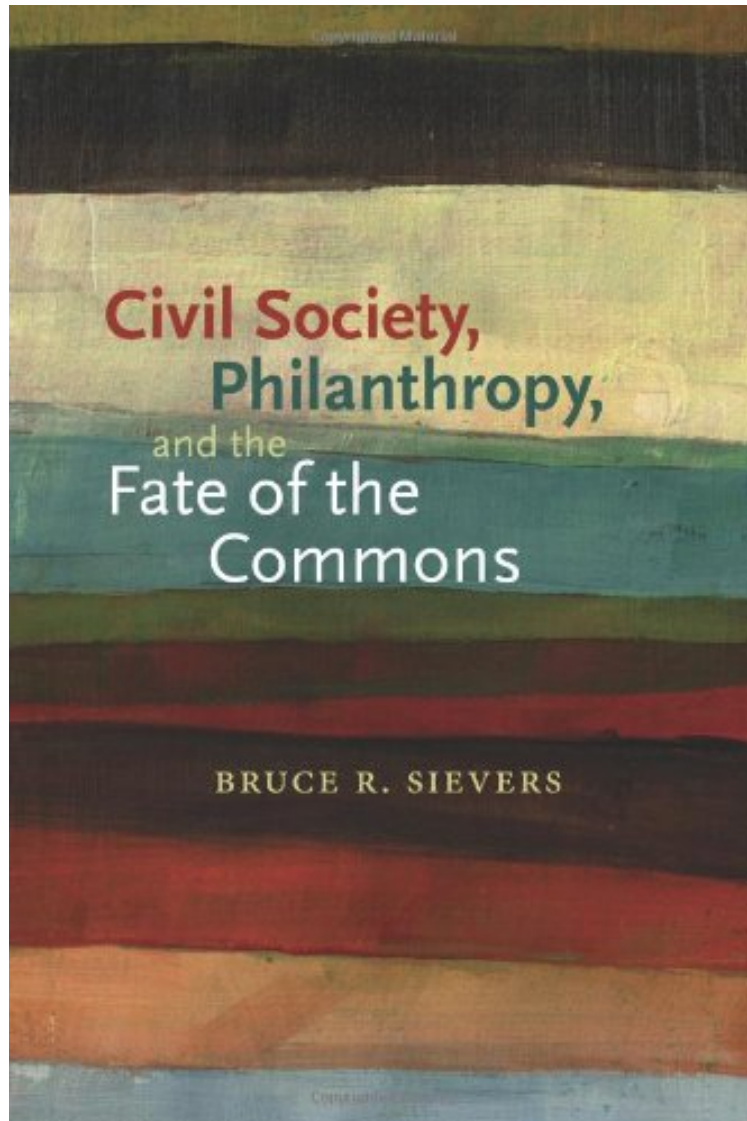


(Free) Civil Society, Philanthropy, and the Fate of the Commons (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives)

Civil Society, Philanthropy, and the Fate of the Commons (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives)

Bruce R. Sievers

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Bruce R. Sievers : Civil Society, Philanthropy, and the Fate of the Commons (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Civil Society, Philanthropy, and the Fate of the Commons (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Timely
By J. Crues
This superbly written review of the human development of the concept of Civil Society in the western world resonates with the grand world issues buffeting the United States's internal and foreign policy struggles today. This is a must read for all of those professional and amateur pundits blanketing our television and online news services.
6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Must read for serious philanthropist
By Marco's mom
Modern philanthropy is going in the wrong direction, argues Bruce Sievers, in this thoroughly researched and provocative book. Instead of narrowly focused goals, this book argues that philanthropists need to strengthen the fundamental platform required to achieve public good - civil society. Looking at societies beginning with the ancient Greeks, to the Dutch, to the pre-colonial and civil war times through to modern times in America, Sievers identifies seven elements for strong civil society: philanthropy, commitment to the common good, rule of law, nonprofit and voluntary institutions; individual rights, and tolerance. If these seven elements are strong, he argues, we see a society in which citizens connect their private interests to a larger sense of public commitment and collective action. And so it is these institutions, traditions and social norms that foundations should support, argues Sievers, because they are the basis of collective action. "The most pervasive problems facing society today - deficient provision of such public goods as education, public health, environmental protection, intercultural understanding, and global security - are problems of the commons which philanthropy should be most able to engage." Foundations and philanthropists in recent years, however, have missed this. Instead, they are going down the road of applying business approaches to philanthropy, focusing on management effectiveness, efficiency and measurable deliverables. But history has already proven, argues Sievers, that private market forces are fundamentally flawed in both it's ability to provide and to be responsible for public goods. "The complex problems of human society do not lend themselves to "linear" solutions," writes Sievers. "The market model is based on the single question - does it make money or not? There is no equivalent unitary test in the broader social world." Instead of narrowly focused, metrics-oriented, specific goals, this book recommends that foundations and philanthropists can better solve social problems by strengthening the seven pillars necessary to support a society committed to common good. How can this be done? The book presents concrete suggestions of programs that "draw people into the public decision-making processes", that foundations can fund such as, civic education in schools, documentary films, and newspapers, just to name a few. (Read the last chapter for all the great suggestions of program areas worthy of funding!) This serious and important book will change your mind about what you thought you knew about philanthropy. You will be guided by the knowledgeable Sievers through the history of philanthropy and then arrive at the present with a new found perspective and urgency to preserve, and strengthen the civil society we have, and that for centuries people before us have worked so hard to create.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Defending the commons
By John Kreidler
Most of this book is devoted to the historical development of the concepts of civil society and the commons, in juxtaposition to notions of private enterprise and government. The book also provides detailed accounts of several eras and places where these notions have been implemented in Europe and the United States from antiquity to modern times. Having traced this history, the author, Bruce Sievers, concludes that civil society and the commons have been eroding since the middle of the Twentieth Century, largely due to the worldwide ascent of commercial interests and the concomitant emphasis on gains for individuals. At risk is the capacity of communities to protect and advance a host of public assets that are not well defended by government or business including free information exchange, a livable environment, an educated citizenry, a just legal system, a minimum level of public health and a functioning democratic political process. Scanning the field of potential champions for reversing this erosion, Dr. Sievers points to one of the only institutions with ample financial assets and a relatively free hand: Organized philanthropies. Dr. Sievers notes that past efforts by foundations and other organized philanthropies to enhance civil society have often been misguided, and he also laments the present trend of many philanthropies to seek overly simplistic linear investment returns from their grants. Nevertheless, he makes a good case, backed by contemporary examples, that enlightened philanthropy, using common sense organic approaches, can do much to restore civil society and the commons. The natural audiences for this book are the boards and staffs of philanthropic institutions, but it is also the book's ambition to generate a broader appreciation for the vital mediating role of civil society as a bridge between government and private enterprise.

Among the greatest challenges facing humanity in the twenty-first century is that of sustaining a healthy civil society, which depends upon managing the tension between individual and collective interests. Bruce R. Sievers explores this issue by investigating ways to balance the public and private sides of modern life in a manner that allows realization of the ideal of individual freedom and, at the same time, makes possible the effective pursuit of the common good. He traces the development of civil society from the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, analyzes its legacy for modern political life, and explores how historical trends in the formation of civil society and philanthropy aid or impede our achievement of public goods in the modern era.

This book will be considered important reading for political philosophers, doctoral students, and theorists interested in the connection of civil society and philanthropy. It outlines more clearly than most previously published work the

implications of the conception of philanthropy as pursuit of the common good by private means. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly