



8. citizenship and civil disobedience

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At a meeting of the group on Wednesday 8 May 1996, April Carter gave a presentation on the topic of civil disobedience and notions of citizenship. Present at the meeting were: Christina Arber, Tricia Allen, April Carter, Howard Clark, Bob Overy, Lindis Percy, Michael Randle, Carol Rank, Andrew Rigby, Walter Stein. Notes for a paper from April Carter were circulated before the meeting. At her suggestion I have incorporated some of the points from it into her opening address. *Note:* In May 2001 April Carter's book *The Politics of Global Citizenship* was published by Routledge, London. It explores further the ideas set out in this presentation

citizenship and civil disobedience - [April Carter](#) [2]

April said that the presentation she had prepared came primarily out of academic rather than activists' concerns. It was work in progress rather than a finished product and she would particularly welcome the response of the group to the notion of world citizenship. The purpose of her talk was to explore how civil disobedience could be justified in relation to various perspectives on government and concepts of citizenship. Possible theoretical approaches were: an anarchist belief in individual responsibility to society but rejection of government; a republican concept of active political participation, and responsibility for the public good; a liberal concept of civic obligation modified by appeal to individual conscience and universal principles; or an attempt to realise a model of world citizenship. These approaches suggested different views on what methods and styles of civil disobedience are either justifiable or effective.

As a starting point she would look briefly at the arguments in Thoreau's 1849 classic tract *Civil Disobedience* which did invoke an appeal to the individual but also suggested a near anarchist position, somewhat modified by his invoking elements of a republican view of citizenship drawn from the American revolutionary tradition. She would also raise some questions about the elitist implications of Thoreau's stress on the few just men (or even one just man), who could have a disproportionate impact, and ask if a moral elitism is an issue for contemporary civil disobedience.

That morning's *Guardian* had a supplement on the history of protest with some interesting articles on the nature of civil disobedience and direct action today. The concept of citizenship cropped up in several of the articles. The global dimension also emerged strongly both in relation to the issues taken up and the nature of many protests. She would consider both aspects.

The *Guardian* also raised two other issues. First, the causes which prompt people to take up civil disobedience - such as nuclear weapons, or environmental concerns. Second, methods and tactics including the question of whether it is ever justified and of how strictly nonviolence is defined. In many contemporary protests nonviolence was not defined at all strictly, although there was a general sense that these were peaceful protests. But there were questions about sabotage against property, minor physical violence, secrecy ahead of demonstrations, attitude to the police and so forth which were all part of this debate.

Regarding the causes which justify civil disobedience, there was the view that it should be undertaken only in relation to major social and political issues. Nuclear weapons were clearly such an issue from any standpoint; the roads issue was more open to debate. But even where you had agreement that the issue was important, the specific policies you proposed might be contentious. The peace movement was only too well aware of this after the endless debates about deterrence and unilateralism.

On methods, the sort of issues arising were whether civil disobedience was symbolically appropriate and thus made its point clearly, whether its effectiveness should be measured in terms of some sort of direct victory, or in terms of such things as publicity and changing public opinion. Justifications for civil disobedience were clearly related to the type of methods used. The more confrontational methods were harder to justify from various standpoints. Another consideration was the long-term implications of direct action becoming a standard form of protest which others would take up. This in turn opened up questions of how we viewed our wider social and political system and how we theorised civil disobedience within that. She mainly wanted to consider justification not in relation to issues or methods, but in relation to how we understand our form of society and government or our



conceptions of citizenship.

A long standing justification for civil disobedience, particularly within the pacifist tradition, was the appeal to personal conscience. 'I believe this is a crucial issue. My conscience will not allow me to countenance this kind of action, and therefore I am withholding my support, or taking action against it.' In its origins this was clearly a religious position, although now usually grounded in a more secular or humanist philosophy. Primarily it seemed to be an argument for individual disobedience and noncooperation. Conscientious objectors had often used this kind of argument. It was extended to various forms of group protest. The Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War in the late 1950s-early 1960s invoked this kind of language. This argument from conscience, at least taken by itself, was apolitical. It was an appeal to morals, to one's individual sense of right and wrong, though of course usually linked to more specific arguments rather than being left dangling as a purely individual claim. Nevertheless it was debatable whether it was a satisfactory basis for justifying civil disobedience.

It was unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Firstly, if it was not based on an appeal to generally agreed principles but to inner conviction, it was highly arbitrary. Secondly, it presupposed a protestant culture and tradition. At a recent conference she had attended she was interested to learn that in the United States conscientious objection was originally a group right rather than an individual right and was associated with Quakers and other dissenting groups. It covered such issues as the right not to serve in the army, the right not to pay taxes, and the right to opt out of various aspects of civil and political life. Now it had become a more individualised right both in the United States and other liberal societies. But it perhaps made more sense as a group right where the group held a particular set of beliefs and shared a particular culture rather than as a purely individual claim.

Her third point about this approach was that it could become very elitist - an argument that my conscience tells me I am right and therefore all of you must be wrong if you disagree with me. It was partly a question of tone here, of how you presented the argument. But the claim from conscience seemed either to imply an elitist claim that you knew what was right or, in a more religious sense, that you were in direct communication with God. Alternatively it looked very eccentric; your views didn't relate to those of a significant portion of the population. This was quite a common problem for individuals or small groups who decided to stand out.

Vaclav Havel discussed this problem in relation to the Czechoslovak dissidents, and was aware that the rather small number of people who decided to refuse their cooperation or to undertake various forms of dissident activity could be seen to be either morally very arrogant, or odd or eccentric. Havel's way of dealing with this was to explore the political implications of such dissent - a dissent which might be based on individual conscience or on an appeal to an understanding of certain sorts of standards such as standards in the workplace, or standards of honesty, or standards about certain kinds of political activity. In *The Power of the Powerless* particularly, Havel had an interesting analysis of the nature of what he calls post-totalitarian society - i.e. societies in places like Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. He argued that these societies depended on a regime of lies and silent cooperation with them, and therefore that anyone who stood out was almost necessarily challenging the system. If you stood out on a small issue like just doing your job decently, this tended to spread out and you started taking stands on other issues and bringing in other people. It became politicised.

Some of the arguments about nonviolent resistance which also looked at the role of the individual and small group depended on a similar sort of analysis - a sense that this kind of action would challenge the whole system. If you had that kind of analysis it placed the individual action and gave it political meaning. The problem was that it was easier to argue that position convincingly in the context of a post-totalitarian or other highly oppressive system. It was much harder to demonstrate that individual conscientious protest in a society which was more liberal had those kinds of repercussions and political significance.

If one wanted to think politically and to argue a case not only in terms of the issues but in terms of the political implications for one's society, this raised questions about one's views of society and of what constituted a good society. She had set up three models: the anarchist, the liberal and the republican, though she would concentrate on the last two. If you adopted some kind of anarchist position this left you much freer in terms of the kind of protest you made because you did not have the sense of obligation to the constitution and political system implied by a liberal stance or what she had labelled a republican stance.

It was instructive to go back to Henry David Thoreau's famous essay - which conveniently had just been republished in paperback by Penguin. The context of the essay was 1849 in America which was by far the most democratic and egalitarian society then existing but which, as Thoreau pointed out, was also one in which one sixth of the population were slaves. That was one of the key issues for him, the other one being the war with Mexico.



These were his main grounds for arguing for civil disobedience. In terms of his more general arguments, you found in Thoreau a number of different images and concepts of the role of the individual and the state. There was a strong appeal to individual conscience with religious overtones in some of the rhetoric. You also found quite an anarchistic strand though it wasn't quite pure anarchism but rather a deep distrust of government. The opening paragraphs looked anarchist but then he backtracked quite a bit. Later there were biting comments about voting and elections. Even so, he was certainly not advocating that everyone should disobey all the laws but suggesting one should concentrate on what was really important at that moment.

In the language and images Thoreau uses, however, there was also a strong republican sense which no doubt came from his living in America and inheriting American democratic language and ideas. The emphasis was on active, responsible, courageous citizenship, often expressed in very masculine terms. It was related to the sense that real citizens are prepared to fight for the good constitution both internally and externally and that this required courage and a sense of public duty. It was a strong theme, though more implicit than explicit.

Thoreau's justification of civil disobedience was in a sense a passive interpretation. You didn't have to go out and look for trouble, for after all you did have another life to lead. But once the state came down on you by requiring military service, or taxes which maintained the state and supported war, then you had an absolute obligation to resist and not to cooperate. Such a stance would not provide a basis for a good deal of contemporary civil disobedience.

Thoreau was also elitist in his whole tone and attitude. In appealing to conscience there was an elitist assumption, and there was a rather contemptuous set of references to the 'mass of people'. There was a strong sense that although civil disobedience should be morally obligatory for all citizens on issues like slavery and the Mexican war, in practice only a few people would undertake it. He also made the claim that if a few people did so it would have enormous repercussions. There was some splendid rhetoric about this which he did not fully justify. But he did not seem bothered by this sense of the elitism of those willing to undertake civil disobedience.

Turning to a consideration of Gandhi, April said you certainly found in him the appeal to conscience, an interesting fact given his religious background. There was also quite a strong anarchist strand in his distrust of a centralised state and his opposition to various compromise proposals in the '30s which would permit the Congress Party to partly take over the reins of power. There was also the claim that just before he died he proposed that the Congress Party should dissolve itself. This suggested an opposition to party politics and that whole kind of parliamentary, centralised government. He clearly looked towards a more decentralised, communitarian kind of politics.

On the other hand he was a consummate politician and he also, especially in his earlier writings and speeches, stressed the obligation people had to the state they lived in - even to the extent of arguing that Indians had a strong obligation to the British Empire. Hence his decision to recruit Indians to fight on the British side in the first World War. This seemed to link up with a republican sense of citizenship even though it might seem an odd word to use in this context. Gandhi also emphasised manliness and courage.

In his specific views on how one should conduct a civil disobedience campaign, Gandhi's approach was very different from Thoreau's. Whereas Thoreau was saying not to bother with all these constitutional channels because there wasn't the time and they were not important, Gandhi proposed a careful political campaign. He placed a strong emphasis on persuasion rather than coercion, and on exhausting all available legal and constitutional channels before resorting to civil disobedience. He was also concerned to find the appropriate symbolism and the right kind of civil disobedience in relation to what you were opposing. He held to a strict interpretation of nonviolence at least in how he conceptualised the campaigns. Sabotage was to be avoided, likewise conspiracies, and the authorities were to be told in advance what you were planning to do. He also stressed the importance of adopting a nonviolent attitude towards the opponents at every level and of a willingness to suffer the penalties of the law. For Gandhi, civil disobedience did not imply disrespect for the law as such but a conviction that the particular law was wrong and therefore should be broken. Gandhi's legal training was evident in his constitutional concerns and in his general precepts about how to conduct civil disobedience.

This linked up with the justification for civil disobedience that was easiest to defend from a liberal standpoint. John Rawls, the contemporary theorist of liberalism, justified it very much in these terms, drawing on Gandhian precepts, whether consciously or as a result of the logic of his own position. Rawls argued that civil disobedience may be justified but only if it was persuasive rather than coercive, only if it was appealing to the wider public to think again, only if it was strictly nonviolent and in the context of having first tried other means.



Turing to a consideration of liberalism, April said that, to oversimplify somewhat, it presupposed reasoned debate, peaceful and nonviolent political means to achieve change - hence political meetings, elections and so forth. It also, she thought, assumed there would be limited political activism by the majority of the population who would vote every few years and not get deeply engaged in politics. It stressed individual rights and a large individual sphere which should be protected both from the state and majority pressure, and supported the toleration of differences. Liberals could fairly easily accept the kind of conscientious objection we had considered earlier because it fitted in with tolerating odd individuals and groups, and a respect for people's beliefs and ways of life. Thus it could encompass the sort of civil disobedience in which, for example, Sikhs refused to wear motor-cycle helmets, or Muslim schoolgirls in France recently refused to wear certain types of headdress. Liberal democracies tended to be fairly sympathetic to that kind of civil disobedience, and it could lead to changes in the law. However, more militant direct action which involved a wide range of issues and a wide range of protest actions was rather harder to fit in with a strict conception of liberalism - though if it dealt with issues of wide public concern, it might be seen as tolerable provided it did not become seriously violent.

In contrast to the liberal approach, the republican tradition emphasised more active citizenship and a much stronger awareness about public good amongst members of the society. These were, of course, ideals, but they presupposed that people ought to subordinate their individual interests to the good of the republic. Freedom, in republican thinking, was freedom of the citizens rather than freedom of the individual to do whatever she or he liked, readiness to defend the republic internally and externally, loyalty, hatred of tyranny, pride in being a citizen of the republic. Patriotism was usually associated with republicanism. Emphasis on civic pride and shared political culture suggested limits to tolerance of dissenting religious or cultural groups. It would be difficult to justify disobedience for some kinds of minority rights in republican terms. The patriotic emphasis of republicanism was unsympathetic to individual conscientious objection but it might be responsive to just war arguments and the claims of individuals in other countries to the right to have a free republic. So civil disobedience to promote these principles could be justified.

Civil disobedience in the republican context was in some ways more permissible because there was a concept of the right of rebellion if your political system was unjust and not a true republic, a concept that individuals had a right to claim full citizenship or to deal with corruptions in the system. The methods available were less strictly defined by that approach and might not totally exclude violence, although one would have to argue in detail the case for using violence in a particular situation. In general, a more militant claiming of rights, or attempt to reform the republic, seemed justified in a republican setting. However, that standpoint did suggest that specific protests should be an integral part of an attempt to reform the whole political system. Thus if you were protesting on environmental issues you should also be trying to change the political institutions which dealt with them so that they were more open to popular participation and influence. There was a strong political component related to improving the system.

Republicanism, however, also had elitist implications, at least as a long-term conception of how individuals should behave, either as citizens or as protesting citizens. Probably very few people could meet the exacting standards demanded by high levels of political participation or protest. In that sense Thoreau's republican elitism might have some justification in terms of what was at all likely to happen. There was also a certain paradox in that, as she and Michael had both argued, direct action and civil disobedience could empower people who were disempowered by the political system. It was a valid point, and ran against the notion of activism as elitist. There were clearly times both on the national scale in periods of revolution, and at local level occasionally, when this militant direct action could be genuinely popular rather than involving just a few people. Nevertheless as a long-term position it implied self-selection if not conscious elitism. One could also think in terms of a groups of semi-professional activists alongside the professional politicians and opposing them in many cases.

April went on to consider the internationalisation of protest, and whether a lot of protest could and should be justified not just in national terms, or in terms of liberal or republican concepts, or some mix of those, but in terms of some concept of world citizenship. Before pursuing that, there was the question of how far liberalism or republicanism could meet the obvious need for an international dimension. Up to a point they both could. Liberalism was intrinsically a kind of universalist position in that it asserted, for example, that all human beings had rights. It was therefore able to justify quite a wide range of protests related to people in other parts of the world, not just in one's own country. Liberalism in pure theory, as opposed to practice in most supposedly liberal states, was strongly anti-militarist in its general approach. Clearly much international action could be seen as a manifestation of liberal principles. Amnesty International, though not involved in civil disobedience, seemed almost an archetypal liberal organisation - appealing to human rights, having an international focus, but acting very carefully in terms of procedures and maintaining balance. However she would provisionally suggest that although liberalism had a



strong internationalist dimension, and made universal claims, liberals were far more inclined to use petitions and the like when acting internationally rather than to use civil disobedience or direct action. They might well find it harder to justify protesting illegally in someone else's country, except possibly in the case of some very harsh tyrannies.

Republicanism in its historical origins and some of its associations seemed to support patriotism or loyalty to one's own republic as against cosmopolitanism and internationalism, and to this extent was antipathetic to world citizenship. Nevertheless it was associated with the belief that other countries should be republican too, and that republican principles were universally valid. This international focus was exemplified by Tom Paine's moving from England to France to America to propagate republican views. The idea of republicans fighting for republican principles in other countries seemed to be totally compatible with a republican view of the world. Republican hatred of tyranny was also indicative of internationalism, and again might suggest a more militant approach to protest - a willingness to take up arms or certainly to resist, or help others to resist, with fewer concerns about legality and constitutionalism than liberals would have. There was a question, therefore, about whether trying to create a concept of world citizenship advanced the argument much further.

One strand in thinking about world citizenship was clearly associated with the peace movement. Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* had the famous statement: '...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman I am a citizen of the whole world.' That idea was very much around in the 1930s and Woolf used it to rhetorical effect. A grave distrust of nationalism and of nation states naturally pushed you towards having a kind of allegiance and obligation which transcended nation states and an embryonic sense of world citizenship. In the post-World War II period, the American Gary Davis declared himself a world citizen, burnt his passport, and travelled illegally from country to country - and he was still actively promoting this ideal.

However, the concept of world citizenship had roots that went back to the collapse of the Greek city-states and to the Stoics who started thinking in terms of being citizens of the world rather than just citizens of Athens or Sparta or wherever. And the concept did tie in with notions of natural law and natural rights, and to an extent with the strand of liberalism concerned with human rights. The concept had been interestingly revived quite recently in academic circles in the fields of both political theory and international relations. In political theory it was related to Kant and his pamphlet *Perpetual Peace*, and to thinking about the notion of global democracy and global citizenship. In international relations it was linked to dissatisfaction with various models of international society, particularly the strongly realist model which emphasised the exclusive, or almost exclusive role of nation states. Interest in world citizenship reflected the increasing interconnectedness of the world, numerous international governmental organisations and agreements, and the growth of transnational organisations and movements among peoples. It had been discussed in America by Martha Nussbaum, a very interesting theorist, lawyer and classicist who had been arguing for cosmopolitan citizenship. The *Boston Review* had published a whole issue called 'Patriotism or Cosmopolitanism?' which was sparked off by an essay she had written. Richard Falk, with one foot in the peace movement and one foot in academia, had for a long time been thinking in these terms.

April had attended a conference in Cambridge about a month previously organised by David Held which was discussing global democracy and global citizenship. It had obviously become a trendy and live issue. That raised the question of why. She had also noted that some people prominent in the peace movement for many years had become engaged with this topic; Nils Peter Gleditsch from Norway, and Mary Kaldor from Britain were both at the Cambridge conference. Thus there seemed to be a coming-together of different strands with an interest in this idea. In Australia the government itself was very proud to call itself a good international citizen. Whether this was true was another matter, but it was interesting that it used that kind of rhetoric. It was intended to suggest that as a middle-level country Australia was trying to promote international agreements and to adhere to them conscientiously. It again suggested that that idea, and that set of concepts, were attractive and had a resonance at this time.

Did the concept of world citizenship have any meaning? There was a case both for and against. One could argue that the development of international law, the signing of various agreements, and the establishment of international organisations had created a semi-legal and semi-political set of structures which linked states together, and imposed certain obligations upon them. There were also debates about the implications of new technology, especially the expansion of communications - the establishment of a 'global village' as the cliché has it. There was also the argument that the many problems, including obviously environmental problems, could not be solved on a state by state basis but required action at a global level. This also implied a degree of responsibility for your country's actions if it was creating environmental problems somewhere else. There had also been a huge increase in the number of transnational people's organisations and movements suggesting there was some degree of



reality in the notion of world citizenship.

The argument against this from the 'realist' school of thought was that although states said they would adhere to certain laws and international agreements whenever their real national interest was at stake they ignored them or else pretended to follow them while in practice doing as little as possible. In terms of individuals, it was argued that real political obligations existed in relation to your own state and could not do so in relation to an embryonic international society. The notion, too, of a duty to humankind was so general and abstract that it really didn't mean anything. It was also difficult to envisage what in a strict sense world citizenship might mean. One could argue that there was a kind of general moral human duty, but it was much more difficult to say precisely what that implied.

World citizenship related very obviously to the debate about civil disobedience if one's own government was contravening international laws, agreements or principles. The peace movement had used this argument, citing for instance the Nuremberg Principles to justify civil disobedience against nuclear weapons. One could extend that to a whole range of agreements concerned with human rights - poverty, the environment, women's rights and so forth - and suggest that there were specific agreements embodying principles which were not as yet fully realised in international law. One might also perhaps argue that the claim to be first of all a citizen of the world might justify a wide range of protest actions, including the use of civil disobedience in other parts of the world. The latter would not be justified by a strict liberal interpretation and not necessarily in all instances, from a republican standpoint. If you did things for yourself as a world citizen, then national boundaries were not very important. Pragmatic considerations would influence what you felt should be done, but you could justify your actions in terms of your obligations as a world citizen to uphold certain rights or resist certain injustices. It might suggest a positive duty almost to participate in international protests which brought people of different countries together. April concluded, however, by saying that at this point she herself was very uncertain and would welcome the responses of the group.

Discussion

The appeal to conscience

Michael, commented that the notion of an appeal to conscience was not limited to the protestant ethic. You found the same notion in the Antigone of Sophocles in classical antiquity, and in Catholic as well as Protestant thinking. Moreover, the appeal to conscience did not exist in isolation and in practice was inevitably linked to a certain set of beliefs. If you took the anarchist, liberal or republican position, there was still a sense that the individual or the group had the right to act in accordance with those beliefs. In the Direct Action Committee days, there was a strong emphasis on the individual conscience, but it was linked to wider political concepts. Why for instance would we have gone to Ghana to protest against the French nuclear tests in the Sahara had there not been that strong internationalist element in our thinking?

Howard responded that the notion of the individual right of dissent and resistance did not exist in all cultures, though doubtless it was not confined to the protestant ethic. Japanese war resisters at the time of the Second World War would rather commit suicide rather than be objectors in the Western sense. Generally, too, Asian notions of conscience were quite different. In the current Conscientious Objector movement there was a tendency to reject the idea that the individual conscience was the key element. The cutting edge of a new approach was to be found in the State of Spain where in the first instance they had decided to refuse to make individual declarations of objection but instead to make collective ones, and subsequently converted the whole thing into a strategy.

April asked if the Spaniards and some of the Americans, were taking their action from a particular political standpoint. Howard answered that they didn't necessarily take an anarchist stance though they were close to that. The basis for much of their civil disobedience and direct action was that the state had lost its legitimacy - where for instance it was destroying your home or your environment. The rejection of an obligation to a criminal state was at the heart of a lot of people's attitudes. It was only quite recently that he had begun to address in his own mind the question which Walter often raised about the direct action methods becoming standard social practice.

Individual Conscience and Universal Values

Walter said he was struck listening to April that one could think of the historical developments almost as an evolution of analytic models. Someone who started from a conception purely of private conscience might think of himself or herself as acting simply on the model of an inner voice without examining what that might imply. But as



soon as they came into any kind of conflict or dispute with someone who did not share their conscientious view, they were faced with a dilemma. Either they could simply assert their views, as an indisputable thing - 'That's my view'. This was becoming quite a common phrase, in fact, and was a good way of closing down a discussion. Alternatively they might want to enter into a discussion with the other person.

As soon as that happened, Walter continued, you were on the way to an appeal to some kind of universal. All the people, and all the schools of thought, April had named were in a sense engaged in the process of defining what this universal should be and what its credentials were. From the point of view of current problems concerning the credentials of civil disobedience, it was of relatively academic interest whether one's starting point was republicanism or liberalism. It was difficult to unscramble the two concepts since they seemed so closely related. The crunch came with the notion of internationalisation. What had happened in our century, and was beginning to happen in the 19th century, was that the theoretical universals which were implicit in any form of conscientious action had begun to find incipient institutionalised embodiment, particularly with the birth of the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations. So the universal one was thinking of was not merely a theory but represented some kind of ideal society, with even an incipient organisation.

Christina commented that transnational agreements could sometimes galvanise people into acting more effectively. A recent article by Stern and Druckman raised the question of whether the 1989 revolutions had destroyed the discipline of international relations. They argued that the discipline had been dominated by the realist school of thinking, yet had completely failed to predict the revolutions of 1989. This was because it had not taken account of certain phenomena, amongst them the normative agreements established by various treaties, notably the Helsinki Accords which enshrined respect for certain basic human rights.

Citizens or consumers?

Howard spoke of the kind of consciousness that resistance to transnational corporations had brought. This was a context in which you might take civil disobedience in this country against a body doing things that harm populations elsewhere, though you would be aware that your protest would be totally beyond the comprehension of most of the public at home.

Bob said the concept of citizenship had strengths but all sorts of problems. A different concept which related nicely to the transnational corporation was the concept of customer. It was being introduced all over the place, and we hated it. But as a world concept customer was in many ways stronger than citizen. Several people voiced their dissent, but Bob responded that in terms of civil disobedience and objection to the world system it was potentially important. Increasingly the world no longer comprised a system of states but a system of global domination by capitalism and markets. Many of the successful international actions in recent years were actions by customers who objected to what transnational corporations were doing. They were acting as customers. Even at Menwith Hill, part of the objection was to industrial and commercial espionage. The rights and obligations of customers were likely to take on increased significance with the spread of markets and the creation of a global economy.

Howard said this tied up with April's reference to Havel and the difference between post-totalitarianism and liberal democracy. What Havel was saying would have found an echo in the West from the late Paul Goodman with his ideas of the honest professional who would be brought into conflict not necessarily with the state but with organisations of power. Increasingly in liberal democracies we were not going to be talking about the formal democratic structures of power but about corporations and shadowy conspiracies. Corporate capitalism, like state communism, restricted the capacity of people to do an honest job of work. To some extent that altered the discussion around civil disobedience.

World Citizenship as legitimising direct action

Carol said that in Peace Studies in the 1980s the idea of world citizenship had seemed a bit passé, associated with an older generation and the idea of World Government. She was therefore rather surprised when April said that it was now trendy. April said she was talking mainly about the academic world, though there was a peace movement, or ex peace-movement, component. There did appear to be a growing interest in the idea and a new discussion about what it might mean. It was not about pure world government, but concerned law, various world trends and questions about the future of the nation-state. The other aspect of it was looking towards consolidating democracy. Part of David Held's argument was that you could not have democracy in one country. Without global underpinning, democracy in one country was continually eroded. Thus there were a number of overlapping



concerns, some clearly relevant to the peace movement. The term, however, was being used rather rhetorically and it was debatable whether it was the best one to use. It had the advantage of being provocative and making a large claim. But it did raise questions of what it could mean in practice and whether the notion of citizenship required a set of political institutions, obligations and rights which certainly didn't exist at the moment.

Walter said that one purpose the concept of world citizenship served, was to substantiate an appeal to standards which one's own state might be failing to observe. The question of legitimacy was the underlying one in the whole discussion - the legitimacy of direct action of various kinds and in various situations. If you did not hold to a doctrinaire anarchist position, you presumably accepted that the state was in some sense a necessary institution in human societies. In traditional Greek and medieval philosophy the state was regarded as a natural institution. It wasn't an arbitrary institution created by a Hobbesian kind of contract, but had an intrinsic legitimacy. The question was, if the state misbehaved, how should the citizen respond?

There were different ways in which traditionally this question was answered with reference to constitutional action. Nonviolent resistance came into the picture where it was judged that these traditional forms of opposing an oppressive state were insufficient, and therefore some more radical opposition to the state was legitimate. The problem that advocates of nonviolent action had to face had been touched on by April, especially in the concluding paragraph of her paper where she said that such action might have to take 'more radical forms...than suggested by liberalism, where an urgent threat to global society was involved.'

This was where an appeal to world citizenship came in, even if it was not explicit. In her final sentence, April said: 'The problem was identifying a form of political discourse which was genuinely global' - a recognition of the fact that there were problems about how we represented to ourselves a situation in which a radical attack on the state though extra-constitutional acts of disobedience, was legitimate. If you defined this too loosely, you would gradually arrive at a culture in which the legitimacy of the state had actually been disowned. Michael addressed the point on page 194 of his book, *Civil Resistance*, where he said: 'The problems to which extensive and habitual resort to civil disobedience could give rise are an argument for those committed to democratic self rule to resort to it with care and discrimination'. But how could one define the situations in which this extreme form of action which has a tendency to undermine the legitimacy of the state was justified? April's answer was that it was justified where there was an urgent threat to global society. It was a difficult test to apply when one wanted to know whether a particular issue was a legitimate occasion for such action. But at least you had the beginnings of some criteria.

Carol said that some of those involved in thinking about world order argued that sooner or later the nation-state would wither away. But how we were to get from where we were now, entrenched in the nation-state system, to a global system in which we would all be identifying the needs of the planet and so forth represented a huge challenge. In some of the examples Michael gave you could see how undermining the state could be extremely destructive in the short term. You might end up with something worse. One danger to which he had pointed in the chapter was that the state might be fatally weakened by extensive civil disobedience and thereby provide an opportunity for unscrupulous, anti-democratic forces to seize power. Howard added that you could also envisage widespread gang warfare, or even genocide, following the breakdown of a state. There were a number of alarming scenarios, especially if you considered not just Britain but other parts of the world.

However, the kind of issues, Howard continued, on which civil disobedience should be undertaken was not the only consideration. At one point in her talk April had pointed out the importance of the process of decision-making and the manner in which you took your action. As Bob had pointed out on other occasions, Gandhi was willing to go to extremes over a small issue. Gandhi justified that position not simply in terms of the issue but in terms of a social process. He also laid down other criteria such as exhausting the constitutional channels, using persuasion not coercion, maintaining strict nonviolence.

Spiritual dimension

Bob commented that April had virtually removed religion from the discussion in her opening paragraph. If there was going to be a universal basis, one element was surely people's religious awareness, whatever their particular faith. Gandhi, as April had noted, had drawn on anarchist, liberal and republican traditions, But he drew also on the religious element. This was a universal that could mobilise people and do so globally.

April agreed that the appeal to a general spiritual sense was extremely important for Gandhi. But whether one could do that in most Western secular societies was questionable. Societies that had adopted a fundamentalist



religious stance were not very susceptible either to such an appeal. It was difficult to see how it could work at a global level given the variety of faiths and sects, and the clashes between Islam, fundamentalist Christianity, Buddhism and so forth. What struck her was not the unifying force of religion but its divisiveness. One could say that appeals to human rights and principles were a secular version of religion and that what they were appealing to in some sense was people's better nature. Bob said that the concept of the sacred was perhaps another thing one could appeal to. That was present in all religions. You found something akin to animism also in the ecological movement. Gandhi was not concerned with any particular faith, believing there was a universality about religion which could be drawn upon.

Christina said that often Gandhi linked religion and morality. Our political system as it had evolved was in part concerned with Machiavellian power struggles, but notions of democracy and the rights of individuals had provided a moral basis for it also, at least since the French Revolution. There seemed to be a strong dichotomy in April's presentation between individual conscience and politics whereas Gandhi insisted, perhaps too strongly, that politics was based on morality. Politics, she felt, had more of a moral underpinning than April's presentation suggested.

Walter thought that Christina was simply using somewhat different language from April's. The notion of a universal appeal in terms of world citizenship was itself essentially a moral concept. The real opposition was between almost all forms of political philosophy and the ideas of Machiavelli and figures akin to him. All political philosophies had important ethical elements in them, and that was true too of the notion of world citizenship. April agreed with that. She said she was partly using politics to distinguish between a purely individual religious appeal and a sense of its wider social implications. But Bob was right in saying that she was not including a sense of the sacred, and this was true not only of this paper but of her more general thinking.

Andrew said it was necessary to distinguish between a religious sense and religious organisations which he would say are state-like structures to be transcended along with the nation-state. There was a sense of the divine which was the very basis of global thinking. Walter said he thought the notion of human rights was itself inseparable ultimately from religion. Human rights could either be asserted in a purely power-political sense. You projected yourself and claimed a right - in the sense that you landed on a territory and claimed a right to it. But he thought it could be shown by analysis that the terms we normally used in talking about human rights didn't really make sense without reference to transcendence. This was possibly why Kant was coming back, though he hadn't been aware of this. For Kant the notion of human rights was totally inseparable from divinity. Although morality was something we discovered by reason, it was something given not something you created. You discovered it and therefore could engage in dispute about it. If you held a different moral judgement from someone else you could talk about it because you both thought there was an objective moral order, even though you might have got it wrong. Kant's whole philosophy in some ways focussed on the implications of moral values, and for him they were inseparable from the idea of a lawgiver. The aim of Sartre and the Existentialist movement was to deny that this was how human values worked, and to proclaim that these were created by human choice. It wasn't just that human choice selected actions according to certain values which it discovered but that the values themselves were created by human choice. This was what a religious outlook fundamentally denied.

Christina said it was running ahead too fast to link human rights so directly to religion. The whole humanist tendency in the present century was based on a different premise and there were many people who would feel there were basic human rights without subscribing to a religious view. Walter said it was perfectly possible to talk about human rights without bringing in religion. For Kant especially you didn't deduce the notion of morality from a belief in God; on the contrary you believed in God because you believed in morality.

Significance of individual civil disobedience

Bob said another point he wanted to raise about April's presentation was her tendency to dismiss individual civil disobedience. He would defend not only apolitical civil disobedience but individual apolitical civil disobedience. The person engaged in individual civil disobedience by definition couldn't know what its outcome would be. Nonetheless the power was there, and it could have a political impact. The reason we responded to a lot of civil disobedience was that it was an individual action. It was the strength of that individual and his or her refusal to buckle that was at the heart of the action and was the power of the action. It was the symbol and the identification that generated the leverage.

April said it wasn't so much the individual act she had been discussing at the start of her presentation as the formulation of the reasons for taking it - why one says one is doing it. Individual civil disobedience could be justified



on many grounds, and could be extremely powerful. She was not arguing against that. She had perhaps been setting up something of a straw figure; nevertheless there had been quite prevalent assumption in civil disobedience that the appeal to one's own conscience was a primary justification. It might well be that in practice the justification usually went beyond that, and certainly when one got into discussion one was almost forced to consider universal principles, or at any rate principles within that society. She had been talking about why one might engage in civil disobedience and how one justified it, not whether it was one person or a group.

Howard said he had a real problem with what Bob was saying, because of where it could lead. He agreed that the individual objection or act of civil disobedience that nobody sees should be supported. But it could lead to excessive individualism and partly explained why so many objectors and individual practitioners of civil disobedience were impossible people. There were of course times when you had no option but to register your individual objection - everything in you demanded it. But when you were thinking about strategies for change you needed to take account of, and work with, other like-minded people.

This related, he continued, to the problem he had with the world citizen idea. In a sense, the world citizen belonged nowhere. These individual notions and these big concepts associated with civil disobedience needed tempering. With world citizenship, if it had not got roots somewhere, some notion of cultural appropriateness - perhaps bio-regionalism - you could land up with imperialist civil disobedience. And individualist civil disobedience could lead to a martyrdom complex. Bob responded that the absolute determination of an individual was the key thing. If you shied away from that in talking about civil disobedience, you lost the essence of it. This he feared was what happened when one stopped talking about the individual and also when one began to make criticisms about elitism. Some people could be justifiably criticised for elitism, but to criticise the concept as elitist was entirely wrong.

Civil Disobedience and the threshold principle

Andrew said one had to recognize that individuals who were prepared to say no and to make a stand were going to be difficult. They were an elite in the best sense of the word and should be recognized as such. The elite did challenge the rest of us. Michael said it had to be an open elite. Elitism in the pejorative sense implied a group or section of society which enjoyed special privileges and as a matter of policy excluded outsiders from joining it. The elite we were talking about was open to anyone but was likely for various reasons to remain a minority within the society. Walter said an elite in this sense meant those who injected a new element into an existing culture. All artists were elitist, all intellectuals too, in this sense. Bob said that this was a minor part of the wider argument, but important because for him individual civil disobedience was at the heart of civil disobedience.

Walter said that at the risk of sounding pedantic he would prefer to say that individual action was at the root of civil disobedience, or some such phrase, rather than 'at the heart' of it. It could become much more than individual activity and the danger was that it became so much more that it produced an embryonic culture. At that point something which ought in a sense to be an elitist activity, or at least a very rare kind of activity, became a kind of norm without further reference to its wider repercussions. As he had noted earlier, civil disobedience in addition to its strengths carried the risk of tending to delegitimise the authority of the state which we required in order to exist as communities at all, and certainly to exist as democratic communities. So those committed to civil disobedience in some circumstances, as he himself was, should be prepared to define a threshold at which civil disobedience became legitimate - in the same way in which in just war theory there were strict criteria defining at what point violence became legitimate.

Christina said Michael in his chapter had attempted to define a threshold principle when he said that in democracy there was the majority principle but also the principle of respect for human rights. If a state by a particular act, or series of acts, violated those rights, it forfeited its legitimacy, partially if not totally. Michael also, in the final paragraph of his chapter, had spoken of the 'alienating and disempowering force of the modern bureaucratic state.' It was important to be aware that the state was constantly growing and encroaching on the individual. Civil disobedience was a process for checking that expansion of state power.

Walter said he agreed with most of that. The state might misbehave in various ways including taking some forms of action which violated human rights. But did the state lose its legitimacy as soon as it violated any human right to any extent? Or did it depend on how great the violation was before it opened itself to the sort of radical anti-state activity constituted by civil disobedience? Michael pointed out that civil disobedience was not necessarily aimed at overthrowing the state altogether but was more often aimed at correcting particular injustices and violations of



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rights. Walter responded that one had to take into account the effect not only of any particular action but the cumulative effect of many such actions. You did not have a state that was 100 per cent good. The question was therefore - what must the state do before it opened itself to the kind of radical action we had been talking about? It was a matter of degree and of very careful thinking out which we had hardly begun to attain.

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