



Theorising the Democratic State

Elizabeth Frazer

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~efrazer/default.htm>

Lecture 6:

Associational Life





Atomised mass society

Schumpeter:

- *People are engaged in their personal concerns*
- *Citizens' task confined to choice between governments*
- *Voting is modelled on individual choice between consumption goods*



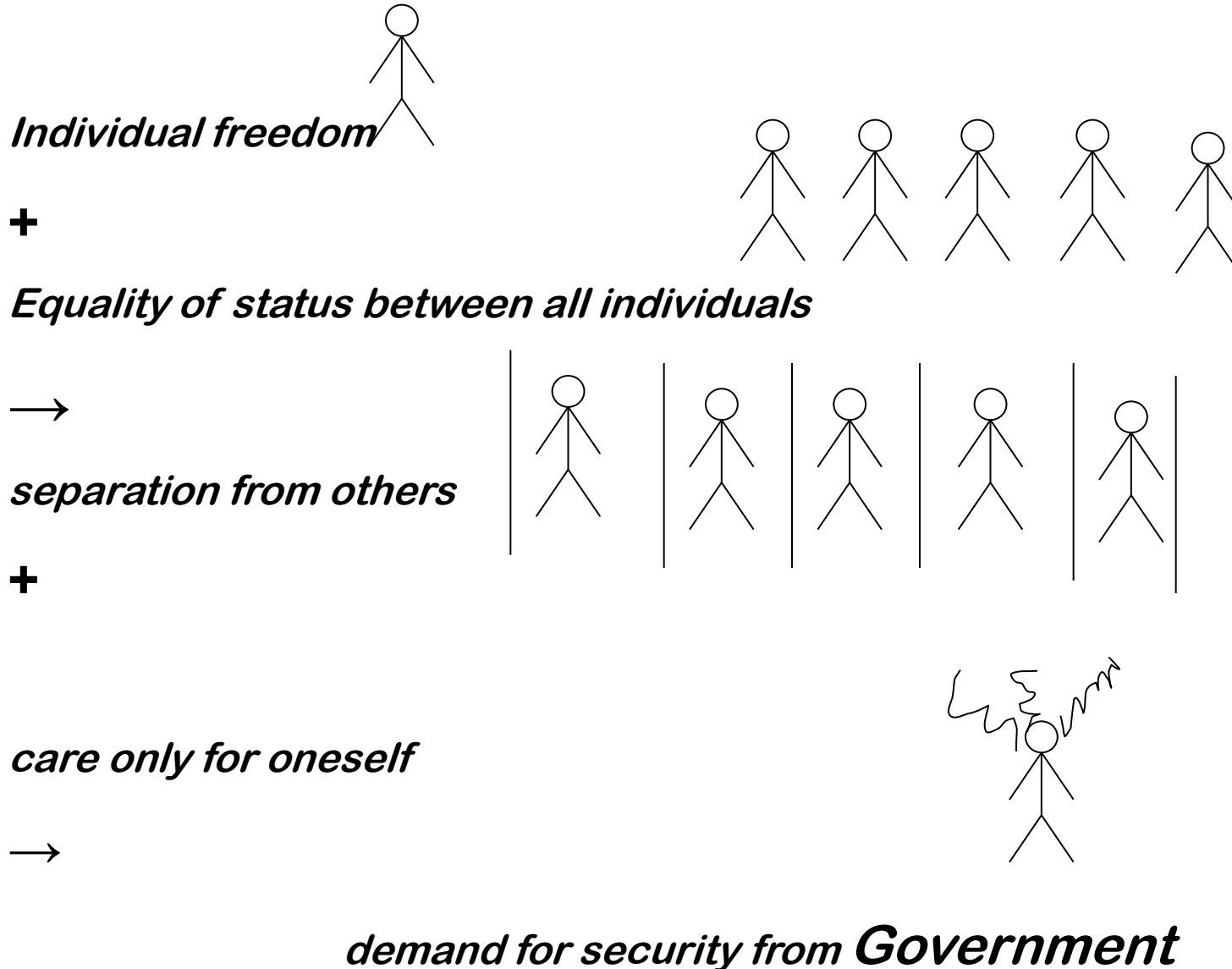
Individualism

leads to

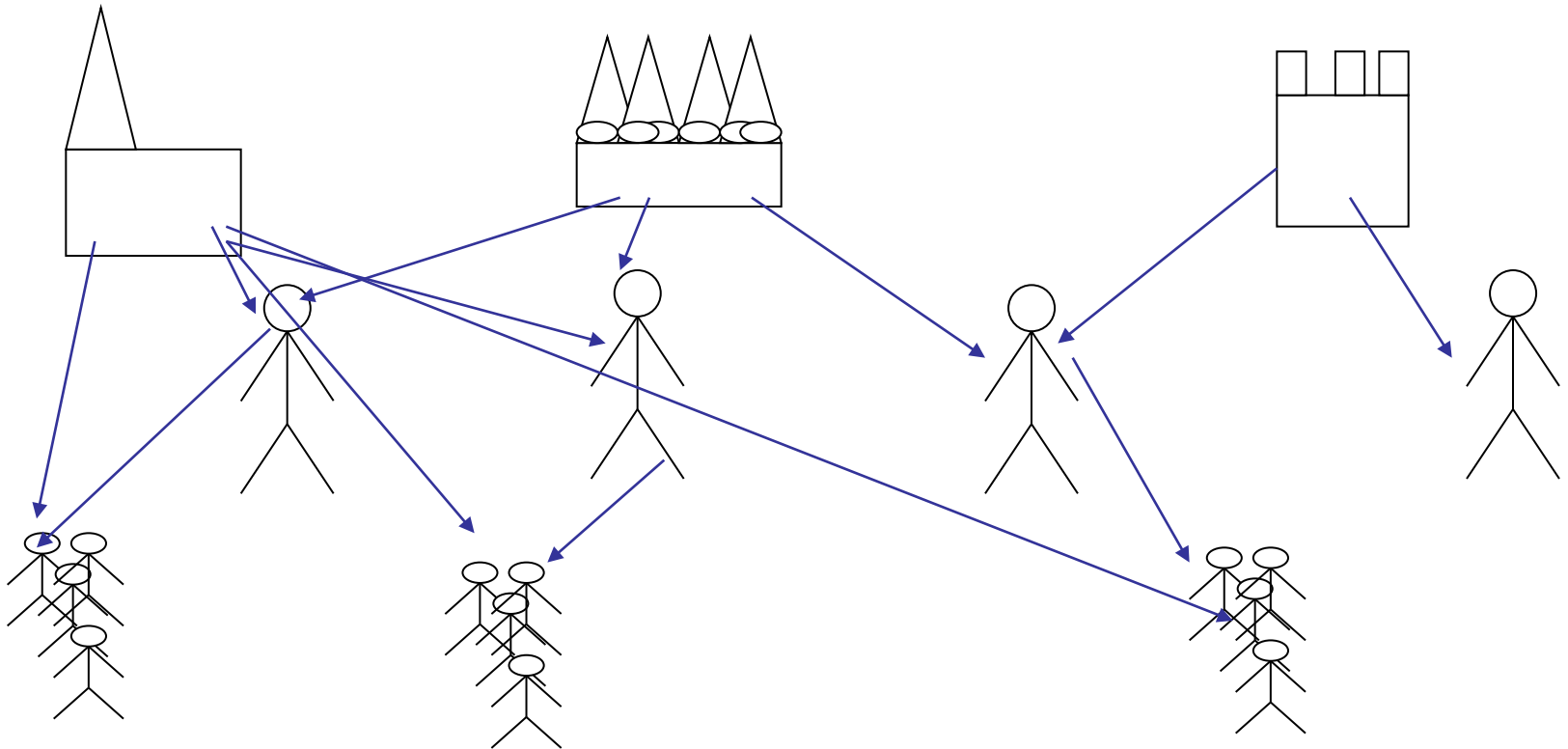
**authoritarian
government**

Alexis de Tocqueville 1805-1859

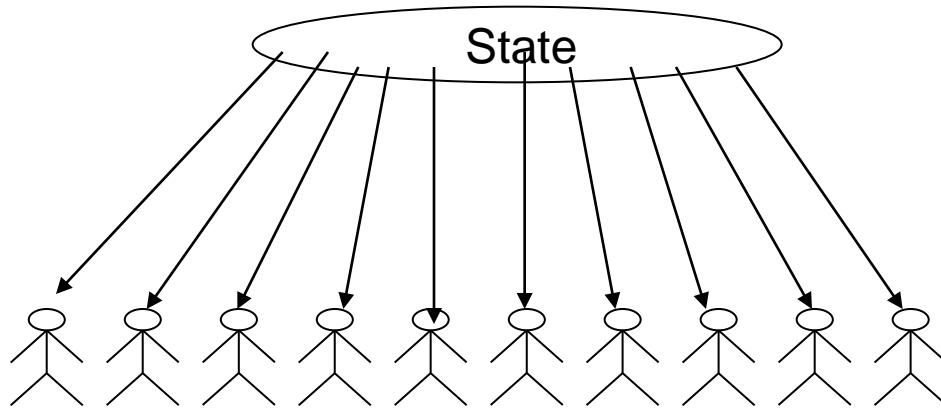
Individualism and Authoritarian Government



Feudal/aristocratic society



Modern central state



Remedy for tendency to state centralisation

- Local collective self-government and public provision
 - *decreases need for central state provision and regulation*
 - *raises local social capital – stocks of resources needed for social investment and production*
 - *increases individual capacity and reliability*
 - ? *raises expected costs of defection*
 - ? *engenders friendship and preference for helping*

**Centralised and authoritarian states
proscribe civil association;**

**Civil association keeps truthfulness alive
in authoritarian states.**



Vaclav Havel b. 1936

‘Here a different kind of life – a kind of anti-political politics – can be lived, and the self-sustaining aspects of the system, its presence within each individual, can be shaken off.’

(John Keane, introduction to Power of the Powerless, 1985)



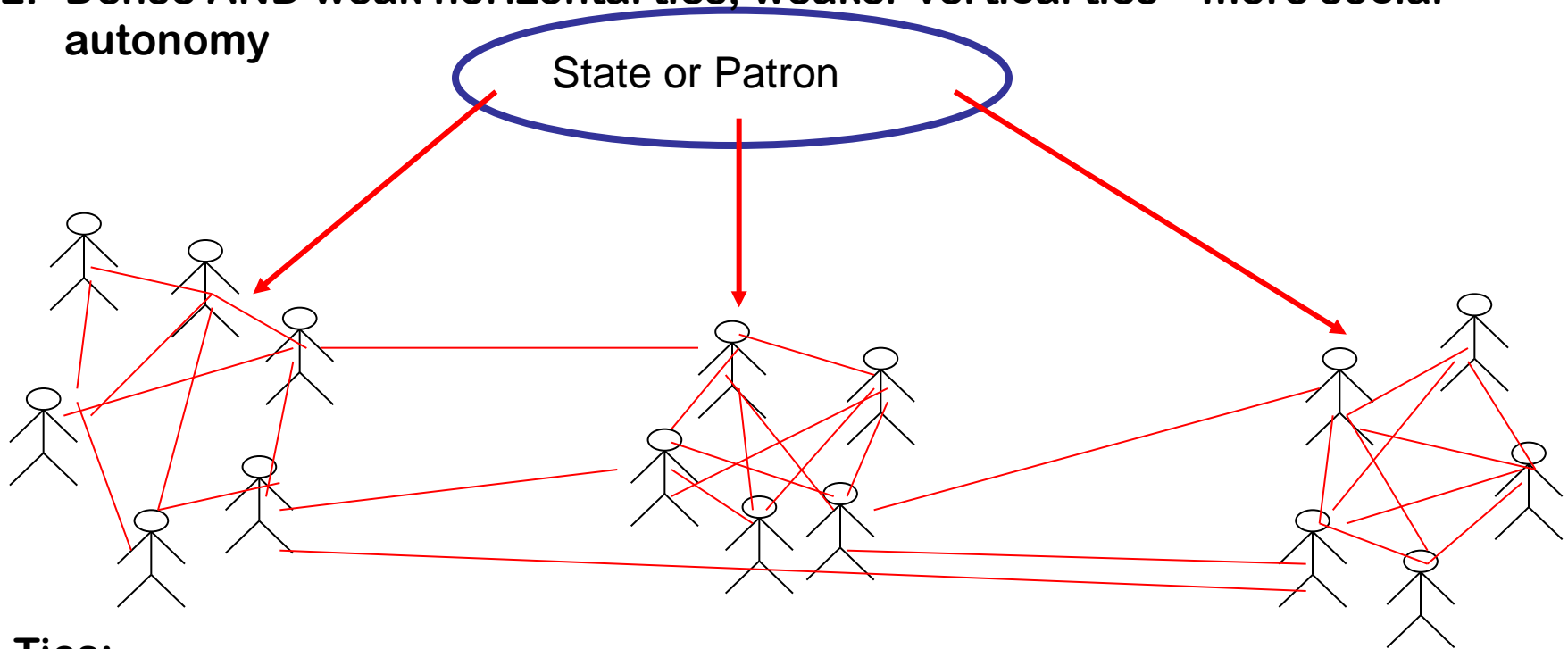
David Hume 1711-1776



Adam Smith 1723-1790

Commercial society requires trust in contract, civility and sociability between parties to contracts; and has its counterpart in friendliness and politeness in social life.

1. Dense networks; strong multiplex vertical ties
2. Dense AND weak horizontal ties; weaker vertical ties – more social autonomy



Ties:

Density: Is everyone connected with you connected with each other?

Multiplexity: Does the connection between two persons have more than one dimension (eg work, leisure, worship, debt, kinship)?

Strength: Is the tie direct, or is it e.g. the friend of a friend?

In a society and state with a civic culture there is 'a substantial consensus on the legitimacy of political institutions and the direction and content of public policy, a widespread tolerance of a plurality of interests and belief in their reconcilability, and a widely distributed sense of political competence and mutual trust in the citizenry.'



Gabriel Almond 1911-2002



Sidney Verba b.1932

Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

----- eds. *The Civic Culture Revisited*. London: Sage Publications, 1980 – p.4

The theory of civic culture:

Democratic stability needs an underlying culture – a political culture - of a particular sort: a civic culture

Almond and Verba's method:

Attitude measurement by survey

Civic culture vocabulary

Political culture: *the culture that underlies and supports, or is the counterpart to, a particular kind of polity (political society including government) and politics (competition, formal and informal, for the power to govern)*

Civic culture: *(Almond and Verba) a political culture centred on 'civility' and 'civic values' – acceptance of political authority, tolerance of plurality, broad agreement about public policy, widely distributed political competence, trust in government and other citizens*

Democratic culture: *acceptance, endorsement and practice of democratic procedures and values: majoritarianism, public deliberation, governmental accountability, election or selection of government, popular sovereignty ...*

Civic culture vocabulary contd

5. Social Capital: *the resources that human beings need in order to make social investments, get a return on these, engage in social production – eg friendships are a form of social capital which enable individuals to get help and support when needed; neighbourly relations are a form of social capital which enable neighbourhoods to make improvements in their environment ...*

6. Civil Society: *Society based on civil values (politeness, trust in contracts, sociability, public life (coffee houses, art, public space, news media and discussion); hence with organisational and regulatory capacity independent of state and government; the basis for 'speaking truth to power' (Havel).*

Other possible and actual political cultures

- *Marx on capitalist society: exploitative and ever concentrating capitalist class; exploited, propogandised and coerced working class; vanguard revolutionary proletarian party alongside bourgeois political parties;*
- *Marx's communist vision: self-governing communities absent public political (coercive) power;*
- *Elitists: permanent and stable hierarchical domination; orderly reproduction of elite groups through inter-generational transmission of position*
- *de Tocqueville's ancien regime: irresponsible aristocracy; bourgeois jealousy of aristocratic privilege; peasantry angry about exploitation; intellectuals intoxicated with grand theory*
- *'amoral familism': closely knit kinship groups, hostile to each other; strong vertical ties to patrons* [Banfield]



Theory:

Civil Society (high levels of social capital; civic culture)

is a necessary condition of

a stable and properly democratic state and government

because ...

Negative: *relation between mass society, loss of social ties, and authoritarian government based on demagogic appeal*

Positive:

1. *learning for people in groups: cooperation, organisation, deliberation, selection of officers*
2. *concentrations of social and human capital – for campaigns, participation in public debate, holding government to account etc*
3. *multiple memberships and overlapping networks: more effective power facing government*



