



Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals (Penguin history)

By Ernest Gellner

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Western democracies are "open societies" in which neither the state nor religion try to achieve a monopoly of power or the exclusive claim on people's hearts. In between the state and the family are countless other institutions from Trade Unions to stamp collecting clubs, from student organisations to churches and protest movements. This is the civil society. Before the fall of communism in 1989 all this was prescribed. The state controlled everything and in the Middle East this remains the case. In eastern Europe there is a burgeoning civil society but in fundamentalist Islamic society there is none. This book examines the part played by the civil society in a post-communist world. Examining Islam in its unique fundamentalism, the book asks what we can learn by a comparison between such a society and one in which civil society is often overwhelming.

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Editorial Review

Review

Will Islam fill the void left by the recently-collapsed Communism? What are the current rivals to civil society? Gellner provides a fine discourse on various political doctrines and their applications in today's changing Europe, surveying the pros and cons of various institutions and their challenge to democracy. --
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