There was euphoria especially among liberal intellectuals following the collapse of European Communism in the early 1990s. However, after more than two and a half decades, the imagined civilisation based on democratic values they had hoped would dawn did not materialise; the fact is the world continues to be marked by issues of economic inequality, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, global warming and political apathy.

It is quite obvious that there is much to be done in academic circles in providing better tools (theory and concept) to understand the world setting we are currently in. It appears that conventional social science ideas such as the state and civil society should be revisited if the staying power of the three separate categories (state, market and society) are to remain forceful.


Consistent with the first edition, he continues to argue on the importance of the state in taming the wild nature of the market that civil society is too weak to challenge, let alone stop the corrosiveness of the market.

The book is divided into three broad sections, in eight chapters, excluding introduction and conclusion. Surveying two and a half millennia of the idea of civil society, the author categorised the development of the idea into the three broad categories: The Origins of Civil Society, Civil Society and Modernity, and Civil Society in Contemporary Life. He observed that the last 35 years have witnessed historic levels of economic inequality, relentless attacks on the regulatory and redistributive functions of all levels of government, and that “civil society” has moved to the centre of democratic theory and political discourse.

The main argument of the book is that the current logic of civil society which is influenced by the paradigm of Antistatism popularised by Tocqueville and Hegel-Marxism should be opened to criticism. A new approach should be developed and that the classical and modern ideas of civil society re-examined. He argued that current studies on democracy and civil society have not gone far enough as they are too obsessed with the logic of the Tocquevillian and Hegel-Marxist approach. Ehrenberg believed that the inadequacy of both paradigms is reflected in the contemporary conundrum of economic inequality, the failure of the state to play its regulatory function and the dominance of the middle class in public debates.

This highlights the debates in Chapter 1 to 4 whereby the author urges
discourse in explaining civil society in Singapore, it can be summed up the contributors have struggled to move beyond the “Tocquevillian” argument of civil society.

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