

Social Solidarity versus “Social Capital”

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Preface

“Social capital” theory aims to extend the concepts and methods of economic science so as to subsume the political-economy of poverty under economics; what is needed on the contrary is a critique of economics which sheds light on the politics of poverty.

I. Foundations

The key concept for understanding the modern social crisis is the “Subject.” The dichotomy of individual versus community obscures the principal problem facing poor or marginalised people both individually and collectively – self-determination, *i.e.*, gaining control over their own lives.

II. “Social Capital”

Jane Jacobs, James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama each have quite distinct concepts of “Social Capital.” The general idea behind this investigation requires a critical appropriation of what each writer has to offer.

III. Social Solidarity

“Social capital” data can be better interpreted in the light of the concept of “subjectivity,” the precondition for which is “social solidarity.” Practical intervention to support the self-determination of stigmatised and impoverished groups requires the disaggregation of the concept of “social capital.”

Conclusion

Poverty should be conceived primarily as a *political* problem, not an *economic* problem.

Preface

The value of the idea of “social capital” is that it sheds light on the non-economic factors which allow poor or marginalised communities to improve their situation irrespective of welfare payments or other measures of redistribution. But exactly what should be done is not immediately obvious.

The problem with “social capital” is that it introduces the language, concepts and methods of economic science into the political-economy of poverty, whereas what needs to be done is to introduce the language, methods and concepts of political science, especially those of social movements, into the political-economy of poverty. A *political* critique of the concepts of economic science is required to demonstrate the social arrangements by means of which certain classes of people are *made poor* and marginalised by modern economic conditions.

The empirical work of Robert Putnam has established once for all that people are better able to overcome challenges to their well-being, and thus, over the long haul, avoid poverty and marginalisation, if they manifest a rational disposition to extend trust to strangers and a readiness to establish new social-bonds.

By following James Coleman in attempting to mobilise the concepts of economic science to conceptualise this observation, the empirical fact of “sociability” is obfuscated rather than clarified by the body of theory which has been erected on the foundations of “social capital.” Rather, it would have been better to have followed Jane Jacobs, who only used the term

“social capital” incidentally by way of a metaphor in her 1961 *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, but who understood the problems of poverty and disempowerment as first and foremost *political* problems that could be overcome only by communities that were able to organise themselves into a self-governing “Thing.”

The idea of rendering political relations into the language of economics was first developed by Coleman in his 1968 study of the “marginal utility of a voting commitment.” By the early 1980s, Coleman had developed this idea into what passed for a fully mathematical theory with a claim to respect as an extension of economic science. The claim is utterly spurious however. As is frequently the case, mathematical foundation (linear action theory) is valid enough, but the conditions for its application to the phenomena under consideration (commitment) are not met. Nevertheless, by this move, Coleman gave respectability to the idea of “social capital” as a category of economic science.

For Jane Jacobs — an activist, not an academic — however, the idea of “social capital” arose as a way of communicating the general social and political conditions by means of which a neighbourhood could deal with the challenges of living in the midst of strangers and subject to attack by powerful outside institutions. Herself a resident of a New York neighbourhood under attack by a Freeway project, Jacobs’ point of view was closer to that of the civil rights activists than to that of the Tammany Hall bureaucrats who more closely expressed James Coleman’s idea of “social capital.”

The anti-racist, feminist and gay-rights movements and the neighbourhood, working class and trade union movements, developed their own views as *subjects* of oppression rather than as *objects* of investigation. These currents have accumulated a sophisticated body of ideas, not only in social theory and economics, but moral philosophy, epistemology, cultural criticism, political science, and so on. The conceptual tools of these movements are attuned to shedding light on the exploitation and stigmatisation of people *made poor* by certain social arrangements which have to be subject to critique in order to overthrow them. People who are poor because they were born on the wrong side of the tracks have also been *made poor* by certain social arrangements, and it is these social arrangements which have to be subject to critique. Economic science is itself one of those social arrangements.

The crucial difference is that between subjectivity and objectivity.

The aggregation of many different social measurements into a single factor by Robert Putnam has had the effect of convincing a large body of people of the importance of this kind of information and opens a window on a different approach to dealing with poverty. However, the task now is to *disaggregate* these factors for the purpose of providing practical guidance to people who are trying to resolve social problems in an area.

At the very foundation of the idea of social relations as a form of capital, capable of generating other forms of capital and wealth, is its conception in *quantitative* terms. However, the more “social capital” is used as a basis for academic research, the more problematic becomes this idea of a simple *quantity* of “social capital,” the more the need is being voiced to distinguish, for example, between “social capital” which *contributes* to the capacity of a community to meet challenges, and forms of “social capital” which *exacerbate* social problems or actually *constitute* social problems in themselves. But if the quantity of social capital cannot be taken as an indicator of anything in itself, without breaking it down into its component parts, then the whole rationale for the concept of “social capital” is gone. Measuring “social capital” is actually *destroying* useful information, rather than constructing a useful indicator.

For example, if a community needs a “*balance* of bonding and bridging social capital,” what is gained by adding these two quantities together as the “*total* social capital”? An investor may equally well need a “balance of shares and cash,” for example, but these two forms of

capital are completely interconvertible; “bonding” and “bridging” “social capital” are *not* convertible.

Pierre Bourdieu, whose own notion of “social capital” plays a fairly restricted role within his theory, at least is clear on this point:

“to construct the continuous, linear, homogenous, one-dimensional series with which the social hierarchy is normally identified, implies an extremely difficult (and, if it is unwitting, extremely dangerous) operation, whereby the different types of capital are reduced to a single standard. This abstract operation has an objective basis in the possibility, which is always available, of *converting one type of capital into another*; however, the exchange rates vary in accordance with the power relation between the holders of the different forms of capital. ... one of the fundamental stakes in the struggles between class fractions whose power and privileges are linked to one or the other of these types. In particular, this exchange rate is a stake in the struggle over the dominant principle of domination (economic capital, cultural capital or social capital), which goes on at all times between the different fractions of the dominant class. [*Distinction*, p. 125]

Simply put, what is called “social capital” *cannot* be conceived as a form of capital. This is not because of the notion of “capital” is being conceived too narrowly, but rather because the *objective* convertibility of forms of capital is *objectively* not manifested by the phenomena conceptualised as “social capital.”

The contradictions arise because the *wrong conceptual framework* is being used to investigate the political economy of poverty. The wrong concepts are being used because the wrong question is being asked.

The question which needs to be answered is not in the first place: how can the people of a neighbourhood or region gain more wealth and resources? but rather how can the people of a neighbourhood or region organise themselves so as to have more control over their own life and more *political clout*?

All those things that are picked up in the various measures of “social capital” (trust, sociability, participation, social cohesion, norms of reciprocity, networks, etc.) are *self-evidently* relevant to answering this alternative question, but the manner of their relevance is much clearer. The proposition that the answer to the question “Can most people around here be trusted?” is *obviously* a good indicator of the likelihood that people in that area are going to be able to get organised. Putnam discovered that it is *also* a good indicator of the likelihood that people in that area are going to be able to overcome poverty and exclusion. Now that we have all been convinced by Robert Putnam’s statistics, isn’t it time to leave this problematic concept behind us, and look at the actual social and political conditions which are needed to overcome poverty and exclusion, and for that matter, *other* challenges which communities may face?

In my experience, those who are active in the “social capital” discourse actually don’t mind that the concept is dysfunctional; it has marked out a range of issues and a field of observation, and who needs a concept anyway? Divergent and sometimes perverse policy recommendations emerge from the debate according to the different conceptions people bring into the discourse.

In order to reconstruct the body of enquiry currently taking place under the banner of “social capital,” I propose the concept of “social solidarity” as the aspect of social relations which is the pre-condition for the construction of “subjectivity,” or “self-determination” — the real objective of all social action. Wealth is just one, rather problematic, route to self-

determination. Far from generating a “trickle down” effect, the pursuit of wealth as a means of attaining self-determination actually *undermines* the self-determination of others and *destroys* social bonds, rather than strengthening them.

Creating companies means creating new social bonds of collaboration. In this sense creating a company is little different from creating a new club, pressure group or voluntary association. Once the conditions for collaboration and corresponding commitments have been established, what people choose to do with their new-found collaboration is *up to them*.

The approach put forward here by no means minimises the importance of economic progress and the improvement of living standards as opposed to political and social progress itself. However, it tries not to put the cart before the horse.

Introduction

Social scientists from left to right, community activists and churchpeople, liberals like Francis Fukuyama to social democrats like Robert Putnam, both the leader of the (Australian) Opposition Mark Latham and next in line to the Liberal throne, Peter Costello, all seem to agree that what communities suffering under neo-liberal policies need is “social capital.”

But this is such an *unclear* concept; it can mean having the right connections, having power over other people’s lives or just being sociable. It’s meaning is so elastic that it is simply a dark space in which imagination can substitute for vision.

Nevertheless, opponents of the concept of “social capital,” whether from right or left, seem only to be able to shout shrilly like the advocates Sabbath observance at a Sunday football game. The undeniable truth that both market fundamentalism and the welfare state have equally exhausted their historical mission seems sufficient for the advocates of “social capital” to rest their case. I intend however to put forward a genuine alternative to extending the market into those areas of everyday life which have formerly escaped its ravages (as may be the outcome of “social capital” theory) or choosing between a “nanny state” or a “police state.”

Broadly speaking, my conclusion is that “social capital” theory wrongly attempts to conceptualise poverty as an *economic* problem rather than as a primarily *political* problem.

I shall proceed by making a critique of the main theories of social capital, including those of Jane Jacobs, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Francis Fukuyama and Robert Putnam. As Putnam’s version is the most influential, I will deal with this notion and some of its extensions (vertical *vs.* horizontal, bridging *vs.* bonding, wide *vs.* narrow) at greater length.

Then I shall present the notion of *social solidarity* as a specific relationship and mode of activity distinct from both personal attachment (kinship, love and friendship), rights (civil, political and social) and hierarchy (welfare, direction and regulation, whether traditional, bureaucratic or personal) which offers an alternative to the anomie of the market and paternalism of the welfare state.

The significance of solidarity is that it is the basis for the formation of trust and collaboration on which a new *subjectivity* can be constructed. Whether this subjectivity takes the form of a company, a social movement or a local residents’ committee is important but secondary. However, one of the important questions which is obscured by the notion of “social capital” is whether poverty can best be overcome by transforming *everyone* into capitalists, as proposed by Mark Latham, or whether people most need to develop voluntary association capable of pressing their collective interests against capital and government. Conceptualising nascent subjectivity and social solidarity as a *form of capital* prejudices the agenda for social

policy in the direction of “Third Way” neo-liberal policies of the kind proposed by Mark Latham, as opposed to other legitimate approaches.

However, before I begin I must outline a framework in ethics and social theory from which to proceed. My principal sources are Hegel (both the mature and the young Hegel), Marx (both the young Marx and the Marx of *Das Kapital*) and Lev Vygotsky’s social psychology (including its development by A. N. Leontyev). Some of the ideas have already been broached in my *For Ethical Politics*.

A primary aim of this analysis must be to make clear in terms of person-to-person relationships the meaning of the social and historical concepts utilised in modern social policy, so that people can be actors in defining their own destiny, rather than *objects* of social policy.

‘Solidarity’ is the notion central to the problem of oppressed groups struggling to gain control over their lives. Solidarity is defined as the bond created by an agent voluntarily extending aid to a stranger, under conditions determined by the recipient of solidarity.

This is the concept implicitly relied up when, for example, Brian Murnane of St Vincent de Paul, says “every time someone said let’s do something, we backed them.” It differs from the notion of “bonding social capital” because it relates to new bonds formed between *strangers*, the relation which is most significant in modern, urban conditions; it differs somewhat from the notion of “bridging social capital” because it is distinguished from relations such as “alliance” and “exchange,” both of which are also important “bridging” relations, but do not have the same capacity to foster the development of *new* subjectivity; and it differs fundamentally from the notion of “welfare,” in which the conditions under which aid is extended is determined by the giver, and therefore a mode of subordination.

Further, rather than conceiving of solidarity as a *resource* in the manner of economic science, solidarity is understood as a relation between subjects, which is a pre-condition for important kinds of *collaboration* which can form the basis for a new subject. In talking about *subjects*, the key concept is “self-determination” rather than wealth or “utility.”

A subject is defined as a *self-conscious system of activity*.^{*} By using the conceptual framework of *activity theory*, we can mobilise the social psychology of Lev Vygotsky and his school to understand the psychological implications of social problems and struggles, and to make the connection between personal development and community development. It also allows us to distinguish the different aspects of subjectivity known in Hegelian terms as Individual, Universal and Particular. Here the legacy of Hegel can be utilised to follow the stages through which subjectivity develops from objective systems of activity towards the attainment of self-determination.

The distinction between “horizontal and vertical social capital” cannot distinguish between a community electing a steering committee for their own redevelopment project, and a feudal lord ruling over the affairs of his underlings. Activity theory however not only provides a finely grained view of relations within emergent organisations, but also draws on a substantial body of psychological theory and practice, particularly among educators.

The stigmatisation and exclusion that affects people as a result of their place of birth or residence is structurally no different from the stigmatisation and exclusion that affects people as a result of their gender, “race” or sexuality, and the conceptual wealth of feminist and post-

^{*} At the time of writing I took the unit of analysis for a general social science to be a “system of activity” which I referred to as a “subject,” so as to emphasize the aspect of agency and *self-consciousness*. Later I concluded that the use of the term “subject” in this sense was confusing. I now refer to the same concept as a “project,” taken to be an interdisciplinary unit of analysis for the human sciences. “Project” specifically transcends the subject/object distinction.

colonial social theory can be brought to bear once we leave behind us the mysticism of pseudo-economics and adopt an explicitly *socio-political* approach to the political economy of poverty.

Likewise, 170 years of development of social and political philosophy within the workers' movement, including Marxism, provides a rich source of concepts once we leave behind us the ultimate commodity fetishism of defining human life as a form of capital.

I. FOUNDATIONS

1. The Subject In Itself

We must begin with the social and historical *subject*, and how it defines and reproduces its needs.

In the closing paragraph of his *Foundations of Social Theory*, James Coleman says:

“Rationality consists not in [an economic agent] acting according to his interests, but in constructing the internal constitution so that the actions generated by the internal system of action will bring him maximum viability.

“This model of an internal structure of actors that is consistent with the linear system of action ... does not eliminate purpose, but pushes it back to a deeper level, the construction of an internal constitution. This is the starting point for a theory of the self.” [p. 949]

The *individual* economic agent — whose action is the starting point of Coleman's linear action theory — is therefore a more or less successful internalisation of a *social* subject. Coleman should not be criticised for the infinite regression that this sets up, for it has the virtue of honesty. To deduce the individual from society or to deduce society from the individual — both routes are problematic. History however, solved this problem in its own way. Our method must be a logical reconstruction, but one which lets history do its work. Or, as Evald Ilyenkov put it:

“Science must begin with that with which real history began. Logical development of theoretical definitions must therefore express the concrete historical process of the emergence and development of the object. Logical deduction is nothing but a theoretical expression of the real historical development of the concreteness under study.” [Deduction and the Problem of Historicism, *from Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, Ilyenkov, 1960]

This is the approach pioneered by Hegel.

My unit of analysis will be the *subject*, by which I mean a *self-conscious system of activity*. The concept of *subject*, which I draw from Hegel, encompasses both the autonomous social system, the individual human being and the cultural products and practices by means of which individuals constitute themselves as a community; this is also referred to by Hegel as a *self-consciousness*. However, also following Hegel, I shall consider the subject in *the whole course of its genesis* beginning with the subject which is *not yet* self-conscious — the subject *in-itself*.

It was Vygotsky who first brought into focus the importance of the choice of a *unit of analysis* in the study of a complex phenomenon. In his study of linguistics, Vygotsky based himself on “word meaning” as the basic unit of analysis for linguistics.

“Modern linguistics uses the *phoneme*, the smallest indivisible phonetic unit affecting *meaning* and thus characteristic of human speech as distinguished

from other sounds. Its introduction as the *unit* of analysis has benefited psychology as well as linguistics.” [*Historical meaning of the crisis in Psychology*, Vygotsky 1927]

This was Vygotsky’s earliest methodological work. He later made the concept of the unit of analysis for linguistics more precise as “word meaning.” Vygotsky’s co-worker, A N Leontyev, further developed this insight in adopting *activity* as the unit of analysis for social psychology:

“But what is the actual or real life of people?

“Being, the life of each individual is made up of the sum-total or, to be more exact, a system, a hierarchy of successive activities. It is in activity that the transition or “translation” of the reflected object into the subjective image, into the ideal, takes place; at the same time it is also in activity that the transition is achieved from the ideal into activity’s objective results, its products, into the material. Regarded from this angle, activity is a process of intertraffic between opposite poles, subject and object.

“Activity is a non-additive unit of the corporeal, material life of the material subject. In the narrower sense, i.e., on the psychological plane, it is a unit of life, mediated by mental reflection, by an *image*, whose real function is to orientate the subject in the objective world.” [*Activity and Consciousness*, Leontyev 1977]

The focus on *activity* as the key to understanding human life is consistent with Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*.

“All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.” [*Theses on Feuerbach*, No. 8, Marx 1845]

Likewise, the idea of a unit of analysis is consistent with Marx’s basing of *Capital* on analysis of the exchange of *commodities*, that is to say an embryonic form of economic activity from which the real history of economic life itself unfolded.

“The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities,” its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity.” [The opening words of *Capital*, Marx 1867]

As Ilyenkov pointed out, the activity of exchanging commodities is something lost in the dim past and almost never observed in modern society, but it is the *real* starting point of economic life, despite being in contradiction to the given empirical form of economic activity today. [*ibid.*]

The *subject* is neither an individual person, nor a community, but a unity of *three* things: the individual (for example a person, without which nothing human can happen at all), the universal (culture — language, customs, artefacts, etc., without which no person can be a human being) and particular (communities, organisations, institutions, etc. — the various activities through which individuals engage with and sustain their culture). This is my *unit of analysis*. It differs from an *element* such as the “individual,” which is not a self-sufficient whole, but an *abstraction*, which *in principle* cannot exist on its own or constitute a independent system of action.

“We tried a new approach to the subject and replaced analysis into elements by analysis into *units*, each of which retains in simple form all the properties of the whole.” [Chapter 7, *Thought and Word*, Vygotsky, 1934]

By correctly choosing a unit of analysis in which the properties of the whole are already contained, even if only in embryo, it is possible to approach an understanding of a thing by its own methods and its own forms of movement — immanently — rather than foisting artificial ideological baggage in the form of liberal individualism or communitarianism on to the real development itself.

It was this approach, based on the subject as a self-conscious system of activity, which underlay Hegel's approach to understanding historical development, and is outlined both in his early *System of Ethical Life* and the more well-known *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Marx's early historical essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* also is marked by Marx's identification of the *subjects* in action in revolutionary France: neither "great men" nor "society," but a cast of historical *subjects* ("political personages" as he calls them) raising themselves out of the social and economic crises of the day, dressing themselves in the costumes of "historical ghosts."

Vygotsky died of consumption at the age of 37, relatively isolated and unknown but for a small group of followers, a communist to the end; A N Leontyev remains almost unknown to this day, but died a Communist; Ilyenkov, also a Communist to the end, committed suicide. On the other hand, those inheritors of the Frankfurt School who took the *individual* as their starting point for an analysis of "communication," became famous, well-paid and respected *liberals*. Those social theorists who have taken the *community* as their element, who want a "moratorium on new rights claims" or a "return to traditional values," likewise enjoy fame and prestige, be they social democrats or conservatives. But should we conclude from this that those who followed Hegel and Marx in taking as their unit of analysis the *subject* were therefore mistaken? I don't think so.

The Subject: Neither Individual nor Community

The starting point for an analysis of social action, insofar as we resort to anthropological metaphors at all, must be the isolated tribe or ancient *polis* in which the conception of an individual as opposed to the community is absent, the *zoon politikon* of Aristotle and their tribal forebears.

The starting point for society itself is not individuals who come together to form a society, in the manner presumed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his social contract:

“[The social contract] reduces itself to the following terms:

‘Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.’

“At once, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a moral and collective body.” [*The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1762],

which is nothing but an ahistorical myth, its only counterpart in history being economic transactions enacted between *individuals*, something capable of setting an average price but absolutely incapable of constituting a universal will.

Nor is society the “war of all against all” presumed by Thomas Hobbes:

“It cannot be deny'd but that the naturall state of men, before they entr'd into Society, was a meer War, and that not simply, but a War of all men, against all men;” [*De Cive*, Thomas Hobbes 1651].

a condition which makes the very existence of human society, let alone its progress, incomprehensible.

But nor is the starting point of history a “community” in which individuals count for nothing and cannot meet even their basic needs without the aid of others, as in today’s society. The individuals of ancient times were supremely competent masters of their environment who carried within themselves the entirety of a culture which allowed them to sustain themselves even for long periods of time away from others, with senses acutely tuned to their environment, even while unconscious of themselves as something which could be counterposed to the particular community of which they were a part and carrying nothing with them that belongs to the community rather than themselves. The conception of “community” on its own offers no scope for comprehending how social progress is achieved, other than by means of entirely abstract analyses which impute subjectivity to non-human system-attributes, metaphysical entities like the Laws of History or “the means of production.”

And nor is society composed of individual “economic agents” sending messages to one another in the manner of Kenneth Arrow’s political economy or communicating with one another according to the “ideal discourse” theory of Jürgen Habermas — for what celestial programmer could program these agents so that they could successfully decode one other’s messages? [quote from Habermas] The empirically given fact that such agents *can* decode each other’s message does not improve the situation at all, because such theories can not *explain* this most important empirically-given fact, far less understand systematic failures in that communication. Communication is a developed function of speech, not its primary function; subjects use speech to coordinate their *own* activity before they utilise it in communicating with *other* subjects.

Vygotsky describes how a child first uses language:

“We can see how difficult it is for children to separate the name of an object from its attributes, which cling to the name when it is transferred like possessions following their owner.

“The fusion of the two planes of speech, semantic and vocal begins to break down as the child grows older, and the distance between them gradually increases. Each stage in the development of word meanings has its own specific interrelation of the two planes. A child’s ability to communicate through language is directly related to the differentiation of word meanings in his speech and consciousness. ...

“Only when this development is completed does the child become fully able to formulate his own thought and to understand the speech of others. Until then, his usage of words coincides with that of adults in its objective reference but not in its meaning.” [*Thought and Word*, Vygotsky 1934]

Before words are used to communicate thoughts, a child uses words to coordinate their own activity and *formulate* thoughts. “Discourse” makes no sense at all except insofar as it is connected to some system of activity involving the communicating subjects.

All these theories of on one hand, the individual, and on the other hand, the community, are *abstractions* which begin by killing the real subjects of history, putting in their place ideological constructs which embody the social position of *the analyst* but not the subject itself. A real subject defines itself.

Neither “community” nor “individual” constitute a real starting point for history, but rather the subject-*in-itself*. The subject still in the process of becoming I take to be an undifferentiated unity of individual, community and social practice — a relatively autonomous and self-sufficient community, employing only a natural division of labour based on age and gender, producing no social surplus for trade or exploitation, governed by no law

than their own traditional way of life, all aspects of which are acted out by the individuals spontaneously without constraints of social hierarchy or property.

This is the real starting point of social history. However, I am not qualified and nor is it necessary to describe any actual such historical community; this is the real starting point of social history expressed only in its most general terms; what is necessary is to logically reconstruct from this foundation the conception of a subject which can be used for an analysis of the modern subject, which is so far removed from such a condition.

In James Coleman's terms, we shall start from the point at which the beginning and end of his *Foundations* are *identified*, out of which an understanding of the relation between the individual, particular and universal emerges by way of *differentiation* of a single conception of the *subject*.

To *abstract* the individual from the particular community of which they are a part in *analysis*, is to do exactly what such an act of abstraction does in reality: to take child from its carers and abandon it on a desert island produces nothing better than a pile of bones, unless by good luck the baby were to be adopted by wolves, in which case one would have an inferior wolf. To abstract, in analysis, the community from the individuals that make it up, does much what Vesuvius did to Pompeii, producing a culture of stone populated by corpses. To abstract a culture from the individual human beings who created and understood it, and/or the social context in which those individuals lived, is the work of museum curators of the old school, but not of social theory.

Thus our starting point is a system of activity in which individuals do not yet make a distinction between the objectification of their activity and the subjective or mental forms through which they apprehend that activity. Without a developed division of labour, the individual persons making up such a community carry the whole of their culture within their own activity, which can be sustained in relative independence of the community for long periods of time; consequently, such an "individual" can hardly be aware of the contrast between themselves as an individual and the wider community since their material dependence on the community lacks any material form, and can only begin to come into consciousness with the development of herds, crops, buildings and so forth, material objectifications of communal labour and culture.

But even before we can contemplate such an embryonic subject, the subject must distinguish itself from objectivity — from Nature. By definition, this cannot be a conscious act, but is constituted in the unselfconscious system of activity itself, by means of which the subject sustains itself and practically distinguishes itself from objectivity (Nature).

A subject is not constituted by "having something in common" — more likely in fact by having something *not* in common. The scientific or academic "observer," with his or her questionnaires, opinion polls and check-boxes, the sets and categories of social science, constructed not by the subject but out of the "observer's" mind, creates not a subject, but an *object*, an objectification of *their own* activity.

The subject distinguishes itself from objectivity by its own activity, its own being, which initially does not know itself as a category at all, but rather only in a series or *chain* of associations. This is the pre-history of the subject, which I will return to only later when we can approach the topic in a more concrete context, in terms of the emergence of subjects in conditions of modernity. Our subject begins when the subject has distinguished itself from objectivity, and constitutes what we can call a "subject in-itself," and it is this elemental subject which first concerns us. The *structure* of this subject in-itself I will come to shortly.

The subject distinguishes itself from Objectivity

The relation between the individual and the community in which their needs are met is analogous in some ways to the relation between a young baby and its ‘mother.’ It is widely accepted that the new-born child cannot distinguish between its own body and objects and people in their visual field:

“the external world does not seem formed by permanent objects, that neither space nor time is yet organised in groups and objective series, and that causality is not spatialised or located in things. In other words, at first the universe consists in mobile and plastic perceptual images centred about personal activity. But it is self-evident that to the extent that this activity is undifferentiated from the things it constantly assimilates to itself it remains unaware of its own subjectivity; the external world therefore begins by being confused with the sensations of a self unaware of itself, before the two factors become detached from one another and are organised correlatively.” [*The Construction of Reality in the Child*, Piaget 1955]

Likewise, long, long ago the human species grew out of a social animal which, like the rest of Nature, also lacked self-consciousness. “Drawing a line” here, between the capacity to develop self-consciousness and the lack of such an ability is notoriously difficult, and it is of no interest at all to us whether it is possible to draw such a line between human beings and animals. However, observations such as those made by Köhler a century ago that chimpanzees can solve complex problems only when all the elements of the solution lie within its visual field at the same time point to the fact that self-consciousness is not well developed among the primates. The tendency of animals to repeat habitual patterns of behaviour even in the face of obvious physical barriers, much like someone who walks to work by the same route everyday, without even remembering the trip later, or the inability of many animals to recognise their own image in a mirror — all these point to the fact that self-consciousness is something which a subject acquires only at a certain stage in its development, including in the evolution of species.

Thus, whether approached ontogenetically (the development of the human individual in modern society) or phylogenetically, self-consciousness emerges out of a system of undifferentiated activity [source: Vygotsky]. Phylogenetically, if we look at the development of the human species, the consciousness of the contrast between human and Nature is unquestionably a conquest of evolution like conceptual thinking itself. If we look at the cultural development of human society over the past few thousand years, then we see that “individual” and “humanity” are relatively recent innovations in how societies have understood themselves (“Individual” was coined by Bacon in 1605 and “humanity”, in the sense of “humankind,” originated in 1645, though it was used 200 years earlier as in contrast to deity and by Shakespeare in contrast to animality]. Even today, “humanity” is a concept still only in the process of becoming a reality, under considerable pressure in Guantánamo Bay and in refugee camps around the world; and “individual” far more of an ideological construct than a reality in all but biology.

What we know of the earliest forms of society, before they were drawn into commerce with the outside world, would lead us to believe that for the vast multiplicity of cultures, each with their distinctive languages and modes of living, the word “human being” was synonymous with their own people [source], with other peoples belonging to the category of non-persons, along with the flora and fauna and the rest of Nature. On the other hand, animism reflects a still-incomplete distinction between human beings and non-human Nature [source]. Likewise, a child develops the capacity to distinguish between objective and subjective before they

develop a “theory of mind” and learn to deal with the objective world as populated with other self-conscious people like themselves [source: Luria?].

In terms of social subjects, women existed for countless centuries before the women’s movement emerged, and people deprived of any means of production sold their labour-power for wages for at least a century before a self-conscious workers’ movement stepped onto the historical scene. During the interval between the beginnings of the life-activity which would later become the vehicle for subjectivity and the actual emergence of that subjectivity, one has two elements (individual and particular), but, lacking the third (universal), the given activity cannot constitute a form of subjectivity, other than in the deprecated, alienated form given by objectivity (woman as Other of man, worker as pauper).

In choosing to set out from the *subject* as my unit of analysis, I choose not to begin with a dichotomy between *individual* and *community*, since history and developmental psychology provides us with evidence that the starting point is one in which in an individual self-consciousness, insofar as it could be said to exist at all, does not differentiate itself in this way from the culture of which it is a part.

On the other hand, following Hegel, I will conceive as “subject,” both *individual* human beings who act according to their own will with whatever degree of independence from the community of which they are a part, *particular* systems of activity, organisations or social formations of any kind which manifest the attributes of subjectivity: that is to say, express a will, take actions, have a voice and relate to others like themselves, and whole (*universal*) cultures, with their language, customs, division of labour, artefacts, land, property relations and so on. However, the *separation* of individual, particular and universal in the way we moderns are able to imagine, is something which is an historical accomplishment; the identity or separation of individual, universal and particular is always only relative, never absolute. Initially, however, they do not distinguish themselves from each other at all.

Thus at this starting point of our analysis we have before us individual human subjects and particular, collective subjects, but under conditions where the individuals making up a given collective do not distinguish themselves from the social subject of which they are a part, and conversely, the social subjects do not look upon their individual citizens as individuals, as such, but rather integral component parts of the whole community.

Such a community, and such a personality, is both the beginning and the end of social theory, if we are to accept James Coleman’s observations cited above.

As I said above, I conceive of the subject as a *system of activity*. For an outsider, it is possible to abstract from any field of vision a “system of activity.” What distinguishes a subject from any other “system of activity” is that the subject is a system of activity that *defines itself*. The role of a system of activity which defines itself in social theory is crucial: these are the social *agents*, the actors on the stage of history, even if at the beginning they do not know themselves to be such.

Internalisation and Externalisation

Our starting point is the *sole* subject. As we shall see, the development and differentiation of self-consciousness is inextricably linked to its coming-into-relation with *other* self-consciousnesses. Thus the starting point is the subject acting in Nature — a non-human world which appears to the subject as “outside” and “natural” — and the subject’s first act is to distinguish itself from Nature or objectivity in general. I say “objectivity in general,” because that which lies outside the subject may include *homo sapiens*, but to begin with, the subject knows only the distinction between itself and *Other*; differentiation of objectivity between inorganic Nature and *other subjects like itself* can come only later, in the process of development of self-consciousness.

What I ultimately have in mind is *any* social subject, but let us imagine this subject as an *isolated* system of activity (isolated from others like themselves, not isolated from Nature and the material systems from which they sustain themselves, of course); in effect, subjectivity always begins in isolation, within the confines of a single system of activity because, lacking self-consciousness, it lacks consciousness of the other. Adult human beings in modernity so multiply define themselves that we must confine our imagination for the moment to a community living according to its own ways in isolation from others like themselves, or the earliest weeks of the life of a child.

What is the relation between subject and object and the relation of individual to particular (or collective) in such a system of activity?

Piaget conceives of the earliest development of “sensori-motor” intelligence as a process of *assimilation* and *accommodation*. According to Piaget, the only equipment the small baby has are reflexes to suck, grab, recoil from pain, etc., common to any organism. Accommodation is the process of the organism *following* the objective world in its actions, subordinating itself to it; assimilation is the organism using the acquired properties of the objective world to *extend* it in the organism’s own actions, i.e. to impose itself on to the world, but in accordance with the object’s own nature.

“In its beginnings, assimilation is essentially the utilisation of the external environment by the subject to nourish its hereditary or acquired schemata ... the necessities of this accommodation constantly thwart the assimilatory effort. But this accommodation remains so undifferentiated from the assimilatory processes that it does not give rise to any special active behaviour pattern but merely consists in an adjustment of the pattern to the details of the things assimilated. ...

“... in proportion as the schemata are multiplied and differentiated by their reciprocal assimilations as well as their progressive accommodation to the diversities of reality, the accommodation is dissociated from assimilation little by little and at the same time ensures a gradual delimitation of the external environment and of the subject.” [source? *Construction of Reality in the Child*]

Initially accommodation and assimilation are “undifferentiated,” so the earliest emergence of self-consciousness is the differentiation of self and other as *forms of activity*.

This is how Piaget described the development of a system of activity in the child-subject in its earliest pre-intelligent, pre-linguistic phase of development; the subject acquires the capacity to act in external Nature by its own means and in doing so gains an awareness of the distinction between its own powers and an external, objective material environment. There is still a long, long way from the child orienting towards a part of that environment as a person like himself.

In his early *System of Ethical Life* Hegel also describes the development of a “natural ethical life” in which human subjects distinguished themselves from Nature. He begins from a non-subject which has not distinguished itself from Nature:

“Need here is an absolute singleness, a feeling restricting itself to the subject and belonging entirely to nature. This is not the place for comprehending the manifold and systematic character of this feeling of need. Eating and drinking are the paradigms.” [*System*, 1.A]

According to Hegel, working with plants and animals as they exist in Nature obliges people to accommodate themselves to Nature, but the systematic *use* of plants, their *cultivation*, the domestication of animals corresponds to the formation of a “humanised nature” in contradistinction to Nature as such. The *raising of children* obliges people to universalise

their knowledge of their way of life so as to inculcate their children in it. “In the *tool* the subjectivity of labour is raised to something universal. Anyone can make a similar tool and work with it. To this extent the tool is the persistent norm of labour.” This construction of the ideal reaches its maturity in *speech* — “the tool of reason.”

Mediation

Hegel described the child, the tool and the word as forms and levels of “*mediation*” in the historical development of the human subject. That is, the subject becomes aware of itself in contradistinction to Nature through specific forms of activity in each of which a mediating element plays the pivotal role.

It is this notion of *mediation* which is crucial to Hegel’s approach to subjectivity. In Piaget’s conception of very early childhood, the mediating element is the child’s body and sensorimotor system, and he is surely right in this. However, Piaget does not make this explicit, it is taken for granted; Hegel however makes quite explicit the place of mediation in the self-definition of subjectivity.

In accommodating itself to each and every aspect of Nature, *assimilating* the powers of Nature to itself, and objectifying its own powers in material artefacts and in future generations of themselves, human beings go through a process much like that described by Piaget in relation to a very young child. In passing on the capacity to work with Nature in a specific way, and in particular in passing it down the generations, the raising of children is a specific form of activity in which a human capacity is taken out of its immediate, unconscious context and made the subject and focus of activity in itself. In order to pass a skill on to children, one must apprehend it and be able to reproduce it outside of the immediate stimuli with which it is normally associated — “extend” it. Likewise, the making of a tool presupposes that the activity for which the tool is to be used must be reproduced outside of the context in which it is used and objectified into some material object. The tool-making activity is therefore a system of activity in which the use of the tool is given material representation — human powers are invested in a material object. The production of language takes this process of idealisation of forms of activity as *forms of mediation* to its completion. Particular activities are transformed into *universal ideal* forms, themselves material things existing in the world.

Culture — the raising of children, the domestication of plants and animals and the production of tools and language — is thus in its entirety the *mediating* element in the relation of a social subject to its environment. Culture also mediates between a community or particular social practice and the individuals who carry it out, while these social practices are the mediating elements between an individual and their culture.

I make this point because I believe that the most important error that is made in the conception of subjectivity and intersubjectivity is to ignore or marginalise mediation, while culture is subsumed within the individual or the social subject itself. Thus communication and failures of communication are conceived as intersubjective or cross-cultural phenomena, the mediating element for which is either absent or brought in from outside the concept of the relation itself, complicating rather than facilitating understanding. Problems arising in interaction can only be resolved on the basis of clarifying what it is that people are trying to do together.

Nature is *not* a subject; the subject here distinguishes itself from Nature as part of Nature; the subject does so by making the specific forms of activity, by means of which it sustains itself, into systems of activity which become reified and abstracted into cultural elements which *mediate* between the subject itself and its object, Nature. In this scenario, “Nature” — the object, the world beyond — does not contain any other subjects. Thus what we have

discussed here is the dynamic of subjectivity *in itself*, independently of any relation to any other subject. This is called subjectivity *in itself* because a subject which does not know of any *other* subject like itself cannot be *self*-conscious, simply because if no other exists for it, then it exists for no other (like itself) and, as we shall see, if the subject has no relation to another such as itself, it cannot know itself, it cannot in a sense, step outside and look at itself *objectively*, it has no second or third person perspective on itself. It cannot be said therefore to know itself at all. In the beginning therefore, consciousness is unconscious, or at least, *unself*-conscious. It should be noted here that we are beginning from a “pre-subject,” and trying to understand subjectivity as something which creates itself, rather than as something which is simply *given* or a product of contemplation or analysis.

In his 1998 *Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth appropriates the work of the child (ex-)psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott thus:

“it is a misleading abstraction on the part of psychoanalytic research to study the infant in isolation from all significant others, as an independent object of inquiry. The care with which the ‘mother’ keeps the newborn baby alive is not added to the child’s behaviour as something secondary but is rather merged with the child in such a way that one can plausibly assume that every human life begins with a phase of undifferentiated intersubjectivity, that is, of symbiosis. ... the ‘mother’ also comes to perceive all of her child’s reactions to be part and parcel of *one single cycle of action*: [p. 98]

“The progress that the child’s development must make if it is to lead to a psychologically healthy personality is read off changes in the structure of a system of interactions and not off transformations in the organisation of individual drive potential. To designate the first phase — that is, the relationship of symbiotic togetherness that begins immediately after birth — Winnicott generally introduces the category of ‘absolute dependency.’ Here both partners to interaction are entirely dependent on each other for the satisfaction of their needs and are incapable of individually demarcating themselves for each other. ... the ‘mother’ experiences the infant’s helpless neediness as a lack of her own sensitivity. ... her emotional attention is so completely devoted to the child that she learns to adapt her care and concern, as if out of an inner urge, to the infant’s changing (and yet as it were empathetically experienced) requirements. ... During the first months of life, the child is incapable of differentiating between self and environment, ... It is only in the protective space of ‘being held’ that infants can learn to coordinate their sensory and motor experiences around a single centre and thereby develop a body scheme.” [p. 99]

I take issue with Honneth’s use of the term and concept of “intersubjectivity” here for it is obvious that at *this* stage, the mother does not exist for the child as a subject, but rather only as part of its own sensory field. Thus Honneth is linguistically doing just what he warns others not to do. Nevertheless, it is clear from the way Honneth describes Winnicott’s analysis, that the child-subject is “one single cycle of action,” a “system of interactions” with the ‘mother, in which the subject capable of differentiating between itself and its environment only slowly emerges by learning to coordinate its specific sensory and motor functions, and it is the baby’s physical organism which functions as the mediating element, the first outcome being a ‘body scheme.’ Only subsequently can this single system of action differentiate itself sufficiently for an elementary relation of intersubjectivity to develop, in terms of a primary relationship founded on the single system of bodily interaction from which mother and child differentiate themselves. [Consult Elkonin, Piaget, Luria for confirmation]

In conditions of modernity, people define themselves in a *multiplicity* of ways, so it is not possible to illustrate in such *purity* the processes of emergent subjectivity in respect to nascent social subjects on the modern political arena. Nevertheless, all the features mentioned by Hegel in respect to the emergence of a social subject in the dawn of history are appropriate today.

For example, *refugees* fleeing war-ravaged ex-colonies to detention centres in industrialised capitalist countries is a new phenomenon; only after this human tide had reached significant proportions did *refugee advocacy* and *refugee activism* appear on the scene, along with new nuances for the word “refugee,” deprecatory words such as “economic migrant,” “border protection,” “queue jumper” and a range of new legal and moral claims. It could hardly be otherwise. This migratory activity is the mediating element between the individuals engaged in activism and advocacy and the repressive response to refugees. It has generated new technologies, new professions, new moral principles and new words.

In turn, the various cultural products generated along the way played the role of *mediating* elements in the generation of new systems of activity and new social subjects. Words cannot enter the language until there are both an activity to name and people engaged in the relevant activity. [“A word is a microcosm of human consciousness” — *Thought and Word*, Vygotsky 1934]

Thus the mediating elements which are the substance of the process by which subjectivity emerges in the first place are the already-existing medium in which the confrontation of a subject with an Other will take place, and from which new forms of mediation may emerge. To conceive of a subject independently of the activities and objects which mediate the subject’s relation to its environment, block the path to conceptualising the mediating elements involved in *intersubjectivity*. Intersubjectivity would thus be rendered incomprehensible. It is far more likely that a programmer invented the word “interfacing” as part of the activity of interfacing, and possibly to cooperate with other programmers in interfacing, rather than that the word was invented to tell someone else, not involved in interfacing, about it. Jargon becomes generally known only when it ventures outside the activity context within which it was born, but its meaning and real usefulness is in the context where it is not jargon, but normal speech. [Vygotsky on egocentric speech and its primacy against communicative speech]

Actions create ideal objects — tools, words, icons, etc. A person may critically interact with these ideal objects, endeavour to perfect them, concerned with how they function to sustain a form of life, more or less in accord with the creator’s expectations, or in mobilising energies around a specific activity and coordinating specific forms of activity. For example, changes wrought in naturally existing plants to better meet the material needs of a people, become a *crop*, and this crop which is simultaneously both a part of Nature and an artefact, becomes a token of the fact that a community has distinguished itself from Nature. The same comments apply to the manufacture of stone implements in which a person’s powers are given an external form which can be the focus of both usage and improvement, while representing in a material form, human powers which have been abstracted from their immediate context. Likewise, the coining of the word “sexism” performed magical effects in crystallising the modern women’s movement around criticising certain male practices.

The Individual, Universal and Particular

The first act of a subject is to distinguish itself from objectivity. The form of development which a subject then undergoes, still in-itself, in supposed isolation from any other subject like itself, is the differentiation of individual, particular and universal, the relation of each to each and the mediation of each in the relation of the others.

This is a uniquely Hegelian concept. Although present in his early works and in the *Phenomenology*, it was only fully developed in the *Science of Logic* (1811-12). In Hegel's hands it was given a brilliant but extremely obscure exposition. Nevertheless, the concept of a subject as something real and alive is incomprehensible without this structure, so I should explain. I should mention that I have dealt with this subject also in "Getting to Know Hegel," (2000).

Hegel uses these logical terms because the concept of "subject" is itself a *logical figure*, capable of being used to conceptualise a range of different relationships. The terms may even change places in usage relevant to one and the same process. In order to make the idea clearer, I will illustrate it in relation to the emergent social subject we have been considering by means of an anthropological metaphor.

If a 'community' has distinguished itself from Nature, then it will have created crops, domesticated animals, fashioned buildings of some sort, tools, weapons, language, symbols, practices for the raising of children, etc., etc. All these elements of their culture I will call the *Universal*. These continue to exist through successive generations of individuals, modified by each in turn, and may be shared, in a more or less modified form by different communities which are part of the same culture. These are the *ideal elements* of the subject. Of course, if they are not given material form, that is to say, they are not fully differentiated from the individual "carriers" of the culture themselves, the culture exists, but it is not actual. The existence of crops, for example, marks a certain stage in the differentiation of a culture as something distinct from Nature. But this "Universal" remains "ideal" even when it is given material form in its own right.

The *Individuals* — Henry, Josephine, Mary, Arnold, ... are just as ordinary language indicates. I make no special distinction at this level between mind and matter, but take individuals as they are, as thinking, feeling, wilful, needy, active, material beings. The question is: how is it that these individuals are in some way subsumed into the Universal, how they can know it and act as its carriers and not only carriers but *creators*?

By *Particular* I mean the activities and active groupings of various kinds whereby the Individuals engage with the Universal. So for example, when a group of people collaborate to harvest the crop and sort the seeds for milling and sowing, this *harvesting* is a Particular. By participating in the harvest, a youngster, for example, gets to know about the crop and how to deal with it, and participates in changing the seed-stock which will make next year's crop. Each village, with its system of relationships in which every individual has a particular place, constitutes the Particular by means of which an Individual is sustained while getting to know their culture, is assigned property rights and responsibilities, learns the language and customs, etc., and generates and modifies the Universal.

A subject is not an indifferent addition of Universal, Particular and Individual. As is well-known, an individual who is by some unlucky circumstance plucked from their normal social environment into an alien culture, cannot sustain themselves other than by integrating themselves into their new social context. On the other hand, a culture which is known to individuals, but does not animate their collective activity is a dying culture, not a Universal.

The Universal, Particular and Individual differentiate from each other in the course of the Subject distinguishing itself from objectivity. For example, individual women experience the oppression of patriarchal practices before there is a subjectivity called "the women's movement." But this experience can only take an individual, "unhappy" form, a *suffering*; feminist subjectivity itself only arose when the ideas, words, culture of feminism took on a material form, was objectified in books, speeches, organisations, ideas, etc.. Only then, when individual women could *see*, so to speak, the Universal as something distinguished from themselves as individuals, could a woman become an individual part of the women's

movement, not necessarily formally, but nevertheless animated by what has been called “folk feminism,” forms of ideology appropriated by women, animating their activity on a daily basis. On the other hand, early feminist writing did not constitute a feminist movement until conditions made it possible for individual women to engage with and give active form to those ideas. And finally, without the opportunity to engage in *some* particular practice — even just reading a book written by someone else! — there is no way that an individual woman can be a feminist. Thus all three aspects of subjectivity are needed; they must be in relation to one another and they are required to mediate one another — otherwise subjectivity cannot exist.

Further, as a subject develops, not only do individual, universal and particular differentiate from one another, for example in material forms, but each becomes itself the focus for specific activities and in turn the Particular and Universal become themselves Individuals; that is, there is a kind of division of labour between Individual, Universal and Particular.

It is important to distinguish these relationships from relations of domination, which we will come to presently. If a Subject is to maintain its culture, then that task requires special attributes and becomes a task *in itself* alongside the Universal life in which the culture is substantiated. So in the example above of bringing in the harvest, it may become the special function of a priest to say when it is time to bring in the harvest, and the special function of some particular group to actually bring it in. Thus the “natural division of labour” is enhanced with a division of labour oriented to the *ideal tasks* of a subject. This differentiation which takes place *within* a subject is not a form of domination, even if it has the potential to be transformed into a form of domination. [The casting of relations internal to a subjectivity, relations of delegation, representation, authority, etc., as relations of domination is a view widely shared by “social capital” theorists such as Putnam and Fukuyama. We will return to this later.]

Similarly, a small child which is endowed by Nature with bodily organs needed to breath, ingest and digest food, and so on, will turn particular parts of their body towards *ideal* functions, especially the speech organs, hands, sense organs and brain, which are not necessary for the basic life functions of the body. A social movement must also undergo a kind of differentiation which should not be conflated with hierarchical domination, in order to sustain its ideal in the activity of living people: a branch structure, national committees, delegates, treasurers and so forth. The idea of a social movement in which there are no eminent speakers, recruiters, performers, propagandists, and so forth, is conceivable only in the imagination.

Thus far I have outlined to processes of *differentiation* of a subject — the subject’s differentiation of itself from objectivity and its internal differentiation between individual, universal and particular, and two forms of *mediation* corresponding to these two forms of differentiation — the objectification of subjectivity and subjugation of objectivity (accommodation and assimilation in Piaget’s terms, the making of tools, artefacts, symbols, etc.) and the mediation of the relation between universal, individual and particular by the third term.

This is the genesis and life process of a subject expressed in the most general terms possible. Such a subject is however not yet fully self-conscious because it has not yet (in our exposition of its genesis) come into any kind of relation with *another subject* — conscious perhaps, but not yet *self-conscious*.

It is not intended at this point that any substantial content has been introduced into the concept of subject. My intention is just that this concept is a *logical figure* which can form a starting point as an alternative to that of “individual.” So now we must turn to the problem of the relation between subjects.

2. Unmediated Contact between Subjects

To emphasise the point that unmediated interaction between two independent subjects is impossible and inconceivable, we must turn to see how history solved this problem. The scenario is two or more mutually independent cultures living according to their own way of life, unself-consciously in what Hegel called “natural ethical life.” Nothing about the nature of their way of life concerns us here, other than that the social subjects concerned are either unaware of the existence of other peoples like themselves living elsewhere in the world, or if, as is more likely, they are aware of other cultures, they do not regard or treat these others as human beings like themselves, but rather as part of the natural world outside the boundaries of the own culture. The Museum here in Melbourne, until only a few years ago [find date], displayed evidence that we Australians regarded the first peoples of this continent in exactly this way, showing cameo displays of aboriginal people alongside displays of native flora and fauna.

Now if the mid-20th century settler community in Australia failed to recognise the indigenous people of Australia as human beings even after living with them for 200 years, it might seem that perhaps this is a privilege only of a dominant culture. While this doubtless explains the persistence of this failure of recognition throughout the period of colonisation, I do not think that the relation is inherently a one-sided one. When the British settlers first arrived in Sydney Cove, the local Aborigines, it is reported [Robert Hughes source], paid little attention to the arrival of the fleet of large vessels and their threatening occupants. For a long time it seemed that the settlers had nothing of interest or use to the Aborigines and vice versa and contact between the two communities only developed (disastrously) over time as the settlers destroyed the Aborigines’ use of the land. [more from Robert Hughes and/or Henry Reynolds]

Very early on in antiquity there were laws and customs in place according certain rights to foreigners and prescribing appropriate norms of conduct in relation to strangers. [MacIntyre] However, I think it would not be drawing too long a bow to suggest that in the earliest times during which human cultures grew up, the situation was as I suggested above, that such cultures did not recognise other such cultures as human beings, but rather as part of the natural world. I am obviously not talking here about neighbouring communities which had intercourse with one another and so on, and nor am I talking about communities which traded. “Nature” essentially means “outside my culture.” [I use the word “culture” here loosely as an “outer boundary”; I mean “subject,” and neither “community” nor “culture” covers this meaning.]

The aim is to reconstruct the possibility and preconditions for contact between any two subjects which are independent of each other and mutually self-sufficient in order to elucidate the nature of a subject and their interactions from a beginning in which nothing is presupposed. While it should be clear that it is methodologically impermissible to presuppose isolated *individual subjects* as the presupposition for society, it is by no means impermissible to presuppose the existence of mutually indifferent *social subjects*. In fact, the positing of isolated *communities* is also untenable, since people move from place to place, but when they do so, they leave and enter different *systems of activity*. In that sense, the use of the word “isolated” goes too far here; “independent” or “self-sufficient” would perhaps be more to the point. When I talk about mutually independent *subjects* I do not refer either to the physical individuals or the aggregation of such bodies in ‘communities,’ but exclusively to the respective *systems of activity*. There is nothing abstract about such a conception; the activity I refer to is material activity and it is a self-contained whole, reproducing itself in Nature, from which it has abstracted *itself*. Any *other* such conception must be an abstraction. Doubtless such subjects came about through intermarriage, the interchange of travellers,

migration, the collapse of empires and all sorts of material intercourse between communities, but I believe that the essence of the situation is still historically appropriate to be represented as essentially independent subjects.

A Subject without a social surplus

I want to add another constraint to the situation of the independent subjects that we need to consider, viz., that the subject produces no *social surplus*.

I mentioned above that culture was “the raising of children, the domestication of plants and animals and the production of tools and language.” Obviously from the very earliest times, arts and crafts and all kinds of spiritual activity extended culture beyond the culture immediately associated with sustaining the community. To be able to engage in such activity, people must have some time and energy “left over” from the struggle for existence (“individual surplus”). This kind of spiritual activity will in turn generate its own needs and its own artefacts and also a division of time between addressing material and spiritual needs, and ultimately some kind of division of labour over and above the ‘natural’ division of labour based on age and sex connected with the reproduction of material life. Since such spiritual activity is so central to interaction and social consciousness in general, it is necessary to look back so to speak to a hypothetical time at which no such social surplus was available over and above material life, or at least ‘abstract’ from such spiritual activity. Since arts and crafts, literature, musical performance and such like are generally unknown in the animal kingdom, let alone wage-labour, it seems reasonable to ask the reader to imagine an isolated subject which produces *no social surplus*, and consequently has no division of labour over and above the age, gender and kinship based division of labour of natural ethical life.

Having set up the experimental conditions for our thought experiment, the question we have now to ask ourselves is: what happens when two such subjects come in contact with each other?

History provide ample response to this question: *war* is what happens. The appearance of another human society in one’s territory is probably worse news than the arrival of a horde of locusts, for the intruders are no more going to recognise your land or your domestic animals and your rights in these, than would a horde of locusts. This is the circumstance which Hegel had in mind with the famous “life and death confrontation” which initiates the “master-slave dialectic” in the section of *The Phenomenology of Consciousness*.

Two such subjects, each living according to their own way of life from the fruits of a domesticated natural environment, simply *cannot share* those environs; that they should simply violate the premises of our thought experiment. Either one will devour the other or vice versa. And neither will have any compunction about it either, as the alternative to being killer is to be prey. Or failing the ability of one or the other to triumph, the two sides will retreat to a safe distance back into their own territory, and post look-outs. Devouring the enemy may not mean killing them; a stranger may be taken prisoner and married into the kinship system of the community, learn the language and customs of the hosts and take their place in the community. But from the point of view of interaction between *subjects*, the result is absolutely the same, for it is not the body of social organism with which we are concerned here, but its activity. The prisoner or traveller who is peacefully adopted into the tribe is not recognised as such, as having a different culture, but *sheds* his or her former identity and adopts that of their host, even if she or he modifies it in so doing.

So under the circumstances we have presupposed here, no recognition of one subject by the other is possible.

Failure of Recognition

I should mention here that no comfort can be taken from this thought experiment by postmodern advocates of theories of the “master signifier” and so on, who theorise failure of recognition and communication within conditions of modernity, by *abstracting* from the ubiquitous mediation between subjects, including the sharing of the Earth, let alone the world market, language, etc., characteristic of modernity. The failure of recognition contemplated here is absolutely presaged upon the hypothesised lack of mediation between the subjects prior to their confrontation.

I have mentioned the word “recognition” several times above, and introduced it here without definition. Later we will have to explore this concept further and go so far as to determine different degrees and kinds of recognition, but the total *failure* of recognition which we have considered here is not difficult to determine. If I use you as a door-mat, as an object to be used and disposed of, if I kill you or lock you up like a circus animal, then I do not recognise you. If I confront you in battle, then I recognise you as my deadly foe, but only in the same way as I do a lion or poisonous spider, and as soon as I get the chance I will make a trophy of your head. I recognise you in just the same way as I recognise the forces of Nature such as a dangerous animal — but the mediating element is a *warrior* rather than a hunter.

Isn't it clear that the confrontation between two such subjects sharing nothing but their sudden presence on the same turf, presents to each a mortal danger and each responds accordingly? No innate urge to domination such as proposed by Francis Fukuyama is required to comprehend this perfectly rational reaction to a situation of mortal danger. If there are no rules, then gloves are off.

All that is necessary to make sense of recognition in the only sense possible — battle to the death — is to contrast it with the recognition that an individual person gives to another member of the same community. Let us look at this first, elementary form of recognition that the individual components of our emergent social subject grant to each other.

3. The Individual and Social Subject

Our elementary social subject, producing no social surplus, with no functional or hierarchical division of labour or trading relations with others, is composed of individual human beings, reproducing their lives in a natural division of labour based on gender, age and kinship, raising their children, tending domestic animals and crops and using tools and language. But the social subject exists only in and through its individual subjects; there is no “central processing unit,” so the ethos of this community is carried forward only by means of and within the activity of each and every individual.

However, it is inconceivable that this “natural ethical life” is possible without mediation between the individual and the universal; people are not programmable automatons — their cooperative labour is conscious and intelligent. Though under our assumptions lacking in spiritual activity *as such*, the various systems of activity around each individual are coordinated by language and custom, tools, land and herds. The way I propose to approach the coordination of the various individual subjects into the system of activity of the community is by means of the concepts of *individual*, *universal* and *particular* as elaborated by Hegel.

Individuals in this elementary social subject clearly recognise each other in the sense that they participate in the same system of activity with their “cousins” and their pattern of life presupposes that they have distinguished themselves from Nature in the manner discussed above. But this is not to say that they have a concept of the Individual in any sense remotely like that known to modernity.

My point is that all the Individual social subjects here identify themselves with the Universal social subject, but this is not a *flat* identity, as if they were incapable of distinguishing between a single individual human organism and the language, foundation myths, land, artefacts, and so on through which they exist as a people. Such a notion is an absurdity, in fact it is not a notion at all.

The relation is rather like that kind of distinction we make we say “That is a cow,” while obviously knowing the difference between Daisy and the species “cow.” However, the anthropological and archaeological evidence is that early human beings were uninclined to make use of generalised concepts such as “cow;” their knowledge was very concrete, tending towards knowing each tree as an individual rather than having knowledge of trees as a genre in contrast to “shrub” or “flower.” There is evidence [source: Vygotsky] that very concrete and effective knowledge of the objects in their environment was compatible with quite unclear distinction between the individual and universal. It is reasonable to suppose that this situation is also typical of the way they conceived of *each other*.

In the discussion above about how a subject distinguishes itself from Nature, I pointed to the production of artefacts of various kinds which both objectified human powers and provided a focus around which systems of activity meeting people’s needs could be organised. Following the terminology of Evald Ilyenkov, such artefacts, though material objects, can be called *ideals*; their function in a whole culture is the same as spoken words — the stabilisation of a certain system of activity, the production of artefacts reflecting its requirements and the invention of words used for gaining the assistance of others and coordinating one’s own activity in the system of activity are all part of a single process of the production of culture.

We can designate the culture of a people and its ethos as “Universal,” being the sum of all its ideal elements. [“Culture,” and thus “the Universal,” is wider than “community” and subjectivity is not co-extensive with “culture;” “subject” is an intersection of the universal with “particular”. A culture which is wider than a community simply points to the fact that subjectivity has already developed beyond the bounds of the “isolated subject.”] The particular performances of systems of activity by means of which the people reproduce their life — farming, cooking, hunting, storytelling, etc., — we can call the “Particular.”

These three aspects of the Subject — the Individual, Universal and Particular — all *mediate* each other in the sustenance of the life of a people and its culture down the ages. This *triangular* relationship, which Hegel calls a Syllogism, is the proper relationship only by means of which we can conceive of the relation between individuals and their community. Without the concept of mediation, thinking of people simply as a collection of elements belonging to a set, there is no possibility of conceiving of this relationship other than by rendering the subject like parts of a simple piece of machinery, as some kind of robot. An individual human being cannot *directly access* the ideals of their culture; phonemes and implements have no meaning until they are utilised in cooperative activity.

To exemplify what I mean by each of these three aspects of the Subject mediating the others, it goes like this:

When a particular group of individuals bring in the harvest they collect the seeds for next year’s crop, continuing the process of selection and maintaining the breed of grain; when a group of people cooperate in the building of a house they further concretise the meaning of the words they use in coordinating their activity and reproduce in yet a new particularity the pattern of house-building they learnt from their parents: the universal (culture, artefacts) mediates between the individuals and the particular activity at hand, functioning to coordinate it and guide in the necessary direction; the particular practical activities or labour processes mediate between the individuals and the culture, helping them learn and acquire the culture

and further develop both the culture itself and themselves as individual participants in the culture; the individuals which come together also mediate between the particular labour process at hand and the cultural products which are necessary for its performance, bringing their knowledge and energies to the task and activating it. One could go on indefinitely. There is always three sides to the relationship; each side *mediates* the relationship of the other two.

However, it is fair to say that none of the participants have an education in Hegelian philosophy and all this takes place without the slightest consciousness of a distinction between individual, universal and particular. If one were to ask one of the harvesters “How to you bring in the harvest?” then he or she would most likely answer with words and gestures to the effect of “Like this.” If asked “Who brings in the harvest?” then they would doubtless answer with the names of those engaged in the task.

Thus when we say that the individual subjects here do not distinguish themselves from the social subject (i.e., their community), then we mean that the form taken by such a distinction is simply that between individual, universal and particular, and that in the earliest stages of development even *these* are not clearly distinguished. The richness of the vocabulary of early cultures in concrete designations is evidence of this type of consciousness. It is necessary only to read Shakespeare to see the traces of this vocabulary, so rich by comparison with our own. The richness of vocabulary represents traces of this kind of subjectivity because things and activities tend to be known by “their own name,” rather than being referred to in a mediated way by generic universal categories and names.

I make no claim to originality in what I have said so far. All this was worked out by Hegel about 200 years ago. Although I intend to go beyond Hegel later on, I believe Hegel gives us what is necessary to establish the nature of subjectivity; all that is required is to rescue Hegel’s original idea from 200 years of interpretation and his own metaphysical mode of thinking.

The individual subjects “recognise” each other, but not in the sense in which such recognition is possible in modernity. They “recognise” each other only insofar as they are each *participants in the same, single system of activity*, but one in which there has been a degree of differentiation between universal, individual and particular. The form of recognition which sustains modernity is one in which a subject recognises *another* subject, an *independent* Other like itself, possibly even a stranger. This we have found is *impossible* for the “abstract” subject which constitutes the beginning of our analysis.

In modernity, the social subjects whose systems of interaction we must deal with, are not of course anything like the individual or social subjects we have imagined above. It is not our aim to try to reconstruct modernity as an aggregation of such simple, undifferentiated, mutually independent subjects, but rather to concretise our conception of the subject by following the way in which the subject *differentiates* and concretises *itself* in the historical process. The outcome is a worldwide concatenation and interpenetration of systems of activity which are not separable from one another but nor do they form a single whole. We have constructed what we have described as both the starting point and endpoint of social theory — the subject in itself; what now remains is to trace how such a subject can differentiate and unfold itself to something resembling modern conditions.

4. The Two possible Modes of Recognition of the Other

In order for two simple, “isolated” subjects to be able to interact with one another, and for a simple social subject to be able to differentiate itself, there is a pre-condition. That is that they must be able to produce a *social surplus*, over and above what is essential for the reproduction of their material life on a day-to-day basis.

If their way of life allows for (a) a part of the product to be expropriated from the producer by someone who is thereby relieved of productive work and can concentrate on “theoretical” work — doing philosophy or overseeing the work of others, *or* (b) a surplus product over and above what is required for immediate consumption which can be exchanged for goods produced by other subjects.

(Parenthetically, I should note that at this point I have made a minor departure from Hegel’s exposition, inasmuch as Hegel places (a) as a primary point for the emergence of self-consciousness and (b) is introduced only later. I see no reason for this separation. In *System of Ethical Life* he posits three categories of surplus product, individual, particular and universal, corresponding to the manner in which such surplus is appropriated; in this sense, (a) and (b) above correspond to particular and universal appropriation.)

Thus we have two independent paths to the recognition of another subject and to the differentiation of a single subject: enslavement (or *colonisation*), and trade (or exchange, *commodification* or “neocolonialism”). I will look at each in turn.

a. Enslavement and Colonisation

Let us return to the prospect of two social subjects confronting one another in just the dire circumstances considered above, but with the difference that one party at least has sufficiently developed its mode of living that a division of labour is feasible.

Thus instead of physically destroying the Other, perhaps robbing them of their land, domestic animals, goods and so forth, they can *enslave* them. By “enslave” I do not mean that the people concerned are turned into commodities or even necessarily that they are put to work under the cat-'n'-nine-tails in the manner popularised in movies. How the enslavement (colonisation, subjugation) is implemented is of no concern for an analysis of modernity; what is of interest is the way in which the concept of the Subject develops itself.

This scenario is the one sketched by Hegel in the “Master-Slave” dialectic made famous in his own way by Alexander Kojève and is well known as an effective means of conceptualising not just long-forgotten episodes of antiquity, but the process of colonisation inflicted upon the continents of Africa, Latin America and Asia by the European powers. However, many interpretations of this dialectic fail to capture what for Hegel was essential, viz., the manner of *mediation* involved in the subjugation of the Other. In my opinion this failure derives in some measure from a failure to begin from an adequate concept of the Subject itself, a failure which can flow from undue concentration on the single passage of the *Phenomenology*. For these reasons, I will ask the reader to suffer a short recapitulation of the Hegelian concept of enslavement (or colonisation).

In order to grasp what takes place with the process of colonisation it is important to conceive of the Subject in its two aspects: the *objectification* of the Subject in its culture: language, customs, arable land, domesticated animals, tools, machinery, literature, etc., etc., on one hand, and on the other, the *subjective* form of this culture in the individual human beings who act out the culture and *internalise* its meaning in their persons. This is what Hegel calls the “duplication” of self-consciousness. This duplication does not coincide with the mental-material contrast, but reflects the differentiation of a subject from objectivity, manifested in internalisation and objectification (or externalisation), the contrast between natural human beings and domesticated Nature, between accommodation and assimilation, to use Piaget’s terms, equally meaningful in relation to a *social* subject as for an individual actor.

When a Subject colonises an Other this is what takes place: the *objectification* of the other is destroyed, the language may be outlawed, cultural artefacts either physically destroyed or removed from their context by the termination of the customs and practices of the colonised people, plants and animals are either destroyed as useless to the coloniser or taken possession

of by them; the objectification is detached from the subjectivity and subordinated to the colonising subjectivity. The subjective aspect of the Other however is subsumed within the activity of the coloniser, but in a subordinated, dominated position, effectively destroyed, acting out the culture of the master, put to work on its land, utilising the methods dictated by the master, speaking (at least for all serious purposes) the language of the master and obeying its laws. With the expropriation of the objectification of their subjectivity, their self-consciousness, i.e., their own differentiation of themselves from Nature as human beings, is destroyed; at the same time, they remain conscious human beings; as productive workers, they distinguish themselves from Nature through their labour, but not as before, as themselves, now in the manner of the master-culture. Thus, now subsumed within the system of activity governed by the master, the system of activity which meets the needs and desires of the master, and coordinated according to *its* consciousness, *its* theory of the world, the colonised people is now able to identify themselves as human beings only by means of the culture of the coloniser.

However, what has taken place is a rupture between the subjective aspect of the system of activity in which they produce themselves, and the objective activity itself; the practice is the activity of the slave, the theory is that of the master. Thus in the now-differentiated subject, there has been a separation between *theory* and *practice*, and one in which theory governs practice. Once a self-governing and self-sufficient, independent Subject in which theory and practice were not differentiated, by contrast, the “slave” is now a dominated being, used in the same way as domestic animals as means for the “master” to achieve their ends. In this sense the master does not *recognise* the slave as a human being, as an “end”, as a subject like themselves. Rather, the master-culture *subsumes* the activity of the colonised subject into its own culture, expropriating its surplus, and then successively *transforming* its activity in line with its own schemas. However, the slave recognises the master since the master *is* the end, the purpose of their activity, the true subject of their activity.

Let us look at the mirror image of this situation from the position of the “master” in the system of activity which results from the act of colonisation. Whereas formerly, the “master” was a subject in which theory and practice were, as described above, indissolubly connected in day-to-day life, the activity of the master class is now a “theoretical” one; he oversees the work of his slaves; whether it is by means of architectural drawings or the cat-'o'-nine-tails makes little difference. How are the subjective and objective aspects of the subject now related to one another? The coloniser has enhanced the objectification of their activity by the act of colonisation, and by putting the colonies to work, they find their culture objectified in the activity of the colonised. Instead of doing practical work themselves, they now produce much more by means of theoretical work, but what they take to be the objectification of their own subjectivity is objectively the activity of the slave. For the master-culture (i.e., for this subject), the activity of the slave is no more the creation of the slave than milk is the creation of the cow or potatoes the creation of the earth. The activity of the slave is *their own* activity, albeit theoretical activity. In this sense, the master *fails* to *recognise* the slave as a human being, as a subject like themselves. He is as dependent on the slave just as he is on Mother Nature, but this is not his subjectivity, for he has mastered the slave just as he has mastered Nature. The master’s attitude to the slave is the same as his attitude to Nature. Thus Hadrian’s Wall is deemed to have been built by Hadrian, though it is hardly likely that Hadrian lifted a single stone.

Let us look at the form of mediation which is inherent in this process of separation of theory and practice.

Whereas in the case of the simple, undifferentiated subject, the individual sees their own powers and knowledge in the artefacts of the culture and participates in the regeneration of

that culture as an expression of their own subjectivity, so that the relation of individual, universal and particular is barely differentiated, in the case of the class society now constituted by the differentiation of the subject the situation is quite different.

The producer sees in the objectification of their activity the culture of the oppressor, the culture of the oppressor class with its overseers and its theories and desires intervenes between their own consciousness and the practice they are engaged in, as if they did not have a mind of their own. While dying of starvation they produce and export tons of rubber to Europe. Their life activity is absorbed in this culture, and except insofar as they retain a memory of their former days, before colonisation, or have contact with other subjects, both of which are excluded in this thought experiment, their consciousness can only be that of the culture of which they are a part, albeit a denigrated and lowly part.

On the other hand, the great cathedrals which exalt the religious sensitivities of the ruling class are built by labourers who can't read Latin. The activity of the workers intervenes between the ideas and intentions of the ruling class and the product in which these intentions and desires are given objective form. The material of the master culture is the objective activity of the slave.

The subject-object relation of the slave is mediated by the subjectivity of the master; the subject-object relation of the master is mediated by the (unrecognised) objectivity of the slave. A relation of dependency is established: robbed of their own culture, the slave is made dependent on the master, ideally dependent, dependent in law, so to speak.

Unable to reproduce their own wishes by "their own" activity, the master is dependent on the slave, but this is only an *implicit* or potential dependency, an material, "unrecognised dependency," for the master dominates the slave in the same way as it dominates the material objects of the rest of its culture. Dependency is therefore implicitly independence, and independence implicitly dependence.

Recognition here becomes a concept with real content. The slave recognises the master; she recognises the master insofar as she obeys the master's laws, acts according to the property rights and customs dictated by the master-culture. The master however does *not* recognise the slave; she regards the slave as only a means to an end, a door-mat to be walked over, she does not listen to the slave's opinions nor care for her desires, except in the way a bee-keeper cares for the pollen supply of her bees in order that the bee may produce honey.

This is a single subject; it is one culture, but it has differentiated itself. On one side the master enjoys the *respect* of the slave but does not reciprocate it since the slave is not worthy of respect, and consequently the respect received from the slave provides comfort and security but is no basis for self-respect.

On the other side, although, as a good worker, the slave satisfies the desires of the master, her product is not an expression of her own subjectivity but that of the master. The possibility of the slave to know herself to be worthy of esteem and esteem herself, is therefore blocked. Lacking respect from the dominant culture she also lacks self-respect. The master the other hand regards the product of the worker as the product of her own subjectivity — any defects are ascribed to the nature of the slave of course.

Thus this internal relation of the now differentiated subject is asymmetrical. The individual subject who grew up in the self-contained world of the simple, undifferentiated, isolated social subject enjoyed confidence that their activity would meet their own desires. The virtue most characteristic of this condition is that of *self-confidence*. Self-confidence is shattered by contact with a foreign subject until recognition of the subject's culture is gained from the Other.

On the other hand, insofar as the “defeated” culture survives — in the outback and the interstices of the dominant culture, perhaps in the privacy of the colonised homes — then here the relation between the two subjects is just as before: *non-recognition*. Thus so long as such a situation remains, there must be a kind of dual-personality in the colonised person, who knows of his or her former culture by means of marginalised, rural or domestic vestiges of it, while in public life and production it is the dominant master-culture which absorbs her. [source: *Wretched of the Earth*]

In the subject divided within itself between the theoretical attitude and the practical attitude, we have respect and esteem on one side, but not on the other. Recognition is given only to the one, dominant subjectivity whose culture is objectified in the activity of the subject, and denied the Other. As Hegel points out however, receiving respect and esteem from someone who is no better in your eyes than a domestic animal is no basis for the development of self-respect and self-esteem. Both aspects of the subject are dissatisfied with the development.

I should mention here that in his early *System of Ethical Life* Hegel offers an alternative scenario by which the master-slave dialectic may arise, and that is the growth on inequality of wealth within a society. [quote from *System*] This has the effect of denying culture to one part of the subject, while giving excessive power to the other; the poor person is thereby forced to offer themselves in the service of the wealthy individual and the same dialectic is set in motion, this time not through contact between formerly isolated subjects, but through the differentiation of a single subject, due to inequality of wealth. Clearly the production of a social surplus remains a precondition for this differentiation and the implications are the same. Hegel makes clear his view that this is a very unhealthy development and puts the responsibility for ameliorating the situation on the shoulders of the rich person, not on the state nor on the self-emancipation of the worker.

Now it is evident enough that this subject which is differentiated within itself is fraught with contradiction — the colonised subject reproduces the culture of the coloniser in their own life activity and consequently *master* that culture, while the colonising subject, though master, is *objectively dependent* on the colonised — but it is not relevant to our task at the moment to follow the possible course of such contradictions. One possible outcome, of course, is that the “slave” gains recognition as an independent producer and *sells* their labour or product to the master as owner of the objectification of the culture, its means of production.

I should mention in parentheses that in his Subjective Logic, Hegel posits the union of Theory and Practice, i.e., the supersession of the contradiction described above, as Reason, which for Hegel, is synonymous with the modern state. That is, Hegel posits modernity as the overcoming of the domination of the “slave” by the “master,” made possible by the fact that working with the objectification of the dominant culture allows the worker to master that culture, and put forward the claim to *Rights*. The dialectic leading up to this turn-around is called the “Unhappy Consciousness” in which Hegel sketches the stages of development of consciousness the “slave” goes through to overcome its “slave mentality.” The modern nation is, for Hegel, one in which the traditional relations, division of labour, law, religion, etc., of kinship-based ancient society has been overcome; there is a separation of state and church, between ethnicity and citizenship, etc. It is in this context that Hegel posits the second mode of contact between subjects, to which I now turn, at a higher level than the Master-Slave confrontation.

b. Trade and Exchange (commodification)

Let us return again to the scenario of the subject which produces a social surplus over and above their own needs, and comes into contact with another subject, another culture, but in

this instance we suppose that neither one nor the other subject is able to subjugate the other and all attempts at taking possession of what is claimed by the other are repelled.

If the first subject produces nothing of use to the Other, even if they can win the respect of the Other by repelling attempts to rob them, they will never enjoy the esteem of the Other. In this scenario, the two subjects will continue their independent ways of life in mutual indifference.

If the first subject produces a surplus of something which meets the needs and desires of the Other and repels their attempts to rob them of it, then so long as the relation is reciprocated, the option of *trade* opens up; each can satisfy their needs by exchanging surplus products for the valued goods of the Other.

The relation which then develops between two previously mutually independent and indifferent subjects is a symmetrical one in which each respects the other (because they are forced to bargain with them) and esteems the other (because the other's labour produces a product which they value and which cannot be produced within their own culture, something distinctive or exotic). Each subject enjoys the respect and esteem of an Other, equally respected and esteemed in their own eyes. Thus each subject enjoys the capacity for self-respect and self-esteem, since they see respect and esteem reflected in the behaviour of the Other towards them.

More than this, since a subject's needs and the means of their satisfaction are reflected in the system of activity by which the Other is constituted, we have in fact a *single system of activity*, a new, single subject; a more concrete subject inasmuch as each part is now able to enjoy what cannot be produced by their own labour, and they develop new needs reflecting the culture of the other. But it is also two *separate* subjects; each looks upon the other *externally*, as just means to the satisfaction of their own ends with whom they are unfortunately forced to negotiate, but in no way does each necessarily respect the customs, laws and way of life of the other, nor work together with them in any particular productive activity. Each is a *means* to the ends of the *other*. Although they speak the language of commodities, there is no requirement for any other common language. They become mutually dependent, but only *externally*, still morally independent. They value the *product* of the other, but only the *surplus* product, not the life activity of the other as such. They remain foreigners to one another.

Doubtless this entering into relation with the other transforms both parties to the relation; the labour which was formerly useless and surplus to their own needs now becomes useful as the basis for obtaining exotic goods from the Other. There is an inherent tendency therefore towards the merging of subjectivity, *towards* a single system of activity, but it is *not* a single subject. Even to this day, the world division of labour, which in a strong sense constitutes a single global system of activity, remains in an equally strong sense, exchange of commodities between subjects who are foreigners to one another.

This relation, the relation of exchange of commodities, commodification of labour, is thus a powerful process for the formation and differentiation of subjectivity, generating mutual esteem on the basis of mutual respect, but it does so only while retaining the differentiation between mutually alien subjects.

In fact, by means of the process of separating production and consumption, its impact *within* a formerly undifferentiated subject is to *fragment* the subject into mutually alienated (foreign) subjects, each of which *uses* the other as a means to their own end, swindling them if possible.

Rights

According to Hegel, there are two modes of recognition: being a member of the one and the same subject, and *having Rights*. Having rights is the characteristic condition under which citizens of modernity relate to one another.

However, the methodological move of introducing the concept of *subject*, and of describing the *logically possible* relations which are compatible with such a concept of the subject, is no substitute for a concrete investigation of history and the actual course of events by which modernity emerged. Nor is it a substitute for an empirical study of social psychology, which could disclose how it is that individuals can acquire the capacity and inclination to act in accordance with a system of rights. All I have done here is to introduce a *methodological tool*. The relation of exchange of commodities could be described as “paradigmatic,” to use Thomas Kuhn’s useful concept, but I am not making an historical materialist claim that a relation arising in the labour process must *therefore* find its way into aspects of the “superstructure.” I am *not* making this claim. My purpose here is simply to clarify the methodological foundations I intend to use in a critique of “social capital” theory. The task certainly calls for a sound methodological foundation, but I am not claiming anything with respect to a theory of history or a theory of social psychology.

Both the relations between subjects which I have outlined: (a) enslavement (domination, colonisation, subsumption) and (b) trade (commodification, exchange), have acted over the centuries to construct modern subjectivity, trade by means of colonisation, colonisation by means of trade, and so on. However, the trend of modernity seems to have been towards the predominance of the commodity relation, and we will have more to say on this relation later on.

I should mention at this stage that I do not regard this approach to the relationship between subjects as “economistic.” At a stage of development of a subject and its relation to others where there is no scope for a relationship which goes beyond “eating and drinking”, the relation is clearly describable as “economic.” However, the elementary relations-to-others which we have introduced are *simultaneously* both *recognition* relations and *economic* relations.

Further, I have introduced the relation of exchange of commodities and the commodification of relations internal to a subject only *after* dealing with recognition in the form of *membership* of a single system of activity in the form of the mediation of individual, universal and particular, and the relation of “colonisation,” and I intend to move onto the relation of “solidarity.” In this context I am very far from any kind of “reductionism.” The fact remains, however, that *this* relation, the relation of commodification, is the one which is currently *growing*.

c. The Mediating Subject

Whenever two subjects enter into relation with one another, a specific mediating activity is necessary for the interaction:

- in the case of mutual alienation, i.e., warfare,
- in the case of enslavement, the activity of directing labour, both on one side, overseeing and management, and on the other the theoretical tasks as such, science and technique,
- in the case of trade, the activity of commerce and communication.

Thus both the differentiation of the subject and the coming-into-relation of subjects, always generates a new subject specifically associated with the mediating activity: the military, a bureaucracy and a merchant class. Every process of coming-into-relation with another

subject, involves both the internal differentiation of the subject and the creation of a new subject constituted by the specific self-contained system of activity mediating the relation. Each *relation* of subjectivity, which is a relation internal to a subject, is therefore also a subject in itself, complete with artefacts, specialist language and, of course, individual practitioners.

The concept of mediation is thus important not just for understanding how subjects interact with one another, but also how new subjectivity emerges in the interaction between strangers. Mediation is always a process, an activity, but to begin with it is not of course a self-conscious system of activity. But whenever subjects get involved together in a system of activity, even total strangers, then you have an emergent new subjectivity.

Mediation then means looking at interaction not as *communication* but rather as a form of subjectivity in itself, in which what is normally taken as “information” or “symbolic exchange” and so on, is the ideal aspect of the specific form of activity constituting the mediation.

5. The Relationships of Modernity

In summary, the process of construction of modernity is one of successive differentiation of subjects, in the process of simultaneously bringing into relation with one another mutually independent subjects. I have defined a subject as a *self-conscious system of activity*; over time, the isolated simple self-consciousnesses (subjects) which we can imagine to have been the setting-off point of history, are reconstituted, merging the still extant subjectivity originating in ancient times in different parts of the world, with new subjects based, among other things, on the functional division of labour, capital accumulation and class consciousness. These latter concepts go far beyond what I can deal with here, and I intend to deal with such concepts through a reading of the literature on “social capital.”

The point has been to derive the concept of the subject and the basic relationships by means of which subjects interact with one another and change, as an alternative to the conception exemplified by James Coleman and any number of others from Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau up to John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, of entering an infinite loop which begins with Robinson Crusoe and ends, at best, by denouncing Robinson Crusoe as a myth.

This approach is also to be contrasted with the method of taking the *community* as the starting point, since the concept of “community” marginalises the activity of the individual as the material creator and carrier of the culture. The most consistent form of communitarianism is *monotheistic religion*, since any conception of the community as agent has to invest subjectivity into the community by some means — either God, collective consciousness or muddle and confusion. Papism or monarchism are capable of giving individual, subjective form to the Universal, but hardly in a convincing way. Vulgar materialist theories which endow Nature or “Laws of History” with responsibility for determining historical progress carry the risk of blessing the subjectivity of those privileged with knowledge of the laws of Nature and history. Concepts like “society” and “community” can only be covers for the subjectivity of the ruling elite who speak on behalf of the community.

The obvious fact that nothing like the isolated undifferentiated subject described above is visible in modernity is neither here nor there. Nor is an independent economic agent maximising their utility. The point at issue is the basic *unit of analysis* by means of which the activity and relations of modernity can be approached in theory. The *subject* is a far more adequate and appropriate unit of analysis for understanding the complex relations and interconnected systems of interaction of modernity than either the “individual” or “community.” Concepts like “self-interest” and “control over events” are abstractions that are divorced from reality because they do not correspond to the real processes of development of

human beings. They are abstractions well-adapted to computer modelling and mathematics but not to human life. Also, though human societies and individuals bear little resemblance to the elementary social subjects we began with, the *subjects* of modern life — including companies, individuals, families, associations, social movements and so on — *are* generally speaking amenable to understanding as *subjects*.

On the other side, for those who may be familiar with the Hegelian tradition, my recapitulation of the Hegelian description of the emergence of self-consciousness may appear unremarkable, and I make no claim beyond to have faithfully presented the rational core of Hegel's thoughts on this subject. However, recent presentations of this process, by for example Francis Fukuyama and Axel Honneth, writers with considerable standing, fail to identify the place of mediation in Hegel's concept and continue the conception of the Master-Slave dialectic as an *unmediated confrontation* between two independent self-consciousnesses. But it is the third element which constitutes the *development of culture*; both sides of the confrontation in the Master-Slave metaphor are mortal human beings, but the culture mediating their conflict is eternal. To omit the moment of mediation is to transform the Master-Slave dialectic into a foundation myth on a par with Adam's being cast out of the Garden of Eden, of only symbolic significance. But it is much more than that! After writing the *Phenomenology*, Hegel wrote up his theory of the subject in Book II of the *Science of Logic*. By casting his theory as *logic*, he insulated himself against the dangers of anthropologising his concept and of making it dependent on fallible, contemporary science. The concept of Subject is basically a *logical device*, one which is more adequate and appropriate to the understanding of social phenomena, and *not* an anthropological or social-psychological metaphor or foundation myth.

Nothing I have said should leave any room for poststructuralist relativism of the type which denies the possibility of communication between subjects on the basis that different cultures employ incompatible closed systems of concepts (with their own "master signifier"). [source: Laclau and Moufe etc] Subjects are self-conscious systems of activity, and the only subjects which would totally fail to recognise or comprehend one another are those considered at the beginning of this analysis, living in self-enclosed isolation in the forest. The first material interchange between subjects constitutes mediation and puts an end to the failure of recognition. Ever since, all subjects, at whatever stage of formation, participate in *shared* systems of activity with *other* subjects. The idea of subjects whose interaction is not mediated is necessary only in order to demonstrate the precise *significance* of mediation, but nowhere on the globe today does there exist a subject whose interaction with other subjects is not mediated. If people exchange products or work together, then there is *some* degree of understanding between them. Only a postmodern philosopher could think otherwise.

The *first* system of relations between people that we have described is that between members of the same self-conscious system of activity, for example between close members of a family or collaborators in a common life-project or institution. This relation is reflected in all manifestations of spontaneous collaboration, even between modern individuated citizens with a life outside the given system of activity. We have theorised these relations under the concepts of Individual-Particular-Universal. Commodification is making inroads into this relationship, but it is still ubiquitous, being located within the "thick ethos" of close communities and institutions of the functional division of labour.

The *second* type of self-conscious systems of activity (subjectivity) we have described are those associated with *direction*: a division of labour between theory and practice within a single system of activity, between the direction of labour and the execution of labour. This is a relation fraught with contradictions centred around the fact that the subjectivity of the class

which reproduces the subject is denied in favour of the class which directs production. This relation is also ubiquitous but in decline in conditions of modernity.

The *third* system of activity (subjectivity, relation) we described is that of *exchange of commodities*: a symmetrical division of labour between customer and service provider, which we showed to be an *external* relation in which two subjects each deny the humanity of the other in the very act of offering it respect and esteem, simultaneously drawing subjects into a single system of activity while mutually isolating them from one another, as merely means to one another's ends.

Solidarity

It is my contention that around the 1830s a *new* kind of relation began to manifest itself in Europe, *solidarity*. I will leave to the concluding part of this essay a full justification for the concept of solidarity and its historical origins, but I want to just briefly outline the relation of solidarity in the same terms as I have described the subject as a self-conscious system of activity.

By way of contrast, I will first introduce the notion of *welfare* (or charity).

I see a person in distress, someone perhaps who has lost all subjectivity, having no means of livelihood, or at risk of destruction by a hostile subject; moved by compassion perhaps, I step in and rescue them. In doing so I subsume them into my own subjectivity, my own system of activity; it is an asymmetrical relationship of dependence. Perhaps having been restored to some level of functionality, the rescued party will break herself free and re-establish her own subjectivity, but as a relationship, welfare is one in which the welfare-provider subsumes the recipient of welfare into their own subjectivity. It is not uncommon in fact for welfare recipients to adopt the religious practices of the charity which helped them or for them to go on to become welfare providers themselves. But as a relationship, welfare is a system of activity, a subject, which undermines and negates the subjectivity of the recipient. Like any system of activity, welfare generates its own subjectivity and a whole industry can grow up around the activity of welfare provision. This relation therefore comes under the heading of "colonisation" — "benign colonisation" perhaps.

State intervention of this kind need not be conceived under the concept of charity however; it may be Rights (as in free public health and education in many countries), community obligation (as in Veterans and "senior citizens"), mediated individual accomplishment (as in "self-funded retiree"). There is currently a powerful tendency towards stigmatisation of social groups by means of "welfare;" communal responsibilities are exercised in a way that gives institutional forms to the ethos of a community, and this offers only certain modes of assistance, not limited to the stigmatising mode of "welfare." [Nancy Fraser]

By contrast to the relation of welfare, what I mean by solidarity is this: you are struggling, for whatever reason, perhaps I think "There but for the grace of God go I," I come to you, a stranger to me, and say "What can I do to help?" I voluntarily *subordinate* myself to your subjectivity; the relation of solidarity puts you, the recipient of solidarity, in charge; as giver of solidarity, I demand no say in what I can do for you, but by submitting myself to your subjectivity, by lending a hand as they say, I *strengthen* your subjectivity. Solidarity is, in my opinion, the single most important relationship in respect to the crisis of modernity, which I describe as a *decline in social solidarity*.

The word solidarity entered the English language in 1848, and German (*solidarität*) at the same time from the French *solidarité*. The word originated in the street battles in revolutionary Paris as revolutions swept across Europe bringing down the old order, coming out of the environment which had given us the word *communism* in the 1830s, and "solidarity" entered the lexicon of the trade unions and other emergent working class

organisations across Europe almost instantly. In other words, solidarity is a mode of action, the propensity for which is a *virtue*, which emerged along with the modern proletariat and is the characteristic virtue which is the essential condition for survival of the proletariat, and like any other activity it constitutes the *formation* of a subject.

According to Hegel, the corresponding virtue of the bourgeoisie is *honesty*; honesty is the virtue which is essential for the conduct of business; without honesty in business there is no trust, without trust that the other will honour their own word, there can be no contract or on-going commercial relationship or credit, no recognition. An entity which keeps its word is a subject capable of doing business.

Hegel ascribes the virtue of *trust* (*vertrauen*) to the agricultural class; working on the land, with plants and animals, the peasant must trust mother Earth to give them the fruits of their labour. No-one expects the peasant to be honest however. Nor does any employer expect their employees to be honest; all work practices will be presaged on the assumption in fact that the worker will be dishonest. But solidarity is a virtue without which the working class cannot survive.

Trust on the other hand is the mode of activity which can grow only on the basis of participation in a single system of activity, over a period of time. Honesty engenders trust, in business, but trust here is a highly conditional one for the two subjects engaged in business, i.e., exchange of services, remain external and foreign to one another. For the working class, when one subject lends herself to the subjectivity of the other, participates in the other's struggle as a "helper", then trust develops around that single system of activity and this is the process of formation of *class consciousness*. Over time, the relation changes and transforms from solidarity to one of *collaboration*, in which each has an equal say on what should be done. This is because by means of trust based on solidarity a *new subjectivity* emerges out of the activity of the subject who was struggling in the first place. Since the subject who offered solidarity was a stranger to the subject who accepted solidarity, the activity of solidarity creates a *new social bond*.

Why is it that solidarity is such an issue for the proletariat? I can quote the words of Eichhoff, a contemporary historian of the First International:

"In so far as it is possible to divine the secret thoughts of the founders of the International, their main, we might almost say their only, object was in the first instance to bring about an understanding between the workers of all lands. This understanding was to prevent the competition which had long existed between the workers of various countries. Hence forward, through the power of combination (or to use the jargon of the International, through *solidarity*) all the 'workers' would be able to impose their laws upon the employers who were not in a combine or were not *solidarised*" [*Histoire de l'Internationale*, Gamier, Paris, 1872. emphasis in original]

The fact that their labour has been transformed into commodities, placing them in competition with one another, means that without solidarity their standard of living and ability to control the conditions of their own labour will necessarily decline to the lowest level at which it is possible to survive and simply stay alive. The relation of competition between workers militates *against* mutual aid; as sellers of the same commodity to the same buyers, their *similarity* is no basis for their constitution as a subject; when at work, they are subsumed under the subjectivity of their employer, at home they are fragmented as individual consumers, on the labour market they are in competition with one another. Solidarity therefore is the only mode of activity which *constitutes* class consciousness. Without it, workers may either subordinate themselves to the subjectivity of their employer to be used and disposed of as the employer sees fit, or be destroyed. Class consciousness, i.e., social

class constituted as a *subject*, cannot arise on the basis of “having something in common,” such as being sellers of wage-labour, a commonality which in itself is counterproductive for constitution as a subject. As a self-conscious self-contained system of activity, class consciousness can only come about through subjective participation in a common system of objective activity, and it is solidarity which constitutes this subjectivity. Solidarity is in its essence not the subordination of individual subjects to a collective subject, but rather the subordination of the collective (provider of solidarity) to the individual subject, insofar as the subjectivity of the individual subject furthers the universal aim of the class.

Because of the growing commodification of all aspects of life in modernity, this question of solidarity extends far beyond the ranks of organised labour where people still remember the old slogans and sing “Solidarity Forever!” down at the Working Man’s Club on a Friday night. It affects everyone.

Unlike love and friendship, solidarity is a relationship one extends to complete *strangers*. Solidarity is the stuff of safe neighbourhoods and the only alternative to descent into the maelstrom of walled villages and police powers. Solidarity differs from the social conformism which is characteristic of the self-contained subject such as the rural village or bureaucratic state. The conformist social subject acts to subordinate the individual to the universal; solidarity on the other hand acts to reinforce and support the individual subject which is struggling, and constructs a culture based on struggle. Thus solidarity is a social bond of the opposite kind from “communitarianism,” which is in irreversible, and not unwelcome, decline in modernity.

A final word on friendship. I regard friendship as a bond which has been formed in any shared system of activity, but which extends beyond the context of the shared activity. One has to find things to do with friends. Friendship is therefore an important social bond, but depends for its existence on the possibility of participation in share systems of activity. Thus I distinguish between *love* and friendship, because I believe that love is a social bond formed, like friendship in a system of activity, and which like friendship *survives* withdrawal of the individuals from the particular system of activity, but the distinction is this: love is based on a close physical system of interaction, such as child-rearing, sex, or life-and-death struggle, and survives the separation of individuals from this closeness, but because of the emotional impact of love, one does not have to find things to do with a loved one and its survives time and social distance. Both love and friendship have therefore a capacity to support social cohesion, but both are limited to significant extent in their “radius of operation.”

Humanity

Hegel talked of virtue as being the propensity for engaging in certain modes of activity with others, and of the necessity of appropriate modes of life activity for providing the life experience out of which corresponding virtues can be developed. [quote from *System of Ethical Life*] Thus, he talks of the working with crops and domestic animals as providing the basis for developing the virtue of being trusting and of engaging in business as the basis for developing the virtue of honesty and of warfare as the necessary life experience for developing altruism. Whatever we make of Hegel’s ideas on this score, I use the word *humanity* as the virtue which grows from the experience of giving and receiving solidarity. It is self-evident that a world filled with people who enjoy self-respect and self-esteem as a result of the experience of enjoying the respect and esteem of others, remains for all that a fragmented world of mutually alien subjects, lacking in social solidarity, lacking in *humanity*. If we follow Axel Honneth’s pragmatist social psychology, and locate the development of the aforesaid self-relations in the experience of perceiving the respect and esteem of respected and esteemed others, then what happens when we get to solidarity. Lending solidarity takes a

subject *out of themselves*; they get to see themselves not *from* standpoint of the other, but *in* the standpoint of the other. Thus solidarity does not build self-respect and self-esteem, but allows a subject to become *other-related*, to develop *humanity*.

Before moving to develop this conception by means of a critique review of a number of writers on “social capital,” I want to mount a final defence of the decision to adopt the subject as the methodological foundation.

Defence of the Methodology

In choosing to adopt the methodology of the subject as a “unit of analysis” for social theory, I stand in the fine tradition of Hegel, Marx, Vygotsky and Ilyenkov, all of whom used this approach very fruitfully. On the other hand, by adopting this methodology I risk losing the means of engaging with all those currents of thinking that begin from the individual — liberalism, sociology and critical theory, for example, not to mention those who approach social problems from a religious point of view or remain enclosed within the universe of “text.” That’s life.

It could be said that in order to critique modernity I ought to utilise the concepts of modernity. In the sense that antiquated or alien values and concepts cannot provide insight into an issue, this makes some sense. So for example, elaborating a “theory of socialism” as an analysis of capitalism, would be an entirely fruitless exercise. One most certainly must address oneself to the modes of activity, ideology and concepts of the *subject itself* if one wants to criticise it. But this does not mean that one should uncritically accept the subject’s own concept of itself as one’s own.

In order to make a critique of liberal individualism ought I to adopt individualism as the foundation of my own methodology? Surely such an exercise could serve a purpose only as a *reductio ad absurdum*, but nothing else. Nothing in the fine tradition of Hegel, Marx, Vygotsky and Ilyenkov suggests that a critic should adopt the ideological position of the subject they are critiquing, even though they most certainly should have a methodology which is able to “represent” the actual life activity of the subject itself. One of the functions of criticism is to disclose the real foundation of a way of thinking. The methodology of beginning from the simplest entity which manifests *all* the properties of the system of interest has the best chance of doing that.

Most particularly, I believe that the standpoint of the subject offers a way out of the hopeless dichotomy of “*liberalism vs. communitarianism*,” if only by beginning from a third point which includes both the standpoint of the individual *and* the standpoint of the community.

If only by going to a deeper level, the concept of subject also offer some prospect of transcending the analytical dichotomy between the politics of *redistribution* vs. the politics of *recognition*. This remains to be seen, but the point is that when we start from the subject and its possible modes of activity and relation-to-other, we have no need to *build in* a motivational structure, social psychology or theory of history to justify behaviour to be imputed to the subject. The concept of recognition has already posited itself in the very same relation in which economic relations were first posited in my presentation of the notion of Subject above.

II. "SOCIAL CAPITAL"

1. Overview

There is not a lot one can say about the concept of "social capital" outside of the development and application of the concept by particular writers because the meaning given to the concept is so widely different from one writer to the other.

Briefly, for Jane Jacobs it meant neighbourhood self-government; for Pierre Bourdieu it meant "distinction;" for James Coleman it means the power to control events in other people's lives; for Fukuyama it means trust; and for Robert Putnam it means sociability — though all with varying degrees of ambiguity. For some, it means something one values in one's relations with other people which can contribute to making money, but whether it can be bought and sold, and whether its use in business *consumes* social capital, are questions which people answer differently.

Though the words "social capital" refer to systems of relationships which may be mutually incompatible, almost everyone seems to be in favour of it — or at least their own concept of it. Under these circumstances, I think one has a right to make a semantic criticism of the words "social capital." Of course, if the words signified a clear and useful concept, that they were *semantic* nonsense would not detract from the value of the concept. But this is not the case.

"Social capital" is an amalgam of two terms, so let's start by clarifying the meaning of the word "capital" and its relation to "social." Can social relations be a form of capital?

a. Capital

"Capital" is not a just word which was coined by a political economist who either invented or discovered the concept. Capital had to be there first, as some kind of focus in the way people related to each other and organised their activity before it could be named. But on the other hand, in just this sense capital was not around for ever, and it is fair to say that not such a long time elapsed after people began to organise their lives around capital before someone gave a name to the activity. In fact, the word "capital" was first used in its current meaning around 1611, derived from "capital grant" meaning a grant of land from the King — i.e. the head — which would be the basis of a new estate, and so meaning 'original' funds, thus carrying in its genealogy a mirror of the changing sources and origins of power. In broad terms, the moment at which a word enters the language closely follows the moment at which the concept named becomes something significant in people's lives.

For example, the Sun existed long before humankind, but the Sun, with a capital-S, as something around which people consciously organised their activity and spoke about it, with all the shades of meaning and connotations it has, has only been around as long as human beings, and doubtless the word for it as long as language. "Sexism" was around long before 1968 when it entered the language, but it was only from 1968 that sexism became the focus of activity in the form of the modern women's movement.

Capital carries the connotation of referring to something natural, outside of the human psyche, but it is undeniably a social construct, that is to say, something which exists only insofar as people act in relation to it. This is compatible with the undeniable fact that the movement of capital is subject to "laws" in the same way as all the other phenomena of mass society. To understand the meaning of the word "capital" it is necessary, momentarily at least, to enter into the conceptual framework of which it is a part, for "capital" is not a simple construct, determined in the day-to-day personal experiences of people, but is a very concrete historical construct of mass society. Capital, as something which existed as a reality for people, only came about after *money* had been created and developed to such a high level that it was an integral part of social life. Without ruling out for a moment the possibility that

things *other than* money can constitute capital (which is of course the case), we need to call upon the concept of money in order to determine the meaning of capital, since the concept of capital is derivative of the concept of money.

To lessen any suspicion that I wish to determine capital as a form of money, I will use the term “value” in lieu of money, on the understanding that value can be invested in an infinite variety of forms other than money, even though it is an historical fact, that it was not until the value-relation had given birth to money as a central organising factor of societies, that money gave birth to capital.

Capital is an accumulation of values which can be put back into *circulation* so as to return increased in magnitude. Capital can be invested in the form of materials, machinery or land for example, provided only that a product results which can be put into circulation and sold for a profit so as to increase the invested capital. Wealth in any form which cannot be sold so as to return continuously to itself *increased* in magnitude is wealth but not capital.

Now, clinging to the idea that “money isn’t everything,” and pointing to all those myriad aspects of life which are enjoyed without having been purchased for cash, the advocates of “social capital” can respond in two ways.

Firstly, one can object to the tying of the notion of “capital” to its entering and returning from circulation: surely social bonds which can be enjoyed in themselves and which can generate other, new objects of enjoyment are as good a form of capital, as worth owning, as money? However, what is being talked about here is simply *wealth*, and wealth is as old as civilisation. No-one can deny the need of poor people and poor neighbourhoods for *wealth*, least of all poor people themselves. To observe its lack and to advocate for its accumulation in poor neighbourhoods requires no conceptual innovation at all. Capital is a distinct and historically constructed form of wealth, and the whole argument is about *capital* not wealth. Wealth is the end not the means, but capital is means, but not in any healthy sense an end.

Or secondly, the objection could be that while good social bonds are not capital in themselves (inasmuch as you cannot lend someone else your friends and contacts) they most certainly are a *means of acquiring* exchangeable wealth: if you have friends and contacts, distinction, or power over events of importance to other people, you can *use* them as levers for things that people will pay you for, you can use them to obtain credit, you can use them to establish cooperative working relations with people and you can exchange them for favours from other such people. But this confuses the *preconditions* for production of value with *value* itself. No-one would deny that poor neighbourhoods and countries, and poor people, need conditions propitious for the creation of surplus products over and above what they need for immediate consumption, for the creation of wealth, and the possibility for selling their product or at the very least exchanging for something which is saleable and making a profit by it all. This then is an argument about the pre-conditions for capital accumulation. But this is an entirely different argument, and entirely fallacious conclusions can follow from the confusion of the pre-conditions for production of capital and capital itself. No-one of *any* political persuasion would or could argue against the fostering of the preconditions for the production of a social surplus, whether accumulated as capital or not; what is at issue is whether the surplus produced is transformed into capital and accumulated by capitalists, or remains in the community where it is produced and enjoyed or distributed according to other social norms. The introduction of a concept of “social capital” sheds no light on this universally recognised problem at all, in fact it positively *obscures* it.

Now these criticisms are not equally relevant to the notion of “social capital” developed by each of the writers mentioned. James Coleman’s definition could survive a critique of this kind, but the social and political consequences of Coleman’s concept of social capital would, if brought into the light of day, meet with much less success. Robert Putnam’s laudable aims

on the other hand, rest on a concept of “social capital” which is confusion from beginning to end.

Before proceeding to look at each of the different concepts of social capital in turn I want to just briefly review the concept of capital, without any attempt to bend it towards or away from a notion of “social capital” and without entering in any depth to the vast terrain of issues that are entailed in exploring the concept at any but the most superficial level. And then finally I want to briefly review, in the same terms, the array of similar oxymorons which have crept into our language alongside “social capital”: “natural capital,” “human capital,” and “political capital,” everyone of them a unique and original assault on the capacity of the language to express anything human.

b. Capital as a social relation

Capital is in its very *essence quantitative*. Wealth is qualitative. Whether a good book or a garden is wealth or a burden on you depends on whether you have any use for it; but a scientific discovery or a corner shop or a field of hemp is only capital to the extent of the value of what it can be sold for. Capital is essentially that which moves into and out of circulation, and capital today circulates on a world market, transforming from one form to another at an unbelievable pace. The overwhelming mass of all capital transactions are electronic, lacking *any* physical form, constituting one single unified movement of value, and anything which cannot enter that market is not capital. If you can't put a price on it, it's not capital.

The process of mentally creating a measure of something, if it corresponds to anything in reality and is not a mental fiction, must be a real process of abstraction, quantification and quantitative aggregation. “You can't add apples and oranges” so the saying goes, and nor can you add grapes and watermelons, unless by weight, calories, price or some other *real* abstraction.

It is in this precise sense that we can say that capital is *abstract*.

On the other hand, capital is a social relation. It exists and counts only insofar as people organise their activity in accordance with its nature. Leaving aside the issue of *money* as a social relation, definite social conditions are necessary before an accumulation of money can move in and out of circulation and increase itself, — productive forces sufficiently developed to generate a social surplus, the existence of a class of people who do not have access to the means of their own reproduction, and the capacity for those means of production to be monopolised in the form of private property and bought and sold on the market as a form of capital.

Thus capital is also a system of activity. However, we cannot designate capital as a subject, because it is not *self-conscious*. Nevertheless, it does act *as if* it were a self-conscious agent on the social plane as it determines the activity of people according to definite forms of behaviour and concepts. Indeed, the way in which capital determines people's behaviour and consciousness bears an uncanny resemblance to the way God determines the behaviour of people in the various traditional cultures that utilise the concept of God.

However, capital is different, because it is an *abstraction*, and the process of abstraction is a perfectly real social process, not a flight of fantasy — but abstractions are not self-conscious. So we have this peculiar entity which acts for the world like a social subject, with its own ethics and its own ends, but as an abstraction is not human at all.

The work of exposing capital as a social relation was done by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century. This work was of course received with mixed enthusiasm, and for a long time political economists and their successors, the economic scientists, continued to study capital

as an entity with its own laws standing above human society, as something ahistorical and *natural*, governing the affairs of humankind from outside like a force of Nature. However, over the decades, this kind of thinking gradually came into disrespect, and at least since about the 1960s, it has become more or less widely accepted that capital is a social relation, in other words, a form of human life. Amartya Sen's deconstruction of the notions of commodity, value, utility and so forth, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize, are evidence of the currency of the view that people are capable of adopting *different* constructions of value as a rational basis for public economic and social policy.

While the idea that capital is a form of human life has achieved the status of commonsense, it has taken these geniuses of "social capital" to discover that, on the contrary, human life is a form of capital!

How does this process of abstraction take place? When a group of people are working together, as part of a single system of activity, a single subject, then there is no need of exchange between people casting each other as customer and service provider — they collaborate. Exchange only arises in respect to *another subject*, an outsider, in the event of an external relation with a separate independent subject. That is, it is only to the extent that the unity of a subject is broken and fragmented that the opportunity and necessity for the quantification of labour and its expression in the form of exchange-value arises. Also, of course, only in the event of contact with another subject does the possibility for exchange arise. But our point here is that the quantification of human labour, its transformation into *value*, and thus eventually money and eventually *capital*, expresses the *abstraction* of human beings from the productive social bonds with each other. In other words, abstraction of labour in the value-form, in money and eventually capital, is but a concentrated expression of the abstraction of human beings, of their being torn away from the social bonds by means of which they sustain themselves and distinguish themselves from the animals.

Capital is an abstraction which expresses the degree of abstraction of people, of the tearing of people out of their context, of abstract, interchangeable, uniform and undifferentiated labour.

Human beings were working and sustaining themselves and producing a social surplus before capital came along. The process of the last several centuries of world history has been the ever-expanding subsumption of human labour under the relation of capital. That is to say, the ever-continuing abstraction of workers from each other and from the means of their labour, obliging workers to sell their labour power to capital, while the surplus of production itself is subsumed into capital, culture itself therefore taking on the form of capital. The relation of one person to another is therefore no longer mediated by artefacts, traditional methods of working, land, herds and such like — since all these are subsumed under capital — but by capital itself.

In the "omitted chapter six of *Capital*" published as an appendix in the Penguin edition of *Capital*, Marx describes the subsumption of labour under capital in a two-stage process. First, the workers continue to work in the old way, but their product is directly appropriated from them and they are paid wages. Secondly, the way of working is gradually changed, with the relationships *between* workers who were formerly cooperating by traditional methods, using traditional tools and methods of work, and producing a product in its traditional form, changing to accommodate with the requirements of capital. Their material are acquired from new sources, their product is changed to adapt to the needs of capital and the relationships between the workers are commodified. [some quotes]

Thus the distinction between the timeless concept of *wealth* and the specific, historically limited concept of *capital* is an important one because "capital" denotes specific changes in the relations between people, in particular the "abstraction" of people from each other and the products of their labour, and the concentration of the means of production in private hands, as

a saleable commodity. The fate of the former USSR has given us an exhibition of how capital can grow just as wealth declines. Capital is a measure of the *concentration* of power, not its absolute amount, of the *ownership* of means of production, not their existence.

Personification of Capital

Although capital is an abstraction it exists only if it is *personified*, and the owners of capital, companies, whether individuals or collectives, *are* subjects. The company, the subject which is the owner of a unit of capital, are the subjects which collectively constitute the bourgeois class. The basic unit of the bourgeoisie is the company. [source: Connell]

The human relationships corresponding to capital are thereby two-fold. The subject of a unit of capital relates to others outside that capital through the commodity relation — they buy and sell the labour subsumed under their unit of capital, including the purchase of the labour-power of employees on the labour market. *Within* the capital-subject the relationships are different; once having purchased the labour-power of the employees, the capital owner disposes of it by *direction*. Thus within the capital the relations are those of *direction*; between capitals, the relations are those of *commodity*, which is the relation which is the fundamental relation out of which capital itself arises. The commodity relation in respect to the purchase and sale of labour-power is of course a very asymmetrical one, since the buyer and seller of labour-power meet not as equals but with an enormous differential in power; on one hand we have wealth and power and on the other necessity.

Thus, although capital is not itself a subject, it exists as a social relation as *subjects*, plural, in the person of the owners of capital, companies. Companies of course have not only overlapping boards of directors and so on, but their relation to each other is also mediated by all sorts of complex overlappings and different modes of ownership of capital. For our purposes these complexities are of little interest. The main point is the constitution of subjects who must act according to the “laws of the market,” whose internal relationships are those of direction or dictatorship and whose external relations are those of commodity exchange, much like the simple subjects, producing a social surplus and trading with one another that we considered above.

Capital is therefore a specific form of human life, corresponding to a certain pattern of human relationships. It would be labouring the point to carry this analysis any further. I hope that this description of what capital is should raise caution about any proposal to further assist in the subsumption of human life under capital by declaring human life to be a form of capital.

c. Natural, human, political and social capital

I don't like the term “political capital” and I never use it, but I think it is just a metaphor; no-one seems to propose that gains in political assets is something which can be usefully conceived as a form of capital, only that “political capital” is an accumulation of political assets which, like capital, can be cashed in in the form of political profit. I have no problems with this kind of metaphor. What troubles me is the industry based on the creation of confusing oxymorons like human capital, natural capital and social capital.

Even though capital is a form of value, and as such, an abstraction from a specific form of human relationship, it is the idea of capital that capital, like any value, can be embodied in different forms. That is to say, capital can be a factory, a patent or copyright, a brand name, land, stocks of a product, etc., etc., provided only that these forms have the *potential* to be transformed into money and enter the process of circulation and return with a profit. Once we admit of the idea that capital can have different forms, the way is open, and quite *rightly* open, to the consideration of capital of different types according to the momentary form in which it waits for the opportunity to convert itself to money and return again to the same

form in expanded magnitude. Thus we have finance capital, manufacturing, the service industry, landed property, the share market and so on. These different forms of capital correspond to different sections of the capitalist class, once we abstract from their overlappings and interconnections. Capital itself, by its nature, is capable of freely transforming itself into and out of any of its “forms,” as the power relations between different sections of the bourgeoisie ebb and flow in accord with the changing patterns of the organisation of labour.

In so far as adjectives are applied to capital to designate in this way forms of capital, corresponding to sections of the bourgeoisie and productive activity subsumed under capital, then we can have no argument.

In *The Identification and Analysis of Indicators of Community Strength and Outcomes*, Black and Hughes 2001, have offered definitions for the different types of capital; as adapted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, these are:

- *Natural capital* is considered to consist of natural resources, ecosystem services, and the aesthetics of nature. Natural resources are the material and energy inputs into production. Ecosystem services are the natural processes that we depend on in some way such as the process of conversion of carbon dioxide into oxygen by trees. The aesthetics of nature are those aspects of nature valued for their beauty such as rainforests, seashores, birds and flowers.
- *Produced economic capital* includes all products that are harvested or manufactured, the built environment, physical infrastructure that has been constructed and financial resources such as money. Cultural and intellectual property are also forms of produced economic capital.
- *Human capital* is the knowledge, skills and health embodied in individuals.
- *Social capital* refers to the patterns and qualities of relationships in a community and
- *Institutional capital*, but this concept has not been picked up by other writers, being usually subsumed under “social capital.”

These definitions are nowadays close to being a consensus among the social policy experts who use these terms. They are frequently referred to as “resources” to be used, though they are also seen as products which are enjoyed.

Natural Capital

“Natural capital” cannot be such a term though, for Nature is precisely that which is outside human society, that which is *not* a labour process. Of course, the word “Nature” can be used in a corrupted, colloquial sense in which it simply means plants and animals, in which case a commercial pine plantation or a herd of cattle are “natural capital.” But this is not what is meant by the term. Commercial crops and herds are not, even in the colloquial sense, “natural” and are obviously artefacts, and capital in just the same sense as factories and brand names.

What is usually meant by “natural capital” is that part of Nature which is outside of human activity *so far*, which in the opinion of the speaker constitute the *pre-conditions* for the accumulation of capital. So for example, a forest which is perhaps a national park, but *could be* privatised and cut down for lumber, or rivers which are the source of water either for sale in a privatised water industry or for free consumption by a profitable chemical industry or rice and cotton farmers or as a tourist attraction, can be called “natural capital.” The word is also used in an even wider sense as a contributor to quality of life (in which case it ought to be “natural wealth”); so for example, clean air and clean water are “natural capital” because they form part of the natural wealth of the citizens who, if it is destroyed, must spend money

to buy water in plastic bottles or move to the countryside and commute into the polluted city centre, and either way suffer a degradation in their life-style. [source: natural capital, book and journalism] By a stretch, those who use the term in this sense could go on to conjecture that the money saved in avoiding the expense of acquiring clean air and water and in the health expenditure on curing the maladies resulting from polluted air and water can be turned to more profitable ventures. But this ignores the fact that all the evidence is that selling bottled water, suburban real estate and private medical services are as *profitable* as any other industry, and if it weren't for pollution, these areas of capital accumulation would dry up.

Thus implicit in the use of the term “natural capital” are potentially two kinds of confusion, which are not just semantic offences, but spread unclarity and obscure reality.

Firstly, the pre-conditions for production are not *capital*. Nature is most certainly the most important pre-condition for human life, and only *thereby* for the accumulation of capital. The process whereby nature functions as a precondition for human life and thereby for the accumulation of capital is the *consumption* of nature in production. The question is of course whether or not Nature is able to regenerate itself after its consumption in the process of production. In general, Nature does reproduce itself without human assistance and provides a continuous flow of the conditions for productive human activity. Of course, we are nowadays more conscious than ever that the capacity of Nature to regenerate the conditions for human life is not infinite, and more and more we are engaged in “protecting” and “helping” nature, by deliberately creating artificial environments which can be managed in lieu of simply taking from Nature, and deliberately moderating and regulating behaviour which is destructive of the natural preconditions for human life.

The message usually wrapped up in the envelope of “natural capital” rhetoric is that production, and capitalist production in particular, destroys the preconditions for human life. The basic idea is that if “natural capital” is added to “money-capital” then the sum represents the true level of productive resources of the community; by deducting for the destruction of “natural capital” while adding for the accumulation of “money-capital” we could see more clearly the progress of capital accumulation. In other words, we should put a price on Nature so that we can count it along with our money.

It should be observed that in destroying the conditions for the production of human life, capital does not necessarily damage the pre-conditions for accumulation of capital. Destruction of the natural preconditions for human life create a *need* for the recreation of those conditions, which is in itself a profitable industry in which capital is accumulated: poison a river for a profit and then get the lucrative contract for cleaning it up! Nor does industry “damage Nature,” which will continue to exist whatever we do, without giving humankind a second thought; what is destroyed is only its *usefulness for humans*.

Now these qualifications aside, this message is a perfectly legitimate one: unchecked capitalist industry destroys the preconditions for human life. But is the message clarified by designating nature as already a form of capital? Counting lyre-birds helps us keep track of our destruction of their habitat, but does it help to put a dollar value on a lyre-bird?

What is obscured by the use of the term “natural capital,” is that nature is what is *not yet a labour process* and therefore *not yet* subsumed under capital. It also peddles the illusion that nature is a *source of value*. This distinction between nature as a pre-condition for labour, and nature as a source of value, is important for understanding the dynamics of capital. If for example a forest is subsumed under capital, for example by privatising it or by making its maintenance the responsibility of a private company, so that its natural attributes become a source of profit, then it is no longer “nature,” but rather an artefact like a zoo or urban park. The only way in which it can then be saved from destruction is by the *regulation of human behaviour*, by government legislation or by ethical-political action, acting *against* capital,

putting *boundaries* around capital and restrictions on its activity. Or air pollution can be privatised by means of Greenhouse Gas Coupons, which aims to have the effect of regulating market behaviour, with states paying companies to stop polluting the air. This creates a series of profitable industries in the domain of technology substitution and so forth, but it is not clean air that is the source of profit, but the *labour of people* dedicated to technology substitution and so forth. Whether this policy works or not is still an open question but the point is that it only works insofar as the policy moves production away from activities which destroy the natural preconditions for human life towards those which *sustain* those conditions. The point of all such policies can only sensibly be to prevent production from consuming the conditions of human life, and so far as possible to leave conditions so far not consumed and destroyed by capital intact, as part of nature. To forthwith declare Nature to be already a form of capital certainly undermines the only useful objective in this area, namely to prevent the transformation of Nature into capital.

Human Capital

Human capital is another fad term which, while describing human beings as a form of money, aims to encourage companies to enhance the quality of their labour force and governments to take action to improve the quality of the available pool of labour. Slave-owners doubtless well understood that their slaves were human capital and in their case the observation would have been true, since slaves were owned as private property, used in the expansion of capital and bought and sold on the market. What precise benefit is supposed to follow from encouraging modern capitalists to adopt this attitude escapes me.

But although there is such a thing which we could legitimately call “human capital” it is not this which is usually referred to as “human capital.” When directed at employers, “human capital” is taken to mean the skills and knowledge of their employees. But this is not capital; this is the property of the employees. To suggest that it is capital, and that employees are not entitled to take it with them when they go, and offer it for hire to another capitalist is both deceptive in relation to the employer and naïve in relation to the employees. The employer has *use* of the human energies belonging to the employee for the term of the wage contract in the same way that the employer has use of land belonging to the landlord for the period of the lease, but the employer does not *own* the land, it is not part of their capital. The skills and knowledge of employees is part of labour-power.

Now what *is* part of capital are the various relationships within a firm which are not portable for the employees individually when they leave. The most significant of this human capital is the specific weight of skill, knowledge, reputation and loyalty which adheres to a company and survives the departure of any and even all of their employees. This is an asset, owned by capital, generally-speaking associated if tenuously with their brand name, and which can be bought and sold. But although attached to a brand name it resides only in the mass of employees, that is, it belongs to the subject, the company.

Even in this usage the term remains a semantic paradox, but if we allow latitude for the idea of a type of capital referring to the form in which capital is temporarily invested which is capable of being put back into circulation, in contrast to finance capital, industrial capital and so on, then this is a legitimate usage of the term “human capital.”

Now, when the term is used in addressing governments, this becomes an absurdity. Improving the health and education of the residents of a locale is supposed to increase the “human capital” of the locale. It does increase the quantity of labour-power available for sale, but labour-power is a different kind of commodity. Why is it necessary to describe saleable skills as “capital” when they are the property of a person whose means of production is the private property of some company? Like nature, a skilled, loyal and healthy workforce may

be a precondition for the accumulation of capital, but it is not capital. Many other conditions are necessary for the accumulation of capital. For example, should we count as human capital the low standard of living of a neighbourhood which will provide employees at low wages, the presence of gangs of racist thugs that can be used to intimidate workers, perhaps the defeat of a recent strike creates “human capital” by creating a tendency towards compliance in the labour force? Well obviously yes; these are human capital in exactly the same way as trade qualifications and supportive families, in fact ignorance may be a human trait more conducive to the accumulation of capital than trade skills.

If people want to say to the government: “As well as providing good infrastructure, tax-cuts, anti-union laws, and lucrative government contracts, you ought to be providing a compliant and skilled workforce for business to employ,” then say so.

One of the trends in the “knowledge management” industry, an off-shoot of the “human capital” industry, actually proposes that the appropriate metaphor for “knowledge management” is *mining*, that is, that employees should be treated like dirt. [source] One of the things that all these trends have in common is that they address themselves to companies and governments, that is, people dedicated to serving capital, and say “Look, this is a form of capital, too; you should care about this!” while people know perfectly well that they are human beings not capital, are perfectly sick of being treated as commodities by their bosses, and do not need to have their bosses given any encouragement in that regard. And yet these trends all think that they are doing something very progressive. But Dracula is already in charge of the blood bank and telling Dracula that the air and water and human life are also forms of blood does not help.

Social Capital

If the concepts of “natural capital” and “human capital” are unclear, then the concept of “social capital” is mud of the thickest order. The general idea is that there is a form of capital inhering in relationships; governments and companies are advised to invest in it, on the assurance that they will reap a profit in return, and do a good deed at the same time. But very different things are meant by “social capital.”

2. Jane Jacobs

It was Jane Jacobs who first used the words “social capital,” in her famous 1961 work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The focus of this book is the struggle of urban neighbourhoods for “self-government” and the actions of governments and capital which thwart them. She used the phrase just *once*, in *passing*, in the following passage:

“The districts that are effective enough to defend themselves from planned disruption are eventually trampled in an unplanned gold rush by those who aim to get a cut of these rare social treasures. ... If *self-government* in the place is to work, underlying any float of population must be a continuity of people who have forged neighbourhood networks. These networks are a city’s irreplaceable *social capital*. Whenever the capital is lost, from whatever cause, the income from it disappears, never to return until and unless new capital is slowly and chancily accumulated.” [p. 148, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacob, 1961. Emphasis added]

Even such a problematic oxymoron as “social capital” can be easily forgiven, especially when it is improvised rather than echoed and used only in passing. I accept however that the entity that Jane Jacobs is arguing for the maintenance of in *Death and Life* is in broad terms the same entity that she designates in the above paragraph as “social capital.” Jane Jacobs never *defines* such this entity, but she describes in great detail the factors that make it up,

insofar as they are under the control of neighbourhood residents and vulnerable to destruction or protection by city planners.

Personally, I very much value the concept which Jacobs is arguing for, and she does so not as an outside observer or bureaucrat, but as a *resident* of the Greenwich Village of the 1950s, and as someone who is clearly passionate about the vitality and diversity which urban neighbourhoods generate, when left to their own devices and not destroyed by City councils and/or developers.

Jane Jacobs never qualified in any town planning related course nor worked as a town planner; she spent her life defending neighbourhoods in New York and later Toronto, mostly against freeway projects; yet she wrote the definitive book on town planning.

Recently, Robert Davies of the Urban Village Forum in Britain observed of Jane Jacobs that “*everything she said about urban areas was true.*” He neglected to add however that many of her criticisms of the “Garden City,” “Radiant City” and “City Beautiful” utopias also extend to the “designer neighbourhood” concept of “Urban Village” promoted by the UVF. [See [www.changingclimate.org/store/attachments/urbanvillages_fullreport\(133\).pdf](http://www.changingclimate.org/store/attachments/urbanvillages_fullreport(133).pdf)]

Jacobs repeatedly uses the words “self-government” as the ultimate objective for neighbourhoods, which she refers to as “becoming a Thing.” In my terminology, a “self-governing Thing” is a *Subject*. The capitalising of the “T” in “Thing” is the only instance of Jacobs emulating the practice of English translators of German Idealism to personify abstractions, and is a clear indication that her concept is precisely that of “Subject.”

What Jane Jacobs describes is in the first place something *qualitative*, not quantitative; nowhere does she attempt to *calculate* it or imply that it can be bought or sold; she certainly believes that it is a precondition for doing business, but it is this only as part of being a precondition for a safe and worthwhile life in cities. So on three counts, what Jane Jacobs names as “social capital,” just once in passing, cannot legitimately be called *capital*. Since I know of no evidence that Jacobs was committed to this word, I will take the liberty of referring to the entity she describes and defends as “social solidarity,” because it *is* broadly speaking consistent with what I will argue for. Jane Jacobs’ more recent book, *Systems of Survival. A dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics*, (1994) deals with moral conflicts that arise through participation in business and government, and I am reinforced in my view that, for Jacobs, capital and bureaucracy are figures on the stage of life that one must learn to deal with ethically, but there is nothing in her work promoting the idea of capital formation as a route to the Good Life.

For Jacobs, “social solidarity” is all those qualitative conditions which are prerequisites for a vital and sustainable life in a big city. The principal challenge that a big city faces, in order to be able to benefit from the concentration of so many human beings in one place, is the ubiquitous presence of *strangers*. She is at pains to point out that suburbs, villages and rural properties sustain their *own* kind of life and self-government in quite different conditions, requiring quite different preconditions, and nothing in *Death and Life* should be taken as relevant outside of urban neighbourhoods. In order to enjoy the benefit of living within bus-ride of sufficiently many other people engaged in almost any activity you can think of, in sufficient specific weight to make it viable, you pay for it by living cheek-by-jowl with strangers, and certain *moral norms* and geo-social conditions are necessary to survive these conditions fruitfully.

One of the things which has changed in the 40 years since Jacobs wrote her book is that “urban neighbourhoods” now subsume the majority of the world’s population. Of course, Jacobs was always convinced that the people living in these neighbourhoods were the *most important* for the future of humanity, but now we can say “urban neighbourhoods” is pretty much the normal environment for modernity.

The social conditions Jacobs was interested in were broadly speaking networks of solidarity, trust and collaboration encompassing people living, working in and passing through a neighbourhood and moral norms supporting the public good up to the point where the population of an area could *become* capable of “self-government,” of effectively defending itself against the attacks of city planners, big business and hostile strangers, securing safe streets and good living conditions out of which people could go to off work in the morning, in which people could raise their children and enjoy leisure time and into which people could come to visit or do business, etc..

Reading *Death and Life* is a bit like watching one of those revenge movies where your empathetic anger builds up to such a point that you find yourself cheering when the hero eventually starts knocking the hell out of his or her tormentors. Jacobs shows how even the poorest neighbourhood, if blessed with the kind of urban conditions which would normally be inherited from past unplanned urban development, will eventually pull itself up by the bootstraps and become a place where anybody would want to go to live, a Thnig; but city planners and developers with an instinct equal to that which guides eels unerringly to the Sargasso Sea from the lakes and rivers of central Europe, systematically destroy and sabotage what neighbourhoods achieve, mainly by trying to do it for them, but without understanding what it is which is being built.

One of the central tenets of Jacobs’ approach to urban development is that, given a chance, people *do it themselves*; invariably governments and municipal authorities and private developers fail to understand the processes involved and in trying to help, destroy neighbourhoods. Of course, better policies on the part of authorities, as urged by Jacobs, *could* help neighbourhoods a great deal and the book is full of suggestions. Jane Jacobs’ book is a modern classic; it would be surprising if there is even one advocate of “social capital” who hasn’t read it, and yet the infuriating practices which Jacobs describes in the 1950s are still going on, and it would appear, are even using her name to badge their products.

Read in 2004, *Death and Life* can appear quaint and nostalgic; we have *lost* the features she wanted to preserve. But the point is that the relationships Jane Jacobs describes do *not* rest on traditional relationships or modes of life and by their very nature *can* be reproduced under conditions of modernity, given a chance (though the impact of commercial television was still incomplete in the US in 1961 and the internet still to come, and so remain open questions).

The features which cities need to cope with strangers and build brand new social ties are: (1) the existence of and venues for “self-appointed public characters” known to everyone but intruding on no-one’s privacy, typically a local grocer:

“The social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters” [p. 79]

and (2) people brought up in a “sidewalk culture”:

“In real life, only from the ordinary adults of the city sidewalks do children learn — if they learn at all — the first fundamental of successful city life: people must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other. This is a lesson nobody learns by being told. It is learned from the experience of having *other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you* take a modicum of public responsibility for you. ... This is instruction in city living that people hired to look after children cannot teach, because the essence of this responsibility is that you do it without being hired.” [p. 93-4. Emphasis added]

and (3) a population which is stable, but not stagnant.

“Even a ghetto, after it has remained a ghetto for a period of time, builds up a social structure and this makes for more stability, more leadership, more agencies for helping the solution of public problems.” [p. 147, quoting from the *New York Times*]

while

“The first sign of an incipient slum, long before visible blight can be seen, is stagnation and dullness.” [p. 287]

Maintaining these interconnected conditions turns out to be a complex task, too difficult for big business or local governments, but basically it is all built on these three elements. Let's look a little closer at them.

Sidewalk culture. Jacobs says that the *essence* of the experience of having strangers looking out for you as a kid on the sidewalk is that they have *not been hired* to do so. So, if the neighbours are *paid* for the job they formerly did for free, the essence of the practice has been lost. If caring for sidewalks is *privatised*, transformed into “real” *capital*, then the so-called “social capital” is not “realised,” it's destroyed!

The insurance/litigation/regulation dynamic has exactly the same effect. It is no longer acceptable for a teenager to mind their smaller cousins, and they are replaced by paid child-carers. Good news for the valuation of women's labour, but bad news unfortunately for social solidarity.

Busy sidewalks. It is not enough that sidewalks are busy between 8 and 9am; to create a safe environment they need to be busy *all* the time. The only way this can be achieved is by means of a close mix of functions. Private shopping malls, residential development projects, zoning of areas as industrial or residential, all favourite tactics of big business and government alike to this day, make it impossible to populate sidewalks around the clock. Necessary for busy sidewalks around the clock and also for maintaining venues for “public characters” is the gradual turn-over and renovation of property, so that small and old commercial premises are always around. These allow for small start-up businesses, “mixed businesses” and such like to carry on when they can, and get bought up by newcomers when they can't, whereas the slash and burn tactics of government and developers *never* allow for this mixture of buildings, old and new, good and bad, large and small. And building “designer demography” on “brownfields” sites does not solve the problem, which is something which has to be solved by real people with real projects.

Jacobs' “self-appointed public characters” is an interesting concept; mostly they are local grocers because this is the calling which most lent itself to this role in Jane Jacobs' New York, an almost extinct race in the MacDonald's-K-mart world of today. The way she describes these people is a picture of a possible modernity: low-level contacts, but contacts with everyone, not intrusive, but trusted. Again, the essence of the role they perform is that they are *not* paid for it.

“Cities are full of people with whom, from your point of view, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.

“In speaking about city sidewalk safety, I mentioned how necessary it is that there should be, in the brains behind the eyes on the street, an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down — when a citizen has to choose, for instance, whether he will take responsibility, or abdicate it, in combating barbarism or protecting strangers. There is a short word for this assumption of support: trust.” [p. 66]

(My one small beef with this passage is that “trust” is not quite appropriate in this context; I believe the operative word for this “general street support” is “solidarity,” which is not quite the same as “trust.”)

It is also worth reviewing the series of types of relationships which build the ethos which Jacobs believes sustains modern life:

“The constructive factor that has been operating here meanwhile is time. Time, in cities, is the substance for self-containment. Time, in cities, is indispensable.”

“The cross-links that enable a district to function as a Thing [read *Subject*, — *AB*] are neither vague nor mysterious. They consist of working relationships among specific people, many of them without much more in common than that they share a fragment of geography.

“The first relationships to form in city areas, given any neighbourhood stability, are those in street neighbourhoods and those among people who *do* have something in common and belong to organisations with one another — churches, PTAs, businessmen’s associations, political clubs, local civic leagues, fund-raising committees for health campaigns or other public causes, sons of such-and-such a village, property owners’ associations, block improvement associations, protesters against injustices, and so on *ad infinitum*. [most of these ‘bad social capital’ in Fukuyama’s terms and many of them “vertical social capital” in Putnam’s terms *AB*] ...

“The crucial stage in the formation of an effective district goes much beyond this however. An interweaving, but different, set of relationships must grow up; these are working relationships among people, usually leaders, who enlarge their local public life beyond the neighbourhoods of streets and specific organisations or institutions and form relationships with people whose roots and backgrounds are in entirely different constituencies, so to speak. These hop-and-skip relationships are more fortuitous in cities than are the analogous, almost enforced, hop-and-skip links among people from different small groupings within self-contained settlements. Perhaps we are typically more advanced at forming whole-city neighbourhoods of interest than at forming districts, hop-skip district relationships sometimes originate fortuitously among people from a district who meet in a special-interest neighbourhood of the whole city [or the internet today — *AB*]. ...

“It takes surprisingly few hop-skip people, relative to the whole population, to weld together a district into a real Thing [*Subject* — *AB*]. A hundred or so people do it in a population a thousand times their size. ...

“Settlement-house directors are often the ones who begin such systems of district hop-skip links, but they can only begin them and work at opportune ways to extend them; they cannot carry the load. These links require the growth of trust, the growth of cooperation that is, at least at first, apt to be casual and tentative; and they require people who have considerable self-confidence, or sufficient concern about local public problems to stand them in the stead of self-confidence.” [p. 143-6]

On these basic conditions, people build a complex set of overlapping networks of low-level solidarity, on which in turn, mutual trust highly effective social and political collaboration can be built, capable of self-management of communities and their environs. That is to say, to transform a neighbourhood into a *subject*.

It may surprise some that I can declare war on the concept of “social capital” and at the same time be so supportive of Jane Jacobs’ views on urban life. I hope to clarify this seeming contradiction as I move on to examining the way *other* writers since 1961 have made use of this idea. Although Jacobs uses the words “social capital” once and also uses other similar metaphors like “capitalising” on the attributes of a neighbourhood in a “gold rush,” and so on, there is no harm in such metaphors up to a point.

Firstly, Jacobs describes “social solidarity” as something *qualitative*. For example, in outlining the way in which *diversity* is generated and maintained, she elaborates four factors: mixed use, short blocks, varying age of buildings and sufficient density, and insists that *all four* must be present for diversity to be maintained. So you cannot add up the degree of each of the four contributors to diversity as “types of social capital.” Likewise, diversity is itself one of a number of factors, alongside population stability, borders and the amount of credit/investment which are needed in just the appropriate measure for a neighbourhood to achieve “self-government.” Again, you cannot add up diversity plus borders plus credit, the more so since too much of any of these factors turns it into a negative. The right combination and balance is required. The capacity for self-government will *grow* if the soil has the right conditions. It cannot be installed or exchanged.

Secondly, it is in the very essence of the practices that go to making a healthy neighbourhood that they are done for *free*. The point is the building up of a certain *ethos*, certain *moral norms*. It is not the *ethos* of the rural village which may be exactly the kind of *ethos* that people came to the city to *escape*. It is a “thin *ethos*.” But it is not a “you-scratch-my-back-I’ll-scratch-yours” *ethos* either. Attempts to cash in on neighbourhoods, what Jacobs calls a “gold rush,” inevitably destroy what it was hoping to exploit. It cannot be bought and sold.

Thirdly, the “social solidarity” Jacobs is talking about *does* create a viable environment for doing business, but it is unlikely to create a compliant workforce which could be underpaid and bullied and would be unlikely to tolerate the dumping of poisonous waste or other unethical and unsustainable practices. Jacobs is not primarily talking about conditions for the accumulation of capital. In fact, it is capital accumulation which drives the local grocer out of business, pulls down the old houses where cobblers and artists, musicians and hackers, try to earn a living, and pushes up the rents to such a level that the original residents have to move out — in short, capital accumulation has exactly the same effect it has on so-called “natural capital,” it *destroys* it. What Jacobs is interested in is the whole combination of factors which constitute the preconditions for a dynamic, diverse, interesting and fulfilling urban *life*, inclusive of the capacity to earn a living, locally or elsewhere. It’s nothing to do with *capital*.

The issue Jacobs is talking about could be defined thus: how can a group of *strangers* in a neighbourhood surrounded by other *strangers* become a *Subject* — a “Thing”? Jacobs approaches this problem in a perfectly practical way, as a member of the self-governing community of Greenwich Village, under attack by capital and government. Did anyone get the impression that Jacobs was interested in Greenwich Village Incorporated? I don’t think so.

3. Pierre Bourdieu

Social class is defined by relation to the means of production; but this does not tell us how classes are *constituted as classes*, nor how the complex status hierarchies of capitalist societies are articulated and internalised by individuals or how other systems of status subordination are integrated within a class system of domination. Possession of greater or lesser title to means of production (“economic capital”) in fact fails to explain very much about the dynamics of bourgeois society on its own.

Pierre Bourdieu shows at great length and detail (in reference to 1960s/70s France) how the knowledge and use of cultural artefacts and the body, and the taste which people develop for culture (everything from food, clothing and life-style to preferences in painting and music) constitute multiply sublimated transformations of a single relation of dominant to dominated class, moderating the myriad of struggles between classes and class fractions in modern capitalist society and teaching people to tailor their expectations and their own view of themselves to their place in a hierarchy of political power and their share in the social product, at the same time as providing vehicles to *contest* the place a class fraction has in that hierarchy and for an individual to claim a place in a given class fraction.

Bourdieu's ideas also contribute to understanding how other deep-seated relations of subordination, especially age and gender, merge with economic and cultural relations of subordination in sublimated forms, shedding light on how multiple forms of subordination articulate with one another.

Let us clarify some of the main concepts Bourdieu uses.

Capital

Let us take it as read that the concept of "economic" capital is understood, and that it can take various forms — factories, stockpiles, intellectual property, shares, finance capital, and so on. What is required then, to justify the concept of forms of capital which are "non-economic" is to establish that they can be converted into "economic capital," and thus that everything deemed to be a form of capital can be arranged, under some specified condition, along a single axis, i.e., quantified. Here is how Bourdieu deals with this problem.

"Projection onto a single axis, in order to construct the continuous, linear, homogenous, one-dimensional series with which the social hierarchy is normally identified, implies an extremely difficult (and, if it is unwitting, extremely dangerous) operation, whereby the different types of capital are reduced to a single standard. This abstract operation has an objective basis in the possibility, which is always available, of converting one type of capital into another; however, the exchange rates vary in accordance with the power relation between the holders of the different forms of capital. By obliging one to formulate the principle of the convertibility of the different kinds of capital, which is the precondition for reducing the space to one dimension, the construction of a two-dimensional space makes it clear that the exchange rate of the different kinds of capital is one of the fundamental stakes in the struggles between class fractions whose power and privileges are linked to one or the other of these types. In particular, this exchange rate is a stake in the struggle over the dominant principle of domination (economic capital, cultural capital or social capital), which goes on at all times between the different fractions of the dominant class." [p. 125]

Thus Bourdieu extends the concept of capital according to an underlying concept which only in principle relies on convertibility into capital in the normal economic sense. Bourdieu does not do us the favour, however, of explicitly spelling out what this underlying concept is, which maintains itself across different forms of capital, despite the problem of convertibility. Nevertheless, it can be surmised.

Capital is the resource, command of which, enables one to exercise and resist domination in social relations, or putting it another way, to maintain a position in the status hierarchy of society, or putting it objectively, an "organising principle." "Composition of capital" thus refers to the composition of total capital of cultural and economic capital (the other types of capital playing a subordinate role), creating a "plane" across which dominance increases

monotonically towards the top-right corner (economic capital +, cultural capital +) but with the gradient at every point on the plane subject to contestation.

Thus, as “capital” in this sense, is capable of ordering the relation between any two people, in any given part of social space, but such an ordering principle does not thereby necessarily produce a “complete” ordering of society, along a single axis of subordination.

I think it is fair to say that this conception marks Bourdieu’s concept of capital off from the broader, more intuitive concept of wealth; indeed, it appears that use and maintenance of the various forms of capital is not a matter so much of enjoyment (i.e., of wealth) but of work (i.e., of production).

Conceived in this way, “capital” can span across different social formations, not only bourgeois society, representing the degree of command a subject has over whatever it is in a given society or social stratum, which confers the right to subordinate others. But Bourdieu does not go there.

Bourdieu accepts “economic capital” as the dominant principle of domination in capitalist society, but observes that the efficacy of economic capital as a principle of domination is constantly under challenge by fractions of the dominant class (e.g. artists, professionals, academics, etc.) who are relatively poor in economic capital, but who by dint of their social role, rich in cultural or other forms of capital, who strive to enhance their own specific form of capital as a rival principle of domination.

This conception is not dissimilar to the struggles which have gone on down the centuries between landed property, industrial capital and finance capital. Once it is granted that, for example, possession of the capacity to define what is valid art (or science or body-shape or life-style, for example) by those capable of elaborating it, it can be seen to be a powerful lever of domination, and it seems not unreasonable to designate command of such authority as a “form of capital.” Thus struggles in the domain of art (or science or body-shape or life-style) take on the appearance of struggles within the dominant class, just like the struggles between landed property, industrial capital and finance capital.

The principle which generates taste of a given class fraction across the whole range of different fields or domains, Bourdieu calls the class ‘habitus.’

Cultural capital and educational capital

Cultural capital is the capacity to play the culture game, to recognise the allusions made in a novel, what is being “quoted” or refused in a work of art, to know what and how to approve and disapprove, how to avoid the question if necessary, to have internalised appropriate manners and acquired a taste for appropriate art, to know the directors (or actors) of films, be they popular or *avant garde*, to know how to make dinner conversation, how to wear clothes, how to occupy space, how to look down your nose, and give or not give someone your time, and so forth — all those manners which infallibly identify you to others as a person of a culture, popular, *avant garde* or legitimate, with a likely trajectory in life (declining or rising), likely to have access to certain circles or not, and with more or less right to have an opinion on political matters or whatever.

“Thus ... the social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a ‘sense of one’s place’ which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded.” [p. 471]

Bourdieu's research shows that possession of cultural capital is closely predicted by social origins. The bourgeois child knows the price of an Impressionist painting at auction and where it should hang in the drawing room, like the working class boy knows who won the World Cup and how to eat a pie. Professionals know from an early age who is a good director, like a young working class girl knows the actors and actresses of popular cinema.

The educational system both offers a way for parvenus to acquire culture and a certificate to prove it, but Bourdieu's research shows that "scholastic" culture can never quite duplicate the ease and depth of the cultural capital acquired by constant exposure at home. As the educational system is opened to wider and wider sections of the populace, a struggle goes on to redefine qualifications and jobs, and create new certificates, so as to restore the social order, or on the other hand, to open new doors to young graduates. At the same time, there is a constant struggle going on between *rising* class fractions and those in *decline*, between technocratic executives with degrees in business management and all kinds of cultural mediators redefining their own life-styles upwards, while shopkeepers and skilled tradespeople, for example, inexorably decline, and so forth. The autodidact meanwhile, Bourdieu says, enters a race which he has lost from the beginning.

Thus we have the phenomena which Bourdieu describes as judgments of classification which are themselves classified and classifying acts. As is well-known in respect to all internecine struggles, no distinction is so important as the distinction between social neighbours, and thus one has all the acts of *refusal* in which what is valued by one is refused by the other, obvious in respect to *avant garde* art in relation to legitimate art.

The main axis of these struggles is *within* the dominant class, between those who lack economic capital, against those wealthy bourgeois who, relatively speaking lack culture, with professionals of various kinds promoting their own status by trying to shift the dominant principle of domination towards cultural means, distinguishing themselves from the uncultured wealthy by emphasising taste for the refined and off-beat, as against the acquisition of rare and expensive cultural goods. And on the other side, among those lacking in economic capital, among the dominated classes, to promote the sensibilities of professional skills acquired by hard work through the public education system or artistic production, to gain entry to the lower ranks of the dominant class. At the same time, the working class, making a virtue of necessity, call to order anyone of their number who gets above themselves and threatens class solidarity.

Appreciation of culture is thus reduced, with little or no residue, to *pretension* — people acquire and express a taste which expresses their pretension to be recognised in a given class fraction, refusing the vulgar or the common, the difficult or the fancy, according to the need for distinction.

Social capital, body capital, linguistic capital, political capital

Although cultural capital and economic capital constitute the principal axes of subordination within capitalist society, Bourdieu talks of other forms of capital as well. *Social capital* are 'connections' needed, in particular, to make use of one's cultural or *scholastic* capital (certificates). *Body capital*, both inherited and acquired through the socially-approved diet and exercise regime and so on, also constitutes a resource which gives an individual leverage in social struggles. *Linguistic capital* is basically a subset of cultural capital contained in appropriate ease in the command of language. *Political capital* is standing in the political world and the ability to command votes.

Since all these types of 'capital' share the conditions of production of economic and social capital, not a great deal of time is spent giving them special consideration.

Class, class fraction and habitus

The concept of 'habitus' plays an important role in Bourdieu's theory.

"To reconstruct what has been pulled apart [the different practices performed in different fields] ... one must return to the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle, i.e., the class habitus, the internalised form of the class condition and of the conditionings it entails." [p. 101]

and

"Social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is 'normally' (i.e., with a high statistical probability) associated with that position." [p. 372]

Thus the 'habitus' is the "internalised form of the class condition and of the conditionings" by which a member of the class knows, without thinking about it, just how to react to different cultural stimuli, what he or she finds "pretentious" or "vulgar" or "gawdy" rather than "attractive" or "dignified" or "beautiful." Habitus is not a direct reflection of the conditions of existence of a class, but a sensibility acquired through a life-time and an upbringing in those conditions and the possibilities they include or exclude, with a future (including a future for one's children) which offers prospects, or on the other side, a past remembered when things were better.

Thus, whether a person *actually* has money, or skills or education or family, in practice turns out to be secondary to the habitus they have acquired, which may, under exceptional circumstances, be at odds with the life-style and attitudes, the way of using the body, command of language, friends and contacts, preferences in art and aspirations, etc., etc., which are *normally* associated with those conditions.

Thus we have the phenomena of the miner's son who leaves town to become a dancer, or the junior clerk who bluffs his way into being accepted as a well-heeled investor and by good luck turns pretension into reality, and so on. But these are rarities.

Bourdieu can be accused of some ideological sins, and it is worth looking at his defence against some possible charges.

Cultural relativism

At the end of reading *Distinctions* one is left with the impression of an extreme relativism in cultural criticism; everything it appears is appreciated solely for the purpose of establishing markers of one's social status, albeit unconsciously. The book therefore concludes with a critique of Kantian and other aesthetics and we find not quite pure relativism.

Taste responds to two kinds of stimuli, on the one hand the pleasure connected with basic human needs, on the other, basically "quotation" and "association" which refer to other points in the cultural universe in a kind of "in-group" conversation. This creates distance from the material world and entry to an ultimately social world structured and populated by cultural references and the social universe of the dominant class.

According to Bourdieu, all the dichotomies of cultural criticism are successive sublimations of one basic distinction between the dominated class and dominant class, beginning with animal nature versus human culture, therefore crude/heavy versus fine/light and so on.

These distinctions can undergo inversion when the dominated fractions of the dominant class use the same contrast to indicate ascetic/serious versus light-weight/frivolous, etc. in distinction both to the culturally poor, economically dominant bourgeoisie, and the simple enjoyments of the unpretentious worker.

Bourdieu also finds that the basic dichotomies of gender and age are deployed to express or reinforce distinctions of cultural dominance. So for example, one has the contest between immature/mature against youthful/aged, and all the contested markers of antique subordination penetrate and express the language of cultural subordination.

So although the dominant class's appreciation of art is sublimated through multiple shifts, it is basically stimulating the same need for a feeling of distinction or distance from the crude necessity of the life of the dominated classes. Through multiple sublimation, culture constitutes itself as a relatively independent domain, but the taste for a work of art ultimately traces its way back to the pleasures of enjoyment or domination.

Thus, we have a window into the class struggles as it is played out in the domain of culture:

“Taste is at the heart of these symbolic struggles, which go on at all times between the fractions of the dominant class and which would be less absolute, less total, if they were not based on the primary belief which binds each agent to his life-style. A materialist reduction or preferences to their economic and social conditions of production and to the social functions of the seemingly most disinterested practices must not obscure the fact that, in matters of culture, investments are not only economic but also psychological. Conflicts over art or the art of living, in which what is really at stake is the imposition of the dominant principle of domination within the dominant class — or, to put it another way, the securing of the best conversion rate for the type of capital with which each group is best provided — would not be so dramatic if they did not involve the ultimate values of the person, a highly sublimated form of interests.” [p. 310]

Idealism

Bourdieu could be open to a charge of “idealism” by virtue of the fact that he has removed the means of domination from production of the means of existence. However, this charge does not stick, for he shows well enough that the class habitus is basically making a virtue of necessity; taste has its origins in the conditions of production of its characteristic modes of life.

He observes that the means of domination has shifted:

“substituting seduction for repression, public relations for policing, advertising for authority, the velvet glove for the iron fist, pursues the symbolic integration of the dominated classes by imposing needs rather than inculcating norms.” [p. 153-4]

Thus the mode of domination is inextricably connected to the system of needs and the mode of their satisfaction.

Objectivism

Reading *Distinctions* also leaves one with an overwhelming feeling of *objectivism*, in the sense that all the social agents appear to be pursuing illusions — tastes and desires which derive from unconscious internalisations of their social position. “Culture is the ultimate fetish,” he says, and there undoubtedly is such a pessimistic flavour to the work, but it is nuanced.

In his analysis of the French newspapers, Bourdieu shows how the culture addresses itself to the bourgeois as “subjects of history, or at least subjects of a discourse about history,” whereas the habitus of the working class, centres around the worker as *object* of politics,

whose only political voice is that delegated to a spokesperson in the language of the dominant class.

The social arrangements reflected in Bourdieu's analysis therefore capture the form of rule active in bourgeois society. There is little suggestive, however, of how the working class, acclimatised to subordination and ruling themselves out of matters of state, can transform themselves into subjects of history.

“With mass market cultural products — music whose simple repetitive structures invite a passive, absent participation, prefabricated entertainments which the new engineers of cultural mass production design for television viewers, and especially sporting events which establish a recognised division between the spectators and the professionals, virtuosos of an esoteric technique or ‘supermen’ of exceptional ability — dispossession of the very intention of recognition of dispossession.” [p. 386]

Political Opinion Formation

Somewhat as an aside from the main argument, as part of a critique of the naïve use of questionnaires to measure political opinion, Bourdieu refers to three modes of political opinion formation:

“first, a *class ethos*, a generative formula not constituted as such which enables objectively coherent responses, compatible with the practical premises of a practical relation to the world, to be generated for all the problems of everyday existence.

“Secondly, it may be a systematic political ‘slant’ (*parti*), a system of explicit, specifically political principles, amenable to logical control and reflexive scrutiny, in short, a sort of political ‘axiomatics’ (in ordinary language, a ‘line’ or a ‘programme’) ...

“Thirdly, it may be a two-stage choice, i.e., the identification, in the mode of knowledge, of the answers consistent with the ‘line’ of a political party, this time in the sense of an organisation providing a political ‘line’ on a set of problems which it constitutes as political.” [p. 418]

In countries where there is universal suffrage and people are forced to participate in politics, this is an interesting observation, and demonstrates how the breakdown of collective forms of subjectivity and growing individualism and reliance on the mass media, is enormously destructive of the psyche of working class people, let alone the unemployed and young.

Systems of Status Subordination

According to Nancy Fraser, capitalist society is marked by the co-existence of two forms of subordination, “the class structure and the status order,” [*Redistribution or Recognition*, 2003] and according to Fraser, it is necessary to utilise two different systems of concepts to grasp the two systems of subordination, and understand the interaction between the two. This is in contrast to Honneth's insistence on using the paradigm of “recognition” to unify the dimensions of social subordination. In this sense, it could be said that Bourdieu is attempting to bridge the reconciliation and redistribution dichotomy by utilising redistribution as the master paradigm.

Bourdieu's approach to subordination along multiple axes is a kind of utilitarian analysis whereby individuals choose a strategy which maximises their benefit for the particular composition of capital that they have command of, plus a struggle by groups to valorise their own life-style in competition with others.

Thus we have the observation that (in 1960s France) working class women don't bother about their appearance and prefer to be home-makers and make their men happy, because the jobs on offer for them are rotten anyway, while the daughters of the bourgeoisie dress-up, get educated and corner prestigious jobs as "cultural mediators" because this offers the optimum route to improving or maintaining their own status.

Bourdieu is also attuned to a lot of the observations found in Fraser's work, such as the deployment of gender stigmatisation on gendered forms of labour, with consequences such as male nurses suffering from low pay and the pay rates of trades falling when they become open to women, and so forth.

There is a sense on which Bourdieu's two-dimensional map of social space expresses Fraser's idea of two systems of subordination, and there is quite a lot of overlap between the two different approaches.

Social Capital Theory

"Social capital" plays a secondary role in Bourdieu's theory; someone who aspires to move up the social hierarchy who has accumulated the necessary qualification and taste, still needs connections for their qualifications to be translated into admission to a class fraction of higher status. It is hard to see how this concept could be broadened into a "third dimension," in the way it has in "social capital" theory.

The difference between this extension of the concept of capital from that of people like Robert Putnam is that Bourdieu brings the economic and non-economic entities into relation with one another by means of a broader conception of social subordination, from which both notions of (economic) capital and cultural (or social, etc.) capital can be derived.

In contrast, Putnam et al take the fetishistic theory of capital, economic science, as a given, and extend the fetishism into non-economic relationships.

Bourdieu clearly breaks with Marx's conception of capital, but does so in a way which acknowledges its own break in attempting to take Marx's critique of political economy a step further, rather than simply ignoring it.

Axel Honneth's criticism of Bourdieu

According to Axel Honneth [*The Fragmented World of the Social. Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, 1990], Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital suffers from a fatal ambiguity: on the one hand, his empirical researches highlight how social groups and individuals cultivate *distinction* for their own life-style and tastes in *contrast* to those of other, lower strata, by making use of whatever social assets they have to make their own life-style take on the aura of exclusiveness; on the other hand, social groups express their own values in terms of distinctive social practices and demand *recognition* for the intrinsic worth of these practices from society at large, refusing to adopt instead, *other* tastes and life-styles which may already enjoy more general social appreciation.

Capital however, by its essential nature, is the value given to one's property by society at large, by *everyone else*. It is *quantitative, abstract-general*, not qualitative and *unique* in its value. If distinctions were a form of capital, then the value of possessing them is precisely that everyone *else* values them, so accumulating capital means getting hold of things that *other* people value, even if you do not value the stuff yourself at all. Big-time drug dealers are not users; capitalists do not hoard. Equally, the strategy of investing value in something that you already monopolise has exactly the same logic. If no-one values what you do, you will be poor; being poor *means* that no-one values what you do. "Recognition" and "material self-interest" are in perfect accord here.

For Honneth, this unexplained contradiction constituted a “flaw,” because Honneth’s interest was in developing the concept of *recognition* in contrast to that of *interest*. Bourdieu on the other hand is trying to cast the struggle for recognition of the *distinctiveness* of one’s social group as a form of *capital*. Capital however, by its essential nature, is the value given to one’s property by society at large, by *everyone else*. It is *quantitative, abstract-general*, not qualitative and *unique* in its value. If distinctions were a form of capital, then the value of possessing them is precisely that everyone *else* values them, so accumulating capital means getting hold of things that *other* people value, even if you do not value the stuff yourself at all. Big-time drug dealers are not users; capitalists do not hoard. Equally, the strategy of investing value in something that you already monopolise has exactly the same logic. If no-one values what you do, you will be poor; being poor *means* that no-one values what you do. “Recognition” and “material self-interest” are in perfect accord here.

Subjectivity

As remarked above, Bourdieu is quite pessimistic about the prospects for the working class or any part thereof, to form themselves into subjects of history, and indeed, he observes that those who act as spokespeople for the working class are forced to adopt the language of the dominant class in order to express the political demands of the working class.

On the other hand, his description of the class habitus, contributing as it does to the understanding of class consciousness, and his elucidation of the mechanisms of class struggle within the domain of culture, should give clues about a way forward in the struggle against capitalism.

Certainly, Bourdieu provides ample ammunition to be used against professional and petit-bourgeois claims to high pay and status, as against the under-valued skills and labour of the working-class. There is a sense in which Bourdieu’s philosophically inclined analysis expresses in the most cultured possible way, the spontaneous working-class prejudice that bourgeois culture is nothing more than a pretension aimed to make its connoisseurs look smarter while making working class people look stupid, demeaning even their body-shape.

Bourdieu’s use of the term “capital” at least raises the question of whether one should follow him, by rendering the study of status subordination into the terms of distribution of capital, both cultural and economic, thereby solving the problem of meshing recognition- and distribution-theoretic analyses.

Personally, I do not intend to follow him in this move. His work can stand as a critique of cultural pretension as a form of domination, but I don’t think it is the best form of expression for a critique of subjectivity.

4. James Coleman

James Coleman is the writer who has launched “social capital” as a key concept in social policy. For Coleman, social capital is control over events in which other people have an interest. I would characterise it as “Tammany Hall” social capital (after the ethos of the old Democratic Party machine in New York, in which the exchange of favours and vote-buying was normal practice and developed to a fine art).

Coleman’s social theory generalises the ideas of economic theory to deal with resources of any kind which can be used to gain access to another resource or good. For example, if I have control of something for which you are willing to pay \$1, then clearly this power I have is worth a dollar; and if you have control over something for which I would pay \$1, then we could exchange favours, and even though no money has changed hands, an economic exchange to the value of \$1 has been effected. It is clear enough that an economic theory which did not have this kind of transaction on its radar would be missing a lot of significant

activity, especially among people who do not have a lot of money, people whose *tradeable wealth*, if any, is in forms other than money-capital.

Thus Coleman's social theory resembles a theory of economics in which the definition of economics has been *broadened* to include all manner of ways in which people pursue their interests whether or not money is involved.

Let us suppose that A has control over an event in which B has an interest, then so far as A and B are concerned, A has possession of 1 unit of social capital. These units of "social capital" Coleman calls "social capital credit notes," as if you held an I.O.U. for return of a favour done or promised. The control that A has over events of interest to many individuals could be added up to a quantity which would make some sense as their total "social capital." However, only those favours owed to A by people who have some influence over events of concern to A, are relevant. If a total dead-beat owes you a favour, you might as well forget about it.

Let us suppose that A has control over an event in which B is interested, and B control over an event C in which has an interest, then this 2-step indirect control that A has over C counts, according to the "linear action theory" applied by Coleman, not has 1/2 a unit of social capital, but as the square root of half, i.e., about 70%.

If the network of control that an agent has over all events is combined by matrix multiplication with the interest all agents who control something of interest to A, directly or indirectly, have in those events controlled by A, then one can add up the total "social capital" an agent has, which would be a measure of the direct or indirect control A has over all events in which they have an interest.

For example, if a PTA committee is deciding who should get the contract for the school canteen, and A has on the committee: his wife, the father of the little girl who sleeps over at A's place once a week, and a good neighbour with whom another committee member is in love, then A can add up the number of votes they have on the committee, directly or indirectly to try and win the contract.

Now, if there's a law forbidding A from exercising this control he has over members of the committee to influence their vote, then that is called "friction," in just the same way that "imperfections" in a market can be called friction, factors which obstruct potential transactions from being completed. "Transaction costs" may limit the ability of an agent to cash in their "social capital" somewhere in the system because, for example, someone has principles against exchanging favours, is unaware of the benefit that will flow to them from complying with someone else's wishes, doesn't *trust* the other party, or whatever. Thus the "social capital market" suffers from "imperfections" in just the same way as a commodity market facilitated by money. Money has the great advantage of course that its value is freely transferable over any distance and can be cashed in at any point in the market, and transaction costs are usually small or non-existent.

Coleman's "perfect social system," however, claims to encompass the *whole* of social life, whereas the "perfect market" of economic theory relies upon "externalities" (such as living human beings and nature) which a "perfect" market cannot sustain — the Pareto optimum, in which every possible exchange between any two agents in the system has been carried out, may be universal famine.

What Coleman means by "perfect social system" is given as:

"a social system in which actors are rational ... and in which there is no structure to impede any actor's use of resources at any point in the system. In economists' terms there are no transaction costs. Free rider problems do not exist, for actors are able to use their resources to induce others with like

interests to contribute to the common good. As in a perfectly competitive market, there are no advantages to strategic behaviour, because there are no contingencies of actions. Each actor is confronted with a set of goods or events having values that are system-wide. The system-wide values ensure that each actor's power is system-wide, and not specific to other actors." [p. 720]

and people act ethically because:

"... the value of each outcome of each event is known, ... In such a system there is no conflict because all confrontations are virtual. The weaker side sees that it will lose and deploys its resources elsewhere, rather than wasting them in a lost cause. Norms exist, and sanctions are potentially present but are never used." [p. 720]

Coleman's elaboration of the concept of "social capital" has proved to be very influential, and it is very central to his whole theory:

"In a perfect social system social capital is complete. Also, convertibility of all resources is complete. Thus each actor's potential power is useable at every point in the system. There are no transmission losses, no transaction costs." [p. 720]

Although presented in the form of a social *theory*, there is a strong *ethical* content to Coleman's theory.

Market fundamentalists not only *compute* the behaviour of markets on the assumption that they are "frictionless" and can be expected to arrive some time at the Pareto Optimum, but they *also* tend to make these features of a market *normative*; that is to say, there is a tendency for economists to believe that the assumptions that are made about markets for the purpose of calculation are inherently *good*. Because a "frictionless" market will always provide the best of all possible worlds (so the market fundamentalist believes), a market *should be* frictionless. In just the same way, although he does not absolutely spell it out, it is clear that Coleman believes that a society in which social capital is freely exchanged without transaction costs or friction, where a resource obtained in any part of the system can be utilised to access a resource in any other part of the system, the situation in which Coleman says "social capital is complete," is not only an ideal in the sense of being a mathematical abstraction, but an *ideal* in the sense of being an objective towards which social policy *ought* to aim.

In the 'perfect social system,' norms exist and the actors conform to them without the use of sanctions, and there are no 'strangers' or criminals who fail to recognise or respect the norms of behaviour that they are party to. In addition there is *convertibility*: there are no external constraints on what any set of actors may agree amongst themselves, i.e., all rights are exchangeable, every value is "convertible," and *informal credit* is unlimited, i.e., favours may be given in confidence that they will be repaid.

The *perfect* social system is one in which social capital is complete, and any power one has over any event can be utilised to influence any event in which one has an interest. *That* is the objective towards which Coleman's social theory is directed. The society in which social capital is complete is a certain kind of *subject*.

Let us turn for a moment towards the way in which Coleman develops his social theory. Coleman holds micro-phenomena such as the motivations of individuals to be explanatory of macro-phenomena. However, as remarked above, when one reads to the last paragraph of the 1,000-odd pages of *Foundations*, we find his definition of the 'ideal,' rational social subject — one who has internalised a system of action that corresponds to the external social system of which they are a part.

Supplementing this generalised conception of rationality, the pursuit of self-interest (or “utility”) characterising economics is supplemented with the concept of “psychic investment,” in which the subject is assumed to rationally (in the above sense) pursue the interests of a range of social actors, including themselves and others such as family, friends, colleagues, fellow-nationals, etc., in whom the social agent has a certain “psychic investment.” Thus in lieu of a reflexive action-consequence-benefit *vector*, the subject acts according to a *matrix* of benefits accruing to the various subjects in whom the agent has an interest in the consequences of any given action they may take.

This kind of generalisation of the ideal rational-atomistic-instrumental model of the utilitarian agent, allows the methods of linear analysis to be applied to social theory in which the basic social agent is conceived of as a kind of *internalised, miniature social system*, rather than as an isolated atom.

“Rationality consists not in acting according to his interests, but in constructing the internal constitution so that the actions generated by the internal system of action will bring him maximum viability.

“This model of an internal structure of actors that is consistent with the linear system of action ... does not eliminate purpose, but pushes it back to a deeper level, the construction of an internal constitution. This is the starting point for a theory of the self.” [*Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990]

Thus rationality does not consist in the perfect, individualist instrumental intelligence of the economic agent of the utilitarianism, but rather in ideal, consistent coordination with some system of interest, trust, delegation, etc..

For example, rather than assuming that a social agent can rationally compute consequences by decoding messages from every other agent, it may be the case that they follow the advice of a trusted other; rather than assuming they pursue individual interest in circumstances where this would lead to mutually assured destruction, the agent may act according to a certain set of *norms*, even without sanctions.

On the face of it, this sounds much more satisfactory than the conception of the subject in economic theory, consistent perhaps with the concept of “subject” from which we began here. However, the construction of the subject formally lies *outside* Coleman’s theory, which concerns itself only with external exchanges *between* subjects. But if the idea that there is more to life than money has any value at all, surely it is precisely in making sense of the constitution of these subjects, not just relations between them; the more so because it precisely the *relationships* of subjects which *constitute* them.

In fact, Coleman says that the ideal agent is the ideal internalisation of the social system, so presumably the ideal internalisation of the ideal social system. So, it seems that Coleman solves the problem of the indeterminate ego upon which the whole edifice is built by asserting that the individual constructs their interests and relationships to others in the same way that the social subject constructs its relationships with other subjects in the system.

An interesting extra light is thrown on the nature of Coleman’s “perfect social system” (and therefore ideal social subject and ideal individual agent) with the observation that in a perfect social system, it should be possible for people to trade political power and economic resources, buy votes in other words, or to trade a decision on one committee for an unrelated decision on another: “An economic system in which power is measured by wealth comes closest to a perfect social system,” and he goes on to observe:

“Because of the existence of money as a fungible medium of exchange, an economic system deviates from a perfect social system primarily in social-structural barriers or transaction costs between pairs of actors, rather than in

non-convertibility between pairs of resources. A major reason why an economic system most closely approximates a perfect social system lies in its very conception: Within such a system there is no intentional non-convertibility of resources as there is, for example, between money and votes ..." [p. 720]

That is to say, Coleman's ideal subject is George Washington Plunkett of Tammany Hall.

While Coleman sees that under existing 'imperfect' conditions, it is necessary to have laws against corporations buying legislation, he observes that the very fact that it is necessary to have such laws while at the same time the laws are systematically flouted, is an indicator of an 'imperfection' in the social system. Coleman holds in fact that legislative bodies are inherently incapable of managing fundamental social change, and furthermore, that national legislative bodies are impotent and effectively irrelevant in a global social world. The kind of informal wheeler-dealing that takes place in small business/local authority/voluntary sector bargaining, constitutes, in Coleman's eyes, a more rational system of social organisation than the existing attempts to wall off a system of political rights in a constitutional-democratic state, from the system of economic and social rights operating in civil society and the economy. He says that such arrangements are necessary to preserve a *plurality* of power, something for which there must be "constitutional arrangements," such as a universal and more ubiquitous right-to-vote — some kind of political anti-trust legislation.

The factors which make up "social capital" are listed by Coleman as: *Obligations and expectations* — "social capital credit slips;" *Information sources*; *Norms and effective sanctions*; *Authority relations* which allow someone to act on behalf of others and/or offer advice; *Appropriable social organisation*, brought into existence for one purpose but which can be used to aid another; *Intentional organisation*, structures of obligations and expectations, responsibility and authority, norms and sanctions intentionally designed for a social purpose.

There is a minor unclarity to do with the availability of information in my view; access to information is listed as part of social capital, but it would seem that information must be counted as a resource like any other. So it seems that the availability of information is subject to the same requirement for convertibility, i.e., there must be no 'artificial' or 'external' constraint on the provision of information, which can be subject to exchange of favours like any other resource.

So what we have is that the 'perfect social system' is actually *laissez faire par excellence*. Just as the market leads to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, *laissez faire* in social capital has the same effect, but with a much more thoroughgoing, dramatic effect, because "social capital" is all-encompassing. Unless there are "constitutional arrangements" to prevent the concentration of social power in the hands of a few — laws against bribery, pork-barrelling, exploitation of children, etc., an independent judiciary, etc., then unrestricted wheeler-dealing will ultimately lead to a form of despotism. The poor will not only have no money, they will also be deprived all rights and non-monetary resources.

We should ask: what is Coleman's purpose in introducing the concept of "social capital"?

"This concept groups some of the processes together and blurs the distinctions between types of social relations, distinctions that are important for other purposes. The value of the concept lies primarily in the fact that it identifies certain aspects of social structure by their function, disregarding differences in form, just as the concept "chair" identifies certain physical objects by their function, disregarding differences in form, appearance, and construction. The function identified by the concept "social capital" is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realise their interests.

“By identifying this function of certain aspects of social structure, the concept of social capital aids both in accounting for different outcomes at the level of individual actors and making micro-to-macro transition without elaborating the social-structural details through which this occurs. ... Whether social capital will come to be as useful a quantitative concept in social science as are the concepts of financial capital, physical capital, and human capital remains to be seen; its *current* value lies primarily in its usefulness for qualitative analyses of social systems and for those quantitative analyses that employ qualitative indicators.” [p. 305]

That is, Coleman’s approach renders “social capital” as a *quantitative* entity, which may be put into circulation or invested and which returns a profit on investment, even though Coleman recognises that conceptualising it as an additive quantity is not yet the same thing as being able to usefully calculate its magnitude for any given real individual. This kind of gap between conception and actual calculation is normal for economic theories, and such a gap is not on its own any basis for denigrating it as a possible basis for theorising. *If*, Coleman’s quantification holds up, then he has, it would seem, described something which can be legitimately described as a “form of capital,” and should facilitate mobilising the mathematical apparatus of modern economic theory across a much broader front.

Despite the questionable normative element, one would not have to be a total cynic to think that this approach, if it proves to be analytically valid, would have some powerful insights to give us about how society works. Let’s look then at this ‘linear action theory’ on which Coleman’s highly mathematical apparatus is built.

By ‘linear system of action’ is meant that one-to-one relations may be aggregated indefinitely, as is mirrored by the application of mathematical addition of effects, without “friction;” “linear” means that one plus one equals two, and a million such additions equal a million. To be slightly more precise, linear action theory adds vectors in n-dimensional space, so addition is not “scalar” like $1+1+1=3$, but rather, vectors add like the sides of a cube; the diagonal of a cube is not 3, but the *square root* of 3 times the length of one side. So adding a thousand steps will not take you a thousand metres; in linear action theory it will take you as far as a thousand steps in which each step is in a different, independently chosen, direction from the previous step. This theory has been applied with great success to natural processes in which very simple individual reactions are aggregated in large masses, such as in the behaviour of gases, Brownian motion, and so on. If $1 + 1$ equals much more than 1, as for example when an oil is heated to flashpoint; or much less than 1 as in “two’s company three’s a crowd,” then we have “non-linearity.”

The calculation of “social capital” illustrated briefly above is executed as mentioned by matrix multiplication. This allows the influence exercised indirectly by ‘social credit slips’ to be multiplied through long chains of influence and added up across all potential chains of effect.

Such a calculation is true, however, only under the conditions of ‘*linearity*’. Examples of systems which are *not* linear include not only systems with “friction” and “transaction costs,” but systems in which inhibitors or catalysts operate for example. Personally, I believe that the idea that social systems can be subject to linear action theory is absurd. No real natural system such as an ecology or organism is even remotely linear, even the more complex chemical reactions are non-linear. At most one can imagine a kind of market-place in which favours of various kinds are exchanged in addition to commodities. Coleman’s claim to a social theory with a mathematical foundation comparable with contemporary economic theory is crucial to the validity of the concept of social capital, but a moment’s reflection demonstrates that the claim is spurious.

The suspect character of Coleman's mathematics has not dissuaded Coleman's acolytes from inventing newer and bigger formulae to calculate social capital without even the foundation of linear action theory to fall back on, generally by simply converting ordinary-language sentences descriptive of social capital into formulae with lots of sub- and superscripts, Σ s and Π s.

However on the other hand, money does, within well-known and not inconsiderable bounds, behave linearly. For example, monetary incomes can be added up to determine an agent's total income; interest accrues over the years according to the formula of compound interest; income from capital through chains of company-ownership can be computed with some sense. I think it highly unlikely that Coleman's "social capital" computations, on the other hand, work beyond the most trivial application.

The fraudulent nature of the quantitative material and the questionable nature of the ethical content, still does not take away from the qualitative insights. Generally speaking, these are to enumerate and study the range of other means people use to achieve their ends outside of the economy proper, and the events and policies which may undermine these means or serve to expand them.

An issue that needs looking at though is that the concept of "social capital" groups together as a single quantity a range of different phenomena, and this aspect is precisely what makes it useful for quantitative analysis and social policy and which justifies its designation as a form of capital. Here and there Coleman remarks that social capital, or some kinds of social capital, may have negative effects (for example, social capital may militate against innovation and social capital facilitates whatever anyone wants to do, destructive as well as creative activities, comments which are, by the way, just as applicable to capital as such). Generally speaking, however, using the concept in analysis implies accepting that society needs *more* social capital, and the specific nature and *diversity* of the social phenomena concerned is rendered secondary. Otherwise, the device of *aggregating* "social capital" is meaningless.

So, if Coleman's "perfect social system" is where we arrive when "social capital is complete," the value of the concept of "social capital" comes to depend on the normative value of the "perfect social system."

And yet, we have observed that the "perfect social system" has some features which are counter-intuitive as features of an "ideal" system. We have to ask ourselves whether the enforcement of political domains, where political subjects enjoy formally equal rights, insulated from civil society where inequality is endemic, is an 'imperfection' best done away with. Should bribery be regarded as a legitimate expenditure of one's assets, and laws against bribery as bureaucratic interference with the free market? Are laws against corruption and bribery a necessary evil until such time as our culture achieves a level where the community tolerates individuals who want to spend their assets on votes? Whose interests are served by the constraints on "social capital" found in modern society? And whose interests would be served by their removal?

Coleman's view is that the segregation of the political process from economic and informal pressures is unfortunately necessary to ensure a 'plurality of power,' much like anti-cartel laws, but hints at other 'constitutional arrangements' to redistribute power which would be more suitable to modern, globalised society and allow vote-buying, nepotism, racial discrimination, branch-stacking, careerism, favouritism, blackmail and bribery to be accepted as normal and legitimate part of social and political practice.

For those who do not favour the Tammany Hall philosophy of life, the challenge is, I think, to elaborate a vision of a 'perfect social system' which can do better, or at the very least, explain

how the power relations of civil society are to be prevented from determining political decision-making.

This author's own experience is in the trade union movement, a domain where generally speaking no services are rendered for payment of money and formally at least, decisions are made rationally, for the good of the union and not according to the informal leverage held by someone or by return of favours. Coleman's description of "social capital" very much reminds me of the way certain union bureaucrats work, very "powerful" people who, despite being utterly incompetent in leadership could never be removed by election because of the network of favours and levers they have established over time which could always be activated when needed at election time or in order to get a required result on a committee. I know enough of the Australian Labor Party to know that much the same kind of relations apply within that party and I suspect in other political parties and in local government everywhere.

The kind of sensuous understanding of "social capital" this experience has given me is sufficient demonstration that "social capital" in Coleman's sense is a real entity, but it is very far from convincing me that it is something which contributes to the general good. An ordinary member of the union who is in trouble and needs the union's help typically needs some kind of "social capital." If a union is working well, then the necessary lines of communication and obligation are there for them: they know how to contact the relevant local union official who in turn knows how to activate and mobilise the necessary assistance and will not need to be pressured in order to render assistance. A situation where a union member needs "connections" in the union in order to get assistance is a situation indicative of malaise.

Greenwich Village vs. Tammany Hall

How does Coleman's "Tammany Hall" vision of modern life compare with Jane Jacobs' "self-governing" neighbourhoods; would Tammany Hall have helped Jane Jacobs stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway? The question is rhetorical of course: it was Tammany Hall that she was fighting! When Robert Moses sat opposite Jane Jacobs in their fiery confrontations over the building of the Expressway, it was not two *theories* of social capital which confronted one another, but two moral philosophies, two conceptions of *ethical life*, two opposite ideas about the way poor residents of New York ought to live.

Of all the different conceptions of "social capital" I will deal with here, Coleman's comes closest to being a legitimate form of capital — influence, information, access to personal networks, etc., are all tradeable commodities. Unsurprisingly, on closer examination, it also turns out to be the most consistent with the ethos of capital. Jane Jacobs' conception is surely the conception which least justified its label as a form of capital, but it is the only conception which I would want to pursue.

Both conceptions have been very influential, although in terms of social capital literature, Jane Jacobs is generally seen as part of the "prehistory" of social capital. Coleman's mathematical apparatus and general definition of social capital has given a great deal of *academic legitimacy* to the term, but so far as I can see, his own Tammany Hall conception has been thoroughly eclipsed by Robert Putnam's social-democratic interpretation, which has moved part of the way back to Jane Jacobs' original insights.

5. Robert Putnam

Robert Putnam's concept of "social capital" is the opposite of James Coleman's in two respects. Firstly, Putnam is an "empiricist" in contrast to Coleman as a "rationalist;" secondly, Putnam conceives "social capital" as "civicness" or "sociability," a *virtue* or propensity which can inhere in individuals or whole communities in contrast to Coleman's

conception of *levers of power* over other people which can be *possessed* by individuals. The implications of Putnam's conception for social policy are consequently quite different from those of Coleman's conception even though there is considerable overlap in terminology.

What Coleman does is to define an elementary mathematical model of the relationship between two individuals, viz., the "social capital credit slip," and elaborates a mathematical model for the aggregation of these relations by means of the presumption of linear action. If confronted with a real individual in a real community, Coleman has no means of proceeding towards the calculation of the "social capital" held by the individual, their power to control events of interest to them. The mathematical model nevertheless gives the social policy maker a broad idea of how social power is held and how it is accumulated, the kind of measures which contribute to the "efficiency" of the social capital market and identify events and relationships which may be contributors to someone's "social capital."

Putnam, on the other hand, is a *statistician*; his starting point is just a generalised conception of what is to be measured (civicness or sociability) and a real community in which it inheres to a greater or lesser degree. The entity to be measured is *manifested* in various phenomena which are deemed all to be manifestations of the *same* entity which itself lies outside the domain of perception. The entity itself therefore cannot be measured; it is a *metaphysical* entity.

At the time of writing of his earlier book, on Italy (*Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, 1993) Putnam referred to this entity as "civicness;" by the time of his writing of his book on America (*Bowling Alone*, 2000), he had adopted Coleman's term, "social capital."

I will explain in due course why I refer to his concept of "social capital" as a "metaphysical entity," but it should not be taken from this characterisation that I deny that "there is something there." I will, for short, refer to Putnam's concept of "social capital" as SQ, by analogy with IQ. IQ measures the score in an IQ test, and the extent that there is something called "Intelligence" *lying behind* the IQ score is a matter of debate. It is legitimate to argue over whether this or that IQ test succeeds in indicating the generalised conception which is deemed to be manifested in answering the questions on the test paper. Likewise, SQ is the score in a certain range of tests, which is deemed to be a measure of the "Sociability" or civic engagement manifested by an individual, community or any arbitrary sociological sample. The inclusion or not of certain measures, and the weight given them, is a legitimate point of argument, in terms of whether or not the scores reflect the manifestation of the entity whose generalised conception is presumed to underlie behaviour.

At the outset it should be mentioned that Putnam is a sophisticated statistician; all statements made in both books are supported by statistical significance tests on multi-variate arrays of data. It would be tempting to criticise these books from the point of view of statistical analysis or quality of data, but I will take Putnam's word that all the statements he makes are adequately justified in *statistical* terms, in so far as statistics is *in principle capable* of offering support. Although I do intend to subject the measurement of "social capital," "SQ," to some criticism, I am going to uncritically accept the myriad of *other* measures used by Putnam in these two books. Arguments about whether, for example, sufficient weight is given to participating in email listservs as against playing bowls is a legitimate question, but it is very much a debate *within* the conceptual framework of Putnam's idea.

Briefly, *Making Democracy Work* is a report on studies carried out over a period of 23 years since the introduction of regional governments in Italy. Some of these governments (mainly in the North) have "succeeded" and brought about real and lasting improvements in the life of their regions; some (mainly in the South) have failed dismally. Putnam proves that the success of the regional administrations, according to a plausible and comprehensive measure,

is correlated with the SQ of the region's population, and holding SQ constant, relatively uncorrelated with all other factors. He further traces the same trends in SQ back to events in the 12th century AD.

Bowling Alone describes the rise and fall of SQ in the United States, peaking around 1965, declining and then virtually collapsing in the 1980s and 90s, but demonstrates wide differences in SQ across the 50 mainland states. To an astounding degree, *all* kinds of sociability display almost precisely the same historical trajectory. Putnam goes on to prove that almost every measure of the quality of social life, from child mortality to literacy to industrialisation, are correlated almost exclusively with SQ, and nothing else, if SQ is "held constant." The geographical spread of SQ, like in Italy, displays a marked North/South divide, with historical roots going back centuries.

a. Calculation of SQ

In Italy (*Making Democracy Work*, p. 96) the "Civic Community Index" (SQ) was calculated as the weighted average of four measures:

1. Voting by party rather than person in general elections;
2. Participating in 5 national referenda 1974-1987;
3. Reading a daily newspaper;
4. Belonging to a sports or cultural association of any kind.

For the purpose of measuring Civic Involvement 1860-1920, a slightly different mix was used:

1. Strength of mass-based political parties 1919-1921;
2. Incidence of cooperatives, 1889-1915;
3. Membership in mutual aid societies, 1873-1904;
4. Electoral turnout, 1919-1921;
5. Local associations founded before 1860.

In America (*Bowling Alone*, p. 291), 14 factors were combined in the Social Capital Index (SQ):

1. Percent people who served on committee of local organisation in past year;
2. Percent people who served as officer of club or organisation in past year;
3. No. of civic and social organisations per 1,000 population;
4. Mean number of club meetings attended in last year per person;
5. Mean number of group memberships per person;
6. Turnout in presidential elections, 1988 and 1992;
7. Percent attended public meeting on town or school affairs in last year;
8. Number of non-profit organisations per 1,000 population;
9. Mean number of times a person worked on community project in last year;
10. Mean number of times a person did volunteer work in past year;
11. Number agree that "I spend a lot of time visiting friends;"
12. Mean number of times entertained friends at home;
13. Number agree that "Most people can be trusted;"
14. Number agree that "Most people are honest."

Having created the index, Putnam can then measure the extent to which each of the component measures are correlated with the index itself and with the other components, a correlation approaching 100% indicating that each component is measuring the same entity. In the Italian index, correlation varies from 71% for newspaper readers to 91% for people voting by party; in the American index, 66% for people volunteering, working on community

projects and entertaining friends to 92% for people agreeing that ‘most people can be trusted’.

In addition to the above components of the SQ calculated across a population, other phenomena may be deemed to be reflective of civicness, most comprehensively discussed in relation to America: working for a political party, writing a letter to the editor or one’s Congressman or writing an article for a paper or magazine, making a speech, signing a petition, attending a rally or public meeting, running for office, talking to neighbours, visiting friends, donating to charity or paying dues to an organisation (with qualifications), participating in a team sport, eating out with friends or family, attending church, discussing personal matters at work, advising others on how to vote, even eating with the family rather than alone, going out to movies or a disco rather than watching TV, watching the news rather than soaps, sending greeting cards to friends and relatives, playing rather than watching sports, observing traffic laws and laws in general, sending email or participating in listservs, making a long-distance phone call or any phone call at all and so on. The specific features of a factor, the strength of its association with the SQ, its age-dependency and historical trajectory is discussed in each case.

Other phenomena, related to well-being, are investigated for correlation with SQ, to test the hypothesis that SQ generates well-being in various guises, and we find that the decline in SQ means we are dying earlier, sicker, more depressed and prone to suicide, committing and victims of more crime, poorer than we would otherwise be, unhappier, less able to defend our community from toxic waste dumps or highways, unemployed (in a state having higher unemployment), cynical and distrustful of both government and strangers (or your neighbours, since you don’t know them), guilty of tax-evasion, political extremism or religious fanaticism, prone to joining gangs (a low-grade form of social capital, by way of compensation), over-eating and generally with a poor diet. We stay indoors, watching TV, channel-surfing, moaning about the government but never voting, demanding the death penalty for crimes, but not hesitating to commit crime if we could get away with it, not talking even to our spouses, probably living alone in a gated-village where we have employees to guard us, using lawyers every time we buy a sandwich and getting a service to deliver and return kids to/from school while we worked late and spent 2 hours in our car going to and from work, if we had a job, which is less likely. All of these phenomena are correlated with SQ measured across various segments of population.

In terms of factors associated with SQ which are candidates for being identified as *causes*, the first and most significant of Putnam’s findings is that declining SQ is a *generational* problem: individuals do not generally change their SQ throughout their life (outside of life-cycle patterns which are reproduced by successive generations), but each succeeding generation has adopted distinctively different habits and attitudes from early and carried them throughout their life. Putnam produces a number of graphs showing population-wide trends over the 20th century all of which have a startlingly similar pattern of SQ: rising up to the beginning of the Depression, during which SQ takes a dive, rising steeply during the war and continuing to increase up till about 1960-65, becoming unstable, declining from about 1975, and then plummeting during last decade or two of the century. Looking at age-specific phenomena, these curves are able to be deconstructed into a steady replacement of the members of the “long civic generation” born between 1910 and 1945, by Boomers born between 1945 and 1965 and Gen-Xers born between 1965 and 1980, each successive generation starting out with a lower SQ than its predecessor. The one ray of sunshine is that there has been a slight increase in volunteering among teenagers in recent years.

Putnam speculates about causes for this generational decline in sociability. He treats generational change (constant across all segments of the American population) as an

independent factor alongside TV (10-15%), work pressures / two-career families (10%), suburban sprawl / motor car (10%) and 15% “unaccounted for.” According to Putnam, generational change accounts for 50% of the historical decline in SQ, about a third of this resulting from being reared on TV. So TV is a major factor in his explanation, but so too are other historical conditions affecting the changing outlook of these generations.

Statistics has a limited capacity to shed light on causality: if two phenomena, A and B, are correlated, then for A to be shown to be a cause of B, A must be *prior* in time to B, A may be found without B, but not B without A, relatively speaking, since there will always be enabling or inhibiting conditions and residual effects, and in addition, there must be a *plausible causation theory*. This latter condition is generally ignored by statisticians as it is by Putnam, or rather Putnam confines himself to plausible causation hypotheses, and does not test the correlation of PTA membership in America with population of zebras in Lusotho. [John Maynard Keynes was the first to prove this, in his work as a mathematician before he made his name as a political economist, in *A Treatise on Probability*, 1920]

Nevertheless, statistics can make a reasonable contribution to *eliminating* causation hypotheses, and perhaps even more interesting are the various factors which Putnam considers and rejects as causes for individual, generational or population differences in SQ. The skilled use of multivariate factor analysis is necessary for this. Phenomena A, B and C may all be correlated across a population P, but if P is divided into sub-populations, PA in each of which A is constant, and the correlation of B and C computed in each sub-population PA, and then averaged across all PA, then we find the correlation of B and C “with A held constant.”

In this way, Putnam proves that wealth, educational level, race, religiosity, gender, urban/suburban/rural living, white/blue collar employment, all *affect* SQ, but do not account for generational or geographical *change* in SQ, and while these and more may be correlated with each other as well as happiness, health, cynicism, honesty and much else, none of the well-being “outcomes” are correlated with these other sociological “inputs” when SQ is held constant: SQ emerges then as the predominant *cause* of well-being in a population.

As an aside, Putnam is embarrassingly inept in a couple of cases: he rejects “capitalism” as a cause of the historical trajectory of SQ in America, because “capitalism is a constant and a constant can’t explain a variable,” despite the fact that all the factors he *does* identify as causes in the case of America, arise directly out of capitalism and the development of the relations of production of capitalism, while the southern deficit in SQ originates specifically from the persistence of pre-bourgeois relations. The strong correlation between successful regional government in Italy and PCI control of a regional government is dismissed by the thesis that the PCI had an *ulterior motive* for running the regional administrations well, to support their credentials for national government [*Making Democracy Work*, p. 119].

This particular blind-spot, is further explored in a review by Sidney Tarrow, whose thesis is that progressive political parties in Italy (as elsewhere) have deliberately fostered civic engagement — the result rather than the cause of the effective performance of democratic institutions:

“Thus, the impressive correlations that Putnam displays in Chapter 5 (figures 5.3 and 5.4), which he interprets as evidence of a causal link between past civic competence and present regional performance, can also be interpreted as a correlation between progressive politics then and now and between progressive political traditions and civic capacity. In both periods, electorates were deliberately mobilised on the basis of networks of mass organisations and social and recreational associations; and in both, civic competence was deliberately developed after World War II as a symbol of the left-wing parties’

governing capacity. Both progressive politics and civic capacity were correspondingly weak in the South.

“To some, these may seem like methodological niceties, but they begin to indicate an alternative model: The operative cause of the performance of the regional institutions in both North and South is neither cultural nor associational but political. Expressed in the form of a hypothesis, the historical evidence can be read as support for the idea that the nineteenth-century popular politics of north-central Italy are themselves the cause of both the civic community and the positive performance of its regional governments. But something more than party building was occurring in nineteenth-century Italy — there was also state building and the differential structure of a public culture.” [p. 394]

“Every regime that governed southern Italy from the Norman establishment of a centralised monarchy in the twelfth century to the unified government which took over there in 1861 was foreign and governed with a logic of colonial exploitation. ...

“Nor did southern Italy’s semicolonial status suddenly disappear with unification. The region was joined to the North by a process of royal conquest, its fragile commercial sector brutally merged with the North’s more flourishing economy, a uniform tax system and customs union imposed on its vulnerable industries, and brigandage rooted out by a full-scale military campaign. Politically, the South’s communes and provinces were governed by northern administrators who regarded the region as a *terra di missione*, ...”

“But if this reviewer is correct, and if the absence of civic capacity is the by-product of politics, state building, and social structure, then the causes of the malaise in U.S. cities or in Third World agriculture are more likely to be found in such structural factors as the flight of real capital, in the first case, and the instability of commodity prices and the presence of exploitative governments, in the second. In north Philadelphia and the Sahel, as in Southern Italy, while the indicators of malaise may be civic, the causes are structural. If my critique of Putnam in Southern Italy can be extended as far as his theory, then policy makers who attack the lack of social capital by encouraging association would be attacking the symptoms and not the causes of the problem.” [*Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time*, American Political Science Review, June 1996, Sidney Tarrow, p. 396]

Responses to Putnam’s work are generating a rising chorus of cries that government and political structures and action outside the state (such as corporatist agreements between unions and employers leaders in Sweden, moves towards compromise between the former civil war foes in Spain) are major creators and destroyers of “sociability.”

In decoupling “generational” effects from the three factors identified as other significant factors (work pressures, urban sprawl and TV) all of which have been generationally changing experiences, Putnam can only speculate. Loss of religiosity or “secularisation” is eliminated, but Putnam entertains psychological speculations about how the experience of *war* and possibly the memory of the Depression figure as factors which may have inculcated sociability and civic mindedness in the generations which experienced war service and mobilisation and remembered the Depression.

In the Italian study, Putnam shows that SQ in a region in 1900 was a better predictor of both industrial performance and SQ in the same region in 1980 than industrial performance in 1900, and the same claim can be made for infant mortality, per capita income, urbanisation or

industrialisation. Putnam can go so far as to claim, alluding to the negative legacy of Catholicism:

“Good government in Italy is a by-product of singing groups and soccer clubs, not prayer” [*Making Democracy Work*, p. 176]

and in reference to statistical correlations of factors affecting the health of Americans:

“As a rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year *in half*. If you smoke and belong to no groups, it’s a toss up statistically whether you should stop smoking or start joining ... In round numbers, getting married is the ‘happiness equivalent’ of quadrupling your annual income. ... Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or church attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income.” [*Bowling Alone*, p. 331-3]

b. Putnam’s Concept of “social capital” (SQ)

Before going on to examine some of Putnam’s more detailed findings and the contribution he has made to resolving some speculation about the nature of modernity and the factors contributing to contemporary malaise, I want to examine in a little more detail how his concept differs from that of James Coleman, not only methodologically but conceptually.

Looking over the 23 measures which are incorporated in the three different formulations of SQ, we can see that what Putnam is measuring is the disposition people manifest towards civic engagement, sociability, either formal or informal, and recognise norms of reciprocity with strangers, in a given social setting. We say disposition *manifested* because what is measured is only actions taken, rather than preferences (though preferences are consulted in some cases when Putnam wants to shed light on causality), and joining, for example, depends on having something to join, and consequently, among other things, on the existence of other joiners; trust depends not just on psychological disposition, but on experience and the rationally assessed trustworthiness of others.

The heterogeneity of the components is justified on one hand by the close correlation between them and by a hypothesis that they all originate *causally* from a common disposition towards sociability. As an empiricist, Putnam pays no attention to the need for such an hypothesis, just as Coleman seems unperturbed by the insuperable challenge of measuring “social capital” under his rationalistic definition.

For example, if one were to define the “temperature” of a gas as the average of the mv^2 of all molecules in a sample, this sheds a great deal of light on the nature of temperature and makes it possible to found thermodynamics on the exact science of statistical mechanics, but it does not tell you the temperature of any given body of gas. For that you need a column of mercury and the Centigrade scale. This is the methodological difference.

But there is also a difference in content, in the *ethos* which Putnam and Coleman are measuring. “Social capital” for Putnam is a condition existing in a population in which the citizens have a disposition towards civic or amicable engagement. Individuals partake in this “social capital” by their contribution towards civic or amicable engagement. Norms of reciprocity, trust, widely distributed organisational skill, and freely flowing information are the intangible substances manifested in the measure of “social capital.”

It is in this sense that I have characterised Putnam’s concept of “social capital” as a “metaphysical entity,” for it is a “something” which lies behind the manifestations of civicness *perceived* as SQ, a “something” which is not directly amenable to perception but which is *inferred* from perception. But nevertheless, the generalised conception of “social capital” is *civicness*.

For Coleman, on the other hand, “social capital” is informal “credit notes” for favours done, held by an individual who has used her control over events to do favours, and expects a return. The total social capital in a population is the sum of the social capital wielded by each individual within the population. The holder of a large quantity of social capital is the Tammany Hall official who has large numbers of the citizenry, contractors, government officials, community leaders, etc., in his *debt*. It is private property which has been accumulated by self-interested use of relations of reciprocity. The person who wants to acquire “social capital” in Coleman’s sense will always seek to incur *obligation* to return a favour and seek improvements in their own standing insofar as they act in the more general interest.

This definition of “social capital,” rather than reflecting relations of reciprocity and an orientation towards civiness, more closely resembles what Putnam calls “patron/client” relations, which although recognised as sociality and as a rational social orientation in a society where such relations are dominant, he does not refer to as “social capital” and does not pick up in the components of SQ.

I think it is fair to say that there is a lot of rapport between Putnam’s and Jane Jacobs’ conceptions, though they are not identical in focus, methodology or content. The methodological differences make it difficult to rationally contrast the underlying concepts.

Let us return to my theme of the aptness of the words “social capital” to denote the metaphysical entity underlying SQ. Putnam’s social capital is really much more like social and ethical infrastructure or social *environment* than disposable assets. When the civic-minded person goes to live in a community, are they going to find other civic-minded people to work with? or they going to find that no-one turns up to the public meetings or afternoon teas that they organise and are the flowers they plant on the roadside going to get pulled up overnight?

This is a *real* issue. That Putnam has shown that there is a measurable quantity reflecting this “civiness” or “sociability;” that it has determinable historical roots and causes is of great value.

Putnam is concerned with *belief* and the *rational basis* for belief in the *existence of norms of symmetric reciprocity* in a community; it is these norms that make life easier, more productive, happier, healthier and more fulfilling.

These norms are “externals” for Coleman, in the sense that the existence of norms of reciprocity constitute the extent to which the presumed, ideal social capital market corresponds to the actuality. In order that “social capital credit slips” can be added up, it has to be presumed that favours will be returned. Consequently, Coleman’s conception of social capital *rests on* norms of reciprocity, but it does not measure them; Putnam’s concept of social capital on the other hand, endeavours to *measure* norms of reciprocity, but is less concerned to measure the extent to which people are actively drawing on them.

Putnam seems to hold that the active orientation of people towards civic engagement and the extent to which people believe in the existence of norms of reciprocity are the measurable phenomena of “civiness.” Nevertheless, Putnam introduces us to certain qualitative distinction in “social capital,” which cut across the idea that “civiness” is something of which a community has more or less, rather than a different kind.

When a good idea like this comes along, there are always epigones who have to make themselves a name by further developing the idea. One thing Coleman and Putnam have in common in their conception of “social capital” and a feature which goes a small way to justifying conceiving of it as “capital” is that for both of them it is a *quantity*. Elaboration of the original idea in the academic literature falls into two lines of enquiry: (i) further

elaboration of mathematical *formulae*, and (ii) deconstruction of the quantitative conception into *types* of social capital.

The literature on mathematical aspects of “social capital” that I have seen is of very little value. Some writers try to merge the Coleman and Putnam concepts and set up long formulae adding up sums and products of different measures of social relationships in the hope of “predicting” the SQ. There is no thought in this literature of the application of “linear action theory;” it is just the empiricist search for correspondences between different metaphysical entities; the formulae are no more accessible to computation than Coleman’s linear action formulae and usually serve no better function than to put a respectable “scientific” gloss over empirical sociological speculation.

The other line of enquiry which is used for generating publications picks up on the remarks that Putnam especially, but Coleman as well, make about different *types* of social capital. The problem with this literature is that it is unconsciously unwinding the quantitative conception of “social capital” back towards a qualitative description, at which point the whole of Putnam (and Coleman’s) achievements fall to bits, for it is based on the observation that different types of phenomena can be subsumed together in a single measure, pointing to a single metaphysical entity. This is all very well. If the results of our investigation show that certain kinds of orientation foster norms of reciprocity and others do not, then we are moving towards a different theory of the origins of public ethos and we should clearly state that “social capital” is an ideological construction.

I would like to briefly outline now the different distinctions between “types of social capital” that are introduced by Robert Putnam.

The concepts relevant to identifying different *kinds* of social capital are introduced in the latter pages of *Making Democracy Work* and the early pages of *Bowling Alone*; I refer to the distinctions between “bridging” and “bonding” social capital, and the related question of the “dark side” of social capital, and the interrelated group of distinctions between “weak” and “strong” bonds (p. 175), or “thick” and “thin” ties, and the radius of association.

c. Bridging vs, Bonding social capital

Putnam describes the distinction between *bridging and bonding*, two “types of social capital,” as follows:

“Networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive. It was social capital, for example, that enabled Timothy McVeigh to bomb the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, McVeigh’s network of friends, bound together by a norm of reciprocity, enabled him to do what he could not have done alone. Similarly, urban gangs, NIMBY movements, and power elites often exploit social capital to achieve ends that are antisocial from a wider perspective. ... Social capital, in short, can be directed towards malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital. ... Therefore it is important to ask how the positive consequences of social capital — mutual progress, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness — can be maximised and the negative manifestations — sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption — minimised. Toward this end, scholars have begun to distinguish between different forms of social capital. ...

“Of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between *bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive). Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups ...

Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. ... Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilising solidarity. ... Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion.” [Bowling Alone, p. 21-22]

Closely related to the distinction between bridging and bonding is the distinction between “thick” and “thin” relations of community:

“The trust that is required to sustain cooperation is not blind. Trust entails a prediction about the behaviour of an independent actor. ‘You do not trust a person (or an agency) to do something merely because he says he will do it. You trust him because, knowing what you know of his disposition, his available options and their consequences, his ability and so forth you expect that he will *choose* to do it.’ In small close-knit communities, this prediction can be based on what Bernard Williams calls ‘thick trust,’ that is, a belief that rests on immediate familiarity with *this* individual. In larger, more complex settings, however, a more impersonal or indirect form of trust is required.” [Making Democracy Work, p. 171]

Thus a “thick” ethos is one which enmeshes its participants in a dense network of relations in which every action has multiple ramifications, such as pertains in the classic rural village where everyone knows everyone. This kind of trust is associated with extreme conformity and social stability, and is the kind of setting which is disappearing in modernity. What predominates in modernity is a “thin” ethos within which people are constrained in their cooperation with strangers despite the fact that the ramifications of any action are unlikely to redound on the actors. It is this kind of trust, described so aptly by Jane Jacobs in her description of the side-walk culture of inner city neighbourhoods, which sustains the fabric of modern life.

The contrast between “weak” and “strong” ties is similar. The concept of a “radius of trust” concerns the social distance, presumably measured by the number of people belonging within a given radius, and entails the idea that at a larger radius, relations are weaker, that ties that extend outside of the circle of one’s associates, neighbours and friends, ties have a correspondingly weaker ramification. Putnam points out the importance for social life of the existence of these “weak” ties, which allow you to find out about jobs, drum up support for a cause and so on. The existence of a wide radius of trust facilitates the development of intricate interlocking networks and “grape-vines,” without the suffocating conformism of too many strong ties.

I think there is no doubt that this insight is valuable in understanding the problems of modernity. This distinction tends to fall below the radar of Putnam’s SQ, however. The component measures focus on activity along “weak” ties, at a relatively wide “radius,” but in *Bowling Alone* he includes visiting and entertaining friends in the computation of SQ, and claims a correlation of about 70% with SQ for these propensities. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that maintaining a circle of friends exhibits a propensity which could be further expressed in civic participation.

Let us accept that this discovery of a “thin ethos” sustaining public life in modernity is genuine, and that the contrast with “thick ethos,” found not only in village life, but in institutions and organisations with well-defined codes of behaviour, hierarchy and division of responsibility, is an important one. I question whether “social capital” is an appropriate way of conceptualising this phenomenon.

Let us draw on the concept of *subject* introduced in the first part of this article. Generally speaking the relations between individuals within a social subject are thick, inasmuch as these

relations all belong to a single system of activity, and have multiple ramifications throughout the system. A small rural village is a clear example of a social subject exhibiting a “thick ethos” binding individuals into its cultural norms. On the other hand, the typical relations pertaining in modernity between total strangers include those of commodity exchange, so long as there exists the “thin ethos” characteristic of lawful behaviour in the public arena. As we have said, these relations which are referred to as a “thin ethos” are one of the typical relations *between* subjects, provided they meet each other with mutual respect and esteem.

The observation that there exist “bridging” and “bonding” forms of “social capital” is therefore, in the terms I am using here, the observation that in modernity participate as component parts of social subjects and relate thereby to individuals as component parts of other subjects, and that this contrast is reflected in different kinds of relationship governing by different norms of behaviour.

However, according to the approach we are arguing for here, these two relationships do not exhaust the field of possible relationships. Relations between subjects can also be those of dominance/hierarchy (which we will come to in the next section) and solidarity (which we will come to in the third part of this article). The simple contrast between bridging and bonding however subsumes the relation of solidarity under “bridging” in a way that is unsatisfactory, and *excludes* the relation of dominance/hierarchy altogether. Jane Jacobs made the point that the very essence of the ethos which underpins life in modernity is that the relationship of solidarity which a child may learn on the sidewalk is that it is *not paid for*. Thus this is entirely distinct from the kind of “social credit slip” which underpins Coleman’s conception and which is still lingering in the background of Putnam’s “civicness,” as there seems to have been no settling of accounts between these two conceptions.

d. Vertical vs. Horizontal social capital

Putnam also introduced the distinction between horizontal networks and “patron-client” relations which, as I read it, Putnam does not count as “social capital” at all, even though they are “social capital” *par excellence* under the Coleman and Bourdieu definitions. Putnam also talks about “vertical” and “horizontal” relations, but it would seem that “vertical relations” (such as a soccer team which elects a captain) are not synonymous with “patron/client” relations.

“Any society — modern or traditional, authoritarian or democratic, feudal or capitalist — is characterised by networks of interpersonal communication and exchange, both formal and informal. Some of these networks are primarily ‘horizontal,’ bringing together agents of equivalent status and power. Others are primarily ‘vertical,’ linking unequal agents in asymmetrical relations of hierarchy and dependence. In the real world, of course, almost all networks are mixes of the horizontal and the vertical: Even bowling teams have captains, while prison guards occasionally fraternise with inmates. ...

“A vertical network, no matter how dense and no matter how important to its participants, cannot sustain trust and cooperation. Vertical flows of information are often less reliable than horizontal flows, in part because the subordinate husbands information as a hedge against exploitation. More important, sanctions that support norms of reciprocity against the threat of opportunism are less likely to be imposed upwards and less likely to be acceded to, if imposed. ...

“Patron-client relations, for example, involve interpersonal exchange and reciprocal obligations, but the exchange is vertical and the obligations asymmetric ... vertical bonds of clientelism ‘seem to undermine the horizontal

group organisation and solidarity of clients and patrons alike — but especially of the clients.’ Two clients of the same patron, lacking direct ties, hold nothing hostage to one another. They have nothing at stake against mutual defection and nothing to fear from mutual alienation. They have no occasion to develop a norm of generalised reciprocity and no history of mutual collaboration to draw on. In the vertical patron-client relationship, characterised by dependence instead of mutuality, opportunism is more likely on the part of both patron (exploitation) and client (shirking). The fact that vertical networks are less helpful may be one reason why capitalism turned out to be more efficient than feudalism in the eighteenth century, and why democracy has proven more effective than autocracy in the twentieth century.” [*Making Democracy Work*, p. 174-5]

As Putnam conjectures, the social habits of “patron/client,” implanted in the 12th century in the south of both Italy and the United States (and according to Fukuyama, in France), have long-lasting effects. In general, Putnam talks of “patron/client relations” always in the context of an alternative, antithetical mode of social connection to the norms of symmetric reciprocity which manifest “civicness.” At the same time, in passing, he accepts the categorisation of delegation and representation as “vertical” relations, like patronage. Serving on a committee or making a speech are counted in the calculation of SQ as manifestations of civicness, but then a bowling team electing a captain is taken as an instance of “vertical social capital.” Other writers, make much of this business of “different kinds of social capital,” of good and bad social capital. This is not the dominant theme of Putnam’s writing. But he is unclear about this. The subsumption of all these different kinds of relation under a single measure, however, key as it is to the concept of “social capital,” is surely problematic even within Putnam’s own terms. People who voluntarily come together and bend someone’s arm to function as “secretary” are expressing a relation of solidarity, building a new subjectivity and pressing one of their number into service in order to give their subjectivity a human voice. This complex of relationships is the diametric opposite of a group of people who, with no relationship between them at all, are herded together under the whip of, for example, an employer or a landlord or whatever in the “patron/client” relation.

Let us bring together these two aspects of the *quality* of social relations (bridging vs bonding and horizontal vs vertical). Modernity extends the radius of social relations, supplanting the “thick” ethos of a range of traditional and bureaucratic relationships with the *commodity* relation. This is manifested in expansion of the market and especially the financial sector, the blossoming of the service sector, including contract employment, consultancy, part-time and casual work, the socialisation of women’s labour, the corporatisation of internal corporate relations, privatisation of utilities and other government and social services, the intellectual property boom, mass media and the decline of status of teachers, priests and other authority figures.

The commodity relation both fosters and requires the support of an ethos of symmetric reciprocity, of fair dealing with strangers. Asymmetric relationships, whether aristocratic or bureaucratic, are undermined by modernity, but these relations cannot be put in the same basket with relations of delegation and mandation which are essential for civic life. But these too, it appears, are being undermined in modernity. Social life built solely on relations of fair exchange *does* lead to isolation and a loss of civic engagement, to a distancing between people, and it also leads to *inequality* and consequently, poverty, exploitation and alienation. *Combination* is the classic answer to both inequality and isolation, and combination is impossible without mandation and delegation. The conception of “vertical” completely

misses the distinction between combination and dependency, between mutual respect and esteem, and solidarity.

Coleman's version of "social capital" is precisely the kind of relation which is notoriously capable of *transforming* relations of combination into those of dependency, by way of nepotism, corruption and careerism. So this distinction in what is classified as "vertical" are of vital importance.

The fact remains, that the picture Putnam has painted of contemporary America gives grave cause for concern. The rise of "cheque book" or "subscription" organisations coinciding with the decline of "chapter based" organisations and all forms of social mediation, and coupled with this, the "professionalisation" of voluntary organisations are a couple of the most spectacular trends.

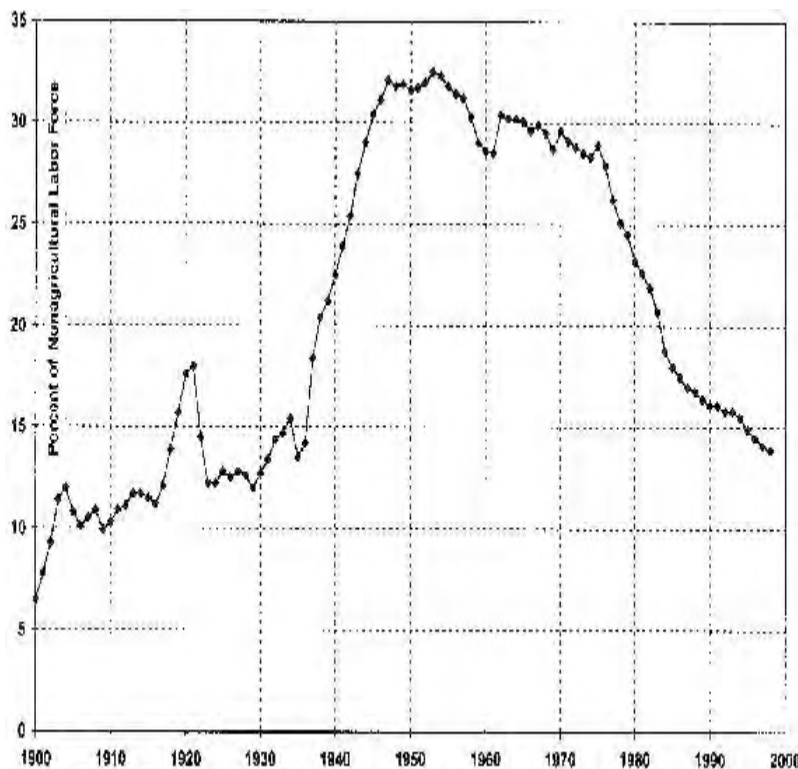


Figure 14: Union Membership in the United States, 1900-1998

It may be some cold comfort to trade unionists to see that the curve of union membership (p. 81) fairly closely matches the curve for *all* "chapter-based" associations (p. 54); Putnam reports how, as these phenomena began to bite in the 1970s, activists in various kinds of organisation began to soul-search and enquire into the reasons for their demobilisation, but we now know that the issue is not the unpopularity of trade unionism, or whatever, but a society-wide decline in civic participation of *any* kind. Also, unionists will be aware of how leaderships reacted to this crisis by a move to "service" unionism, of

transforming activist-based self-organisation into cheque-book unionism, resembling an insurance service rather than an organisation in the normal sense of the word. This same move was accompanied in the union movement, as elsewhere, by professionalism; even child-care now no longer employs part-time teenagers, but relies on professionals with degrees in early childhood development. Putnam's curve showing the rise of membership of national environmental organisations (p. 156) shows not so much a rising interest in the environment rather than worker-solidarity for example, but the rise of subscription membership as opposed to participation.

So what Putnam has drawn out here, is the supplanting of concrete mediation with what I would call abstract identification. A group of people all purchasing a service off the same provider are not participants in the same subjectivity in anything like the same sense in which participants in a "chapter-based" organisation are.

The same relationship is built into the electoral process. Voting on a multiple-choice list of candidates in electorates of 100,000s, if not millions, is the same kind of relationship with government as paying an annual fee to the Motorists' Association or the Senior Citizens

Association. It is an *abstract* relationship: I invest x percent of my disposable income to insure each separate aspect of my identity, but my labour is sold, by the hour just to earn a living.

Information provision and entertainment of course have led the way in this change, and one cannot avoid some empathy with Putnam's fingering of commercial television as a culprit in this crime. *Broadcast* represents abstract communication, moreover one for which recipients are simply the targets for advertising, "consumers." The multiplication of channels and the various means by which *choice* is built into broadcast technology actually *accentuate* the problem. This is not "communication" in the normal sense of the word.

As Putnam points out, the move to this kind of relationship brings with it the conception of the politician elected or the lobby group subscribed to as a *service provider* who should be judged according to the quality of service delivered and consequently, is expected to be a professional. Amateur participation is replaced by professional service. It is essentially a process of *commercialisation* — the replacement of relations of delegation and representation by the relation of client to service provider, whether the service is purchased by a cheque or by a vote makes little difference, but in the long run (as Coleman points out), even votes and cheques become interchangeable. The result of this move can be described as the transformation of human beings into *abstract* beings, "consumers" that count as just so many old people, motorists, supporters of environmental issues or this or that vote on a referendum.

As pathological as this relationship may be, it is quite a distinct kind of relationship from the relationship of patron to client found in communities accustomed to central authority or in authoritarian organisations. At first sight it appears "democratic;" dictatorship is replaced by "choice." Commercialisation is the process of breaking down internal relations within a social subject, be they client-patron, democratic participation or conjugal love, and replacing them with external client-service provider relations. Both Sultan and CNN equally are antithetical to civic republicanism.

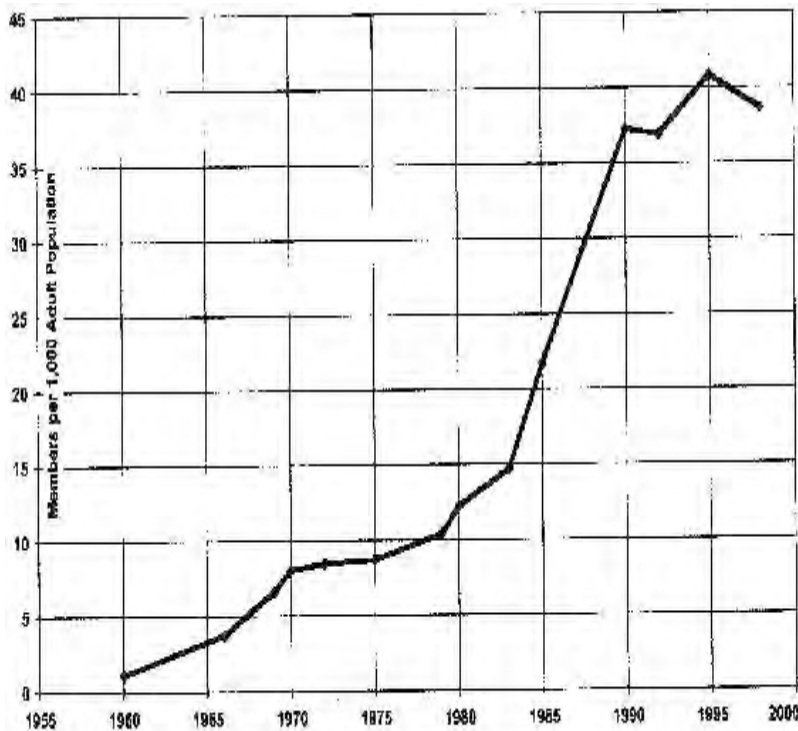


Figure 43: Explosive Growth of National Environmental Organizations, 1960-1998

e. Historical changes in sociability

Putnam's graphs showing historical trends in various aspects of sociability are startling in the coherence of the picture they paint. The graphs of membership in 32 chapter-based associations closely resemble the graph of union membership and participation in card games. Any generalised claim about modernity has to deal with this trajectory affecting "chapter-based" organisations of any colour whatsoever, while subscription-based professional service/representation and

lobby groups follow an almost inverse curve.

Taking the graph of membership in the 32 chapter-based organisations as a base:

- sociability grew steadily from 1900 to 1930;
- sociability fell during the Great Depression, bottoming out in 1935;
- sociability leapt sharply 1943-45;
- sociability continued to rise until levelling out in 1960;
- sociability declined slightly until 1965 and then fell sharply until 1991;
- after 1991, sociability dived, reaching the low of 1935 by 1995.

Secondly, we know that the decline is *generational*, with “chapters” becoming older and older as each generation participated less than the generation before.

Thirdly, as participation in chapter-based organisations declined, membership of subscription groups rose. The curve from 1960-1991 is virtually the same curve turned upside down — except that even this manifestation of sociability declined in the 1990s!

While participation in cards and sport declined, attendance at spectator sport linearly increased from 1960 to 1997. Church attendance follows a similar curve but the recent decline is more modest, and coincides with a church *membership* which steadied after 1980. Voter turn-out also declined after 1960, but from a level which was already below voter turn-out in 1896, which plummeted until about 1920 and only partially recovered up to 1960.

It is the contention of this author that the key factor which needs to be put into the mix along with TV, the War and the motor car is the development of the relations of production and

in particular *commodification*. I don't accept Putnam's assertion that since America has always been capitalist, capitalism has nothing to tell us about this process. Commodification replaces the satisfaction of a need internally to a subject's system of activity, with production of a good or service for sale. Conversely, commodification replaces the satisfaction of a subject's needs through collaborative labour, domestic servitude or otherwise according to right, with instead the purchase of goods and services either from outside the subject's system of activity, or by means of breaking up the subject into mutually alien subjects with commercial relationships between them.

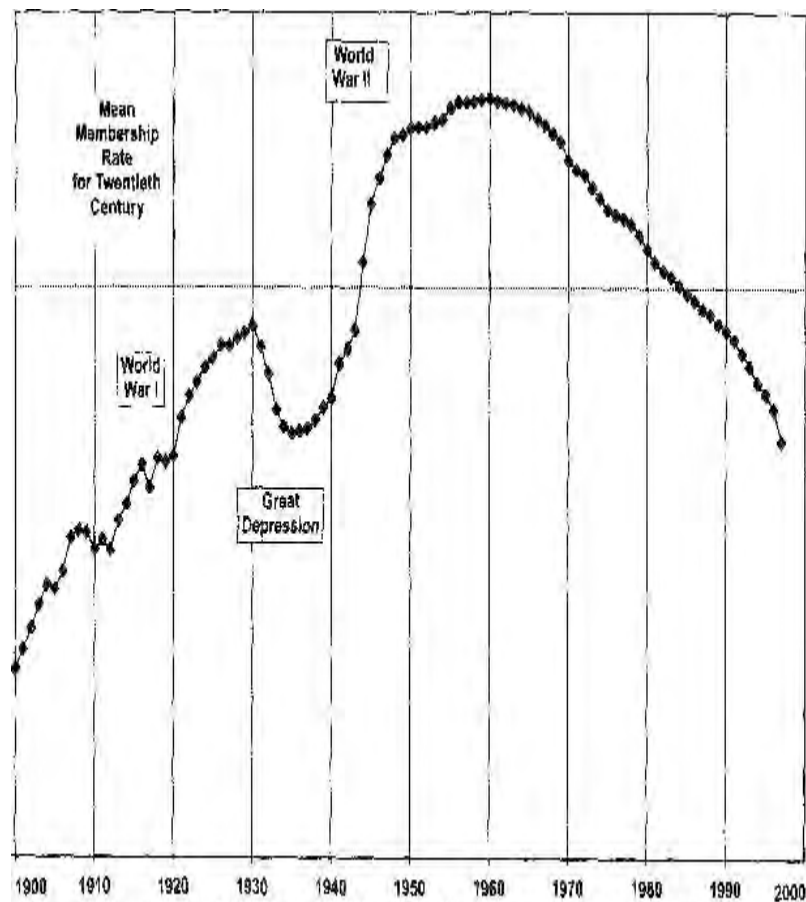


Figure 8: Average Membership Rate in Thirty-two National Chapter-Based Associations, 1900-1997

What is clear is that sociability is an historical variable, a variable which changes only generationally it appears, but changes.

Putnam's evidence from Italy especially, and from state-by-state comparison in the U.S., on the other hand, shows that the roots of sociability lie very deep. The experiences of slavery or of a centralising or oppressive regime, or of war and depression can fundamentally change the ethos of a generation and that such changes can be passed down through many generations.

f. Tolerance and sociability

Putnam's analysis sheds some interesting light in the communitarianism vs. liberalism debate. Putnam shows that measures of racial and other tolerance have steadily *increased* since 1960, when the big battles over Jim Crow laws and segregation were fought, during the same period when sociability was *falling*. Let's face it, during the period where "sociability" reached such heights in America, this was a society dominated by conformism, MacCarthyite anti-communism and racism.

But on the other hand, he also has evidence from both the US and Italy, that those sections of the population (other things being equal) who are *not* sociable, who are not civically engaged, and who only know about other races, other cultures and other sexuality by watching TV, are the *least* tolerant, most fearful and prejudiced members of a society which is becoming *more* tolerant.

Putnam also observed that high levels of social, ideological political disputation and diversity do not lead to a loss of sociability or, in the case of Italy, undermine the effectiveness of government. An intense civic life is factional. Civic engagement is *not* limited by the lack of a "comprehensive doctrine" (in John Rawls' terms); the community with a high level of civic engagement can absorb high levels of disputation and diversity without negative impact on social life and happiness; people learn to deal with difference.

g. Good vs. Bad social capital

Where does one go with this complex process in which relationships of one type decline while other kinds of relationship are on the rise? Putnam's work which hinges around connecting everything to the ebb and flow of a single quantity cannot be bypassed; but nor I think can it provide the answer to its own questions. If social capital was strong in the heyday of MacCarthyism, racism and conformity, how do we know that efforts to "increase social capital" are any different from efforts to wind the clock back to 1956?

In his introduction to *Democracies in Flux*, Robert Putnam shows that he does not understand the problem of quantification at all. He says,

"In the 1950s and 1960s a great debate rages in the discipline of economics ... about whether physical capital was sufficiently homogeneous to be added up in a single ledger. A dentist's drill, a carpenter's drill, and an oil rigger's drill are all examples of physical capital, but they are hardly interchangeable." [p. 8]

But all these drills are quantifiable according to how much they can be sold for. Their status as capital raises additional questions, but their quantification depends only on their market exchangeability.

"The same is true of social capital — it comes in many forms that are useful in many different contexts, but the forms are heterogeneous in the sense that they are good only for certain purposes and not others."

Difference in form is the very essence of quantification and is not the issue with social capital at all. The point is: can an element of social capital be transferred to another in exchange for

something else, or purchased off someone else by way of exchange, or exchanged for a different element of social capital? This is the practical, objective process of quantification, carried out every day in the capital market.

“Your extended family represents a form of social capital, as do your Sunday School class, the people you meet regularly on your commuter train, your college classmates, the neighbourhood association to which you belong, the civic organisations of which you are a member, the Internet chat group in which you participate, and the network of professional acquaintances recorded in your address book. It is even less clear in the case of social capital than it was in the debate [above] about physical capital that we can simply “add up” all these different forms to produce a single, sensible summary of the social capital in a given community, much less an entire nation.”

Exactly. In the case of capital the problem is easily resolved, for example, in the stock market, or when a corporate raider breaks up a company and sells it off bit by bit. In such cases of quantification, the change of form is the very purpose of the quantification. The ability to *use* a social connection profitably may serve to qualify it as an element of *capital* rather than simply *wealth*, but does not bear on the issue of its quantification. The problem of adding these various conditions as forms of capital is like adding the existence of a labour force, adequate demand and competition — all contribute to the profitability of capital, but are not capital as such.

“Precisely because social capital is stubbornly resistant to quantification, we cannot say that an outward-looking youth service corps that clears an urban playground has somehow increased our stock of social capital more than, say, an inward-looking credit union that has allowed a new immigrant community to flourish.”

Absolutely. So why not draw the conclusion that the whole concept of “social capital” is mistaken, and apply qualitative methods to the issue of the social preconditions for production?

“Because social capital is multi-dimensional, and some of those dimensions themselves are subject to different understandings, we must take care not to frame questions about change solely in terms of more social capital or less social capital. Rather, we must describe the changes in qualitative terms. For example, within a given country one could imagine that the stock of social capital has become more formal but less bridging, more bridging but less intensive, or more intensive but less public-regarding. Or there could be truth in all three developments. That is a nation could simultaneously see growth in ethnically based social clubs, rainbow coalitions, and government-hating citizens’ militias.”

Which goes to show that while “social capital” theory is looking at something of importance, it is using the wrong kind of “lens.”

Much of the public debate about this problem hinges around concepts of “good” and “bad” “social capital,” distinctions which, as I have said, negate the very idea of “social capital.” Foremost among those who want to promote the distinctions between good and bad social capital is Francis Fukuyama.

6. Francis Fukuyama

We have seen that Putnam introduced the idea of “different kinds of social capital,” but generally speaking, he did not give a lot of priority to this approach, preferring to count

“social capital” as a social good, qualified by the observation that like any form of wealth, it can be misused. The “patron/client” relations he observed in Southern Italy, though constituting useful social connections, were not counted as “social capital.” Fukuyama however, makes the distinction between good and bad social capital central.

For Putnam, the negative aspects of “bonding” as opposed to “bridging” social capital is important, but since “bonding” social capital is also both useful and in decline, the distinction does not figure strategically as a problem. For Fukuyama however, “bonding” social capital is valued, and the erosion of “bonding” social capital by increased tolerance and sanctions against exclusiveness is positively a social bad.

I want to quote at length this passage from Fukuyama’s book on how the modern “rights culture” has destroyed “communal” bonds:

“while nuclear families have broken down ... A more serious threat to community has come, it would seem, from the vast expansion in the number and scope of rights to which Americans believe they are entitled, and the ‘rights culture’ this produces.”

“Rights-based individualism is deeply embedded in American political theory and constitutional law. One might argue, in fact, that the fundamental tendency of American institutions is to promote an ever-increasing degree of individualism. We have seen repeatedly that communities tend to be intolerant of outsiders in proportion to their internal cohesiveness, because the very strength of the principles that bind members together exclude those that do not share them. Many of the strong communal structures in the United States at mid-century discriminated in a variety of ways: country clubs that served as networking sites for business executives did not allow Jews, blacks, or women to join; church-run schools that taught strong moral values did not permit children of other denominations to enrol; charitable organisations provided services for only certain groups of people and tried to impose intrusive rules of behaviour on their clients. The exclusiveness of these communities conflicted with the principle of equal rights, and the state increasingly took the side of those excluded against these communal organisations.

“The chief injustice that began the rights revolution from the 1960s onward was racial discrimination. One of the great and necessary victories of American liberalism was the ending of legal discrimination with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as the courts to open up public institutions, and then private organisations serving the public, made it the strategy of choice for subsequent excluded minorities, including people accused of crimes, women, the disabled, homosexuals, and more recent immigrant groups like Hispanics. Over the second half of the century, this drive to include the formerly excluded led to increasingly broad interpretations of the individual rights defined by the Constitution. Although each of the individual steps taken could be justified in terms of the country’s basic egalitarian principles, the cumulative and unintended effect was for the state to become an enemy of many communal institutions.

“As an example of the difficulties that communal institutions face, consider the Boy Scouts, an organisation founded as a Christian group intended to inculcate “manly” virtues like courage, self-reliance, and fortitude in boys. In subsequent times, it has been sued by Jews for excluding non-Christians, by women for admitting only boys, and by gay rights groups for excluding homosexual scout masters. The organisation, as a result, has become fairer and less exclusive, but

in the process of becoming as diverse as the American population, it has also lost those features that made it a strong moral community.

“Americans have developed a ‘culture’ of rights that is quite distinctive among other modern liberal democracies. ... American law does not support any kind of duty to rescue or otherwise enjoin citizens to do good to strangers in need. A Good Samaritan in the United States is much more likely to be sued for administering the wrong kind of help than rewarded for his or her troubles...

“What is particularly insidious about the American culture of rights is that it dignifies with high moral purpose what often amount to low private interests or desires.” [p. 314-16]

The reactionary content of Fukuyama’s defence of the institutions of privilege hardly needs comment, but this should not obscure the observation that the extension *rights* destroys the bonds internal to social subjects, in the cases Fukuyama discusses, the ruling social subjects of mid-twentieth century America. The “bonding social capital” which Fukuyama is defending in the above passage, against assault from self-interested promoters of the “culture of rights,” clearly of exactly the same kind as the “bonding social capital” that Putnam attacks in the early pages of *Bowling Alone*, is contrasted by Fukuyama with the bonds of self-organisation formed by “*interest groups*”:

“Cartels, guilds, professional associations, unions, political parties, lobbying organisations, and the like all serve an important political function by systematising and articulating interests in a pluralistic democracy. But although they usually serve economic ends of their members by seeking to redistribute wealth to them, they seldom serve the broader economic interests of society as a whole. For this reason many economists regard the proliferation of such groups as a drag on overall economic efficiency.” [Francis Fukuyama, *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. The Free Press 1995. p. 157-58]

These observations make some sense of Putnam’s observation of the coincidence of declining sociability with increased tolerance.

Fukuyama goes on to contrast “British horizontal solidarity” with “Japanese vertical solidarity,” the Japanese version proving much more effective in creating wealth.

This highlights the unclarity contained in the concept of “vertical” versus “horizontal” social capital, lumping together patron/client relations with those of delegation and representation. Fukuyama condemns “horizontal social capital” as uneconomic and contrary to the broader social interest, while “vertical social capital” is to be applauded. Likewise, the unclarity of the contrast between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital is turned on its head by Fukuyama for whom “bonding social capital” is praiseworthy in sustaining the privileges of ruling elites, but condemned as uneconomic where it is manifested in “interest groups;” bridging is necessary and proper, but unfortunately is destructive of “community.”

Thus, Fukuyama succeeds in putting a *conservative* spin on “social capital,” in which self-help organisations, trade unions, neighbourhood defence organisations, are thrown into the same bucket with feudal relations of dependence, the Klu Klux Klan and professional lobbyists. To my mind, this trajectory demonstrates the dangers implicit in the concept of “social capital” from the beginning.

Nevertheless, Fukuyama makes two important contributions to the concept of “social capital.” In *Trust. The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. 1995, Fukuyama (1) uses comparative historical study of the structure of the family in a number of different countries to elucidate how different forms of *company*-subjects have historically evolved out

of *family*-subjects, and (2) posits the term “*trust*” in lieu of Putnam’s “civicness” and “sociability” to conceptualise the entity reflected in “social capital” studies. Given that Putnam registered a 92% correlation between his “basket” of measures making up SQ and the single measured based on “Do you think most people can be trusted?” I think Fukuyama can claim empirical support from Putnam for his move.

The Transition from Family to Company

With the aid of a team of researchers and a host of collaborators, Fukuyama has reviewed the historical development of the bourgeoisie in Italy, France, Korea, Japan, Germany, China (and ex-patriot Chinese communities) and in the United States, to compare and contrast the specific character of the bourgeoisie of each country.

With Church and State in the background, the essential form of organisation of pre-modern ruling classes is the *family*, in the broadest sense of the word; the form of organisation of the modern bourgeoisie is the *company*, again in the broadest sense of the term. Apart from Church and State, late-feudal and early-modern societies also produced other non-familial organisation such as religious orders and guilds, but these were conditioned by and inseparable from the form taken by the family in the given culture. Fukuyama shows how the diverse forms of company structure in different more or less successful capitalist developments have been shaped by the *modification of the family* in connection with other forms of organisation inherited from the past — sometimes by deliberate adaptation, by state intervention, outside pressures, liberal ideology, established or disestablished church, as well as the effects of capital accumulation itself.

Fukuyama does not use the word “bourgeoisie” of course; “class” is a word that he generally uses only in a pejorative sense. What is more, “society” for Fukuyama is exclusively the society of property-owners — property owners, the family of property-owners, potential property owners and ideologists. The working classes fall entirely below the radar for Fukuyama except as material for employment, more or less resistant to the extraction of profit. So although *Trust* is a history of the bourgeoisie, the reader could be forgiven for taking it as a social history of society as a whole. To be sure, the working class in each country emerged from within bourgeois society, and has always been more or less dominated by the culture of their own country, so a history of the ruling classes goes a long way to giving an insight into the culture of the working class in any given country. But it is not the same thing. Wherever the working class disturbs the development of the bourgeoisie, Fukuyama calls it “ideology,” which of course, is now “at an end.”

This study is of interest to us because it claims to demonstrate the various paths through which the subject of pre-bourgeois times transformed itself into the bourgeois subject. The state and the church are also subjects, but these have already been the focus of any number of historical studies.

Trust

Fukuyama’s thesis is that the substance of “social capital” is *trust*.

“... economic activity represents a crucial part of life and is knit together by a wide variety of norms, rules, moral obligations, and other habits that together shape the society. As this book will show, one of the most important lessons we can learn from an examination of economic life is that a nation’s well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive characteristic: the level of *trust* inherent in the society.” [p. 7]

“Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of the community.” [p. 26]

Trust exists *within subjects*, that is to say, within self-conscious systems of activity such as the family or any institution which supports a “thick ethos” of collaboration. The point is, in the transition to modernity where day-to-day interaction, commerce and production all require collaboration with those *outside* the family and strangers, even people in other parts of the world, how is it possible to extend the *radius of trust* more widely, so as to be able to create collaborative enterprises with scope much wider than the immediate family?

Thus, from his own right-wing perspective, Fukuyama is looking at much the same problem as Putnam and Coleman — how can poor people create capital out of nothing? Fukuyama’s investigations into this question do shed light on the broader question of how poor and oppressed people can constitute themselves into subjects, not necessarily just by transforming themselves into capitalists.

Fukuyama makes a broad categorisation of cultures into “low trust” and “high trust” societies. Initially, trust extends as far as the boundaries of the family; the first kind of company is therefore invariably the family business. “Family structure affects the nature of family businesses.” [p. 336] The questions are firstly, whether the history of a nation has given it forms of family which facilitate the maintenance of enduring and extensive family businesses, and secondly, whether their history has created forms of non-kin association which have promoted the habits of trust and which can be turned to the construction of corporations transcending the boundaries of the family. This capacity to form *new* bonds of trust Fukuyama calls *sociability*:

“There are three paths to sociability: the first is based on family and kinship; the second on voluntary associations outside kinship such as schools, clubs, and professional organisations, and the third is the state. There are three forms of economic organisation corresponding to each path: the family business, the professionally managed corporation, and the state-owned or -sponsored enterprise. The first and third paths, it turns out, are closely related to one another: cultures in which the primary avenue toward sociability is family and kinship have a great deal of trouble creating large, durable economic organisations and therefore look to the state to initiate and support them.” [p. 62]

Southern Italy and China are instances where history has not provided opportunities for the extension of trust beyond the immediate family. China has had the minor advantage of extensive “clan” relations traced through many generations, but these are relatively loose. In addition, Chinese tradition has it that a father must divide his estate equally between all his sons. As a result, any large estate is inevitably dissipated within two generations. The only way for a Southern Italian or Chinese society to form a large business is by the intervention of the state.

In feudal Japan on the other hand, *primogeniture* was the norm; that is, the entire estate was passed to the eldest son. As a result, not only could the family business grow from generation to generation, but there was always a ready supply of the younger sons of noble families out there looking for work, and these formed excellent professional managers as well as *samurai*. In fact, a by-product of primogeniture was the sanction given to adoption; not only could you hire a younger son from another noble family to run your estate, you could adopt him into the family, and Japanese culture was accepting even of the adopted child inheriting the estate when the master died.

The ease with which modern Japan has built giant capitalist corporations while China and Taiwan are a seething mass of small businesses then makes sense. Fukuyama shows however how the deliberative intervention of the state in Korea, under Park Chung Hee, was able to *change* the culture in Korea, whose families were more like the Chinese than the Japanese, and force the creation of large corporations.

But whereas as Southern Italians and Chinese knew that other Southern Italians or Chinese shared the same values, that only meant the presumption that they would be always looking after their own family and therefore could not be trusted. A Japanese on the other hand, could trust a fellow-Japanese of noble birth, even though a total stranger, to keep their promises even at pain of death.

Germany and the United States are also examples of societies exhibiting a high propensity for “spontaneous sociability.” In the case of Germany, the medieval guilds continued in existence right up into the present time, while changing their form to meet the exigencies of modernity, and have carried forward not only the ability of non-kin to associate for mutual benefit but the pride in work, professionalism, the valuing of work-related skills and ability to collaborate in relatively egalitarian ways which have served Germany industry so well.

“... the apprenticeship system, which is broadly credited as the basis of Germany’s industrial dominance in Europe, is the direct descendant of the medieval guild system. Throughout the industrial revolution, the guilds were the *bête noire* of liberal economic reformers, who believed the latter represented hidebound tradition and a hindrance to modernising economic change.” [p. 245]

“The Germans hardly preserved the guild system intact any more than the Japanese preserved feudal clan structures, but nether did they remake society entirely anew based on purely liberal principle. Instead, the liberal framework was moderated and given cohesiveness by certain pre-modern holdover institutions.” [p. 249]

America

Fukuyama is most interesting, however, in his analysis of American history.

“The source of spontaneous sociability ... Japan’s stem from family structure and the nature of Japanese feudalism; Germany’s is related to the survival of traditional communal organisations like the guilds into the twelfth century; and that in the United States is the product of its sectarian Protestant religious heritage.” [p. 151]

He convincingly shows that America is historically a society with both an exceptionally well-developed capacity to form new bonds of sociability and that Americans have an exceptionally high tolerance for conformism within large bureaucratic organisations. This history belies the self-concept of the American bourgeoisie as highly “individualist.”

“The business elite that created the impressive corporate world that had emerged by the middle of the twentieth century was as homogeneous ethnically, religiously, racially, and in gender terms as those of Japan or Germany. Virtually all the managers and directors of large American corporations were male, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, with an occasional Catholic or non-Anglo-Saxon European thrown in. ... they enforced on their managers and employees codes of behaviour that reflected the values of their WASP backgrounds. They tried to instil in others their own work ethic and discipline, while ostracising divorce, adultery, mental illness, alcoholism, not to

mention homosexuality and other kinds of unconventional behaviour. ... at mid-century most critics of American life characterised U.S. society - and particularly the business community - as *overly* conformist and homogeneous ... the Americans who had built the country in the nineteenth century were inner-directed by religious or spiritual principles, and therefore determined individualists; the contemporary Americans of the 1950s had become other directed, setting their compasses by the least common denominator of mass society.” [p. 277]

He traces this contradiction to the founding of the United States by the Protestant religious sects.

“... the sectarian Protestantism that the early immigrants to North America brought with them from Europe ... is simultaneously one important source of American individualism; a doctrine subversive of established social institutions at the very same time gave a powerful impetus to the formation of new communities and strong binds of social solidarity.” [p. 283]

The *founders* of Protestant sects are individualists *par excellence*:

“Martin Luther’s nailing of his ninety-five Theses to the cathedral door at Wittenberg in 1517 was just the first of many individualistic acts in the Protestant tradition. In the long run, the individual’s ability to have a direct relationship with God had extremely subversive consequences for all social relationships, because it gave individuals a moral ground to rebel against the most broadly established traditions and social conventions.” [p. 286]

Protestantism shared this opening for an individual to question authority with Buddhism:

“In Japan, Buddhism has displayed a Protestant-like tendency to spawn new sects. ... Hobbes and Locke ... shared the Christian view that the individual had a right to judge the adequacy of the laws and social institutions surrounding him based on higher principles.” [p. 287]

The individualism of the founders of religious sects is belied by the conformism of the organisations they create. But the ability to engender to conformity in a brand-new sect is a significant departure from conformity to traditional institutions:

“The most useful kind of social capital is often not the ability to work under the authority of a traditional community or group, but the capacity to form *new* associations and to cooperate within the terms of reference they establish.” [p. 27]

But the germ of non-conformity is lodged in the founding principles:

“Individualism is deeply embedded in the rights-based political theory underlying the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, so it is no accident that Americans think of themselves as individualistic. This constitutional-legal structure represents, in Ferdinand Tönnies’s phrase, the *Gesellschaft* (“society”) of American civilisation. But there is an equally old communal tradition in the United States that springs from the country’s religious and cultural origins, which constitute the basis of its *Gemeinschaft* (“community”). If the individualistic tradition has been, in many ways, the dominant one, the communal tradition has acted as a moderating force that prevented the individualistic impulses from reaching their logical conclusion.” [p. 283]

Furthermore, the nonconformist founders of the United States did not seek the establishment of the Church, but rather opted for a “free market in religion,” and Fukuyama believes that this has given American society an unparalleled religiosity:

“the United States, with no established church and an increasingly secular public life, continues to enjoy a far higher degree of religiosity than virtually all European countries’ national churches. ... when religious identity is mandatory, it often begins to feel life an unwanted burden. ... The Church to which one belongs, rather than becoming a lightning rod for complaints against the state or the larger society, can itself become a vehicle for protest. ... they can also generate a much higher degree of genuine commitment.” [p. 288]

“While revolt against an established church and the setting up of a new sect promotes community within that sect over the short run, the long-term impact of this habit of mind is to weaken respect for authority per se; and not just of the older institution. In the long run, with the broad secularisation of society the habits of sociability would fade away as the social capital accumulated by the original converts was spent. ... The sociability it created, in other words, became gradually self-undermining.” [p. 294]

It was these Protestant sects which Fukuyama sees as providing the model for the capacity to set up new enterprises which made American capital so dynamic.

“Sectarian religious life served as a school for social self-organisation and permitted the formation of a kind of social capital that could be useful in a variety of non-religious settings.” [p. 293]

The propensity for forming voluntary associations with total strangers was turned to good use in America with the invention of the railways:

“Railroads were the first economic enterprises that could not be practically managed by a single family, and it was they that gave the impulse for the creation of the first managerial hierarchies.” [p. 274]

American entrepreneurs were comfortable setting up branch offices hundreds of miles away and doing deals with people over the telephone. This opened the way to building capitalist corporations of unprecedented scope.

A US corporation thus resembles a secular Protestant sect, just like the Japanese company-man resembles a modern *samurai*.

“Highly sociable Americans pioneered the development of the modern corporation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, just as the Japanese have explored the possibilities of network organisations in the twentieth.” [p. 27]

One of the interesting points of contrast between the Japanese bourgeois and the American that Fukuyama observes is that the relations between, for example, an automotive assembler in Japan and their suppliers is neither one of direction nor of commercial exchange, but one of collaboration:

“The relationship might not be so hands-off: the assembler’s engineers might critique the supplier’s own manufacturing methods and request changes, ... The whole supplier network is extremely difficult to set up, but when it is fully coordinated, it becomes a vast extension of the lean manufacturing plant itself. ... The *keiresu* relationship, ... is based on a sense of reciprocal obligation between assembler and supplier.” [p. 261]

The point is of course, that the reciprocal relationship goes further than the exchange of equal values; American firms seem unable to go beyond such relations of exchange in relations either with other firms or with employees. The same problem arose when US companies tried to implement teams and quality circles: they never put in their part of the unwritten bargain.

Summary

Most of what Fukuyama has to say by way of explaining the decline of sociability in the US, as catalogued by Putnam, his comments on African-Americans and on “recognition,” is so misinformed and reactionary that it does not warrant critique. I have reviewed both *Trust* and *End of History* elsewhere, and I will confine myself here to what seems to be a worthwhile contribution in this section of *Trust*.

Sociability is a subject’s disposition towards *expanding* its system of activity. Trust differs from sociability in that trust reflects both objective characteristics of the wider social environment and a subject’s assessment of that environment, in terms of the *possibility* for sociability. Is it reasonable to suppose that it is trust which is driving sociability, that for example, if trust is established, then sociability will follow; and is it reasonable to suppose that if the objective basis for trust is remedied, then the subjective perception of trust will follow?

Further, if we grant that trust is substance for building companies, is trust also the substance for the building of social movements in modernity capable of carrying out emancipatory tasks?

I think at least qualified positive answers can be given to each of these questions. That is to say, subjects which have emerged in modernity, seeking liberation from stigmatisation and exploitation by capital, *need* to expand and strengthen themselves. The problems that both the workers’ movement and all the social movements face (feminism, ant-racism, etc.) have considerable overlap with the problems that Jane Jacobs’ neighbourhoods faced.

The idea that social movements need to orient towards creating trust across the social terrain in which they operate is not implausible, and is not identical with the idea that issues of ideology and program need to be resolved. But which comes first? Will scattered individuals whose activities are not coordinated with one another, between which there is no basis for trust, succeed in resolving problems of ideology and program? Or is it possible that people with no agreement about ideology and program could nevertheless develop mutual trust? And if so how?

Both Putnam and Fukuyama have shown, convincingly enough for me, that building trust is a process which extends over centuries, not years, at least in respect to the bourgeoisie. If this is the case, and if building trust is the process of building new subjects, capable of determining their own future, then this needs to be paid attention to.

Does the definition of social capital as “trust” affect the semantic problems with “social capital” ? I don’t think so. Trust is both a precondition for the formation of the social bonds that go to making up a new social subjectivity, *and* a product of social subjectivity. Putnam’s and Fukuyama’s investigation warrant I think the identification of Trust as a key concept for understanding the problems of modernity and their solution. However, trust does not pass muster as the substance of something which could be called a form of capital. Like Nature, trust is a precondition for human life in general and capital accumulation only because capital accumulation is a form of human life. Trust therefore can be “traded upon” in the sense that in a social environment where trust exists, all kinds of business can be better conducted. Successful participation in *all* kinds of collaborative activity tends to build trust. However, I think it is doubtful that profits made by trading on trust can be returned in terms of increased

trust. Gradually, that trust is going to be used up if its income is accumulated in the form of private capital.

Fukuyama has shed some light on how subjects personifying capital come into existence, but he has little to tell us about the process by which *other*, radical subjects are born. This will be the focus of Part III below.

7. Summary

Our review of five different elaborations of a concept of “social capital” has revealed that each writer has given quite different, mutually exclusive definitions of the term. In August, the following further definitions of social capital were identified in the Australian Bureau of Statistics discussion paper on measurement of social capital:

- “social relations of mutual benefit characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity” (I. Winter, Australian Institute of Family Studies 2000)
- “the degree of social cohesion which exists in communities, the processes between people which establish networks, norms and social trust, and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (WHO 1998)
- “the building of healthy communities through collective, mutually beneficial interactions and accomplishments, particularly those demonstrated through social and civic participation” (Baum, Palmer, Modera *et al* in Winter 2000)
- “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (OECD 2001)

While James Coleman’s definition of social capital as control over events of interest to other people, came closest to something which could legitimately be called a *form of capital*, as something which can be put into circulation in order to return a profit, the scientific respectability which Coleman gave to the term is spurious and his definition, with its connection to cronyism is unlikely to be welcomed by any of the others who have picked up the baton for “social capital.”

Only Jane Jacobs’ concept seemed to have conceptual clarity and recommended itself unambiguously as something which poor neighbourhoods *ought* to cultivate, but Jacobs’ definition of social capital as the capacity for self-government, least withstood the test as a “form of capital.”

Putnam’s concept we saw had the great virtue of being rich in empirical content, but on the other hand was poor in theoretical clarity. Putnam’s work has been the stimulus for a wealth of empirical work which however only tends towards the unravelling of the idea of a unitary *quantity* of something which could be called a “form of capital,” tending rather towards a qualitative description of the pre-conditions for starting up successful businesses.

The theoretical contradictions within Putnam’s “concept” of social capital are exploited by Fukuyama to the point of destruction, but despite this, Fukuyama’s proposal to conceive “social capital” as *trust* is worthy of consideration, as is the light he sheds on the formation of subjectivity in modernity.

Bourdieu adds a further aspect to this picture by connecting the idea of “social capital” with “cultural capital” — something which bears scant resemblance to a form of capital, but sheds some light on the process of formation of subjects in modernity.

The recent OECD identification of social capital as “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups” signals that it is Robert Putnam’s work that has conditioned current usage which social capital is becoming an increasing focus of social policy.

A great deal of criticism of Putnam has focused on his assertion that causality runs from habits of sociability in the population to effective political institutions, making the convincing point that effective political leadership is the single most significant factor in the building of strong civic ties. This correction, in my opinion, by no means cancels the validity of Putnam's conclusion, but it does lend support to a different approach to the conceptualisation of "social capital" data in terms of subjectivity.

III. SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

The term "social capital" arises in the context of discussions of public policy in relation to poor neighbourhoods and regions. The very posing of this issue already incorporates a number of implicit assumptions.

Firstly, taking it as given that *some* problem of justice exists, it is still undetermined whether the problem is correctly understood as one of *poverty*, that is to say one of distribution, rather than a problem of politics, and which is cause and which effect.

Secondly, the posing of the issue as one of *public policy* slides over the question of whether the issue is properly the responsibility of public policy or that of the people of the neighbourhood itself, or some other subject, either singly or dialogically.

Thirdly, the designation of a geographical entity as the victim either presupposes that the people living there are the subjects of a claim *as residents*, or conversely objectifies a construct of public policy which may cut across existing relevant subjectivity.

Fourthly, if "social capital" is to be a solution, as we have seen, this leaves open which of 4 or 5 definitions of "social capital" ought to be the basis of public policy.

I am going to leave aside the issues involved in whole nations which suffer from poverty and underdevelopment, and concentrate for the moment on neighbourhoods and regions whose borders are indeterminate and whose citizens may have freedom of movement into and out of the relevant area. Whole countries, with defined borders and governments, pose the same range of problems, but in different form and emphasis.

It would be a mistake to adopt an "essentialist" attitude towards distressed neighbourhoods. That is to say, to presuppose that there is something inherent in a neighbourhood which makes the people in it poor and lacking in social solidarity.

A neighbourhood is *made* poor by some combination of social arrangements. In some cases poor people go there to live and leave when their position improves and they get the chance to live elsewhere ("neighbourhood sorting"); in other cases, cultural and political processes and events have consigned to economic stagnation a whole area of the country together with the people with their "roots" in the region ("place effects").

In the former case, what may appear to be a "poor area" might more accurately be described in some ways as a temporary haven or "halfway house" for people who are poor, until such time as their situation improves. To the extent that this is the case, improving conditions in a poor area could actually have a negative impact on the people who use it ("gentrification"); they would have to find somewhere else where rents were low and short-term accommodation available.

But in either case, everyone needs to live in an area where there is *trust*; no problem can be solved unless people sharing the same patch of ground extend a basic degree of solidarity and

trust to one another, including strangers. Even people who are only living in an area temporarily need hosts and rely on the self-determination of those who regard themselves as permanent residents.

With some qualification, it is possible to define the resolution of injustice affecting people living in a neighbourhood or region as the achievement of *self-determination*. The qualifications have to do with the fact that the concept of self-determination only makes sense if a group of people define themselves as “custodians” of the neighbourhood. Otherwise, people may commit themselves to other projects, not related to residency, which directly or indirectly contribute to resolution of injustices affecting people living in an area. The responsibility of those who want to do something to help is just that: to help. Only the efforts of groups of people defining themselves around projects which directly or indirectly contribute to the resolution of injustices affecting people living, working or passing through the area can build social solidarity.

I focus on the question of “injustice” rather than “poverty” or “need,” because neither the form of the injustice nor the nature of the remedy can be presumed.

Hiring people to do the job is not effective. Professionals hired to do a job can do the job perfectly well, but they cannot generate social solidarity as a by-product of the work that they do. But this does not prevent money and hired labour being put at the disposal of people who do what they are doing out of commitment.

This turns the usual relationship upside down; voluntary work is usually based on volunteers supporting full-time, paid organisers. I am not suggesting that public money should just be handed over to voluntary organisations, but simply to recognise the benefit that can flow from utilising opportunities to strengthen local initiatives, rather than attaching volunteers to a paid bureaucracy.

For example, areas with run-down, dilapidated infrastructure are always going to find it very difficult to overcome stigmatisation as a depressed area. The job of outside central authorities to redistribute funds, so that a poor area can have the same leafy streets and quality services as a wealthy area, requires bringing political pressure to bear; so does forcing road authorities to pay respect to the needs of residents and limiting pollution and noise from factories. The action of vocal NIMBY groups can contribute to overcoming poverty just as well as charity shops, and they help a neighbourhood become a “Thing.”

In short, the needs of people living in an area, not only in terms of survival, but in terms of overcoming the injustices affecting them because of where they live, ought not to be prejudged from outside. My thesis is that the principal need of a community is to attain self-determination, and a principal need of any individual is to be an active part of *some* collective(s) through which they can exercise their self-determination.

The conclusion from the review of “social capital” theories is that Jane Jacobs has identified the crucial entities that people living in a neighbourhood need, only that it is misnamed as “social capital.” She called it “self-government;” I will call it “self-determination.” This does mean “control over events of interest to others” (James Coleman’s concept), but while for Coleman the question of subjectivity is *presupposed*, for me subjectivity is the very *heart* of the question. It does mean that governments and others interested in development of an area need a much wider focus which *includes* the informal social networks relevant to an area as a central focus of strategy, but it *also* means straightforward issues of *distribution*. Insofar as “social capital” theories are a cover under which regions may be denied investment in infrastructure or local government resources at a level which other regions enjoy, then this is absolutely unacceptable.

Being born on the wrong side of the tracks is much like being born black, female or homosexual. In themselves, there's nothing wrong with being black, female or homosexual, or all three, far from it, and nor is there anything wrong with being born in the Western suburbs of Sydney, Newcastle or Soweto.

The problem is two-fold. In the first place, it is the social structures which stigmatise such categories and assign them to roles on the bottom of the heap; in the second place, it is the political-economic structures which ensure that there is always *someone* the bottom of the heap.

As is well-known, the injustices which originate from the class structure of society and from the status order of society (gender division of labour, racial discrimination, despised sexualities) have proved extremely difficult and complex to resolve, even independently of their "mapping" onto the geographical domain. They have also been the subject of a vast literature of social theory, moral philosophy and political science, independently of any consideration of spatial differentiation of groups. And yet, the spatial differentiation of the same groups would not seem to pose problems of an entirely different order. It is certainly no easier to change one's skin-colour or gender than to move house.

Let us briefly review some of the issues which have come out of debates outside of the domain of regional development, which are relevant to the issues of injustices exercised against people on the wrong side of the tracks.

Redistribution

Poverty by no means exhausts the nature of the lot of someone who, lacking the means of their own labour must sell their labour on the market, and thereby open themselves to exploitation. It is difficult to see how the working class could make any progress towards emancipation other than by combining together for the purpose of increasing wages and improving working conditions, even while remaining wage-workers.

Historically, the wages struggle has involved combining together people whose conditions of life place them in mutual competition with each other, who otherwise only combine under the direction of their employer. Nevertheless, a powerful workers movement developed in Europe and America in the nineteenth century and brought about a vast improvement in the conditions of life of the proletariat.

This success in redistribution began with "*mutual aid*" orchestrated by trade union activists and the First International. Its founding principle was "*solidarity*." The efforts of workers to get better wages and conditions have never ceased to be met with cries that their claims were unfair and unsustainable, but this has of course turned out to be untrue.

It makes sense then, that just demands on the part of people living in a depressed region for money, infrastructure, industrial plant, environmental benefits and so on, ought to be taken seriously and acceded to. If 50 large businesses were moved from central Sydney to Newcastle, and if funding for Sydney roads and parks were diverted to improving the infrastructure in Newcastle, can anyone doubt that life in Newcastle would improve and that the rate of unemployment there would go down, despite all the problems of shortages of appropriate skills, etc., etc.?

Now the working class only achieved the gains that it did achieve by combining and above all by creating solidarity between otherwise atomised individuals. Any suggestion that Newcastle *doesn't* need investment and infrastructure, but "social capital," should be treated with contempt.

Thus, to rectify maldistribution, a neighbourhood must develop a social movement which is capable of bringing pressure to bear. Otherwise, attempts by agencies to correct

maldistribution of resources will more likely be defeated by the efforts of those who benefit from the existing distribution of resources.

Recognition

Class-oppression does not exhaust the means by which people are subjected to poverty and other kinds of injustice. Women and Gays are found evenly across all social classes, and yet suffer injustice, economic insecurity and dependency, and are stigmatised and abused by reason of their gender or sexuality. It is the same with those who are born on the wrong side of the tracks.

Affirmative strategies have a place therefore: “celebrating femininity,” “gay pride,” or “black is beautiful” have their geographical counterparts in “Tidy Towns” across the world. However, it must be said that these strategies have some serious problems and as a strategy for regional development they are no less problematic. This kind of affirmative strategy is useful possibly for “consciousness raising,” for the initial gathering of people together, mutually affirming their pride in where they are, its inherent values, and building up the determination to do something about the injustices they face.

However, all sorts of measures aimed at improving a location can have negative effects if the underlying causes are not addressed. For example, all manner of “targeted welfare” crushes subjectivity and exacerbates stigmatisation, and since it does not address the underlying cause, creates a bottomless pit which only further stigmatises the recipients.

Further, measures to improve infrastructure and so on, any measures at all which improve an area, run the risk of simply driving out the former residents and, through a process of “gentrification,” handing it over to new people moving in. (“Slum clearance” would be the greatest disaster which could befall a poor community, robbing them of what little they did have.)

Thus, the issue is always the welfare of the people themselves, not their location. If people have the power to control their own lives, then they might choose to stay, improve the area they live in and build a community there, rather than move out.

Making an area somewhere to be proud of goes much further than improving infrastructure; it involves the struggle for recognition of the social groups living there.

Deconstruction

Let’s make a metaphor with the issue of women living in a location in the division of labour as unpaid child-carers; think of “women’s work” as a neighbourhood, and women as people living there, some by choice, some against their will. What options are available to women in this space?

One option is increased child benefits for stay-at-home mothers, thus making life better in the ghetto, a measure welcomed and immediately benefiting people stuck there. It also has the effect of marginally enhancing the status of child-carers, but it is hardly likely to enhance the attractiveness of being a stay-at-home parent sufficiently to encourage men to give up their paid work and become househusbands. It actually emphasises a woman’s role as unpaid child-carer, trapping her in that role, since it is a disincentive to going out to get paid work, stigmatises the mother as a welfare recipient and relieves the male of responsibility for contributing to the upbringing of his own children. This is the kind of affirmative strategy which has immediate appeal but fails to solve the problem, and correspond to all those kinds of public policy strategies that are based around providing services to “areas of special need.” Good and necessary up to a point, but unable to resolve the underlying problems.

Another strategy is to commercialise child-care, thus moving the job into the market and giving women the choice of doing the same work for a wage, or doing a different job while their own kids are cared for in a childcare centre. This is probably more effective in giving women a choice, but it runs into a couple of problems. So long as child-care is stigmatised as “women’s work,” then it remains low-paid and women move out of their homes into low-paid jobs doing “women’s work.” There is no way out of this trap until the gender division of labour is broken down. Once women are recognised capable of the same kind of work as men, then women can command wages equal to their male partners and make working for a wage worth putting the kids into child-care. Meanwhile, with child-care no longer stigmatised as “women’s work” she is more likely to be left a fair share of domestic duties and child-care centres are treated as seriously as other service. In other words, the “location” — “women’s work” — has to be deconstructed altogether, and “woman” no longer a socially constructed location.

What this corresponds to in the geographical analogue, is that the boundaries of the neighbourhood have to be broken down. That is to say *any* kind of person might want to live there, and living there is always a matter of choice. The neighbourhood is dissociated from the kind of people who live there.

However, childrearing is an important social function. It ought not to be an occupation which is denigrated and no-one should be forced to go into the profession by reason of their gender, but whoever is there needs to do the job well. If women choose not to be child-raisers, then that has to be a matter of choice, not because they have to go out to work and “can’t afford children.” If we want the next generation to be raised well, then social arrangements have to be made to make it a worthwhile profession.

Likewise, dealing with the social problems in a poor area is a vital social task for the whole country. Some people live in a neighbourhood only because they can’t afford to live anywhere else. If improvements force people to move out, then everyone has a problem. *Someone* has to take on the role of custodians of the neighbourhood, and it has to be made a worthwhile and honourable profession worth sticking around for.

Now, just as I would question that commercialisation of child-care can *ever* provide the full range of things that children need, I also question whether paid social workers and security guards can provide everything that a neighbourhood needs. Like kids, streets need love, even if from amateurs. And it’s everyone’s problem.

Making “women’s work” everyone’s responsibility, means getting men to take on that work and that generally means a fight for those stuck with “women’s work” not so much to change themselves or get better recognition for what they do (these too) but to get other people to accept their responsibility.

Society at large is free-riding on the backs of people living in “poor neighbourhoods” who are bearing the brunt’s of society’s problems, problems arising from inequality, from social change, from immigration and even just raising the next generation of workers. A big part of what these people need to do is to spread the pain and get the wider community to start picking up their share of responsibility for these problems.

Subjectivity again

The contradiction is this. The working class and women had to constitute themselves as a subject for the purposes of abolishing themselves as social constructs. Both began as atomised sets of people. Despite being as atomised as it is possible to be, women had to constitute themselves as a subject in order, eventually, to deconstruct gender as an ordering principle in society, beyond defending their special needs biologically tied to their feminine physiology. A complex task. Let us see how this pans out when translated back into turf.

In order to solve any of its problems, the people of a neighbourhood have to constitute themselves as a subject; their aim is above all though to deconstruct their borders, to reconstruct the neighbourhood in terms of what is *essentially* distinctive about it, give its current residents the option to live somewhere else if they want to, and make it attractive enough to make others want to move in, without making it too expensive for its present occupants to have to leave. On top of that, they have to bring together a group of people who like the area for what it really is and are prepared to put themselves out to defend its interests. None of this can detract however from the warning that a construct of public policy is not necessarily a “neighbourhood,” and if by neighbourhood I mean a Thing (to use Jane Jacob’s expression), then there may be no such thing around at all. Social movements are not constituted objectively. Women suffered under patriarchy for thousands of years before the modern women’s movement appeared. A slum can remain a slum for many generations, and unless it has a stable population it is likely to remain a slum, because the people living there are only there because they don’t have any better option. The last thing they are going to do is identify themselves with a slum.

Consequently, any sign of the slightest tendency to take care of a neighbourhood or region or speak for it, or for someone to try to mark it with their own cultural symbols, needs to be paid attention to. Any pocket of stable population needs to be allowed to feel at home. For the rest, it is far better to deal with the poverty and give people a chance to move out.

Welfare, Rights and Solidarity

One of the issues to be resolved in developing policies to benefit regions and neighbourhoods afflicted by poverty and atomisation is the attitude to be taken towards the notion of ‘welfare’. Giving people something for nothing, it is said, creates a ‘culture of dependency’.

This is a neo-liberal myth. The problem is never dependency (something which never worries wealthy capitalists and self-funded retirees, who are utterly dependent on productive workers for their income), but of *subordination*.

Nevertheless, if your intention is not to subordinate someone (or a group of people), but to help them achieve self-determination, then the important distinction is the subjectivity supported by the act of giving aid.

- *Means-tested aid* given to the “needy” stigmatises the receiver, destroying their subjectivity and subsuming it into that of the donor;
- *Conditional aid* given to the “deserving” aligns the subjectivity of the recipient to that of the donor, while giving it respect;
- *Universal aid* given as of right respects the autonomy of both the donor and recipient, but permits free-riding and exploitation and may weaken social bonds;
- *Hired help* — the most common form of aid — strengthens the subjectivity of the receiver and may reduce the *donor* to the status of dependency;
- *Aid given in exchange for services* — equally common — promotes autonomy, engenders self-respect and self-esteem, but does not help those who have little to give in exchange, and exacerbates inequality;
- *Aid given in solidarity*, by the donor’s voluntary subordination to the receiver, strengthens the subjectivity of the receiver while creating a new social bond.

The Neo-liberal myth is that making aid conditional upon the recipient working for it, ensures that the recipient will enjoy self-esteem as a result of “earning” the aid themselves, and that because aid is thereby made conditional, undeserving people will not receive it until they knuckle down and fulfil the conditions, and thus avoiding the ‘culture of dependency’.

If this means providing jobs, then there is no argument from any quarter is there? However, if the work is meaningless, done by welfare recipients as a compulsory duty, then the recipient may be helping themselves, but they are not contributing to society, and they do so not by their own will, but according to that of “donor.” Neo-liberal rhetoric about forcing people to contribute to the community before receiving aid, sounds great, but usually ignores what it is that is preventing the claimant from contributing. There can be no pretence of contractual reciprocity between a welfare claimant and the state, even if the claimant is a whole region. Neo-liberal ideology rests on psychologistic caricatures like the “dole bludger.” Where we are dealing with whole regions, then such constructions are obviously untenable. Regions are not poor because they are as selfish as neo-liberal theorists. They are *made* poor, and *made* powerless. The only point is that assistance needs to be given in a way that does not produce subordination, but strengthens the subjectivity of the recipient. This means that aid must be given in *solidarity*.

There are a whole range of problems which are born by individuals and groups, which are only born by those people by force of circumstances or a feeling of social responsibility: combating street crime, raising children, making up for deficits in provision of health and education facilities, or advocating for neighbourhood issues, for example. Anyone who takes on those problems should be given solidarity, not just as a volunteer helper, but as a professional, and above all, it should be ensured that they succeed.

In particular, if people demand infrastructure or other measures of “redistribution” for their place, then acceding to the request is not just “welfare,” but a measure which supports the subjectivity which made the claim. If the claim is just, it should be acceded to.

Development

It was pointed out above, that the focus on subjectivity points to a contradiction: a place which initially *lacks* subjectivity must be assisted in gaining it, so as take control of its own fate; but once having gained self-determination, the ultimate objective is to abolish itself as a “needy” place. This means that in the course of development quite different tasks must present themselves.

1. Gaining subjectivity

To start with, there is a place where a lot of people suffering injustice are concentrated. The “place” may be in great measure a construct of external processes, inclusive of “neighbourhood sorting” mechanisms which have made the place a haven for poor people, but one which also exacerbates the effects of poverty by compounding them with lack of access to helpful contacts, poor infrastructure, a bad reputation and all the negative effects of being surrounded by other poor people. It may also be the result of historical processes, such as the concentration of certain kinds of industry which has fostered a supporting demography, but when the industry declines, has left the area high and dry. Here, the former vitality of the area may leave behind a strong subjectivity, but one which is severely injured by the removal of its *raison d'être*.

The task here is to identify, encourage and assist what elements of subjectivity exist, and it is likely that outside help will be needed. An element of “celebrating” the virtues of the place, reasons for being proud to belong to it, will be present in this stage — otherwise, why would people participate?

The next stage is the strengthening of this new subject, under conditions where individuals have to be encouraged to identify themselves with it. So, it is necessary for the new local subjectivity to assist individuals in solving problems. Only self-confident and competent individuals can manage the expression of neighbourhood subjectivity; they have to be found,

strengthened and given good reason to lend their talent to resolving the neighbourhood's problems. That is, they need solidarity; but in their relation to people facing difficulties, their relation may be more of a "welfare" role, since it is precisely the objective at this stage to strengthen the giving subject, i.e., the "local committee." On the other hand, outside help needs to subordinate itself to this "local committee," giving solidarity not welfare.

This phase of development of a neighbourhood is a self-related phase, and the objective is only that neighbourhood representatives can attain self-sufficiency; that is to say, to be able to do enough for the people in the area to justify their existence. Achieving stability of population is a target here.

2. Relation to Other

Once having justified its existence, and established reasons for being proud of who they are, a new subjectivity must turn to others to rectify injustice. This first stage will be to demand aid, redistribution of needed resources that they have hitherto been denied. The skills they will develop at this stage will be the skills of advocacy as much as anything, skills already developed at an individual and local level in the first stage, but now turned to external, large corporate bodies, to advocate on behalf of their area. Here pride in the area passes over to outrage at the injustices affecting the area.

This phase necessarily poses the effective utilisation of aid which is won. Managing new infrastructure and working in new jobs, develops new skills. Thus a new transformation of the subject must take place. To a certain extent this not only prepares people to work anywhere, it will also demand the importation of new skills. Thus *mobility* of population starts to become an objective.

3. Deconstruction

From promoting the special values of the place, the issue gradually becomes the possibility of any of its individuals being able to move into any other place where they can do even better, and the place becoming just like any other, that is to say, not in need of any "special" treatment, but able to offer the same range of things any area can offer. Having been successful in reconstructing themselves, a town will want to expand its borders and become a real player in a larger entity.

CONCLUSION

I have not here developed a theory for tackling poverty. What I have proposed is this: rather than being conceived of as a deficit in *resources*, poverty should be conceived of as a deficit in *subjectivity*, i.e., in collective self-consciousness. Rather than being conceived of as a problem of *economics*, poverty should be conceived of as a problem of *politics*.

Thus, instead of trying to extend economics into social policy by conceiving of the social relations in a group of people as an embryonic form of economic resource or *wealth*, we should rather extend the politics of social movements into economics by conceiving of the resources of a group of people as an embryonic form of *social movement*.

The body of theory for *this* task is relatively well-established. I contend though that the concepts set out in part one of this work is the most appropriate starting point for a social theory capable of informing the struggle to eliminate poverty.

A Postscript

That is my conclusion, but what do we make of (1) the body of empirical data showing that measurement of social capital *a lá* Robert Putnam is a predictor of the capacity of a group of

people to overcome adversity? (2) If “building social capital” is an effective approach to helping a community overcome poverty and marginalisation, why does it not remain a valid approach to social policy? (3) Is it not possible that “social capital” could be inserted into a group of people in order to assist them in overcoming poverty, without such a group of people developing any collective self-consciousness? (4) Is not “social capital” already a sufficiently clear concept that it is better to refine the measurement of “social capital” rather than “changing horses in midstream,” so to speak, and adopting a new concept?

I would respond to these questions by asking the reader whether they would not accept from the outset that there is broad consensus that “social capital” is a problematic and unclear concept, and that so long as it is widely recognised that “social capital” is composed of both “good” and “bad” “social capital,” then any proposal for “building” it is on shaky ground.

If my thesis holds up, that the capacity of an arbitrary group of people to overcome adversity is dependent on their capacity to develop social solidarity, and ultimately a “collective self-consciousness,” then it clearly follows that this will be reflected in measurements of “social capital.” In the event of there being a multiplicity of such collectivities then no “collective self-consciousness” would result only because it existed in such abundance at a finer grain.

A major difference resulting from a change in conception is that my proposal immediately suggests practical approaches to rectifying the problem of poverty in any given instance. On the other hand, it seems fairly unclear exactly what is involved in “building social capital.”

In the case of the projects reported by Tony Vinson in his recent report “Community Adversity Resilience” the project workers seem to have gone about their task *as if* they were charged with building a social movement. That is, it appears more like they utilised a concept of “collective self-consciousness” to guide their work and *not* a concept of “social capital.”

A concept which tells us how to bring a thing into being is surely superior to a concept of a metaphysical entity underlying a set of measurements.

“I understand a thing if I know how to bring it into being out of its conditions.”

Postscript 2: Can measurement of “social capital” be improved then?

Given that Robert Putnam has a 92% correlation of his SQ index with the answer to “Can most people be trusted?” it is difficult to see how the measurement of what he is measuring could be improved. But is “sociability” the best gauge of the capacity of an arbitrary population to take control of its own destiny?

The current OECD recommendation for definition of “social capital” is “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups.” The question is whether we can recommend a further determination of this definition to facilitate measurement of the capacity of a group of people to form the kinds of subjectivity which can deal with social change threatening their economic viability as a group.

There are two halves to this definition: “networks, shared norms, values and understandings” which may or may not facilitate the second half of the definition, “cooperation within or among groups.”

I think the important thing to recognise is that “shared norms, values and understandings” are phenomena which are less and less likely to be found across groups other than homogeneous ethnic groups in modern, urban societies. This means two things.

Firstly, if the OECD definition reflects empirical experience, that the existence of these entities facilitates an effective response to change, then practical intervention should be focussed on those groupings where such “shared norms, values and understandings” exist, i.e., in various communities of value.

Secondly however, it means that we must increasingly look towards those social relations which facilitate cooperation within or among groups which use networks, but *do not* depend on the existence of “shared norms, values and understandings.” This issue was one of the focuses of my book *For Ethical Politics*.

Concretely, this is a question which needs to be tackled with empirical research. However, there are two kinds of social behaviour that I would look to. In the first place, there are measures of compliance with norms of reciprocity in interactions in the kind of “thin ethos” characteristic of modernity. For example, frequency of non-compliance with road laws, tax evasion, vandalism, and so forth.

In the second place, I would look to measures which one would expect to illicit a positive response from only a small fraction of a population, that crucial minority that will actually set up the first “local committee,” and I would deliberately measure to determine the existence of that small minority.

The difficulty with determining the existence of such a group is that it is not only necessary that they should be prepared to take an organising initiative, but that the same people are trusted by others in the population. If there are 50 activists in a neighbourhood, but all of them are despised by everyone else, then this is nothing to be welcomed. Consequently, I think the number of people within the population who have been elected to office of some kind should be considered as an important datum.

A further point. “Shared norms, values and understandings” may exist within communities of value, (the so-called “thick ethos” characteristic of religious communities, employees of the same company, and so on) but such an ethos is well-known to have the potential to prove a *barrier* to combining with *other* communities of value. This is the problem of the need for a “balance” between “bridging” and “bonding” “social capital,” that is, the degree to which a community is marked by boundaries of difference within itself. A community which is divided between two traditionally hostile religious groupings may or may not prove resilient, but this will depend in some measure on how the leaderships of the two communities are prepared to work together and the extent to which the behaviour of the shepherds may guide that of their flock. I would say impossible to determine by “objective” measurement, but resolvable only by subjective intervention.

Further. A group which is not internally divided, but has sharp boundaries around itself is likely to face challenges in overcoming its isolation from the outside world which it has to “lobby.” This involves the problem of the so-called “radius of association.”

It seems to me that the idea of summing a number of factors into a quantity, all parts of which contribute equally to a total “social capital” is not sustainable. There is no reason to go this way. It is better to measure separate factors and not attempt to sum them, even if this undermines the production of neat tables of data. Information is for using, and information about the specific characteristics of an area is more useful than a “score.”

Membership of “thick” ethnic or religious groups tells us a lot in terms of the best methods of approach to assisting a community overcome challenges, and suggests definite practical steps. It should not be “added” to, for example, compliance with traffic laws or participation in national political life.

Having visited the home of a stranger in another city within the past 12 months, for example, would give a measure of radius of association. A measure of “radius of association” gives specific practical information about challenges facing a community and should not be added to frequency of church attendance, for example.

Broadly speaking I think it would be far more useful to have a series of data like this about an area in need of assistance than a total score.