaneously expresses certain core values, whilst nonetheless being less concerned with content than with how that content is developed.

*Understanding how imagined futures change with lived presents and vice versa*

This subsection explores the role of reflexivity in the development of religiously inspired social action to suit a pluralist setting. It begins by discussing the manner in which religiously inspired actors have managed to simultaneously draw on their own tradition, while nonetheless recognising that theirs is one amongst many. It will suggest that a kind of neo-Thomist theology is implicit in their thinking; there is an unknowability about transcendence that makes it acceptable to have numerous approaches to it. It will then explore how this reflexive approach allows religiously inspired actors to expand their imagined community

, broadening their appeal to other people. These actors strip back their baggage, providing a back-to-basics idea of religion that accepts multiple approaches and ideals.

CTL staff hold the notion of reconciling all things to the creator as crucial to their motivation for action. This idea has a specific meaning in that it aims to

direct political action towards issues of social justice. One member is particularly clear, suggesting that he “personally couldn’t be a Christian and a Tory”. Staff wear their faith on their sleeves, suggesting they “unashamedly” use “biblical reason”. They seek to influence people through living a distinctively Christian way of life. They travel to other Christian organisations and seek to inspire a socialist mode of operating. Yet they are very quick to suggest that these are only their personal opinions, that Christianity is not the only creator of this vision. They also make clear that Christianity forms an imagined community beyond political differences, and that it is not their place to speculate as to another individual’s duty.

Here we have a Christian socialist practice that is simultaneously and paradoxically deeply motivating in a particular religious and political direction and involves inspiring others to follow the same direction; but that does not lay sole claim to that direction, that is beyond any particular political direction, and that is unique to each individual. Christian socialism is acting as a mode of direction which negates the world as it is, transforms individuals who in turn seek to transform the world as it is, and yet which is not regarded as a prerequisite for involvement. To put this simply, Christian socialists seek to bring about a Christian socialist future without requiring people to be either Christian or socialist!

Three possible explanations for this paradox emerge, which do not have to be mutually exclusive. The first idea is that the kingdom of God, transcendence, is ultimately unknowable, even if “little bits of it” can be seen on earth. The

transcendent is equally unknowable to all, and so castigating others for imperfectly living it out does not make sense. This idea can be seen in the insistence that “we all have faith”. This discourse not only insists that we are all equally flawed, but also invokes the possibility that we form an imagined community of those that do not know but believe; a community of the faithful. The second idea, related to the first is that if transcendence cannot be fully known, and can never be fully brought about, there is little point in insisting on conversion. The final idea, perhaps the most important, is the priority of love: implicit in the demonstration of the kingdom is that it must be cultivated inclusively. The means must match the ends. The importance of this final idea can be seen in CTL’s stress on prefigurative politics. The world CTL wants to bring about is a world in which all are involved in the construction of that world; to bring it about through castigating, dominating or imposing would be to undermine the ends. Revolution cannot be imposed from the top down. Instead, it must be inspired from the bottom up.

The work of CTL perhaps provides some quite ground-breaking revelations as far as social movement theory is concerned, even if perhaps not for the anthropology of religion. Since the cultural turn in sociology, research is beginning to demonstrate the determinative role of culture and religion in social grievances (Wald et al 2005). What the literature has not observed however, is how deeply religious groups may engage in flexible social construction of their theology to suit the situation on the ground. Wald et al rightly point out that religious groups may act in ways that are not “utility-maximising”, but they treat religion as determinative and immutable. They do

not observe how the process works the other way too, with theologies being related to reflexively to allow for elasticity, and thereby inclusion of more members (Wald et al. 2005: 126). In this way, theology and utility are in constant dialogue.

The work of CTL also contributes to broader social movement theory regarding master frames. Benford and Snow suggest in their comprehensive review of the literature that “the more inclusive and flexible collective action frames are, the more likely they are to function as or evolve into ‘master frames’” that can include people from a diverse range of imagined communities (Benford and Snow 2000: 618). Yet the idea that emerges here is that a frame can only become so elastic. Stretch it too far and it snaps, as could be seen with the notion of Christian socialism stretched so far that the actions of members became entirely unpredictable: members became more nominal than active, and there was little movement left. Moreover, for some frames, no amount of stretching will do. The idea of being either Christian, or on the left, is anathema to some.

Perhaps what CTL lacked here was the willingness to let their ideals dilute into a broader master frame, perhaps of “faith”, as reports of their private meeting on the name change suggest. This kind of flexibility was demonstrated in the work of FbRN, where Gary demonstrated the ability to simultaneously strongly advocate his own faith, while insisting on a broader idea of faith that included people of all faiths and none.

### *Becoming imaginative about the future*

This subsection explores how the reflexive attitude towards religion can be carried through the prism of imagined futures to apply to unreligious actors. Imagining the future is a mode of critical reflection, analysis and development to aid organisations in recognising the things they already believe, working out the aspects that are subversive and positive, including members in this process of construction, and developing rituals that create a strong sense of belonging, becoming and action.

Following Bloch, it is clear that the notion “religious” cannot be universally applied. As a concept it can only be applied to a particular type of activity. The term is moreover alienating, divisive and controversial. It has proved useful, however, to use the term imagined futures, since this was evident even at HCVS, where staff were either hostile or indifferent to religion, or else displayed low levels of religious literacy. HCVS staff frequently used discourses relating to equality. The concept of equality acts as an imagined future which negates and inspires the transformation of the world as it is.

Yet while HCVS staff all displayed evidence of this discourse around equality, the mode did not effectively manifest in belonging, becoming or participation, either amongst those within the organisation, or externally.

There was no formal recognition of equality as a way of imagining the future and transforming the present. The staff did not discuss what they intended by

equality, and had little by way of tradition to draw on. Discussion was around personal experience or the law. The only designated opportunity for discussing equality was in a senior working group on Equality and Diversity. This managerial meeting provided no obvious sense of belonging. One might suggest that the meeting provided a sense of becoming, since it provides an opportunity to identify areas of improvement. Yet lower level staff who felt their ideals were being compromised had no obvious way of addressing this. There was no forum for inclusively exploring equality, what it meant and how it variously inspired and frustrated staff.

There were not attempts to educate in ideas of equality or to develop a spirit of association around the notion of equality. Developing a shared spirit of association was not recognised by staff as a core task. Instead, the focus was on maintaining the stability of the organisation in changing political and economic contexts.

The way that HCVS staff have picked up the ideal of equality demonstrates the way in which, as old gods die, rather than new gods emerging fully formed, new gods arrive half-formed with covert and complicated influences. New gods require critical development, both to uncover and avoid undesired aspects, and to inclusively develop desired aspects.

*Imagining the future as a way of imagining the community*

The absence of a degree of reflexivity and of certain rituals in some groups provides a perspective on what might be required to develop and sustain imagined futures. In this subsection, I reflect on how FbRN and LC provide relatively successful models for imagining the future in a pluralist context. I then provide a concise outline of what I think imagining the future consists of.

FbRN offers positive ways of imagining the future. Gary's ability to simultaneously hold dear his Jewish identity *and* accept that this is not the path for everybody demonstrates an awareness of the importance of reflexivity. And his attempts to build an umbrella around the idea of having faith shows he is aware of the importance of developing master frames that can include people of all faiths and none in a shared project. Yet this focus on master frames, what I call "transcending transcendence" was difficult in the face of very different ideas of transcendence.

Moreover, as referring to chapter 10 will attest, what I found frustrating when discussing with FbRN the notion of cultivating a shared narrative of public virtue was the way the conversation always turned back to how to accommodate various different faiths. Partly, this fixation on accommodation is down to a liberal desire to be inclusive. But partly there is a lack of imagination regarding the ideas and practices to move forwards with shared ideas of how the world should be and what a human community should like amidst a great diversity of different ways of living. It is in this realm that the idea of imagined futures becomes key: it is a way of simultaneously being open to multiple ideas, recognising either theologically, through notions of

doubt, or sociologically, that social construction always plays a role in shaping the ideas we live by; *and* recognising the inevitability, the dangers and the advantages, of holding something sacred, fundamental, that prevents a slide into instrumental ways of understanding human community. The notion of imagined futures is thus a method *and* a recognition. It is a way of inclusively and critically exploring the question of the ideals we live by, both through discourse and action.

LC provides a much more advanced example of imagined futures, despite, or perhaps in spite of the fact that many of its staff are not religious at all. The difference *within* the organisation forces reflexivity. LC uses the phrase “taking the world as it is to the world as it should be” to indicate its collective work towards an imagined future. The phrase is used to construct an imagined community around the world as it could be, helping those with very different backgrounds to recognise that they are similar enough to work together. The notion of the world as it could be was a device for creating an imagined community around a shared imagined future. The idea was extremely powerful, even as it was recognised that it had been socially constructed.

Yet the world as it could be was very rarely fleshed out. Partly, this was because to do so would be to descend into arguments about minutiae before any kind of collective action could be undertaken. Partly, it was because placing too much emphasis on the world as it should be could be a distraction from small, winnable goals. The world as it should be negated the world as it is, and was developed through practical observations of the world as it should

not be: divided and disempowered communities, financial disadvantage. Rather than responding to instances of injustice by theorising about a better future, LC took instances of injustice and thought of small, winnable ways in which they could improve on these injustices.

LC creates a number of rituals around their ideals that create a sense of belonging and becoming. Major events, in which LC challenge public representatives of the world as it should not be, or in which new campaigns are kick-started or successful campaigns celebrated, provide a sense of effervescence and empowerment.

LC provides its staff with a strong sense of becoming, of a character that is improving over time, by increasing responsibility, and offering recognition to those that perform well in events or actions. It also widens the net, allowing members of the public to be involved in this becoming, by making them an integral part of actions and events.

Imagined futures can thus be summed up in the following way:

- Socially constructed imagined future that can never be fully achieved, and that negates the world as it is
- Inclusively developed to include people of different backgrounds
- Never fully fleshed out to avoid descent into argument
- Very rarely discussed to avoid distraction from small, winnable goals.

- Supported through rituals of empowerment, equality and leadership development, designed to change the lifestyle of activists, and thereby the world.

It is worth exploring why imagining the future should come more naturally to some groups than to others. It can be observed, for instance, that whereas CTL and HCVS had predominantly Christian and nonreligious or unreligious staff respectively, FbRN and LC had a mixture of people of different faiths, with LC also having people of no faith. While CTL and HCVS did not discriminate, showing an awareness of operating in a pluralist setting, FbRN and LC experienced pluralism *within* their organisations, and were far more likely to be reflexively aware of what they believed and how it might impact on their actions, as well as understanding how others may believe different things and still exhibit the same actions. For this reason, imagined futures might call for policy that is directed towards encouraging not only equality of provision but also diversity and inclusivity *within* an organisation. This idea has strong implications for numerous policy areas, from welfare service delivery to faith schools.

Imagined futures is an important concept for religious groups, since it helps them to accommodate people of different religious and nonreligious perspectives. It provides an accessible way of transforming religious activity in the public sphere, since rather than broadening framing to the point of losing identity, organisations can develop practices that make their work more inclusive and not just also but *thereby* more dynamic.

Imagined futures is so powerful for unreligious groups because it retains the powerful traits heretofore uniquely associated with religion or nonreligion in the public sphere, such as belonging, becoming and spiritual capital, without the less accommodating aspects such as a strong sense of in-group and out-group, or a need to proselytise. The importance of this flexibility within religious organisations perhaps points the way to impact through providing religious literacy training for religious social actors. Not only would this potentially make those actors more inclusive, better serving a pluralist setting, but it might also make them more dynamic in a changing world.

Imagined futures is also a useful concept for increasing understanding between the religious and the unreligious since it allows them to see that there is parity between them, given that they both hold *something* fundamental. Again a clear case for impact emerges here, with the possibility of developing training in these methods of imagining the future, allowing organisations to become more aware of their core beliefs, more inclusive in their construction, and more inspiring in their ability to cultivate a spirit of solidarity in the community as a whole.

The concept of imagined futures should also be useful for policy makers, who can distinguish between groups that do and do not develop ways of imagining the future, without having to treat religion as a special category at the expense of nonreligious or unreligious groups.

Finally, this ability to recognise the advantages of imagined futures without descending into the treatment of religion as a special category assists in overcoming the post-secular paradox, and transitioning towards a truly post-secular outlook. In chapter 2 I explained the existence of a post-secular paradox, whereby the inherent issues with a secular politics, such as the descent into material measures of success, are not addressed, while religions are recognised for their unique role in developing cohesion and in delivering public services cheaply. The result is that not only are the inherent issues with secularism not addressed, but they begin to colonise religions, killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Moreover, nonreligious organisations become increasingly defensive and the unhelpful religious/secular binary is reinforced. By showing that the strength of religions is in their ability to name something as sacred, a bottom line which they will not give up on, and by showing that this mechanism is socially constructed and can be developed in nonreligious and unreligious organisations, and is more effective when developed inclusively, imagined futures can simultaneously provide a framework for politicians and policymakers to explore their own ideals and baselines, but also assist them in developing this capacity in other organisations – or at least not undermining this capacity.

### **Imagining the future as political process: Turning traditional power inside-out**

By treating imagining the future as political process, a clear idea emerges for the reform of political structures: the idea is to simultaneously turn traditional

power inside out, and to encourage grassroots power to recognise and work with traditional power.

The idea of turning power inside out first emerged when I was working with CTL. At first, there appeared to be a contradiction in their work. On the one hand, they were deeply committed to the idea, strongly in the roots of Christian Socialism, that people and communities must be engaged in service to one another. Hence CTL seemed to sit so comfortably with the post-liberal agenda. But on the other hand, CTL sees the state as key in implementing social change.

This confusion cleared up when I realised CTL see the state as engaging existing institutions in the process of social change. This includes but is also more than the Hegelian notion of the state using carrot and stick to make institutions and people more civil. CTL are critical of the Fabian notion of state-implemented social change because it creates a disconnect between lifestyle and policy. They encourage politicians and the wider public to *live out* socialism. As a politician, voting on left wing agendas does not abrogate the responsibility to live a socialist life. This includes empowering the wider public. CTL reimagines what it means to be a politician: not just manipulating the levers of positional and institutional power, but also empowering and inspiring others to act. Likewise, as members of the public, it is hoped that we will respond to this call.

The idea of turning power inside out then, is of recognising the power of positions and institutions, and of working from these positions and within these institutions to develop new leaders such as will empower more people to become politically engaged. The perfect example of this is CTL's Labour Neighbours campaign, which encouraged Labour MPs and organisers to regard themselves more as community organisers, encouraging local people to become more involved in their local issues, and thereby conforming to the London Citizens definition of leaders as people who have followers.

We can see clear examples of when power has not been turned inside out in this way at HCVS, where not only was the organisation executing the demands of funders, living within this kind of iron cage, but also staff were imposing demands upon community minded individuals at the grassroots, playing its part in the construction of the iron cage. Here we see a model of power traditionally understood: an order is made at the top, which forms into policy, which is imposed through incentives and sanctions on those at the bottom.

This process was not entirely unsuccessful for imagining the future. A clear example of top-down policy is the development and implementation of equality and diversity frameworks. Equality and diversity frameworks have often been imposed on organisations, which in turn implement procedures in perfunctory ways. But HCVS has utilised this top-down framework to inspire its Equality and Diversity Working Group, helping them to reflect on and improve their practice. Chris specifically referred to this working group when

explaining how his personal faith in equality was lived out in his work. From this perspective it would seem that so long as policy adequately matches up, perhaps using social scientific research, with the ideological disposition of those on the ground, far from a burden, it can actually be a tool for framing, reflecting on and implementing their aspirations.

The idea of turning traditional power inside out might equally be considered as working within conventional political structures but adopting nonconventional political strategies: focusing on campaigns, mass-mobilisation and leadership development.

In one sense this idea of turning power inside-out is nothing new, sounding as it does very similar to the Freirean notion of conscientisation (1996). What differs here, however, is that turning power inside-out follows from, and implicitly recognises, the role of ideas of the good in developing the solidarity necessary for collective action. In this model, ideas of the good become the lens through which empowerment is understood: if people are not involved in the construction of the narratives that shape their actions, then they only ever labour under the illusion of power: they have the power to execute a destiny written for them by somebody else. This latter framing is ideal for the hegemonic: leaders define people's destiny for them, while all the energy for its execution is provided by the people themselves. Using ideas of the good for framing empowerment is thus what separates real revolution from the kind envisioned by David Cameron's Big Society.

*Bringing activists from outside in*

Just as it is important for traditional authority to focus less on positional power and more on relational power or empowerment, so it is important for grassroots groups to recognise the importance of working with traditional authority.

While CTL sought to turn power inside out, they nonetheless put a lot of focus on bringing people from the outside in, seeking to engage the civically active but politically disillusioned. CTL thus recognised that part of the process of reforming traditional power involves bringing in different kinds of people. Yet persuading those on the outside, the disillusioned, remains difficult. CTL staff spend a large portion of their time cajoling people to become more involved in conventional politics. They make clear that a number of decisions inevitably do get made in “smoke-filled” rooms resulting in legislation, and suggest that they are not trying to change the room, but the people in it.

HCVS similarly recognised the importance of keeping close relationships with politicians and policy makers, ensuring that they put together reports which summarised the impact of their work. And my time at FbRN demonstrated how important it is to focus on who you know in order to maintain influence. While policy makers might seek to ground their work in evidence, still they often already know the organisations and people that are commissioned, from the research stage to implementation. Gary explained that once government had decided religion might play a role in the regeneration of communities, and that multi-faith was the most appropriate model, still their first step was to start

with “a guy” of faith that they knew. Even when the selection of who to work with is not entirely random, still the tendency to treat religious leaders as representatives of their faith is precarious.

Keeping a strong working relationship with politicians and policy makers is not just a matter of survival. Even an influential organisation such as LC has been tempted by entering into large-scale, long-term state commissions. This is because LC is always having issues with scalability. By building a strong working relationship with the state, organisations are able to share best practice, and either expand their organisation, or expand their model of work. LC also demonstrated the importance of fluidity between protestor and co-designer and co-producer. While the first phase of a campaign might be to embarrass local or national government, the second phase involves negotiating a deal and producing a response.

### *Inside-out and outside-in*

Just as the state needs to open up, indeed be turned inside-out, moving its focus from positional power to relational power or empowerment, in order to engage people on the conventional political process, so do grassroots groups need to recognise the importance of engaging positional power through networking and bidding to ensure their survival and to enable them to flourish.

The state still plays an important role in incentivising public virtue and sanctioning vice. It plays a key role in embodying and delivering the

ideological frames of the public, and can even be seen to empower grassroots activism through these framings. Rather than giving up on politics, that is, suggesting that traditional authority has no place in capturing the diverse and fleeting desires of the contemporary public, it is better to demand that conventional politics needs to adopt the practices of nonconventional political movements that have engaged so much public support.

Adopting these practices includes placing a greater emphasis on inclusive construction of purpose and developing rituals of belonging, especially the development of new leaders. It is also to in part confer legitimacy through the ability to energise mass support. These methods include.

- A prefigurative approach whereby internal politics mimics external politics, that is, where the lived present aspires to the imagined future
- Shifting focus from positional to relational power.
- Shifting method from incentive and sanction to leadership development
- Designing and delivering policy through processes of listening and consensus.
- Making civic engagement the means and the ends of political change.

To adopt the practices of nonconventional political movements is only one step. Alongside this, conventional politics needs to engage with already existing movements with claims to legitimacy through mass mobilisation. Partly, this means encouraging activists to partake on conventional politics.

Partly it means involving new political movements in the design and delivery of solutions.

Engagement is a two-way process. Conventional politics opening itself to new political movements can only work insofar as these movements understand the power of conventional politics and commit to constructive engagement with it.

### **Imagining the future as economic reform: cooperation in capitalism**

Findings suggest that although capitalism and its associated practices can undermine public virtue, by creating unhealthy competition, by producing wages too low to bring talented people into the charity sector, and by cultivating a culture of service delivery rather than community empowerment, there are nonetheless effective ways of working within the capitalist system to bring about change. Cooperation can happen in capitalism, just not as simply as has been suggested by Durkheim or Zak.

It was observed that what Durkheim calls mechanic solidarity, observed in primitive societies that invoke shared ideas and rituals to inculcate social solidarity, and organic solidarity, the kind of cooperation that is supposed to naturally occur in capitalist societies, might be of such a different quality that it is flawed to suggest that the former can be replaced by the latter in any meaningful way. The kind of relationship post-liberals would qualify as being important for a fully human life, namely, a relationship directed towards

contemplation of the ultimate good, and through which each member is transformed into a more ethical organisation or person, is patently not the same kind of solidarity that does appear to be naturally occurring, such as that between service providers to bid for a contract. The relationship, for example, between LC staff, or between LC staff and dues-paying members, was one of a community of shared interest, which was acknowledged as only being as strong as those interests, and often for the benefit of only the immediate community. Yet the occurrence of organisations like BIC and ELBA demonstrate a community of shared action somewhat closer to the post-liberal ideal, and their impetus for formation and ongoing action are worth further research.

Secondly, it was noticed that organic solidarity is flawed, since far from naturally occurring, the cooperation delivered by CTL and LC demonstrates a significant degree of consciousness-raising on the part of dedicated organisers. Ordinary citizens need to be conscientised to recognise where their interests converge, and motivated to act.

What is more, this process of conscientisation actually might depend on mechanic solidarity to create a context for action. Naturally, this could be observed in CTL, who draw on Biblical ideas to inspire campaigning efforts towards an organic solidarity, especially with campaigns such as Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is. But it also applies to LC, as observed through the invocation of moving from “the world as it is”, to “the world as it should be”, and through the invocation of Jesus and Muhammad as community

organisers when seeking to recruit Christian and Muslim members. So the structures of mechanic solidarity, and the production of a shared framework of becoming remain important. Recognising the role of mechanic or transcendent forms of solidarity seems especially important in a time in which trade unions are rapidly losing membership as members decide the organisation is no longer serving their self-interest.

Notwithstanding the importance of drawing on mechanic to establish cooperation in capitalism, it is also worth recalling the way that solidarity does operate within a market. CTL draws the majority of its funds directly from membership fees and public events. HCVS and FbRN are sheltered from this only by drawing funds from the state or from private funders. LC relies on a combination of all three sources. This suggests that religious solidarity can quite easily be dissolved in capitalist logics.

It is important to ask what it means that people are drawing on mechanic solidarity to cultivate cooperation in capitalism. Simplistically, it means that shared ideas of the good, and the rituals around these, provide a pool of resonance that can be tapped into to alter economic behaviour in a capitalist society. Yet these ideas are equally vulnerable to dilution and fragmentation.

### **From political theology to imagined futures**

Could it really be that divinely ordained ideas of the good, interpreted by great people, interpreted into grand political theologies by greater people still, and

bestowed from upon high by still greater people, may only be as powerful, perhaps less so, than imagined futures, deliberately socially constructed by ordinary men and women as they live out their lives? Of course it remains deeply important that great thinkers continue to ask ultimate questions about what a good life consists of. Wisdom can often be neglected in a society focused on equality. But wisdom is of no value if it does not speak to the way lives are lived by real people. I have sought to demonstrate through my discussion that the reality of how people act in solidaristic ways is much more complicated. The point then, is not to ignore ancient wisdom, but to open it up to interact with real people as they live their lives: the question of what the good life consists of is important – too important to be left to just a few people. This nuanced approach can be applied to politics and economics at all levels. The point is not to do away with old institutions, but to reform them to be focused on inclusive practices for imagining the future. The only question left to ask is can anyone really imagine such a future?

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## Appendix 1

The table below represents time spent with each organisation, as well as how many participants were involved: length of time, frequency of visits, size of each organisation, key participants and interviewees.

	Length	Frequency	Organisation size	Key participants	Interviewees
Christians on the Left	6 months	1-2 days/week	10 staff 1000 members	8	4
Faith-based Regeneration Network	4 months	1-2 days/week	4 staff Large network of informal affiliates	4	4
Hackney CVS	4 months	1-2 days/week	28 staff Numerous dependent grassroots organisations	10	4
London Citizens	6 months	3 days/week initially, then 1 day/week	22 staff Large network of informal participants	12	4

