

The political economy of civil society

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Abstract The dichotomy between intended and unintended outcomes of individual and collective action is central to political economy. It concerns the relationship of markets and states and their link to the constitution of society. As such, this dichotomy points to the patterns of connectivity that provide the social embedding of markets and states. The present paper argues that civil society is best understood as the principal locus of connectivity in which markets and states operate. Civil society so configured is neither separate from the body politic and commercial society nor subordinate to them but instead constitutes the primary objective structure of the social domain. It embeds the causal arrangements that determine the crisscrossing of both intended and unintended outcomes in specific contexts. Within the social domain, dispositions of the means-end type interact with non-instrumental dispositions. One important implication is that civil society is compatible with a range of different political economies and specific socio-economic arrangements. Based on a typology of three distinct paradigms of civil society, we argue that the proximity paradigm is conducive to the discovery of political economies that foster greater openness and specificity compared with the political and the economic paradigm. This paper suggests that the theory of civil society in general and the proximity paradigm in particular are indispensable

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