

The Basic Point

Enough!

Enough of the imbalance that is destroying our democracies, our planet, and ourselves.

Enough of the pendulum politics of left and right, as well as the paralysis in the political center. Enough of the visible claw of lobbying in place of the invisible hand of competing. Enough of the economic globalization that undermines sovereign states and local communities. Have we not had enough exploiting of the world's resources, including ourselves as "human resources"?

Many more people are concerned about these problems than have taken to the streets. The will of people is there; an appreciation of what is happening, and how to deal with it, is not. We are inundated with conflicting explanations and contradictory solutions. The world we live in needs a form of radical renewal unprecedented in the human experience. This book presents an integrative framework to suggest a comprehensive way forward.

The Triumph of Imbalance

When the communist regimes of Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, pundits in the West had a ready explanation: capitalism had triumphed. They were dead wrong, and the consequences are now proving fateful.

Rebalancing Society

It was balance that triumphed in 1989. While those communist regimes were severely out of balance, with so much power concentrated in their public sectors, the successful countries of the West maintained sufficient balance across their public, private, and what can be called plural sectors. But a failure to understand this point has been throwing many countries out of balance ever since, in favor of their private sectors.

Welcome to the Plural Sector

There are three consequential sectors in society, not two. The one least understood is known by a variety of inadequate labels, including the “not-for-profit sector,” the “third sector,” and “civil society.” Calling it “plural” can help it take its place alongside the ones called public and private, while indicating that it is made up of a wide variety of human associations.

Consider all those associations that are neither public nor private—owned neither by the state nor by private investors—such as foundations, places of worship, unions, cooperatives, Greenpeace, the Red Cross, and many renowned universities and hospitals. Some are owned by their members; most are owned by no one. Included here, too, are social movements that arise to protest what some people find unacceptable (as we have seen recently in the Middle East) and social initiatives, usually started by small community groups, to bring about some change they feel is necessary (for example, in renewable energy).

Despite the prominence of all this activity, the plural sector remains surprisingly obscure, having been ignored for so long in the great debates over left versus right. This sector cannot be found between the other two, as if on some straight line. It is a different place, as different from the private and public sectors as these two are from each

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other. So picture instead a balanced society as sitting on a stool with three sturdy legs: a public sector of respected governments, to provide many of our protections (such as policing and regulating); a private sector of responsible businesses, to supply many of our goods and services; and a plural sector of robust communities, wherein we find many of our social affiliations.

Regaining Balance

How do we regain balance in our societies? Some people believe that the answer lies in the private sector—specifically, with greater corporate social responsibility. We certainly need more of this, but anyone who believes that corporate social responsibility will compensate for corporate social irresponsibility is living in a win-win wonderland. Other people expect democratic governments to act vigorously. This they must do, but they will not so long as public states continue to be dominated by private entitlements, domestic and global.

This leaves but one sector, the plural, which is not made up of “them” but of you, and me, and we, acting together. We shall have to engage in many more social movements and social initiatives, to challenge destructive practices and replace them with constructive ones. We need to cease being human resources, in the service of imbalance, and instead tap our resourcefulness as human beings, in the service of our progeny and our planet.