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John Ehrenberg: *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*. New York and London. New York University Press. 1999.

Civil society has been used frequently also in third sector literature with several connotations depending on scholarly traditions. John Ehrenberg is making a valuable contribution by presentating the plurality of its connotations from Plato to contemporary usage.

The limitations of Ehrenberg are in four issues. First, he uses only English tranlations as his sources. In some parts, understanding of the etymology of concepts (*koinonia* = participation, *unity*; *bürgerliche gesellschaft* = society of the town) would have clarified the original meaning and the later uses of concepts. Second, he does not deal with Nordic theories of the welfare state as civil society at all. Third, the same is true with nonprofit and social movement theories, which use the concept as well. Fourth, he does not discuss with the earlier research. Discursive notes would have been mostly welcomed. In spite of these limitations, Ehrenberg's work is a book that everyone studying the third sector should have in the bookshelf. Below are some meanings that Ehrenberg has found in the history.

The oldest meaning is the ancient Greek meaning that refers to Greek word *polis*. *Koinonia politikhe* (unity of the town) and its Latin equivalence *societas civilis* (association of the citizens) meant "politically organised commonwealth." The civil society was same as the whole civilised human society. The opposite was barbarism.

Throughout the Middle Ages the Aristotelian concept of good life played a central role in the definitions of the civil society which was seen as the Christian Commonwealth. Much of the discussion centred round the question of the independence / dependence of the state from the Church.

Pope Gelasius I developed a theory of two swords that preceded Luther's doctrine of two regiments. This distinguished spiritual and secular powers and legitimated their leadership in their own spheres. As important was the dichotomy between the central and the local, which remains one of the basic questions in the theories of civil society for centuries.

Reformation's concept of common priesthood downplayed the role of the institutions and legitimated individual independence. Political thinkers of this era, Machiavelli and Hobbes saw the civil society as a sphere where public and individual interests are mediated. Both had also a similar solution: the sovereign prince is a guarantee of civil society.

Liberalism saw civil society as the society of the free citizens. The new point was on the question 'what constitutes the core of civil society?' For Locke and Smith the core of civil society was based on individual property and thus it was the market.

In the nineteenth century, the historical equation of civil society and state was broken by Hegel. According to him, there are three spheres or stages of social life. The family suppresses the differences because of the common destiny. Civil society is the antithesis of the family and it is marked by diversity and competition. Finally, the state reconciles these two.

In the Marxian philosophy, the civil society (bourgeois society) has been something that has to be eliminated. For Marx the state was not an ideal final goal of the history but an oppressive mechanism that served the bourgeois civil society.

In the non-Marxian discussion, the leading theorist was Alexis de Tocqueville who saw the core of the civil society in voluntary organisations. His thinking lies behind the contemporary American thinking of civil society.

In Europe, the roots of contemporary interest on civil society lie in the East Europe of the 1980s when the concept was used to oppose the totalitarian states and in neo-Marxian discussion on

actual existing socialism. In this discussion, the civil society resembles astonishingly that of liberalism.

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