PART III

In search of civil society and democratic citizenship: romancing the market, reviling the state
Let them eat social capital: how marketizing the social turned Solidarity into a bowling team

Setting what is surely an all-time record, in less than a decade the concept of social capital has shot with meteoric speed through the epistemological fast track to become one of the reigning ideas of our time. Even in the rarified air of conceptual superstars, social capital is notable for a charismatic appeal unmatched in recent memory. Few ideas have been projected into such an array of protean forms, displayed such remarkable theoretical promiscuity, or been endowed with such seemingly unlimited powers and capacities for good. From east to west, north, and south, from postmodern capitalist hegemons to struggling postcolonial regimes, the global reach of its ascribed value and applicability is stunning. Society, economics, politics, medicine, anthropology, psychology, epidemiology, ethnicity, history, economic development, marriage, child-raising, international relations, sexuality, institutionalism, law, community, education, race, gender, family, civic affairs, democracy, and global poverty—these are just some of the arenas and concerns to which the social capital concept has been applied in the role of what the World Bank Program on Social Capital calls “the missing link” in the effort to end poverty in the developing world (Grootaert 1997). The breadth of its resonance is equally astonishing. From economists to public health scholars, from public intellectuals to peripatetic health care workers, from World Bank and IMF financiers to NGOs across the globe, from New England town meetings to C-SPAN TV—everyone, it seems, has fallen under the epistemic spell of social capital. 


2 "It is difficult to think of an academic notion that has entered the common vocabulary of social discourse more quickly than the idea of social capital" (Diasgupta and Srole 1999). For a random sampling of the recent social capital literature, see Adler and Froman...
This is a phenomenon that puzzles. For one thing, the actual term social capital is not new, having been in circulation for almost three-quarters of a century since it first appeared in Hanfan (1920), followed several decades later by J. Jacobs (1961), brought into economics and public policy by Coleman et al. (1966) and Loury (1977), into sociology by Bourdieu (1986), and finally becoming a foundational concept of rational-choice theory by Coleman (2000) 1988, 1990 and neocorporatist-nism by Becker (Becker and Nash 1997; Becker and Murphy 2000). For another, that socioeconomic prosperity is dependent on nonmarket, noncontractual social relations can be readily traced back to Aristotle, Adam Smith, Marx, Toqueville, Durkheim, Weber, Malinowski, and Karl Polanyi, again to name only some of the most obvious. The implication that it is a new discovery and, moreover, that cooperative social practices and mutual associations are critically important for successful social movements, would certainly amaze many a social historian and social movement theorist. Legal historians would be equally provoked by such a claim, even those only minimally familiar with the preambles, statutes, and rule books characteristic of medieval and early modern guilds, apprenticeship regulations, tramping associations, eighteenth-century artisanal credit unions, or nineteen-century friendly societies. And as for its being news that strong reciprocal relationships and associative networks are valuable cultural resources—well, one does not even want to imagine the bemused reaction of an anthropologist.

This, then, is the conundrum that needs to be engaged: how and why has social capital come to represent a new form of social knowledge? Even more significant, why does the term have such crowding-out power that it is quickly becoming the sole occupant of the conceptual space once filled by a multitude of competing, jostling, and differing ways to characterize the value of social relations? Clearly, it appears to have become an object of our culture's political imagination. Onto it has been projected an idealized realization and long-earnedit-for solution to a multiplicity of problems. But if social capital has been anointed as the object of a remarkable collective cathexis, why and how and to what effect has it come to assume this position still puzzles. What is the theoretical and—more important—the political work social capital is performing? What need is it fulfilling? One does not have to be a sociologist of knowledge to be intrigued with the significance and implications, the causes and consequences of such a phenomenon.

In what follows I use the metaphor of a “perfect storm” to diagnose and account for the social capital phenomenon. A perfect storm is not one, but a collision of multiple storms. In many ways, the most important of these was the publication of several works by Robert Putnam in 1993. Making Democracy Work (Putnam et al. 1993) produced the counterintuitive finding that what makes democracy work in Tuscany is best explained not by the state's well-known campaign of institutional anticorruption reforms and public policies, but by the local participation of civic groups such as choral societies and church associations. Marking Putnam's achievement as a crossover success from academia to the global public sphere, the Economist magazine celebrated the book under the caption “Civic Lessons” (1993). Almost simultaneously, The American Prospect, a journal of the liberal intelligentsia, published “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life” (Putnam 1993), in which he admonished and forecasted the dangerous condition of American society, which has been increasingly “bowling alone.” Bowling, of course, serves as metaphor and microcosm of the fact that “every year over the last decade or two, millions more have withdrawn from the affairs of their communities” (Putnam 1993: 68). No less than the future of democracy, Putnam forewarned, in what became a series of articles and books, hangs in the balance of whether or not the nation's solitary bowlers would once again become team players (Putnam 1993, 1995, 1996, 2000).

The second of social capital's catalyzing storms itself represented a collision of dynamic historical processes—intellectual, epistemological, and scholarly, but also cultural, economic, sociological, religious, and political. Four of these are of interest to my story: (1) neoliberal looks for solutions to market externalities and transaction costs; (2) neocorporatists advocating a new site of moral restraint and cultural alternatives to the “handouts” of the welfare state and the “excesses” of democratic participation of the 1960s and 1970s; (3) sociologists, political scientists,

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1 In psychiatric terms, one would almost have to call it a fetish, although I prefer to conceptualize it as a more Durkheimian approach to the way that incongruous objects, even social categories, can take on the characteristics of collective desiderata.

2 It is entirely arbitrary to name 1993 as the “turnoff” year of social capital's perfect storm. I do so only because one must register some kind of a beginning, and because of Putnam's central place in the popular discovery of the social capital concept.
rational-choice theorists, and economists (many of whom doubled as public intellectuals) competing over the disciplinary turf of how to best include social relationships in prevailing economic models; and (4) the World Bank’s search for a “post-Washington consensus” in dealing with global poverty and economic development (under the influence of Joseph Stiglitz). ⁵

Call these the multiple streams and trajectories of social capital, each starting from different origins under different conditions and each with different political aims, but eventually all cascading toward the same point where (to painfully mix metaphors) upon colliding with Putnam’s emergence into the public sphere, they erupted into the perfect storm of social capital. Most significantly, despite their radically competing political goals and ideologies, these many social capital trajectories all had the same epistemological agenda, namely, to develop a new theory and vocabulary that would name, explain, and “make true” for political knowledge a source of value that would serve as an alternative to the power of the state. For most, this was economic value, but for others it was moral, and for still others, it was political. But what they all shared was the search for a social mechanism independent of the state to enhance economic prosperity and solve social problems. The goal was to switch from state-centered models of development and entitlement-based solutions to social problems, to market-centric ones which would be resolutely joined to civil society as a whole. With each social capital trajectory driving toward the same epistemological desideratum, their collision was inevitable. When it happened it triggered an enormous opportunity structure to capture, fulfill, and control this space. In the event, social capital possessed the powers to seize the prize.

In parallel development to the four social capital streams was a fifth trajectory, separate from the others yet perhaps the most important for the political dimension of the social capital story. This was the democratic left’s “civil society” movement. Civil society is a concept that in large part was “rediscovered” and put in recirculation during the 1980s in Eastern Europe by Poland’s Solidarity, the GDR’s New Forum, and Czechoslovakia’s Charter 77 (to name the best known), as well as by the new social movements in Western liberal democracies. Advocates of the new civil society concept saw it as both a normative ideal and a social site for autonomous democratic practices, self-organization, and citizen participation, with the goals of contributing to public deliberation in the public sphere and influencing public policy and the state.⁶ But above all, these civil society movements were organized to fight the tyranny of the communist states by establishing flourishing zones of social relations autonomous from the political regimes that for so long had successfully been able to repress them (Arato and Cohen 1984; Cohen 1985; Kitschelt 1993; Offe 1984). Civil society was the capacious rubric to which these movements were both dedicated and attached.

At first glance it would appear that there was little difference between these movements and the social capital streams, as they both shared the passionate goal of establishing and normalizing an antistatist site of the social. But there was one distinction between the civil society movement and the others, a distinction so great that the social capital concept would come to represent a deep and abiding oppositional threat to that of civil society. Whereas the motivational logic behind the social capital movements was to identify an antistatist site of the social, with perhaps the single exception of the “Putnamites” this was a utility-generating view of the social that put it in firm alliance with the market. The vision of civil society carried by the democratic left was also deeply antistatist. In contrast, however, their conception of civil society equally demanded autonomy from the market. They vigorously challenged as false liberalism’s standard dichotomy between state/public and market/private, arguing that this represented not the empirical world but rather liberalism’s normative binary epistemological landscape. Breaking apart the dichotomy to make room for a third sphere of the social was initially triggered by the widespread currency of Poland’s Solidarity. But to effect a permanent change in the distribution of conceptual space required a contest of epistemological politics. Would the social be liberated from the manichean binary between public and private to become civil society—a third sphere of autonomy from the predations of both market and state? Or would social capital capture the civil society ideal and subordinate it to the role of handmaiden to the market?

In what follows, I have grouped these phenomena, processes, streams, and trajectories under two broad, interweaving causal narratives—one primarily intellectual and scholarly, the other political and event-driven.

⁵ The World Bank’s adoption of the social capital concept deserves its own story to do justice to the quantity and innovative quality of this work.

Combined, they make up a larger canvas of multiple intersecting needs and resources, processes and powers, and causes and effects of the epistemological politics behind the social capital concept. The academic/intellectual story is that of the complex relationship between economies and sociology for control of the soul of the social. Because sociology is the discipline that has contributed the most to bringing social capital into the mainstream, this is by necessity a tale of sociological self-deception. Sociologists believe that after years of “smearing contempt” (McCloskey 1994), economists have finally accepted the social dimension of markets. In adopting the social capital concept, a small group of neoliberal economists qua public intellectuals appear to be offering an olive branch of respect to sociology. But it is just that – appearance. Blinded by desire for recognition by economists, sociologists have taken appearance for reality. In so doing they inadvertently collude with the neoliberal project of appropriating, domesticating, transforming, and evacuating the social from public knowledge. Sociologists feel pride in their belief that the social capital concept finally has sociologized knowledge of the economic. But it is actually the inverse. Through a Trojan horse of social capital, the social is being successfully marketized.

The political story is one of the relationships in the 1990s between neoliberal and neoconservative movements on the one side, and the democratic left in Europe and the United States on the other. This story takes us from the revolutionary democratic shipyards of the Polish Solidarity trade union movement in Gdansk, to the recent US trend of substituting “faith-based organizations” and public services once provided by government, to the current nostalgia for the bowling leagues and neighborhood church groups of 1950s America. This is also a story of appropriation and domestication. Powerful neoliberal and conservative public intellectuals of the 1980s and 1990s were drawn to the antistatist and anticommunist impulses of the civil society concept, and at first they eagerly appropriated the idea from the Eastern European revolutionaries. However, once they recognized it as a site peopled by trade unionists, new social movements, and participatory rights-driven politics, they quickly turned to taming and transforming its unruliness. In a truly Pygmalion achievement, civil society became but a shadow of its former identity as, at the hands of conservatives, it morphed into social capital, becoming politically manageable, tamed, respectable, domesticated, and bustling with bowling leagues, church picnics, home schooling, family values, moral regulation, backyard barbecues, volunteer labor, and faith-based soup kitchens. For those committed to market solutions, social capital answered a different need from that of the democratic left’s civil society activists. It was the ideal antistatist solution to the externalities and the imperfections that emerge inevitably from an overly rapid marketization and displacement of public services and safety-net regimes at home and abroad. Like civil society, social capital is antistatist; unlike civil society it perches not in between but on the market side of the entrenched dichotomy between private and public, market and state.

These are, in brief, the dynamic narratives that produced the perfect storm of social capital. But before turning to my causal stories, let me put my own cards on the table by delineating my view of social capital’s immanent incoherences and the fundamental threat it poses for “the soul of the social.”

Social + capital = the evacuation of the social

The social capital literature is riddled with competing definitions. Still, at the most general level, most would agree that social capital refers to the economic value produced by social relationships (Aberg and Sandberg 2003; Arrow 2000; Becker 1976, 1996; Becker and Murphy 2000; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman [1990] 2000; Fukuyama 1995a; Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002; Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000; Putnam et al. 1993). By creating and maintaining social and normative cohesion over time in durable networks and communities these relationships are said to generate a kind of streaming utility that the market either cannot or will not produce but on which capitalism depends for reducing what economists call transaction costs. Thus the World Bank’s definition of social capital: “Social capital consists of a set of horizontal associations between people, consisting of social networks and associated norms that have an effect on community productivity and well-being. Social networks can increase productivity by reducing the costs of doing business. Social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation” (World Bank 2004; italics added).

At the heart of social capital theory is the thesis that capitalism depends on what Durkheim (1984:215) famously called the “non-contractualism of contract,” specifically trust, mutual reliability, and the reciprocal and networks of noncontractual social relations. Absent these attributes,

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1 To be fair, the paragraph following this reads: “Social capital also has an important ‘downside’: communities, groups, or networks which are isolated, parochial, or working at cross-purposes to society’s collective interest (e.g. drug cartels, corruption rackets) can actually hinder economic and social development” (World Bank 2006).
there could be no meaningful contracts but only an aggregate of multiple “spot” markets, a condition in which societies cannot endure.8 A harmless and unobjectionable reprise of an old idea? Maybe. Still, there are ontological, methodological, and epistemological reasons why pairing social together with capital actually threatens the very social relations upon which social capital depends. Parsing social capital into the two separate concepts of social and capital demonstrates just how much is compromised in their coupling.

What is capital?

Standard neoclassical economics defines capital as any kind of resource (physical or otherwise) capable of producing streaming utility resources, that is, with the capacity for economic value over time.9 Capital is also something that must be owned and thus is also a form of property. But if capital must be property, the inverse cannot be true; the vast majority of one’s possessions do not produce economic utility over time. This may be obvious in some cases: automobiles most famously lose value overnight. But is the difference always so evident? We take for granted that whether or not something counts as capital is empirically inherent in the object itself, even if the capital in question is “human capital,” because even mental skills must be manifested in an educational credential or certificate of training. But is the important distinction between property and capital always so easy to determine by having empirical access to the object?

Consider the case of two apples I have brought home from the grocery store. Both are my property, but, as it happens, only one of them is a form of capital. But how to tell which is which? After all, they look virtually identical. Examine them as I might, the answer will not be found in the apples themselves, for the status of capital is not inherent to the object. Rather, the distinction must be found in my mental state of intentionality. Here is why. I bought each apple for different purposes: one to eat, the other to extract the seeds to start an apple orchard. Being hungry, I gobble up apple number one, seeds and all. Alas, unable to defer gratification, apple number one is no more. As planned, however, I extract the seeds of apple number two and plant them in my apple-orchard-to-be. The two apples were identical when I unpacked the groceries and put them on the kitchen counter. But even before I ate the first one, only the second counted as capital. Why? Because I bought the two apples already intending not to consume them both, but to invest one of the apples. It was my intention that determined the different status and fates of the two apples.

My argument is that there is nothing inherent in apples, machines, skills, culture, or computers that make them inherently recognizable as capital. Capital is not an objective attribute but a mental state that resides in the heads of individual agents.10 It represents a decision to defer the immediate gratification of consumption, enjoyment, utility, and exploitation in expectation of greater future rewards. At the theoretical level, the only thing that distinguishes capital from other commodities is all in the mind.

What is social?

If we start from the assumption that what is social is that which pertains to society, the sociological method tells us that that which is social is by necessity relational. Whether one reads Hegel, Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Bourdieu, or Giddens, sociology’s foundational a priori is the social as a “social fact,” what Durkheim (1938) defined as social relations external to the mind, a mechanism of relational constraint, irreducible to its individual agents. Subfields as far apart as contemporary actor-network theory and critical realism share this same foundational premise that society exists outside of the mind of any individual agent (though not necessarily of a collective agency). Call it a social formation, a social structure, a network, even a society of two, as the Victorian novelists liked to do. However unstable in a poststructuralist age, the social is still performatively relational. In Geertz’s (1973) famous formulation, the social is irreducibly relational “all the way down.”

8 See Block (1990) for a discussion of spot markets versus contracts. There is also an enormous literature on the role of trust in social capital; see especially Fukuyama (1995a). Gubbieta (1988), Warren (1999).

9 A Marxist or even an institutionalist definition of capital would be very different. A coherent Marxist perspective could not take on board the notion of social capital in the first place because Marxism and institutionalism begin from the premise that capital is constitutive social in the first place (see e.g., Block 1990; Fine 2001). For Marxism, the term social capital is thus redundant. For social capital to make sense, capital would have to first be depleated of its social nature only to be a feeble conception of social, now conceived as the aggregate of individual actions, choice, and decision theories.

10 By external I include the educational skills of human capital. They do not count as capital if they are simply knowledge in your brain while watching television, not being put to any productive use. Only the intention to invest them endows them with the status of human capital.
Sociology, however, has never had exclusive rights to the study of the social. As much as they tried to hold it at bay, there is a competing approach that lays equal claim to the study of society even while resolutely rejecting its relationality. This is utilitarianism, today often used interchangeably with rational-choice theory. Although not dubbed as such until Bentham in the nineteenth century, utilitarianism properly begins with Hobbes’s utilitarian man and becomes a full-fledged social theory with Locke’s invention of civil society, a fully self-regulating social entity independent of the state and functioning as a countervailing source of power and social organization (Somers 2001). Locke’s contractual vision of civil society could not be less relational. It is peopled by ontologically isolated, separate individuals who, in their presocial “state of nature,” are constitutively autonomous vis-à-vis any and all others and relational entities: “[W]e must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that it is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they see fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man” (Locke [1690] 1952, ch. 2, section 4: 4).

This methodologically individualist view of the social steadily developed from Hobbes, through Locke, to Smith, Bentham, Mill, and Spencer. It was above all Malthus ([1798] 1992) who, beginning from the individual utility-maximizing agent, was the first to fully realize the utilitarian project of theorizing society as a market. After lying dormant from Spencer to the mid-twentieth century, it again manifested itself, first in Homans’s and Coleman’s “social exchange” theory, then in today’s thriving neoutilitarian rational-choice theory. The celebrated social contract notwithstanding, a less relational approach to the social would be hard to find. Yet the problem utilitarianism has always posed for sociology is that this ontologically contractual social theory is nonetheless a theory of society. It is its shared object of study in the social, rather than in a common relational method, that makes utilitarianism a full-fledged alternative approach to that of sociology. To be sure, sociology’s commitment to the constitutive and irreducible relationality of the social does not deny that individuals have purposeful mental states. But these mentalités are not presocial and utilitarian but social and relational. However it is spun, a social state of purposefulness is ontologically and irreducibly at odds with utilitarianism’s competing conception of the social as an aggregate of presocial intentionalities. Utilitarianism’s methodologically individualist view of the social always trumps the idea of a relational entity.

And social + capital? These are two fundamentally opposing approaches to the social: the relational and the utilitarian. The marriage of social to capital thus poses the question of which view of the social is the one coupled with social capital. If we take the sociological perspective, social capital becomes a concept evacuated of its constitutive sociality. This incoherence results from trying to conjoin sociology’s relational view of the social with a definition of capital inexorably tied to a conditional intentional. The effort to attach the relationally social to the intentional agent turns both into something else entirely. Social capital cannot have it both ways: it cannot be both externally relational and internally intentional. It simply does not hold. There is an advantage its advocates gain from this incoherence, however. It gives social capital the kind of capaciousness that readily provides it with the appearance of relationality.

By contrast, the meaning of social capital becomes entirely coherent if we accept the utilitarian view of the social as an aggregate of contractually interacting individual agents. When this version of the social is linked to capital, the two methodological individualisms become compatible. The social aggregate becomes a utility-generating economic asset, while the social is transformed from a relational entity into an agent’s personal property. From this perspective, anyone can have access to social capital as long as she is willing to convert her social relationships into capital by choosing to “invest” in them, rather than to immediately “consume” or exploit these connections. In so maximizing the utility function (future value) of the social network qua social capital, she might decide to prepare meals for a sick family member or to provide useful financial advice to a neighbor. From the point of view of social capital theory, however, these are instrumental choices made in the expectation that at a future point these investments of time, money, or friendship will produce far greater utility returns (i.e. provide far more valuable individual gain and profit) than they would have had if she simply had “used” the connections right away (to get a job, advice, emotional support, etc.). Social capital thus becomes a utility-driven “Rolodex” theory of social connections – one that the individual metaphorically carries around in a briefcase ready to access as she or he sees fit. The ontological and methodological postulates of utilitarianism convert relationships into utility functions.
Both rational-choice theory and modern economics define the fundamental unit of social analysis as the utility-maximizing individual agent. But the postulate that all social and political analysis must be built on microfoundations has two overwhelming difficulties: one is the long-standing difficulty of the externalities and free riderships that result from rational actions applied to public goods. The other is the problem of basing a positivist theory of causal mechanisms on the empirically unobservable quality of mental states. Both of these problems stem from the postulate that the individual agent’s mind, and consequent behavior, makes no distinction between market exchange and social interaction. Perhaps it is precisely this appeal to self-interest that endows social capital with its ideational appeal and promiscuity.

The social approach to society, by contrast, is one with an infrastructure built on the practices and performances of social membership. Social membership is practice-driven, not agent-driven. The relationships are not constructed upon trust (one of the foundational postulates of rational-choice theory’s approach to the social) because trust is a mental state exhibited by individuals. Relationships do not trust, agents do (or do not). Relationality makes the foundational unit of analysis an interaction, never individual mental states or an agent’s investment choices.

More struggles for the soul of the social: sociology and economics

As social capital fills so many intellectual and political needs, it is no surprise that, as almost all the literature on the subject complains, there exists no single definition. Nonetheless, all seem to agree that social capital is, by virtue of the term capital, something that produces value. At the same time, because it is social, it is value that is in some way generatively connected not to standard market value (as in mainstream neoclassical economic theory), nor to state-expenditure value (as in Keynesianism), but to something distinctively social. How paradoxical, then, that it was neither Coleman (1990), the rational-choice sociologist, nor Becker (1990), the self-designated “imperialist” economist, but Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist, who first gave social capital its superstar status.

The protean shape of social capital: Pierre Bourdieu

In “The Forms of Capital” (1986), Bourdieu discusses the concepts of cultural and symbolic capital, which he was already well known for having made the central theoretical elements of his theory of class reproduction, especially in the educational system. In this essay Bourdieu introduces the fungibility of capital: the idea that market value and economic power, while always produced by capital, are not necessarily produced by standard monetary or economic capital. It is just as likely to be the cultural or symbolic capital of prestige and knowledge that generates value. Yet in a paradoxical response to his own success with cultural and symbolic capital, Bourdieu expresses concern that too much attention to discourse and culture is threatening to efface the reality of actual market power. In an effort to navigate a delicate balance between economism and “culturalism,” he thus adds social to his other forms of capital. Although he explicitly distinguishes social capital from economic capital, he develops the idea of social capital to capture the economic value produced by nonmarket social connections and relations. The family is his primary exemplar, but the social connections holding corporations together also demonstrate the value-laden resources produced by group membership, cooperation, and coordination: “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network. . . . The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and the volume of the capital . . . possessed by a given agent, even by the whole set of agents to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu 1986: 248-9).

This succinct definition reveals much about Bourdieu’s ambiguous place in the social capital genealogy. On the one hand, he did not focus on or theorize about social capital in any great depth beyond this one path-breaking essay. Instead, he turned back to a deeper exploration of symbolic capital, and to a direct assault on the power of economic and financial capital in constituting the hegemony of neoliberalism (Bourdieu 1998). And although the term does play a significant role in Distinction ([1979] 1984), he nonetheless never produced a body of social capital literature comparable to these other kinds of capital for which he will be primarily remembered.

Nonetheless, the contribution that Bourdieu made to social capital theory is unique. Unlike any of the social capital theorists to follow, his interest in social capital was to synthesize phenomenological and structural analysis. His Marxist roots spurred him to explain the reproduction of class power, and he found social capital useful for this purpose. At the same time, his commitment to hermeneutics ensured that interpretative meaning would be as important as that of class structure. Bourdieu pioneered this mix of structure and agency as interrelated poles of a single theoretical approach. The conceptual apparatus he uses is the
term *habitus*, where structure and agency are always in mutual play. In this, Bourdieu differed radically from all the social capital theorists to follow, indeed from the very utilitarianism with which he has often been wrongly associated.

To be fair, however, Bourdieu makes getting right his use of social capital not at all simple. In the above quotation, for example, where he uses some form of the term “possession” three times in a five-line statement, his social capital seems eminently compatible with utilitarianism. The possessor, moreover, is a “given agent,” or a “whole set of agents,” for whom the “volume” of social capital, and thus its potential value, is determined by the “size” of her or his network of connections. This begins to sound suspiciously like what I dubbed earlier the Rolodex theory of social capital. But this reading derives from wrongly attempting to understand Bourdieu’s theory of social capital apart from his master concept of habitus. By integrating the social capital and habitus concepts, he produces a theory less about how social connections can be owned, than about how one is more commonly owned by, that is, possessed by, social capital. He differs from utilitarianism, according to Bourdieu himself, not just because he links actors and structures, but also because he does not theorize agency and strategy through utility-maximization and intentional choice. Bourdieu’s agents, rather, are social actors who both act and are acted upon, by their unconscious and their practice-driven habits.

In the end, Bourdieu’s social capital is a great distance from the dominant utilitarian and rational-choice approach. And if he has been read by some as too economic in his use of language, he certainly compensates by his numerous and explicit critiques of the very notion of agential ownership that he sometimes appears to be embracing (Bourdieu 1986). Does this explain why many of today’s social capital theorists have mysteriously forgotten their debts to one of sociology’s greatest thinkers of the twentieth century? It is hard to know. At a University of Chicago conference James Coleman stated that his social capital theory differed from Bourdieu’s insofar as Bourdieu was on the side of the “underdog” – Coleman’s way of pointing to Bourdieu’s Marxist and structuralist influences. And in fact there are many who believe that Bourdieu’s ideas have not been incorporated more broadly into the mainstream of social capital literature because he did not separate his mainly structural analysis of inequality from his own political commitments. I have a different view: the diminishment of Bourdieu’s contribution to social capital is the direct result of the rise to prominence of Gary Becker and James Coleman.

**Sociology and social capital**

For most sociologists, social capital refers simply to the value inherent in the networks and/or norms (values) that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. With the qualifying terms “networks and norms” always paired, it appears that even in this minimalist definition there is an internal contradiction. A network is a structure of relationships irreducible to but not exclusive of its individual components. Network theory, which has contributed mightily to the growth and appeal of social capital, is fundamentally relational, and much of its own growth is a product of its opposition to methodological individualisms of all stripes. From this perspective, social capital is not just an aggregate of the individuals and institutions that underpin a society; it is the relational glue that holds them together.

The sociological concept of norms, by contrast, is a social psychological approach to social organization. Variably associated with the Parsonsian “political culture” paradigm of the 1960s, modernization theory, and the quantitative study of “empirical democracy,” the approach focuses on the psychological values and attitudes that citizens hold with respect to a host of measures of political and socioeconomic life (see chapter 5). Using a normative yardstick modeled exclusively on an idealized Anglo-US political culture, only certain measures of political norms added up to a “healthy” society. These included belief in democratic pluralism (not democratic outcomes but procedural neutrality), in modern industrial capitalism and its ancillary technologies of progress (Fordism), in the transcendence of all forms of traditionalism (familialism, clientalism, and nationalism), and in “the end of ideology” and class conflict. In these empirical studies of democracy, it was the summation of these values that bore the burden of explaining whether societies were deemed healthy and modern or potentially totalitarian and authoritarian.

Like social capital theory more generally, this norm-centric approach diverts attention away from economic inequalities, unemployment, race and gender discrimination, and public sphere activities, and toward aggregates of attitudes held by individuals. The incompatibility of the network and norms-based version of social capital is hard to reconcile. The latter presupposes a methodological individualism that is not only at odds with network analysis; it also brings it perilously close to economic theory.

**The economists**

Although the giants of mainstream academic economics (e.g. Arrow 2000; Akerlof 1984; Solow 2000) have criticized social capital vigorously,
there are those who find it eminently compatible with the discipline's foundational precepts. From the perspective of what Glaeser et al. (2002) call the "economic approach," the sociological method violates the very logic of capital, namely, its methodological individualism. Accordingly, they develop a "model of optimal individual investment decisions" (Glaeser et al. 2002: F438) and explicitly oppose it to "group-based analyses, which emphasize institutions, norms, conventions, social preferences, and aggregate/group outcomes rather than the investment decisions of individual actors" (2002: F438). Their definition of social capital equally rejects anything sociologists would recognize as social, building instead on a modified version of human capital theory with its incentive-driven and agent-centric understanding of market optimality: "Social capital [is] a person's social characteristics -- including social skills, charisma, and the size of his Rolodex -- which enables him to reap market and nonmarket returns from interactions with others. As such, individual social capital might be seen as the social component of human capital" (2002: F438). The economic approach thus simply expands Becker's (1975, 1976, 1993) original human capital theory to include skills oriented to other people: personal skills, educational achievement, and individual character attributes (e.g. work discipline) are analyzed in the aggregate to determine the success or failure of optimal market outcomes.

Information-theoretic economics

A different definition of social capital derives from the recent disciplinary "revolution" of information-theoretic economics associated primarily with Joseph Stiglitz (1989, 1994, 2000). Social capital, from this perspective, is composed of the nonmarket relationships that individuals bring to bear to cope with the inevitable risks of market imperfections associated with asymmetrical knowledge between contracting agents (Stiglitz 1989). Strictly speaking, the very virtues of the information-theoretic conception of social capital prevent it from being considered an exclusively economic approach. Like Becker's theories of how the economic can be extended to explain social behavior, Stiglitz's incorporation of social variables as endogenous to market behavior violates the "rules" of mainstream neoclassicism, with its strict boundaries between endogenous market preferences and exogenous social context. Both are more properly grouped with the rational-choice/utilitarian approach in which social capital refers to the aggregate of social control behaviors that individuals use to address negative market externalities, especially those associated with public goods (e.g. Coleman 1990). Positive market externalities, by extension, are also a product of social capital, in this case not merely aggregate sanctions but, most importantly, the value generated by strong principles of trust among individuals (Fukuyama 1995n; Gambetta 1987, 1988; Dasgupta and Stiglitz 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Åberg and Sandberg 2003).

The Neutillitarian: economic "imperialism" at play in the site of the social

Despite their common interest in social capital, the information-theoretic economists differ substantially from the real revolutionaries of social capital theory. These latter are a distinct interdisciplinary breed of social scientists-cum-economists, public intellectuals, and policy advocates who could also dub the rational-choice neutillitarian (the academic school) or in political parlance, neoliberal. James Coleman and Gary Becker, sociologist and economist respectively, have done more than any others to advance rational choice's utilitarian principle of analyzing all of society as a market. At its analytic core, utilitarianism is built squarely on the foundations of the neoclassical utility-maximizing rational actor. Where it differs from standard economics, however, is in the society-wide scope to which it applies these utilitarian precepts and in transgressing the firm boundaries between the economic and the social set by the neoclassical paradigm (Becker 1976, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996; Becker and Murphy 2000). For them, the work of social capital is an "imperial" project (Becker 1990: 39).

In a radical challenge to the neoclassical paradigm, rational-choice utilitarians extend the postulate of utility-maximizing human action to the entire social and political universe. In so doing, they violate the exacting rules established by the discipline more than a century ago, which mandate the proper scope of economic analysis to a strictly bounded definition of the economic. In going off the disciplinary reservation, however, the neutillitarians are going forward to the past; their approach is no less than an explicit embrace of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epistemological regime of classical utilitarianism, the most capacious approach to society ever claimed by a single theoretical tradition. Classical

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12 I have long caricatured social capital theory as a Rolodex approach to social relations and social action, but always in irony, playfulness, and even parody. Imagine my surprise to find that reality -- without a trace of irony -- now imitates the art of caricature: "We assume that individual social capital includes both intrinsic abilities . . . and the results of social capital investments . . . e.g., a large Rolodex" (Glaeser et al. 2002: F438).

13 See Bowles and Gintis (2002) for a brilliant critique of the "economic approach."
political economy was not a single discipline but an entire moral philosophy. Ridiculous to Malthus, Ricardo, or Bentham would have been the idea that they should limit their analyses to what a bunch of academics later claimed to be the legitimate boundaries of the "economy." For the very hallmark of utilitarianism was its claim that the self-regulating laws of nature drive not only the market, but society as a whole. Society was, in effect, a large market (Bell 1981; Malthus [1803] 1992; Polanyi 2001).

It was not until the 1980s that utilitarianism was cut down to size by what we now recognize as neoclassical economics. Only then did the marginalist revolution for the first time establish strictly defined limits to the proper scope of economic analysis. A Rubicon could not be crossed from the "outside" — the noneconomic terrain of the sociological, historical, or anthropological others — to the "inside" — the terrain of the economy proper, where the operative principles of market equilibrium and utility-driven preferences were treated as given: "What most economists would classify as non-economic problems are precisely those problems which are incapable of being analyzed with the marginalist paradigm" (Heilbroner and Milberg 1995: 7).

The marginalist revolution was the symbolic catalyst of years of sociological exile in the wilderness of exogeneity. There sociologists cultivated an exquisite resentment toward economists. Cast out from the only social science turf with actual power and influence, sociologists duly turned their attention to the social detritus, the "nuts and the sluds," the non-utility-optimizers. But a small faction was not ready to walk away without a fight for recognition and inclusion. A subgroup of economic sociologists launched a long-suffering guerrilla war from without, shooting missiles across the bows in the form of intellectually indignant theoretical assaults: what about the social? where do preferences come from? what about embeddedness? and what about the noncontractual basis of contracts? Inquiring sociologists demanded to know. Such assaults were brushed off easily as so many flies by the powerfully situated elephant of modern economics, and insult was only added to injury with Milton Friedman's (1953) influential reinforcement of the outside/inside boundary regime as set forth in his classic article on positivist economics.14

But we should all know by now that the favorite game of the gods is to inflict the most perverse of curses — namely, to give us exactly what we want. Thus, in the last third of the twentieth century a new breed of economist was born in Gary Becker, dedicated to violating the marginalist rules of the game in favor of an entirely new set of rules. These mandated that economists pay a lot of attention to that social world outside the previously insulated sphere of the strictly economic. Becker first converted the once sociological topics of education and skills into economic human capital theory, then quickly broadened his scope of attention to everything social, from drugs to sex, to welfare, war, and marriage, and so reinvented social capital: "Social capital is crucial not only for understanding addictions... but also for most other behavior in the modern world, and probably in the distant past as well" (1996: 6). And lest anyone doubt the literalness of Becker's reference to "most other behavior," Accounting for Tastes (1996) reveals that fitting appropriately under Becker's rubric of issues to be explained by human and social capital theory is no less than everything — from jogging to government propaganda, with child abuse and deception filling somewhere in between (see also Becker and Nashat 1997; Becker and Murphy 2000).

This is a project Becker proudly calls one of "economic imperialism" (Becker 1990: 39): "From a methodological viewpoint, the aim... is to show how [what is considered important in the sociological and anthropological literature can be usefully analyzed when incorporated into the framework provided by economic theory]" (1990: 194). Once colonized by the imperial power, variables once recognizable as sociological (such as power and politics) and thus exogenous to the market, were now reframed to be newly analyzed and made intelligible by treating them as market variables. Becker's arguments for social capital's breathtakingly wide reach are mirrored by the broad spectrum of concerns for which scholars, politicians, public intellectuals, and institutions have found it beneficial, most notably the World Bank's familiar use of the social capital concept to theorize the social conditions for sustainable development (www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/whatsc.htm).15

Neoeconolamist social capital theory has thus cycled back through time to display the startling hybrid of classical utilitarianism's long-rejected imperial project. In addition to physical, natural, financial, and human capital, economists and rational-choice theorists have coupled the social in an intimate embrace with capital. Whereas the prevailing neoclassical orthodoxy has long disdained and dismissed the social, neoeconomics recognize the far greater advantage in hijacking the sociological paradigm

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14 The image of elephants brushing off flies in reference to the concept economists have long held toward their sociological challenges was given to me by Robert Solow (personal communication, 1990).

15 There is a vast literature on social capital and development. See especially Evans (1996); Fine (2001), McMichael (1998), and Woolcock (1998).
and commandeering it into an appendage to the market. For this, social capital is the perfect Trojan horse.

Social capital, sociology, and the Trojan horse

Sociology is besotted with social capital, besotted with the belief that the “discovery” of the concept represents the surrender by economists to the constitutive role of the social. The belief is that after years of exile in the wilderness of exogeneity, extra-market social relations have at last been anointed with the status of a valued source of streaming utility. The long-desired marriage between sociology and economics has at last been consummated. But this marriage has more the whiff of romanticized puppy love than a real union between equals, for there is a glaring imbalance in the distribution of desire and power between the two putative lovers. Whereas neoliberal economists have a purely instrumental and, well, utilitarian relationship to the social, sociologists are breathtakingly, disproportionately, and recklessly infatuated. Social capital has become a totem animating deep-seated desires for academic inclusion into the privileged circle of power so long occupied exclusively by economics, the “queen of the social sciences.” Surely social capital’s success signals nothing less than a great sociological achievement – the triumph of recognition (or so the argument goes) by the economists.

But this social capital-philia is more warrissome than simply an embarrassing case of “utility-envy.” Nothing better illustrates the wrong-headedness of the infatuation than the parable of the Trojan horse, which in this version tells the tale of a spectator peace-offering hearing the “gift of recognition of the social.” Beguiled by a few economists and rational-choice theorists who appear to traffic in the social, sociologists eagerly interpret social capital as an olive branch from those who have finally surrendered to the need to “sociologize” the market model. The real story, of course, reveals just the opposite: this is a Trojan horse bearing not a sociologizing of the market model, but a marketizing of the social. And marketizing the social signals nothing less than a full-scale threat to the irreducibility of relationality at the heart of the social.

Robert Putnam: the promise and the disappointment

I turn now to the work of the political scientist, Clinton advisor, and celebrity of C-SPAN, the New York Times, and People magazine, Robert Putnam. While Bourdieu, Becker, and Coleman may have been the theoretical pioneers of the revival of the social capital concept, there is no question that Putnam triggered its real takeoff to fame among the broad public of academics and policy intellectuals. It was Putnam who brought social capital into circulation as a solution to what he and others saw as long-standing empirical problems of modernizing development in southern Europe and the developing world, as well as for the “malaise” of civic culture in the United States.

Robert Putnam first impressed the public intelligentsia and political classes with his now famous articles on “Bowling Alone” (1995, 1996), in which he argued that current ills in the United States were caused by a precipitous decline in the life of civil society, specifically in the sharp drop in the character of associational life, in communal trust and neighborly cooperation, and in civic commitments more generally. But true academic stardom came to him with his adventures as “Tocqueville in Italy” in Making Democracy Work (1993), a comparative historical study of Italian regional governance coauthored with several Italian colleagues over the course of the previous twenty years. In this study Putnam’s aim is to compare the causal significance of different variables in making democracy work. His focus is on a series of nationwide institutional reforms aimed at sustained modernizing development, greater governmental transparency, and increased democratic participation (the elimination of corruption, cronyism, and patronage). More than a decade after their implementation, the outcomes were puzzling: real developmental success and genuinely reformed local governance (measured by quantifying civic practices) were in evidence, but exclusively in the northern Italian regions, and not in the southern.

Using macroanalytic comparisons, Putnam tests several explanatory hypotheses. Because the institutional reforms were nationwide and regionally uniform, he effectively rules out any causal role for the Italian state and its local political institutions in explaining the regional variations. More generally, Putnam interprets the defeat of this hypothesis to exclude altogether the influence of political power. That leads to his now famous and controversial finding: the success of the northern regions could be attributed almost exclusively to their singular four-hundred-year histories of deeply embedded horizontal ties and community associations characterized by attitudes of trust and normative reciprocity. As the embodiment of social capital, it was these horizontal ties and norms of trust that served as the lifeblood of prosperous liberal democracies. Thus, social capital became the analytic and theoretical foundation of a new social theory of democracy.\footnote{Among the universe of “Putnamian” literatures on his Italian research, especially important are Levi (1996) and Tarrow (1995).}
Crossing the pond to the late twentieth-century United States, Putnam turns to what he defines as a quarter-century of increasing malaise in civil society. Once again he concludes that it is social capital that explains this phenomenon, but in this case it is due to social capital’s dramatic decline and virtual disappearance over the past several decades, most famously manifested in the decline of bowling league membership, church choirs, community barbecues, and the decay of other kinds of associational and community involvement. Among other empirical evidence, he finds that the number of Americans who attend public meetings on community or school issues dropped between 1973 and 1993 by more than a third (Putnam 1995: 68). Here Putnam gives a lengthier exposition on the nature and limits to what can justifiably fall under the rubric of social capital. Included are horizontal social ties in local communities driven by cultural values and attitudes of trust and reciprocity among “joiners”: bowling leagues, neighborhood barbecues, church choirs, the Girl Scouts. Explicitly excluded, just as in Italy, is any causal role for the decline of such political institutions or programs as federally funded job training, entitlement rights, and community social programs, as well as participation in politics, political parties, and political citizenship institutions more generally, and, most alarmingly, the decline of the power and membership strength of trade unions. Neither the exercise of power, nor even basic struggles over the institutions of rights and civil liberties, have any causal significance in Putnam’s findings. But he goes even further. Not only are politics, power, and the condition of the public sphere missing in his explanation for the decline of civil society, so too is any attention to the dramatic restructurings of the economy and the market over the same period of time (e.g. the privatization of public goods and services, the radical restructuring of firms and corporate downsizing, newly restrictive labor market rules and regulations, the systematic weakening of trade union institutional power). “Bowling Alone” (1995, 2000), the canonical text for the theory and empirical application of social capital, summarily dismisses sociology’s usual suspects, most prominently the collapse of the welfare state and its social safety nets, the neoliberal restructuring and privatization of the economy, and a newly regressive tax system that has been systematically shifting the tax burden from wealth to work. The weakened condition of citizenship rights and political participation, a degraded public sphere, and the dictates of market forces have all been taken off the agenda. Instead, we are implored to go bowling.

There are other concerns about Putnam’s thesis. As others have noted, not all relational entities are positive and healthy phenomena. What Portes and others call the “dark side of social capital” has all too often been exhibited in fascist youth associations and Nazi brown shirts. In today’s skinheads, urban gangs, and populist and racist evangelical churches, among others (Portes 1998). Before any sanguine theories of social capital continue on their present tack, empirical work is necessary to determine the conditions lending themselves to this dark side of social capital. Not to do so is tantamount to eliminating half of the human record of history and society.17

There can be absolutely no doubt that Robert Putnam is a committed civic democrat in search of the foundations of social justice, for whom building a democratic egalitarian civic culture is a consuming passion. He is explicitly not an apologist for the neoliberal or market fundamentalist project. In this commitment, however, I believe his use of the social capital concept is misapplied and wrongheaded. He excludes the entire spectrum of the very institutions of governance, rights, and power without which civil society could not be sustained against the corrosive effects of unregulated market forces. These absences, moreover, are not presented as empirical findings of this or that case (e.g. Italy), but as the very essence of the theoretical work that he wants social capital to perform. Putnam never comes to grips with the fact that the theory of social capital extends market principles to those noncontractual arenas of social life where utilitarian ethics will do nothing less than corrode the very social ties and civic practices he so celebrates. To achieve the practices and institutions of trust, communication, and reciprocity that Putnam tries to represent in the social capital concept requires abandoning its constitutive postulates of localism, acquisition, individualism, the market model of efficiency, the marketization of the social, and the radical autonomy from power and politics. Success with these revisions, however, would leave us not with an improved version of social capital; instead, it would return us to the primacy and the irreducibility of the social where, ideally, we should have started in the first place. And this would take us back to the conceptual site and the normative ideals of civil society.

The end of history? Civil society and social capital

The story of civil society begins in the decades leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. For the democratic left, the fall of the Wall was the accomplishment of a new civil society movement, which served as a

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17There is a curious definitional narrowing in Putnam’s use of social capital. In the transition from Becker’s promiscuous vision in which social capital applies to virtually everything, to Putnam’s more contained application to civil society, social capital theory loses its ability to cure all the personal behaviors that so preoccupy Becker.
launching ground for self-organized bodies of political activists committed to
and conservatives, however, it signaled what Fukuyama (1992) famously
labeled "the end of history" in his best-selling book of the same title. The
End of History was a story and a prediction about the outcome to the
decades-long duel to the death between capitalism and communism that
dominated the globe for the previous half-century. In Fukuyama's story the full of the Wall represented the triumph of free-market capitalism,
a victory over and against the totalitarianism loathed by neolebas,
conservatives, and progressive democrats alike. In retrospect, while there was
unambiguous mobilization for civil and political rights, it is not at all clear
what alternative economic system the European anticommunist move-
ments envisioned. For Fukuyama and his end of history protagonists, how-
ever, there was absolute clarity. Theirs was a conceptual and political
landscape limited to a single manichean dichotomy: the free versus the
un free, good versus evil, the market versus the state. The fall of one meant
the absolute triumph of the other. This was the meaning of the end of
history: With the end of communism there was only one possible future for
the ex-communist world. Never again would history allow industrial
nations to shift their centers of gravity from market to state, from freedom
to tyranny, from notions of "personal responsibility" to those of "moral
hazards." History had in effect stopped with the end of Eastern European
and Soviet communism. Any political advocacy for market rules and
regulations would now be outside the realm of thinkable rational discourse.
The end of history created a new political culture now ruled by Soros's
"Washington consensus," more commonly known as neoliberalism and/or
neoconservatism.

The pronouncement that history had ended, however, was more norma-
lar and ideologically than empirically sound. For while history had in
fact witnessed the defeat of state tyranny with the end of communism,
Fukuyama's concurrent prediction of the future had no empirical model
to build on. Never in history had any societies undergone the transition
from communism to capitalism. There were no how-to models of democra-
tization for societies that had had minimal, if any, institutional frame-
works for administering the rule of law and mechanisms of democracy
before becoming communist. The absence of such models thus made the
end of history's view of the future a triumph of pure theory—an abstract
model-driven commitment to remake the world in the image of the
market, yet one not based on any existing successful transformation from
a communist to a fully functioning market economy. To make matters
worse, the "designer-capitalists" of the 1990s were so driven by antistatist
ideology that they stubbornly refused even to draw lessons from what
was the least analogue to the contemporary situation, namely, the
Marshall Plan's stunning success at nation building in Germany and
Japan in the immediate aftermath of World War II (Glassman 1998).
Instead, it was financiers and bankers at the IMF and the World Bank
who made the global decisions about how market-driven "shock ther-
apy" would be applied throughout Eastern Europe and Russia, and
indeed in much of the developing world.

As Karl Polanyi ([1944] 2001) so brilliantly demonstrated over half a
century ago, however, there is only one problem with the marketization of
everything: it is impossible to achieve without threatening to destroy
the fabric of society (Block and Somers 1984). Nurturing regulated
markets as part of a healthy social order is something very different
from the dream of governance by the self-regulating market mechanism,
or what Polanyi called the "stark utopia" of a "market society." The rest
of the story is thus as familiar as it would have been predictable to any
student of economic sociology and history. Absent the complex, some-
times invisible rules in which successful markets are necessarily embed-
ded, the neoliberal model of governance by self-regulating markets
revealed its inherent weaknesses. It was not long before shock therapy
gave way to social, political, and economic chaos. Profound interna-
tional difficulties began in Thailand in July 1997, spread to Malaysia,
Indonesia, and South Korea, and in 1998 to Russia and Brazil. As safety-
net institutions that were once taken for granted began to disappear, the
new ex-communist capitalist nations succumbed to currency crises and
skyrocketing poverty. Without any constitutional institutional founda-
tions, it was not democracy but the Mafia that took power in Russia.
Soon there was a resurgence of pro-communist sentiment in parts of the
ex-communist world (Holmes 1997; Kennedy 2002; Maier 1997; Soros

In the United States and the United Kingdom, neolebas used the end
of history thesis to facilitate dismantling the welfare state and to further
degrade the public sphere. The corporate need for greater market flexi-
bility in the interests of economic growth turns out to have been a code
for the dissolution of the New Deal and Great Society regimes. With
shock therapy capitalism, crises of public goods and much more inevi-
tably ensued. Market failures and externalities, excess volatility and
transaction costs proved to be the norm and not the exception for today's
global economies (Stiglitz 1998, 2002). Clearly, the utopian dream that the self-regulating market could be the governing mechanism of the future had yet to become the end of history.

At this point, a crossroads had to be faced: how to solve these problems of externalities and diminishing public goods while continuing to privatize? Perhaps shock therapy was not working in quite the way the end of history had predicted. But in a zero-sum world of state versus market, there are no gray zones; any hint of return to the Keynesianism that had for so long saved capitalism from its own excesses would have betrayed marketizing ideals. Of course, there were, and are, plenty of societies—most of Western Europe, for example—that never succumbed to the either/or of market versus state but flourished successfully as social democracies. For the market fundamentalist project, however, even the most modest of welfare states meant no less than socialism and unfreedom—even under the monarch of a mixed economy. In this context, how to address the market’s problems without turning back to the state became an urgent question.

Initially, the solution was to cling even more fervently to market models on the grounds that meddling politicians had prevented them from having the opportunity to be fully implemented. So stubbornly did neoliberalists cling to absolute belief in their model that even in those countries with successful economies the IMF started to withhold loans until there was a commitment to economic restructuring (e.g., McMichael 1998; Miller 1997). This in turn led to a rejection of any evidence that threatened to contradict the model. The practice was to save the model at all costs while blaming “reality” for the failings of the new world of marketization. This is precisely what happened when the giant hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management (LTCM) collapsed in 1998 under the weightlessness of its mathematically modeled reality. In a stunning inversion of the mantra of modern epistemology—theory proposes, data disposes—Martin Gruber, Nomura Professor of Finance at NYU’s Stern School, remarked about LTCM: “A series of events occurred that were outside the norm. . . . These catastrophes happen. The fault isn’t with the models” (Morgenson and Neinstein 1998: 1). When challenged by the limits of its propositions—in other words, it is not the market model but reality that takes the blows for the failure of the world to conform to the [model’s] norms.

But for how long was reality going to lie down and take the blame for the failures of a “virtual” model of governance. In a repetition of much of the past two centuries, the either/or of market versus state was proving inadequate to the task of achieving its own goals. Then a deus ex machina appeared in the new vocabulary of social capital. Not only was it a concept that relied on methodological individualism, it was also one built on a foundational antistatism. But I get ahead of myself. To explain how these antistatists found their way to social capital we have to return to the struggle against communism and the rediscovery of civil society.

Enter civil society

Civil society is the sphere of social organization made famous by its political revival in Eastern Europe and South America’s anti-authoritarian insurgencies of the 1980s (Arato 1981; Barber 1996; Calhoun 1993; Cohen 1999; Cohen and Rogers 1995; Ehrenberg 1999; Foley and Edwards 1996; Geremek 1992). Civil society, however, is an “essentially contested concept” (Gallic, cited in Hollis and Lukes 1982). As I argue in chapter 7, the Tocquevillean-inspired view of civil society as a third sphere between market and state has always been rivaled by that of classical liberalism’s. While both approaches pose civil society in sharp opposition to the state, for liberalism the manichean dichotomy of public versus private overdetermines any gesture toward a genuine third sphere. In a bivalent conceptual landscape of only private and public, market and state, civil society can only be on the private side of the Rubicon that divides market from state.18

Following Locke, who first invented the idea of civil society in the seventeenth century as a self-sufficient social entity and countervailing source of political authority, late twentieth-century market fundamentalists unambiguously identify civil society as the cultural and social dimension of the market. Many conservatives were attracted especially to this cultural view of civil society as an antidote to what they characterized as the moral degeneration caused by years of dependence on the handouts of the public welfare state and the excesses of a rights-laden political culture (Huntington 1975; M. Crozier et al. 1975; Pharr and Putnam 2000). It is a vision of civil society that makes it at once a facilitator of the market and a cultural bulwark against the “nanny state” (and of the perverse dependences it encourages). As such, conservatives hoped that civil society would be a critical mechanism in the effort to shift responsibility for social problems away from the state and the market, and onto the shoulders of civil society’s “little platoons” of family, church, and

18 Hegel, of course, reversed Locke and reinstated a triadic conception of social organization, but paradoxically, this did not create civil society as the sphere of citizenship but as the site of the market and civil society in general and Hegel’s understanding of it in particular, see Cohen and Arato (1992).
community (Berger and Neuhaus 1996; Fukuyama 1992, 1995a, 1995b). It thus became important as both an empirical and a normative site of private personal responsibility and moral autonomy.19

At first, civil society served these needs well. But shortly it became clear that the concept, like all essentially contested concepts, could not be owned by any single interpretation. For one thing, there was the testy little problem of origins. The Polish Solidarity movement that had contributed so much to the rebirth of the civil society idea was, after all, not one of Edmund Burke’s traditional little platoons; it was, of all things, a trade union — one of neoliberalism’s great anathemas. And even if some of Solidarity’s leaders became avid free marketers and anti-statist politicians, conservatives could not sit comfortably with civil society’s trade union roots.

At the same time, with the success of the Eastern European revolutions against communism, civil society had increasingly become a rallying cry for the new social movements of the Western democratic and community left. These civil society social movements, while they invoked their independence from the state, were no allies of neoliberalism (Dean 2004). History gave good reasons to renounce statism, but creating a market-governed society was not the default alternative. For the political democratic left, civil society was not captive to the limits of a public/private dichotomy but instead challenged the hegemony of both the coercion of administrative states and the predatory drives of the global marketplace (e.g. Arato 2000; Cohen and Arato 1992; Keane 1994; Kennedy 1991; Somers 2001). Gdansk, Solidarity, and the rediscovery of civil society thus became clarion calls not merely for freedom from state coercion but also for the nonmarket values of solidarity, reciprocity, horizontal ties, participatory civic values, and social justice, hardly the banner under which market fundamentalists or cultural conservatives could readily march. And for neoconservatism, there was yet another problem with the civil society moniker. In its sociological link to the political project of the democratic left, it was also implicated in the normative ideals of democratic participation, popular political empowerment, and the empowerment of rights-oriented social movements, all of which presupposed a deep engagement with the political public sphere (Rosenberg and Post 2002). Despite their full convergence with the norms of liberal democratic societies, these principles and projects evoked almost everything the neoconservatives had come to abhor, namely a rejection of not only the state but also market-centric foundations of social organization in favor of the

19 For discussions of the relevant neoconservative literature, see also Denneth and Kristol (1995); Gershon (1996a, 1996b); Nicholson (1989); Kristol (1995).


From civil society to social capital

In 1993 social capital became something little remarked on in social theory: an epistemological public good.20 Like all public goods, its resources became part of the "commons" — available to all, exploitable by many. When social capital entered the public sphere and became available as a public good, its epistemological powers were put into circulation. Those who perceived and appropriated this knowledge found themselves in possession of a remarkable kind of social, political, and economic power. Most public goods are characterized by their limited resources. But unlike these usual ones, epistemological public goods have unique powers by virtue of their abstract virtuality. They are infinitely elastic, and there are no limits to their capacity to provide goods. As an epistemological public good, social capital would prove to be the gift that keeps on giving.

It is hard to know what direction the juncture of neoconservatism and civil society would have taken if social capital had not suddenly become a public good. But it did, in large part thanks to the collision of neoconservative, neoliberal, and intellectual social capital streams. Timing was everything. Just as these multiple social capital trajectories collided, Robert Putnam’s success catapulted the concept of social capital into the political public sphere. Across the ideological spectrum intellectuals moved quickly. Conservatives who saw in it all of the appeal and none of the deficits of the civil society concept, appropriated it, then named it, reframed it, and renamed it. In a truly Pygmalion-like achievement, civil society — the once unruly and unpredictable nurturing ground for the goals, practices, and normative ideals of democratic citizenship — reappeared in the 1990s in public and academic discourse as social capital. As a public good the capacity of social capital to solve political problems was perceived to be vast, and neoconservatives and neoconservatives alike were able to fully exploit its epistemological powers. Above all, it provided an antistatist political language to explain, justify, and obfuscate the political project of shifting the burdens of social risk and market externalities from market and state, to the personal responsibility of individual families and communities. From

20 My insistence on social capital as an epistemological public good distinguishes it from Coleman, for whom it is the functional effects of social capital’s actual social relations (of family, community, etc.) that makes it what he calls a collective good (Coleman [1988] 2000b: 317).
the social rights of the New Deal and the Great Society, to the commodified free agents of the 1980s and 1990s, the work of saving capitalism from its own excesses was about to shift once again – this time to the newly discovered gold mine of social capital.

The contributions of social capital to the political project of marketizing the social can be parsed into four dimensions:

1. Social capital provides a nonstate solution to those externalities the market is either unable or unwilling to solve. Call this the function of saving capitalism from its own excesses.

2. Social capital shifts the expectations of citizenship from rights claims to obligations and duties.

3. Social capital provides a nonstate alternative to what conservatives define as the entitlement-driven welfare state and the excesses of democratic rights claims. Call this the reconstitution of citizenship through the cultural sphere of moral regulation, self-help, and personal responsibility.

4. Finally, social capital provides a spatial substitute to civil society in the concept of “community” – the nonstate site in which the relationships of social capital are confined.

The site of community

Let us start with the last of the four and work backwards through the list. The great value of the term “civil society” is that it refers to a real place in the topography of social life. Social capital, by contrast, does not signify any particular domain; it is inherently placeless. To overcome this deficiency, conservatives coupled social capital with community, a concept with a long and noble place in the sociological landscape.21

The well-known phrase “It takes a village to raise a child” expresses nicely the relationship between social capital and community. This idealized approach to childcare is not free-floating and mobile but contained in a particular and local community. It thus carries the whiff of traditional values and of parenting practices dependent exclusively on family, kinship, and (face-to-face) community relationships. Traditional communities are seen to encourage respect for hard work, self-sufficiency, the values of the market, and disdain for dependence on the state. Yet the emphasis on the local village as the appropriate site of conscientious parenting is just as strongly a negative injunction against expecting child support from the government. In lieu of looking to the state to deal with inadequately funded public schools, for example, “[i]t takes a village to raise a child” implicitly blames parents and the community – for their lack of personal responsibility in participating in the PTA, for their inadequate attention to the child’s homework, perhaps even for not taking on the responsibility of home schooling – in short, for their insufficient exercise of social capital. The aphorism could easily be social capital’s own clarion call as it at once celebrates the (private) family and community’s burden of accountability for child-rearing even while, satin voce, it intones “as opposed to the state and the public.”

The first asset for social capital that the site of community provides is thus a negative one: it is the site that is not the state. The valorization of community by virtue of its absent statism and presence of personal responsibility cannot be overstated in the neoconservative project of redistributing the risks of market society from the market and state, to families and communities. In the words of one of its most influential craftsmen, Francis Fukuyama: “If society is not to become anarchic or otherwise ungovernable, then it must be capable of self-government at levels of organization below the State. Such a system depends ultimately not just on law but also on the self-restraint of individuals” (1995a: 357–8 emphasis added).

Fukuyama is one of the best-known US conservatives. But here is the British Labour Party’s Home Secretary, Jack Straw, in his keynote speech to the 1998 Nexus Conference on “Mapping Out the Third Way”: “Community and personal responsibility which have so long been buried in the futile arguments between Left and Right, are at the centre of everything we do… [Therefore] we are literally handing over a huge amount of power to individual citizens and local communities away from the central State” (1998: 18; cited in Rose 2000, emphasis added). Note his almost evangelical celebration of community for being not the state. Community as the site of social capital is morally obligated to compensate for the loss of public services and social rights by providing shelter for the unemployed, the unemployable, and the socially excluded. When the Labour Party takes up the banner of social capital as the alternative to the state, it is clear that this shift of risk and responsibility from the public to the people does not require a wholesale commitment to market fundamentalism, but simply a rejection of the role of the public sphere in supporting social life. The deus ex machina of social capital, clearly, is an equal opportunity solution for all those committed to the superiority of market technologies in morally restoring society.

21 Concerns about social capital thus represent a return to classical sociological preoccupations with community as the foundation of social solidarity and social cohesion” (Gamarnikow and Green 1999: 111). See also Bowles (1999) and Rose (1999, 2000).
From the culture of entitlement to the ethos of self-help and personal responsibility

Once social capital becomes identified with the traditionalist conceptual terrain of community, the question of social action arises. This is the third dimension in the work of social capital. For conservatives, the great deficiency of civil society was its politically oriented content; the practices of civil society could not easily be dissociated from a radical democratic ethos, a strong emphasis on participatory citizenship rights, and activist commitments to influence political and state policy (Habermas 1990; Laumann 1995; Merkl and Weinberg 1993). As we know, the generative value of social capital is not only that it rejects the state as the source of support, rights, and entitlements; it also rejects the state as the locus of social action. The community is responsible for its own moral and economic viability. Social capital requires that people in their churches, their communities, their city councils, their voluntary associations, their Rotary clubs, their women’s societies, and their bowling leagues assume local civic duties and personal responsibilities. Its values are those of self-help, moral autonomy, personal responsibility, and collective self-restraint. These evoke Burke’s conservative dream of “little platoons” as the foundation of social order, as well as Durkheim’s revelation that society survives through moral constraint and normative regulation. Thus, in contrast to the “dutiless rights” of “excessive” citizenship, social capital works through networks of moral control, moral behavioral norms for conduct and interaction, ethical imperatives of self-help and personal responsibility. Here is Amitai Etzioni, the founder of communitarianism and a passionate advocate for social justice: “For a society to be communitarian, much of the social conduct must be ‘regulated’ by reliance on the moral voice rather than the law, and the scope of the law itself must be limited largely to that which is supported by the moral voice” (1997: 139).

From rights to duties: reinventing citizenship

The second dimension in the work of social capital may represent the greatest distinction between civil society and social capital. The duties associated with community activity are not complemented by an equally robust set of rights. Recall the conservative outcry against the putative excess of rights and unrestrained freedoms (i.e. in the 1960s) without the corresponding sense of duties, merit, and personal responsibility, which served as a major catalyst in the search for a site of social life untouched by the state’s entitlements (Berger and Neuhaus 1996). Here, echoing that sentiment, is the “Third Way” British Labour Party’s Jack Straw again:

The old Left...failed to argue against...an extension of individual freedom [as] a license to do almost anything, and that the State existed as some sort of universal great provider, which made no moral judgments regardless of the merits of those who were dependent upon it...it has made rights appear like ready-made consumer items which the state can dispense at will and often for which the “consumer” never need pay. As the philosopher David Selbourne has written: “In its thrall, the citizen comes to be perceived and treated by the civic order (and its instruments, the state and government) not as a citizen but as a consumer, customer, and bundle of wants; and the citizen, perceiving himself in like fashion, loses sense of his duties, as a citizen, to himself, his fellows, and the civic order, at worst without sense of honour or shame” [Selbourne 1994: 79]...This led on to a culture of dutiless rights – where rights are exercised without due recognition being given to our mutual responsibilities towards each other. (1998: 6; cited in Rose 1999)

Third Way enthusiasm for social capital and the traditional community is driven mightily by a shift from rights to duties, from public service to private responsibility, from noncontractualism to a system of market-driven incentives. In depleting civil society of rights and loading it up with duties, the work of social capital in local communities becomes a peculiarly inverted antistatist version of Leviathan. Like the absolute political control exercised by the Hobbesian state, the source of social order and community sustenance shifts from the state to social capital and the community. But, just as in Leviathan, the Faustian bargain requires that in return for the secure moral values of honor and shame inherent in community regulation, individual rights must be abandoned at the entry. Social capital insulates the community from what the Tri lateral Commission of the 1970s (Crozier et al. 1975) famously labeled the excesses of democracy.

It is one thing, however, to be seduced by the safety of community to give up some excessive expectations of the polity. It is something else altogether to define this shift from rights to duties, from the public sphere to the privatized community, as “the essential act of citizenship.” Yet, this is exactly what Jack Straw says: “In many ways the most important example of our approach is our commitment greatly to extend the idea and practice of volunteering – of people doing something for each other rather than having the State do it for them and so diminishing them. We have described this voluntary activity as ‘the essential act of citizenship’” (1998: 16; cited in Rose 2000: 1404; emphasis added).

Even for the moderate Third Wayers, then, social capital detaches the essential act of citizenship from the institutions of state and political
community. Instead, in this reconstituted site of community, the essential acts of citizenship are those in which it is a duty to donate one’s labor to the stock of social capital because it is social capital that in turn provides value to the nation’s markets. This is the stuff of citizenship qua social capital – a radically antipolitical, anti-institutional, presocial, stateless and rightless kind of citizenship. Dutiful citizenship demands that we freely contribute our own labor to the project of transforming the previously noncontractual practices of citizenship into market-saving practices. Social capital’s redesigned citizenship is driven by the duties of individuals to the market, not by the rights and obligations of public membership and the common good; by conditional desert based on merit, rather than by human rights and the equality of status; by moral restraints and self-sacrifice, rather than by the irresponsible license of equitable redistribution (Berger and Neuhaus 1996; Fukuyama 1995a, 1995b; Selbourne 1994; Saebert and Thompson 2001).

If, after foregoing the state in favor of market solutions, markets now fail to solve the problems of poverty, the environment, persistent unemployment, and the risks of private insurance, instead of turning to the state, we are to seek succor in family, friends, relationships, and faith-based organizations. In place of welfare, let family and kin “wealth transfers” do the job; economists qua social capital advocates insist they are “more efficient” anyway (Durlauf 2002). This was the driving force behind the successful bipartisan American legislation that abolished Aid to Families with Dependent Children on the grounds that the welfare state created perverse incentives to moral compromise, irresponsible sexual behavior, and a disdain for the work ethic (Somers and Block 2005). As the alternative to the social state, social capital displaces the “culture of dependency” and the moral hazards associated with welfare. In place of federally funded policing, let neighborhood police paid by local taxes do the job. Better yet, let the neighborhood use its own rich reservoir of information capital (neighbors) as the eyes and ears of social control. In place of environmental regulations, let the community’s voluntary civic associations exercise their own normative sanctions against free-riding corporate neighbors. And in place of public school funding, let the PTAs and home schoolers provide the moral and educational guidance so desperately needed by the children (Bowles and Gintis 2002; Orr 1999; Lin 2001; Saebert and Thompson 2001; Munch 2002).

Liberated from the “diminishment” of excessive rights and readmitted into the constraints and expectations of community, people are now made accountable through the moral approbation and sanctions – the naming, blaming, and shaming – that only friends, neighbors, and traditional communities can inflict to effectively govern behavior.

Saving the market from its externalities and excesses

Self-sacrifice, volunteerism, social control, reciprocal information sharing, the camaraderie of bowling leagues – this is the stuff of social capital (Aberg and Sandberg 2003; Putnam 2000, 2002; Putnam et al. 1993; Coleman 1988, 2000); it is a bundle of voluntary, self-help practices and values that promise to create a fountain of previously untapped economic value. But it is a peculiar kind of economic value. Recall that the turn to social capital on the part of the neocliberarians was not motivated by assumptions of perfect market equilibrium. Rather, it was their recognition of the market’s inevitable limits, externalities, and imperfections that drove them to transgress into social fields beyond the bounds of market analysis. The first item on my list of the work of social capital is therefore that of a collective citizen contributing economic value by performing the duties of modern citizenship – mopping up the nasty messes generated by neoliberalism’s own privatizing reforms. Call this the function of saving capitalism from its own excesses. By absorbing the market’s costs, social capital paradoxically adds value to the market’s stream of utility functions. This is what makes it social capital.

In its job of saving the market from its own excesses and limits, it is social capital (that is us, the way that is now responsible for coping with unemployment, underemployment, loss of benefits, and low-wage jobs – and all without asking the market to pay. Citizenship morphs into a form of capital that adds value to the wealth of the nation while preserving property rights and competitive markets. By protecting markets from government interference, social capital turns citizenship into a prostitute for capitalism. It does not, however, put food on the table.

In the political epistemology of social capital, true citizens must take personal responsibility for their own welfare, treating relationships as investments and exploiting their friends, neighbors, relatives, fellow church-goers, and bowling teams. In the paradoxical new message of privatized citizenship, the social has been evacuated by an aggregate of purely instrumental connections “owned” by each individual, and funneled into the market. In this Orwellian world, exercising citizenship requires activating one’s own personal stock of social capital by exploiting utility from friends. Here is Jack Straw again: “[I]n community asserts our mutual responsibility, our belief in a common purpose. And it also asserts that there is no such ‘thing’ as society; not in the way in which
Mrs. Thatcher claimed, but because society is not a 'thing' external to our experiences and responsibilities. It is us, all of us" (1998: 17, cited in Rose 2000: 1395). Let "us," then, eat social capital.

**Alternative knowledge: Solidarity and civil society**

Whether in the hands of social scientists or self-styled imperialist economists, the concept of social capital is grounded on the imperatives of duty, responsibility, coerced cooperation, moral and religious values, voluntary labor, and absolute trust in the market - but is devoid of rights. Hence one of the most consistent absences from the social capital literature is trade unions. Yet (in their ideal-typical form), one could hardly think of a better normative and empirical exemplar for the kind of associational networks that the social capital concept claims to invoke. To garner the benefits of, say, a successful labor contract, a working person submits to the rules of membership regardless of whether these rules appeal or are convenient. The rules demand accountability; from which follow the obligations of access and ownership but of belonging and membership. And from these foundational membership practices flows the capacity to bargain for and act on their hard-won rights to collective power and influence. These in turn require involvement of the state: not its degradation and privatization but its legal backing to the bargaining contract. Apparently, the social capital advocates managed to overlook the irreducibly public and rule-driven infrastructures at the heart of effective trade unions.

Poland's Solidarity, the union of Gdansk ship workers that first came to the world's notice in the early 1980s, exemplifies the empowerment generated by membership's rule-driven practices. Solidarity membership was based on sanctions and obligations, risks, and sacrifices. Yet the union both catalyzed and provided leadership in the struggle against communism. Such extraordinary power was only possible because the workers displayed commitment to act first and foremost as members of a collective entity. Solidarity's demonstration of how to win democratic rights is an example of the kind of agency characteristic of a membership-driven relational network. The union's membership practices were built on repositories of knowledge, skills, and rules that resided in the capacity of the social network to exercise associational power over the preferences and choices, even the "human capital," of individual agents. To be sure, individuals have choices within this relational entity, but they are framed within the rights and the obligations to participate in the union's rule-driven attachments. These are the choices of "voice" in an entity over which no one has ownership rights, and they are the rights of "exit" - knowing that to exit is to lose the inclusionary powers of membership. These make relational networks and the attachments they embody not forms of capital but mechanisms of social belonging, mechanisms necessary to sustain the robust associational bodies that are required for social movements to be effective in their struggles for democratic freedoms: the kind of relationships, in other words, that enabled Solidarity to bring down a tyrannical state, the kinds of relationships characteristic not of social capital but of civil society.

More generally, the history of market societies suggests that meaningful citizenship practices and durable relationships that are robust, relationally sturdy, reciprocally empowered, and characterized by high degrees of trust depend on deep links to public spheres, the national state, and the rule of law. Democratic practices and social cooperation both require a legal apparatus embedded enough into the fabric of everyday life that the law is constitutive to the infrastructure of membership rules, practices, expectations, and sanctioned obligations. This in turn provides the foundations for a relational body peopled by rights-bearers, not social capitalists. The numerous voluntary associations that Skocpol (2003) and others have shown to be thickly distributed throughout much of US history as well as the modern university faculty are examples of relational bodies driven by membership practices (see also Collins 1979). The paradox is that although these are the very conditions that are essential to the survival of the kinds of social relationships that the idea of social capital claims to represent, they are precisely those that its advocates systematically exclude. The relational networks that the social capital concept wants to evoke cannot be isolated from their social and political environments, from the rules of law and state institutions that enforce the very strength and durability of those networks. Even the World Bank now recognizes "that the capacity of various social groups to act in their interest depends crucially on the support (or lack thereof) that they receive from the state as well as the private sector. Similarly, the state depends on social stability and widespread popular support. In short, economic and social development thrives when representatives of the state, the corporate sector, and civil society create forums in and through which they can identify and pursue common goals" (World Bank 2004).

Political and legal institutions are the mechanisms that actually allow democratic claims to be practiced by rights-bearing people. Without

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22 On exit and voice, see Hirschman (1970).
these institutional expressions of legal embeddedness, middle- and working-class communities would quickly dissolve into competition, unemployment, and despair – precisely the social conditions that, in the context of modern market dynamics, would lead to the dissolution of strong social relations and social supports. In theory, it would destroy “social capital.” In reality, it is eroding civil society.

A militant antipositivism in positivist guise

Notwithstanding Becker’s (1990: 30) and others’ goal of colonizing the rest of the social sciences with economic imperialism, coupling the social with capital is often well intentioned; Robert Putnam, for example, can hardly be written off as either a neoconservative or a market fundamentalist. Because social capital ascribes value to nonmarket relationships, many see it as a way to civilize and humanize the otherwise brittle meanness of market forces. But even the most prestigious economists express serious qualms. Kenneth Arrow (2000) argues that the term social capital should be abandoned as the social relations to which it refers are not actually a type of capital. Instead, he suggests we focus on studying alternative forms of social interactions. Robert Solow (1990, 2000) concurs, suggesting that the theory suffers from confusion about what constitutes capital, thus canceling out the well-meaning intentions to valorize social relations (see also Akerlof 1984). It is time for the rest of us to follow suit.

One way to do so is to conclude by pointing to the politics of knowledge exhibited by the social capital stories – stories that demonstrate just how intimate is that link between what Foucault (1977b, 1995) calls the power/knowledge connection. It is a link that in the case of social capital demands more than merely assertion; it also demands demonstration. After all, at the end of the day social capital is just an idea, and it is fair to ask whether an idea can actually bear the influence I have ascribed to it throughout this chapter. My answer is twofold. First, to paraphrase the great Reinhard Bendix (1976), there are some ideas originally invented to conceptualize the empirical world that have such ideational powers that they end up becoming part of that world. Social capital is one such idea that has become more than an idea; it is now an essential empirical component to that world and, as such, should be subject to all the usual tools of empirical investigation. Second, as hard as it is for sociologists to come to grips with the independent causal powers of ideas, social capital is an exemplary case of ideational power. My argument is that social capital is not a term that emerged to reflect changes actually taking place in the social world. Rather, it is the idea of social capital that has pushed, prodded, and reconfigured our knowledge and understanding of that world, especially that of the appropriate distribution of power among the spheres of market, state, and civil society. As an ideational causal mechanism social capital has played (and continues to play) a mighty part in delegitimizing and dismantling the once prevailing institutionalist/Keynesian regime and converting it to the now dominant belief in market solutions. Social capital – not simply the words, of course, but the wider project of shifting the risks of market society from wealth to labor, from the public sector to individuals and families – has exercised its epistemic powers to successfully embed our contemporary market culture well within the larger ideational regime of marketization.23

This points us to “positivism and its epistemological others” (Steinmetz 2005b) in the construction of knowledge, where knowledge and power are so deeply entwined (Foucault 1977a). The social capital phenomenon entails three kinds of knowledge postulates, each of which has worked to reinforce its ideational role in shifting the study of the social from sociology to economics, and in shifting economic responsibility from the social state onto the shoulders of individuals and their communities. The first knowledge postulate is ontological. The social sciences were born in a stream of history driven forward by two centuries of struggle for the triumph of political liberalism – a struggle for natural individual rights not only against the perceived chronic threat of coercion from the state, but also from the perceived tyranny of feudal social relationships. Political liberalism, however, came attached to its inseparable twin of economic liberalism, which teaches that it is the natural freedoms of prepolitical market society and property exchange that provides for political freedom. As part of the liberal imagination, the social sciences came to life with an intractable ontological conflict: would society be a social entity, a site independent not only of the state but also of the market? Or would it be reduced to the anarist site of natural liberties and the privatized freedoms of market exchange? Today’s triumph of social capital over civil society and the state suggests that the conflict is currently being resolved in the direction of freedom as privatization, as pairing social with capital destroys the very social it aims to valorize. It is a theory of social values built on market theory and utilitarianism.

The second knowledge postulate is social naturalism. That which is natural is that which has its own laws and regularities. Social naturalism

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23 This concept of ideational embeddedness is developed at length in Soemers and Block (2005).
extends the axiomatic laws of nature to society. The naturalist roots of utilitarianism's view of society as a prepolitical and presocial site endow it with lawlike regularities modeled on the self-regulating natural laws of the market. This in turn gives it the patina of a positivist science, one that lends itself to testable hypotheses. But ascribing the laws of nature to society does not really make it amenable to scientific analysis - it simply makes it appealing to the social sciences.

Finally, there is an epistemological postulate at work in the social capital phenomenon. Neoclassical economics, neoliberalism, and rational-choice theory all define capital as utility-generating investment decisions, which in turn require intentional and rational mental states. Yet intentions and rational thinking are unobservable processes without the evidential status demanded by positivist methodology. And absent epistemological access, unobservables become mere theoretical constructs derived from the logic of realist thought experiments. But if the capital in social capital is not an empirical but a theoretical entity, its causal properties can never be fully confirmed or disconfirmed. They cannot even be candidates for truth or falsehood. Its validity instead is entirely dependent on the logic of theoretical realism - a militantly antipositivist epistemology that mocks positivism for its naïve empiricist belief in the "illusion" of the empirical. "Real" causal mechanisms putatively operate at a deeper level of reality than the superficiality of appearance (see Somers 1998).

But here is the problem: if the capital in social capital is defined only by imputed causal mechanisms, when it rejoins the social half of the couplet, social capital's claim to science and positivism is radically undercut. The primacy of epistemologically inaccessible intentional states of mind leaves power as the sole arbiter of what counts as knowledge. Social capital claims the approval of scientific positivism, while it is actually dependent on a militant antipositivism. Combine this with an ontological individualism mapped onto the social and the result is an incoherent and unstable conceptual entity.

Conclusion

Where Solidarity once shined brightly in our political imaginations the Trojan horse of social capital now prevails. With its polysemic and protean language of social ties and community, social capital theorists have tried to appropriate the spirit of civil society. Social capital now inhabits some of the greatest symbols of participatory democratic ideals. By appropriating the language of civil society, but domesticating and evacuating its social, political, and egalitarian dimensions, social capital has turned the social against its natural constituents.

Clearly, the appeal of the social capital concept for the neoliberals and conservatives is in its indictment of public sector investment. It vindicates antistatism by blaming civic decline on the usual sociological suspects of the welfare state and its public services. Most conveniently, it explains the intractability of market failures and externalities not by neoliberalism's starvation of the public sector or its policies of privatization and structural readjustment, but by inadequate quantities of social capital. The message is clear: it is our fault, and our responsibility - yours and mine - for our excessive commitment to greater democratization of the polity, for our lapsed bowling league memberships, for our neglect of neighborhood barbecues, for our insufficient volunteer labor. Along with the privatization of citizenship has come the privatization of responsibility - and we are shamed by our loss of moral fortitude. Let us eat social capital.

In its glorious heyday of the Gdansk-based Solidarity movement, civil society was the nurturing ground for democratic associations of rights-claiming citizens. More than a decade after the fact, it has been hijacked and misshaped into social capital, an antistatist appendage for the compassionate side of market society. Militant antistatism, completely understandable in the case of Eastern Europe's repressed trade unions and social movements fighting heroically against communist state power, cannot be justified in the case of social capital. The exclusion of power, rights, and market inequities from the social capital agenda is not a heroic act; but it is a clever one. Responding to the seductive siren of community, an array of intellectuals, social justice advocates, and well-meaning communitarian proponents of the Third Way are caught in the web of the privatization of citizenship through the allure of social capital and the ever-receding utopia of community. Dazed by the golden glitter of the Trojan horse, we have been dazzled by the social in social capital to collude with a tragicomedy of social science - one in which social capital is bereft of the social, and Solidarity's vision of civil society has been turned into a neighborhood bowling league. Social capital is bad for reducing poverty or elevating civic cultures; and it is bad for sociology - as a discipline and as a social project. Above all, it is very bad for democratic citizenship.
Fear and loathing of the public sphere: how to unthink a knowledge culture by narrating and denaturalizing Anglo-American citizenship theory

This chapter further develops the basic elements of a historical sociology of concept formation—a new research program in the sociology of knowledge. The method is designed to analyze the complex and skewed relationship between the practical world of social organization and the cognitive maps with which we engage that world. Most simply, a historical sociology of concept formation is a cultural and historical approach to making sense of "how we think and why we seem obliged to think in certain ways" (Hacking 1990b: 362). In this chapter I use this research program to make sense of an intriguing but worrisome puzzle about contemporary politics and political argument: namely, the increasing privatization of citizenship and civil society, and the fear and loathing of the public sphere—the demonstrable antitatism of our times. After first elaborating on this puzzle, I propose that the concept of civil society is implicated in a knowledge culture that takes the form of a metanarrative—one I call Anglo-American citizenship theory. By exploring the genealogies of its invention, I suggest that at the causal heart of this metanarrative is the successful demonization of the institutional domain of the state and all that is associated with the public. It is this narrative of the fear and loathing of the public sphere that has been the driving force in defining modern liberal political argument and its equation of freedom with the privatization of citizenship.

A puzzling failure of conceptual space

After almost thirty years of scholarly neglect, citizenship has been rediscovered and reinvented. In this dual process intellectuals and politicians alike have recuperated the concept of civil society. This newly rejuvenated concept is one of the most significant in a conceptual cluster I call the citizenship concepts. A recuperation inspired by the antistatist democratic revolutions of the 1980s and 1990s in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the notion of civil society holds immense conceptual promise. For one, it provides a unique political vocabulary liberated from the stifling constraints of Cold War manichaeism dichotomies between state and market, public and private. At the same time, because of its association with the spread of democratic values and civic practices in Europe, the concept resonates with the increasingly expanding interest in theorizing the conditions for institutionalizing democratic and participatory political cultures in a completely reconfigured geopolitical global landscape.

In proportion to its theoretical promise, however, the concept of civil society also bears an enormous burden. It has been asked to carry not only the theoretical but also the sociological and normative weight of explaining and conceptualizing what is considered to have been the foundational conditions for the Eastern European revolutions of the 1980s. Civil society has thus come to represent the flourishing of a seemingly novel political and social terrain, a space of popular social movements and collective mobilization, of informal networks, civic associations, and community solidarities all oriented toward sustaining a participatory democratic life. In addition to these extraordinary internal organizational traits, what makes the burden of this conception of civic life so enormous is the "place" the concept has been asked to occupy and defend in the post-Cold War social, political, and conceptual landscape. For over three hundred years, the terrain of liberal political thought has been fixed in the foundational premise that there were only two essential actors in forging the modern world—the modern administrative state and the property-based market. This reading of the past was mapped onto a binary conceptual landscape with firm boundaries and epistemological closures that demarcated two mutually exclusive zones of public and private—what Bobbio has called the "great dichotomy" of modern political thought (Bobbio 1992: 2). It is a zero-sum dichotomy that continues to force social organization and political ideas into only one of the two binary possibilities.

1 Elsewhere I have explored in detail the past and current uses of two other citizenship concepts—the public sphere and political culture (see chapter 5).

2 For examples of theoretical efforts in this respect, see Habermas's (1962/1989) work on the public sphere and Almond and Verba's (1963) work on civic cultures. On the conceptual rediscovery of civil society, see Cohen and Arato (1992) and Scheingart (1992).

3 I leave out the more complex model offered by Hegel's triadic inclusion of the family, because it does not change the basic claim regarding the relationship of state and market.
nineteenth-century language of moral failure, individual blame, the shame of "dependency," and the celebration of "personal responsibility" (Somers and Block 2005).

How is it possible that a concept originally recuperated to do the theoretical work of liberating a third sphere now exhibits such a failure of conceptual space? This is a conundrum that needs to be explained. Given the extraordinary importance of civil society in contemporary social and political thought as well as practice, it also needs to be challenged. For this failure signals nothing less than the privatization of citizenship and the degradation of public life.

A knowledge culture: archeological and genealogical explorations

To address this conundrum I take a "cultural turn" in the history and sociology of knowledge. Whereas a traditional investigation in the sociology of knowledge might track down the social and economic interests expressed in ideas, and an intellectual history might trace their intellectual lineage, I suggest that the privatization of citizenship can only be explained by exploring the cultural, historical, and epistemological constraints embedded in the knowledge culture of Anglo-American citizenship theory. My approach builds on Ian Hacking's premise that concepts are "words in their sites," as I argue that all concepts are located and embedded in conceptual networks. Because they are networks and sites of knowledge, I call them *knowledge cultures* (Somers 1996a). Knowledge, the first component of the term, is that which philosophy has deemed to be truth. Falsehoods, ignorance, mysticism, magic, even religion are not forms of knowledge, either because we know them to be untrue or because we cannot know for sure if they are true. We call statements, concepts, classificatory schemes, categories, formulas, and other signifiers knowledge when we believe they state accurately what is true about some thing or entity (the signified) — they know it. Categorizing a rock as mineral is an example of knowledge because "mineral" accurately states the truth about rocks. The attribution of knowledge is thus a great privilege that entails passing the rigorous test of epistemology — the body of rules and criteria (the lie detectors of intellectual claims) used to evaluate whether claims should count as truth, knowledge, and fact. My use of the term is thus capacious. Knowledge includes not only the "facts of the matter" but also the

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4 This placing of the public sphere concept on the side of the divide is especially evident in the work of those who draw directly either from Habermas's early work on the public sphere or in the work of those who draw on the political culture concept in the Proudhonian tradition (see chapter 5).

5 Holmes (1997) suggests we take a sobering look at the tragedy of 1997 Russia to be reminded that only a muscular legal apparatus backed by a state has the power to support a civic culture's normative principles.

6 In taking inspiration from Hacking, I am also incorporating the early epistemological work of Foucault (1972, 1978).
presumption that those facts have gained the epistemic privilege of truth by passing the test of epistemological accountability and credibility.

The second element of a knowledge culture is the term culture. But instead of referring to a coherent set of subjectively held beliefs and values (Almond and Verba 1963), I use culture to refer to intersubjective public symbolic systems and networks of meaning-driven schemas organized by their own internal rules and structures that are (more or less, depending on the situation) loosely tied together in patterns of relationships.7 Whereas the first definition makes culture inseparable from the psychology of those people who internalize beliefs and values, mine separates the realm of culture from other social forces by abstracting it out for heuristic purposes as a distinct analytic dimension of meaning. This makes it possible to explore the internal dynamics of a cultural schema on its own terms. Cultural schemas can take numerous forms such as narrative structures, binary codings, patterned metaphors or sets of metaphors, symbolic dualities, or practices of distinction (see Bourdieu 1984). Examples include gender codings in sexual conduct, grammatical syntaxes, the iconic schemas of a political party, rituals of public hanging in eighteenth-century London, the use of Robert’s Rules of Order in civil associations, and the sacred and profane sumptuary laws of religious doctrine.

Because knowledge requires certainty and accountability, a knowledge culture must be buttressed by an epistemological infrastructure that verifies its truth claims. Thus in coupling knowledge with culture, I am insisting that no less than other kinds of meaning, claims to knowledge and truth are always transmitted to us via some kind of cultural schema. They are culturally embedded – that is, mediated through symbolic systems and practices, such as metaphors, ritualized codes, stories, analogies, or homologies. Fred Block, for example, shows how our most accepted truths about the state and economy derive from enduring cultural images and metaphors (e.g. the image of a “vampire state” that sucks the blood out of the economy), rather than from propositions that have been verified empirically (Block 1997: 6). To be sure, it is counterintuitive to accept that epistemology is founded not on the certainty of the unchanging laws of nature (as per standard philosophy) but on cultural schemas, conventional practices, and symbolic systems. Nonetheless, combining knowledge with culture simply makes explicit what is now increasingly being recognized: that truth claims have always gained legitimacy at least to some extent because of the cultural expressions by which they are articulated. In the case of Anglo-American citizenship theory, as I will show, this works in part through spatial and temporal regularities of the narrative form that substitute for nature’s regularities, and in part through the binary code of social naturalism.

Embedded in my notion of a knowledge culture is also the assumption that concepts (the elements of knowledge) are cultural artifacts – rather than what Durkheim called “natural objects,” or names of things that are believed to exist in nature in a pre-cultural state, independently of symbolic classification systems. In a move that has been built on by the most influential social philosophers of our time, Mauss and Durkheim in their later work, insisted that our most primordial logical and factual knowledge categories, such as time, space, and causality, are themselves cultural creations: “The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men, into which these things were integrated” (Durkheim and Mauss 1903 1963: 82). To be clear: Durkheim is not suggesting that there is no reality outside of our conceptual representations. But since what counts as a fact is determined by a cultural metric that tells us to recognize it as a true fact in the first place (rather than, say, a wild speculation), it is the representational images of these metrics that we map onto natural phenomena that make the world accessible to us, and thus known, in the first place.

To look at the cultural infrastructure of knowledge is not a claim for the exclusively discursive constitution of the social world. It is, rather, a strategy with a twofold argument: first, there is no way to experience the world independently of the representational categories through which we engage it; and second, those representational categories have no empirical life of their own independent of their engagement with the social world. From the sociology of culture, this strategy derives and incorporates the crucial distinction between culture’s analytic (or heuristic) autonomy on the one side, and its concrete (or empirical) autonomy on the other (Alexander and Smith 1993; Kane 1991). The distinction rests on the premise that the cultural dimension of life can never be “concretely” autonomous – that is, divorced empirically from social life and practices. At the same time, culture always exhibits a degree of analytic autonomy from empirical or scientific validation (Alexander 1995). To claim analytic autonomy for cultural structures and knowledge schemas, then, is a heuristic strategy of investigation, not an empirical claim that symbolic systems are the only sources of social

7 My usage is loosely associated with the Bourdieuan/Foucauldian “new cultural history” as reflected in the work of Hunt (1980a); Durkheimian/Saussurian cultural sociology, e.g. Alexander (1992b, 2006); and especially the work of Hacking (1998b). The first reference is that of the Parsonian tradition of culture, e.g. Almond and Verba (1963). On the distinction between the two, see chapter 5.
determination. By examining the analytically autonomous cultural logic of a knowledge culture, we can identify and understand the degree to which cultural codes shape its rules for including and excluding evidence, its epistemological divides and demarcations, and its modes of structuring temporal and spatial patterns. The strategy thus allows us to understand how mechanisms of causal attribution can work very subtly through symbolic and cultural forms, as well as to examine in turn how these forms are also modalities of authority through which social life is given specific meanings. So powerfully influential are the surrounding forces with which cultural structures are always empirically interacting - political, social, economic, and the like - that unless culture is first treated as an autonomous analytic abstraction it will be too easily over-determined by the easier and more recognizable work of explaining culture as a reflection of the material world.

Treating cultural forms as analytically independent but concretely and empirically intertwined with the social world has important payoffs. First, it facilitates examining variations in how cultural schemas buttress knowledge claims. It does this by deciphering classificatory typologies and rules of procedure without immediately reducing or evaluating such schemas and rules by their degree of consistency or actual fit with the objects they represent. Acknowledging the analytic autonomy of a cultural structure prevents it from "belonging" de facto to any particular social class or organizational interest; we can instead examine empirically the historically contingent ways in which different groups may contest and appropriate its meaning.

Second, the strategy makes it possible to see variation in the degree to which a cultural structure can imprint itself on the course of institutional and discursive history, and thereby to test empirically how "the social theories that were advanced to interpret these [structural] transformations [of Western societies] have necessarily been a part of the societies they sought to comprehend" (Bendix 1976: 28). Looking in this way at the construction of social science thought allows us to see how concepts, and ultimately institutions, are built by men and women observing the empirical world through culturally constructed epistemological schemas and cognitive maps. It is the particular shape and logic of these cultural maps that makes it possible to see some things but not others, and to assign differential evaluative status to what is seen.

Another implication of joining the terms knowledge and culture together derives from the sense of culture as being those symbolic practices associated with a historically specific era or phenomenon - such as the "culture of modernity" or the "technological culture." In this use of the term, a knowledge culture can establish the boundaries of epistemic possibilities in thinking, reasoning, classifying, and conceptualizing within a given historical moment. Functioning similarly to other such ideas in the history and philosophy of science (e.g. Kuhn's "paradigm," Bourdieu's "doxa," Foucault's "episteme," or Hacking's "style of reasoning"), when a knowledge culture achieves this degree of epistemic closure it can exclude competing claims and so define the limits of the historically possible. Hence by setting parameters on contemporary rationality and reason it becomes an epistemological gatekeeper. Rather than advocating any single theory or truth, the mark of an epistemological gatekeeper is the capacity to define what counts as reasonable evidence and as rational investigation into truth or falsehood in the first place.

Varieties of knowledge cultures

Narrative structures

A narrative structure is one in which meaning, structure, causality, and explanation are constituted through temporal and spatial relationality (Somers 1994b; Somers and Gibson 1994). A narrative structure arranges its relational elements in patterns of time and place. It contains a characteristic sequence (beginning = crisis; middle = struggle; end = resolution), and it contains a causal plot that assigns a narrative account of the cause and the resolution of the crisis at hand. Narratives are networks of patterned relationships connected and configured over time and space, and in which meaning, causality, and truth are ascribed based on these temporal and spatial arrangements. In a relational conceptual structure, agents and events do not have intrinsic meaning, causal powers, or epistemological validity but have meaning only in the context of their distribution across the temporal and spatial landscape of the overall structure. This is the narrative method of establishing causal employment - something causes something else, for example, because the first thing

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8 This, for example, is the meaning of economic sociology - the study of how the experience of economic relations and markets is, willy-nilly, mediated and given meaning by the cultural structures and schemas in which they are embedded. Thus Sewell (1999: 48) reminds us how a worker accepting the work of a wage laborer is not merely becoming an employee but entering into a culturally defined relation. See also Black (1990); Robertson and Friedland (1990); Joyce (1987); Somers (1995c); Zelizer (1997; 2005).

9 For further discussion of a knowledge culture, and a comparison with the more familiar notion of a paradigm, see Somers (1996a).
comes before the second in time. Cause, in this manner, is established through placement and sequence; joining later outcomes to earlier events provides explanation through chains of causality. (We will see, for example, how Locke uses his story of civil society’s temporal anteriority to the government to justify its normative political priority.) This gives a narrative structure a theoretical and normative status: explanations and accounts are embedded in symbolic schemas that explain the present in terms of the past, and prescribe and justify actions that will dictate the future in terms of the demands of the present.

Within a knowledge culture, narratives thus not only convey information but sever epistemological purposes. They do so by establishing veracity through the integrity of their storied form. This suggests that in the first instance the success or failure of truth claims embedded in narratives depends less on empirical verification and more on the logic and rhetorical persuasiveness of the narrative. In this way the narrative—paradoxically, given its status as a cultural rather than a scientific account—takes on the mantle of epistemological truth and endows the information it conveys with the stature of knowledge, fact, and truth. In the long run, the success or failure of a narrative knowledge culture depends on its relationship to surrounding historical and political relations. But this interaction of cognitive and social forces is the usual starting point of all social science, and hence deserves less attention here. It is the first instance—the heuristic analysis of cultural phenomena—that has been relatively ignored and is thus deserving of extended discussion.

**Binary codes and social naturalism**

Another possible cultural schema of a knowledge culture can be a binary code or pattern of distinctions. Building from Durkheim’s classifications between the sacred and the profane, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, and others theorized that meanings are structured by systems of oppositions and distinction. To illustrate how they can shape a knowledge culture I focus here on the example of social naturalism.

In the work of judging truth value, the *laws of nature* set the template for reliable knowledge in mainstream philosophy. Naturalism is thus epistemology’s ultimate reference point. Because it is not subject to the vicissitudes of culture, place, and time, only nature is credited by philosophers with having absolute regularities and escaping the fickleness and fortuitousness of culture and history. Only nature is what philosophers have increasingly come to call *foundational*—suggesting by this term that nature should be considered as the ultimate grounds of knowledge (Douglas [1970] 1982: 52; Rorty 1979). In naturalism, that represents as natural is more certain, more firm, and most appropriate to use as the highest standard against which all knowledge should be measured. By contrast, the not-natural is arbitrary/artificial/ideological. It lacks the quality of certainty because it is only a product of the thinker’s conceptual schemas, while natural phenomena exist firmly and independently of the mind. Naturalism thus sets up a binary opposition between on the one side truth/certainty/nature and on the other, culture/uncertainty/contingency.

Social naturalism extends the epistemological criteria of the laws of nature from natural to social phenomena. It then evaluates the quality of social knowledge by apportioning conceptual arguments across the binary categories of nature versus culture. Higher epistemological status is attributed to all that falls on nature’s side of the epistemological divide. Certain social phenomena—the market, for example—belong on nature’s side, and are thus ascribed more foundational epistemological status. Others—the state, for example—are placed under the rubric of the not-natural, artificial, arbitrary, contingent, and thus are in an epistemologically inferior position. In these binary distinctions and in the privilege ascribed to the natural world are to be found the roots of social naturalism’s powers and its complex epistemological metric.

**Knowledge cultures as metanarratives**

When a narrative structure is grafted onto the binary code of social naturalism the narrative is transformed into a *metanarrative*. A metanarrative is a cultural form that has been epistemologically naturalized by conjoining narrative with social naturalism. Metanarratives are among the most potent—and troubling—types of knowledge culture. This is because certain kinds of knowledge—we call them postulates or assumptions—are not accountable to the same standards of truth that apply to empirical claims; they are legitimated not by empirical evidence but by the self-evidential status of their seemingly naturalistic—hence preconstructed or presuppositional—qualities. Naturalized presuppositions are like economists’ “as if” assumptions: they are not empirically accurate, but they are used to make empirical claims and predictions. When a naturalized knowledge claim is used, as is so often the case, as if it were the basis for an empirically justified argument, when charged with the inaccuracy of the original claim, economists justify this inconsistency with disclaimers about how it was never meant to be empirically true in the first place. Thus insulated from
criticism by this Catch-22 situation, these foundational postulates and
naturalized assumptions become serious troubleshooters. When these
troubleshooters are arranged in storied form into public narratives, they reason-
ablely can be called metanarratives.

Metanarratives have another kind of power. Recall that social natural-
ism establishes its legitimacy through an epistemology that looks to the
laws of nature as the baseline for the foundations of knowledge,
thereby making the reliable regularities of nature the absolute standards
by which the validity of different kinds of knowledge are adjudicated.
What gives this naturalistic epistemology so much conceptual authority
is that what is viewed as natural and foundational, and what is viewed
as cultural and contingent, form a series of hierarchical relationships.
Concepts placed under the rubric of nature occupy a privileged position
in an epistemological hierarchy, while those things deemed cultural are
contingent, historical, and arbitrary—hence inferior to the natural. When
mapped onto the epistemological grid of social naturalism, a narrative’s
temporal and spatial elements become subordinated to the hierarchical
dichotomy between the natural and the cultural. Those categories of the
narrative that fall under the natural side of the epistemological divide—
for example, the anterior private sphere—immediately gain epistemolog-
ical privilege as foundational objects over those that have been relegated
to the not-natural/artificial side of the divide—for example, the public
sphere and the state. Thus, in Locke’s narrative, civil society and the
market in property are grafted together to be narrated as temporally
anterior to the government. When this temporal anteriority is mapped
onto social naturalism, civil society and the market are transmuted from
a temporal to an ontological condition of being natural, and thus unques-
tionably given in the nature of things. In an instant, then, in being
naturalized the market now assumes a place at the summit of epistemolog-
ical privilege.

It is therefore social naturalism that transforms knowledge cultures into
metanarrative gatekeepers of conceptual authority. Its internal epistemolog-
ical infrastructure imposes a field of relationships, demarcations, and
boundaries that establish power, privilege, and hierarchy among the internal
elements of its narrative representations. What is most paradoxical,
and easiest to forget, is that social naturalism is itself a system of representations,
a cultural schema. What is and is not defined as representational of nature
is, after all, a social category rather than a social “fact,” to use Durkheim’s
words against himself. Yet by its own naturalistic criteria this cultural aspect
of its identity is obscured and reconstructed as natural. The “unnatural”
fact, of course, is that all epistemologies are social and cultural conventions,
and only through naturalizing analogies is some knowledge considered to be
more natural—hence more foundational—than other knowledge.

While the notion of conceptual authority tied to boundary drawing
and hierarchy invokes an image of vertical power and privilege, a meta-
narrative’s naturalizing power also gives it the gatekeeping authority
to control the epistemological agenda. In this sense, a metanarrative
is similar to a paradigm; it not only provides the range of acceptable
answers but has the gatekeeping power to define both the questions to
be asked and the rules of procedure by which they can rationally be
answered. Even more than other kinds of knowledge cultures, a meta-
narrative establishes the parameters of epistemic conceptual possibility
through its power to adjudicate what counts as rational and reasonable
investigation into competing knowledge claims.

A historical sociology of concept formation and historical
epistemology

A metanarrative’s power to reproduce epistemological hierarchies and
boundaries even in the face of competing evidence could induce a deep
pessimism about the possibility of “unthinking” the orthodoxy. There is,
however, an approach that I believe to be well suited for the challenge.
A historical sociology of concept formation is a research program in
historical epistemology designed to analyze how we think, why we seem
obliged to think in certain ways, and how to begin the process of unthink-
ing (Hacking 1990b: 362).

Reflexivity

Social scientists in recent years have increasingly come to recognize
that the categories and concepts we use to explain the social world should
no longer be simply taken for granted; rather, they themselves should
be made the objects of analysis. The work of examining the taken-for-
granted categories of social science (individual, society, agent, structure,
etc.) falls under the mandate of a reflexivity—meaning, literally, a turning
back on itself (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). To turn social science back
on itself entails treating terms like civil society and the public sphere not
as instruments of analysis but as the objects to be explained, thus radici-
ally shifting the context of discovery (at least initially) from the external
world to the cognitive tools by which we analyze this world. With this
shift we suddenly have a whole new set of questions: why and how and to
what effect did social scientists invent the idea that there exists something
significant in the social world called civil society? And how have these terms been used to make sense of the world? Wallerstein calls this “unthinking social science,” while Bourdieu felicitously calls it the practice of casting “radical doubt” (Wallerstein 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 235). Whatever we call it, looking reflexively at our presuppositional categories of social thought involves a vigorous retrieval and embrace of a new kind of sociology of knowledge—a historical sociology of concept formation. It is the first step in the work of destabilizing and unthinking a deeply entrenched knowledge culture.

Relationality

A historical sociology of concept formation requires a relational approach, for what appear to be autonomous concepts defined by isolated attributes are better conceived as relational signifiers, which are contingently stabilized in cultural structures usually made up of binary oppositions. In contrast to what Karl Popper calls “essentialism”—a philosophy that looks to the “essence” of a thing to discover its true nature—a historical sociology of concept formation looks at concepts as relational objects embedded in a relational configuration of concepts, cultural structures, or conceptual networks (Popper 1959). A conceptual network is a relational matrix or the “site” in which concepts are nested—a structured configuration of relationships among concepts that share the same conceptual net. Inspired by Hacking’s notion that concepts are “words in their sites,” the site-as-network metaphor can help us “well on the way to a complex methodology” for generating “more specific conjectures about the ways in which the condition for the emergence and change of use of a word [or concept] also determined the space in which it could be used” (Hacking 1990b: 362). Indeed, conceptual networks are especially well suited to a methodology based on the spatial metaphor, as the network concept invokes images of concepts linked together across cultural and cognitive space. It is the full geometric shape and patterned logic of these ties that need to be reconstructed before we can make sense of the meaning of a single concept within that network.

A knowledge culture is a conceptual network that is dedicated specifically to epistemological concepts and categories of validity that are coordinated through specifically cultural idioms. A conceptual network qua knowledge culture implies that concepts in a knowledge culture are not only related to each other in the weak sense of being contiguous; they are also ontologically related. Like a point and a line in basic geometry, we only accept the definitional truth of one by its relational opposition to the other. In a knowledge culture, then, epistemological justifications for definitional truth convince by virtue of a concept’s fit—its place—in the cultural schema of the knowledge culture as a whole. Hence a relational approach to knowledge cultures foregrounds the importance of relational space in the work of epistemic reflexivity. Exploring the places and spaces of our conceptual vocabularies is a crucial step in understanding and, when necessary, being able to unthink the cognitive worlds we inhabit and impose on the social landscape.

A historical epistemology: the historicity of knowledge cultures

The stipulation that concepts are historical as well as relational objects is founded on a historical conception of knowledge, or a historical epistemology (Somers 1996a). A historical epistemology combines history and epistemology to emphasize what we now find to be relatively uncontroversial—namely, that successful truth claims are historically contingent rather than confirmations of absolute and unchanging reality. Based on the principle that all of our knowledge, our logics, our theories, indeed our very reasoning practices are indelibly (although often obscurely) marked with the signature of time, a historical epistemology underlies the method of a historical sociology of concept formation. Knowledge cultures are sited and sites have histories. Hence another of Hacking’s imperatives: “If one took seriously the project of analysis, one would require a history of the words [concepts] in their sites.” The mandate to historicize in conceptual analysis is not simply a wave at some notion of looking back at the past; rather it is an injunction “to investigate the principles that [concept] to be useful—or problematic” (Hacking 1990b: 362). Knowing how we got to where we are helps to clarify where we are. If we can understand what puts ideas and knowledge in place and what brings them into being—not a teleology but an account of contingencies and “might have beens”—we can hope to better grasp the meanings and the effects of those ideas, and their roles in problem-formation.

When knowledge is recognized as a historical and cultural object, we can worry less about whether it is true or false, and concentrate instead on how and to what extent certain concepts are even considered reasonable

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10 The term “place” as I use it here comes from Polanyi (1957b). For empirical application, see Somers (1993). A similar idea of “positions” in a “field” is suggested by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992).
candidates for truth claims in the first place. Understanding how concepts
gain and lose their currency and legitimacy is the task of historical epistemology,
which entails reconstructing their making, resonance, and contestedness
over time. When we explore the historical life of concepts, and the historicity
of our conceptual semantics, we are likely to find that they themselves have
histories of contestation, and transformation — histories not unlike the more
straightforwardly social phenomena that we study regularly. A historical
epistemology demonstrates that concepts are “history-laden” — a phrase
meant to evoke, and invert, the now well-established Kuhnian understanding
that all empirical claims are “theory-laden.”

Taking stock

A historical sociology of concept formation argues that just as political
ideas and social concepts are not mirrored reflections of external social
facts, so also must our own social science concepts be understood not as
labels for natural facts but as cultural and historical artifacts embedded
within and assigned meaning by their location in symbolic and historically
constructed conceptual networks. The method of a historical sociology of
concept formation differs from the classical approach of Mannheim’s or
Marx’s sociology of knowledge in that it does not look for class power and
social interests behind the accepted ideas. Rather, it looks for the condi-
tions of possibility within which concepts develop and are evaluated,
and by which epistemological boundaries and hierarchies are created and
sustained. It aims to account for how concepts do the work they do by
reconstructing their construction, resonance, and contestedness over time.
From the perspective of a historical sociology of concept formation, con-
ccepts do not have natures or essences; they have histories, networks, and
narratives that can be subjected to historical and empirical investigation. In
what follows, I use this method to do just that: to subject the histories,
networks, and narratives of Anglo-American citizenship theory to a histo-
rical epistemology and to empirical investigation.

Narrating and naturalizing Anglo-American citizenship theory

Applying a historical sociology of concept formation to the concept of
civil society generates three propositions:

Proposition 1. The civil society concept is not an isolated object but has a
relational identity; its meaning is assigned by its place in its conceptual
network/knowledge culture. Thus the subject of research should be the
entire conceptual network, or the relational site, in which it is embedded.

Proposition 2. The knowledge culture of Anglo-American citizenship
theory assumes the form of a metanarrative — a cultural structure that
joins together a narrative form with the binary coding of social natural-
ism. This directs us to the task of analyzing the metanarrative’s symbolic
logic — especially its relationships of time, space, and employment — as
well as its epistemological infrastructure of social naturalism.

Proposition 3. Metanarratives are structures of conceptual authority;
they have the power to establish hierarchies, boundaries of inclusion
and exclusion, tropes of good and bad, rules of what counts as rational-
ity and evidence — all the characteristics of an epistemological gate-
keeper. Hence the mandate of a historical epistemology: to challenge
the power of a metanarrative by revealing its social naturalism to be
nothing more and nothing less than a cultural schema constructed by
historical contingency.

Anglo-American citizenship theory

The conceptual network of the civil society concept is the story of Anglo-
American citizenship — a “conjectural history” of how popular sover-
eignty triumphed over coercive absolutist states to ensure individual
liberties. First adumbrated in the seventeenth century by John Locke,
explicitly articulated by the eighteenth-century Scottish moralists (e.g.,
Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith), appropriated into the foundations of
nineteenth-century classical sociological theory, and still the basic core of
liberal political thought today, this story by my reading is a narrative
political fiction less about citizenship per se than about the rise of
markets and modernity and their heroic roles in establishing the social
foundations for individual freedom and autonomy against the tyranny
of the state. How Anglo-American citizenship theory developed can be
reconstructed by exploring its narrative construction, its transformation,
and its sedimentation over the course of the seventeenth through the
nineteenth century. Here I begin that project by imagining the making

11 By “citizenship theory,” I refer not to one particular theory but to the deeper common
features shared by those who have attempted to provide social science accounts of the
conditions for individual protection by the state, as well as individual freedom from the
state. The concept of conjectural history I take from Dugald Stewart’s characteriza-
tion of Adam Smith’s historical sociology. See Collini et al. (1983); Meek (1976); Winch (1978).
12 Although in this chapter I only explore eighteenth-century discourse, and then make the
leap to the present, there is a very clear trajectory of both continuity and transformation from
Locke through early eighteenth-century English social policy to the later eighteenth-century
Scottish Enlightenment (Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Adam Ferguson), and to the
of a series of key narrative elements in their original seventeenth-century context. Anglo-American citizenship theory theorizes, explains, and makes political claims through narrative and naturalization. Because it is a story, its explanatory plausibility depends on the integrity of its temporal and spatial relationships, and the success or failure of the causal plot depends on the logic and rhetorical persuasiveness of the narrative—and not on empirical verification. Thus its power and durability rely on how well the elements of the story have been organized into a cohesive narrative logic that convinces us that it records and explains, rather than constructs, the empirical world it narrates.

**Theorizing through crisis—what is to be explained?**

At the heart of every narrative is a crisis or flash point that cries out for a solution. To gain access to the internal logic of a narrative thus requires first identifying the narrative's initial problematic—what is the crisis which this narrative account addresses? The crisis driving Anglo-American citizenship theory is the fear of the tyrannical coercion of the absolutist state: how to escape its ever-present threat to individual liberty? The crisis is formulated in manichean terms: the threatening antagonist is the public realm of the administrative state—a domain characterized by unfreedom, constituted by coercion, domination, and constraint, which is backed up with physical compulsion and arbitrary personal dependencies. The job of the narrative is to solve the crisis and remove the danger by theorizing an epic struggle led by a heroic protagonist worthy and capable of defeating the tyrannical state.

The unprecedented suppression of personal liberties in seventeenth-century absolutist England thus catalyzed the first formulation of the crisis. Locke's revolutionary narration was a direct response to what he considered to be the limits to Hobbes's earlier solution to absolutist authority. Hobbes had been the first to conceptualize the "problem of order"—so named because in the context of the English civil war it asked how and from where, given the end of traditional monarchy, would authority and order come? Locke took as his starting point the problem he believed flowed from Hobbes's famous solution in a new Leviathan: how could personal liberty be maintained if the end of the story was again an all-powerful Leviathan to whom the people surrendered their rights? How could that Leviathan be truly contained? Over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, different iterations of the Lockean narrative were driven by an amalgam of successive formulations of this same problem, each new incarnation of the story resulting from the deficiencies of the previous narrative in solving the problem of a coercive state. But it is Locke's original narration that cemented the association of the public sphere with the tyrannical administrative state, thus setting the stage for the privatization of citizenship.

**Narrating place: theorizing through political geography**

A narrative requires a sense of space and place—a social and political geography. The prevailing conceptual landscape in Locke's time was represented in the famous frontispiece to Hobbes's Leviathan (see figure 7.1). In this allegorical engraving of political authority, Hobbes depicts a giant body of a wise, benevolent, and patriarchal-looking king standing godlike above a miniature landscape of country farms and churches. Yet what at first glance appears to be the king's suit of metal armor is on closer examination actually hundreds of miniature people, all facing reverently toward the giant head of the king. What Hobbes has done here is insert into the king's body "the people"—more aptly, the "subjects"—of his kingdom. Embedded as they are within the king's spatial corporeality, the message is that there is no separate terrain available for people to inhabit other than that internal to the king. The disappointment of Hobbes's narrative is that he allows only one social site and then places it under the domination of political power. In so doing, he has robbed the people of any autonomous place of their own.

13 I refer here to both texts and events that have since been dubbed as political or social theory (e.g., Hobbes, Smith, Marx), as well as lesser or hardly known arguments that were less texts in any lasting sense than institutionalized political interventions in the political dynamics of the time—how beheading a king, for example, was justified "by law," or how "the sovereignty of the people" was somehow made synonymous with free markets (see Morgan 1988 for treatment of this kind of informal intervention). As I indicated above, there is a significant alternative non-English story, which would include Montesquieu, Rousseau, Durkheim, Tocqueville, and the 1789, 1830, and 1848 French revolutions most prominently. See Taylor (1990) for an account of the two versions of the civil society concept and story.

14 In focusing on Locke, I demonstrate how a historical sociology of concept formation requires a difficult balance between ascribing anonymity to the cultural form and overtly identifying it with any single thinker. Thus although Locke provides a subject for my reconstruction, this is not intellectual history and I use him primarily as a representative figure in the making of the narrative. In isolating Locke as the seventeenth-century representative of Anglo-American citizenship theory, I am of course not fully doing justice to his contemporaries, especially the wide range of other political re theorists. This is a shortcoming, but one that is unavoidable given the limitations of space.
Driven by the authoritarian experience of English absolutism, Locke fiercely rejected conflating the people into the political space of the king’s body/state. He had an alternative vision that would permanently relocate a place for the people and reverse the direction and the source of political power – away from the state to that of the people. Even though Hobbes begins his story of *Leviathan* in the state of nature’s domain of natural rights, his conclusion ultimately dissolves this original site of the people and in the end settles all of social life back in the domain of the state. Locke believed that Hobbes’ solution of total state power calls for its own negation. To liberate the people from the state’s domination, Locke envisioned an enduring social sphere distinct and independent from that of the state. He envisioned a civil (nonstate) society.

Locke invents civil society through a revolutionary remapping of the prevailing conceptual topography. He imagines, and narrates, a new locus of social organization – a prepolitical and private entity spatially separate and autonomous from the public sphere – a new place for the people alone. It was to be a permanent place of individual freedom and private property that would establish the grounds for an enduring collective entity. It would also serve as a normative reference for how to achieve freedom from the state. In endowing permanence to a private sphere, Locke’s political vision broke decisively from Hobbes’ and introduced the most enduring formulation of the conditions for popular freedom. In making a separate and prepolitical social space the sole realm of true freedom, he forever imprinted on our political imaginations a binary spatial divide between public and private. In this revolutionary narration, he recast forever our vision of the “social imaginary” (Taylor 2004).

Locke carried out his task through a manichaeian dualism. The free-born English people faced a crisis of evil in the Goliath-like character of the state. Like a *deus ex machina*, a social hero appears in the form of the autonomous site of a noncoercive prepolitical (hence private) realm of (civil) society – only within its private boundaries are the people’s liberties safe from state power. Indeed, as is typical in narrative form there is even an element of surprise: it is actually the people themselves who create this new realm of social organization through their own heroic act of consenting to an enduring social contract. And also consistent with most narrations, the evil is never absolutely eliminated but remains in the shadowy background where it motivates a constant vigilance. Even after the sovereign people decide by contract to create a tamed representative government strictly under their control, *Leviathan* hovers as a permanent threat always ready to rear its coercive head against popular sovereignty.
7.1 Frontispiece to *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, 1651, by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) of Malinesbury (engraving) (b&w photo), English School, (17th century) © Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library
Fear and loathing of the state is the wellspring of action in this story of popular freedom. It gives civil society its reason for existence.

We think of the nineteenth century as the age of the discovery of modern social theory. But as this narrative demonstrates, it is clearly Locke who first imagines the spatial possibility of a nonpolitical social domain of life that exists sui generis, free from political authority and control. It is the realm of popular freedom because it is a collective society with the robustness to exist independently of the state. It is this notion of an autonomous self-regulating prepolitical society that by the eighteenth century explicitly is termed civil society.\(^{15}\) Since Locke, the story of ever-fragile popular liberties has been narrated as the fierce struggle of civil society to remain free from the regulative coercive reach of the administrative state.

Narrating time: establishing causality through sequence

Locke's invention of the new topographical site of prepolitical society, as revolutionary as it was, was not in itself sufficient to ensure permanently the people's freedom from state control. After all, what would prevent the state from subordinating anew even this separate society? To solve that problem, Locke invented a new narrative sequence through temporality. Rather than civil society emerging after the state, he reverses the story so that it begins with the people in the state of nature, who first contract into civil society, and who then finally consent to a representative popular government. By narrating the temporal sequence of the plot in this way, Locke is able to depict a government that exists only as a condition of the prior consent of the prepolitical community—specifically, their voluntary social contract to form a government. Because it was created as a conditional contract by a temporally anterior act of civil society, this consent to government could be revoked at any time. Sovereignty resides exclusively in the hands of the people in civil society.

Locke's imaginative use of time was political and moral; he uses civil society's temporal anteriority to explain and thereby justify its political authority over the government it had, after all, created. The temporality of the narrative is also doing the work of establishing moral justification for the subservience of the state to the people. Thus the syntax of narrative is used to establish normative authority: a legitimate government is one morally reduced to being a contingent outcome of the people's consent voluntarily given as a fiduciary trust by an autonomous and self-regulating robust civil society. Through the use of narrative temporal sequence, Locke permanently reversed the source of political authority from the state to the people in civil society.

Narrative structure and causal explanation

A clear causal plot has emerged from Locke's mapping of the narrative structure of Anglo-American citizenship. He has taken as his point of departure in time (in the "beginning") the epic problem of free people with natural rights (the protagonists of a "natural community") confronting the chronic tyranny of the absolutist state—the temporal and spatial Other of the public sphere. The danger to individual liberties and rights lies explicitly with this visible institutional and administratively state power (its personnel and bureaucracy): "A right of making laws with penalties of death" is how Locke defines political power (a definition echoed two centuries later by Weber's characterization of the state bureaucracy as an "iron cage" of coercion). The crisis can only be resolved through a complete realignment of power and legitimacy, something that Locke accomplishes by renarrativizing the story on which the original problem was based. He plots the resolution not only by inventing a geographical domain of prepolitical civil society but also by having the people establish a representative government that is a mere provisional product of the private social contract. Through narrative Locke has established political causality: civil society is not only separate and autonomous from the state, but precedes it and thus, quite literally, caused government's very existence by its voluntary consent. Something that comes before something else, in this schema, causes it.\(^ {16}\) This is not chronological time but epistemological time—a narrative that endows cause and effect.

Locke's dramatic resolution is causally plotted by his inventing both a prepolitical civil society and a representative government that is in a fiduciary relationship to the people. The rule of law, the common law, parliament, and so on—all are narrated to be the outcome of the temporally and spatially prior and independent (of political rule) sphere of civil society. We now have a more balanced epic struggle between state

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15 Locke still used the traditional language of political theory in which the terms "civil society" and "political society" were used interchangeably to refer to the state-centered domain of social organization.

16 Locke here capitalizes on a generic quirk built into English language narratives themselves; as Locke (1988: 194) explains, the "natural logic of English is post hoc ergo propter hoc," or that which comes before causes that which comes after.
and society, made possible by the new boundary between the shadowy threat of a Leviathan on the one side, and the tamed deinstitutionalized representative government under the control of the people on the other.

The place of political culture: the people's sociological glue

With Locke's invention of a private sphere of civil society, he faced a new sociological challenge: what would hold this society together? If the people were to have any sustained power against a tyrannical state – and this is of course the driving aspiration of the narrative – they had to constitute themselves not as an atomistic aggregation of random individuals but into a coherent and self-regulating entity. Authority of civil society over the state could only be achieved with a robust self-organized autonomous civil society that basically ruled itself. The presumption of a society self-organized enough to be able to make and break government rule, orderly enough to snub all government intervention except that of security and protection of property, pushed Locke into developing a theory of social organization to account for a robust normative social cohesion. Only with such cohesion could true autonomy be achieved (Calhoun 1993).

Locke found this in his notion of a civil community held together first through property and commercial exchange, and second through a political culture of public opinion and social trust. The integrative work of the market was the foundation of civil society. But Locke also believed that common moral concerns based on public opinion would ensure order, freedom, and moral cohesion enough to make state power unnecessary. Unlike political authority, for Locke both the authority of civil public opinion and the self-regulating civility of the market were free of "the legislative authority of man" because they are both voluntary, spontaneous, and noncoercive. For Locke, the idea of a civil society based on free market exchange and a normative political culture provided the glue of popular sovereignty and representational consent. He exalted civil society's economic and cultural harmoniousness free from public external political authority.

This is how Locke theorized through narrative a robust and durable self-activating civil society in parallel with the normative claim that authority, right of resistance, and consent must be located within the private sphere. His radical challenge was to reject the notion of ordered social relationships sustained by the power of a political center, in favor of a conception of society as a unit capable of generating a common moral order – spontaneous in its workings, self-activating, and functionally independent of the state. To give the people the capacity to make and unmake political power and sovereignty, Locke endowed their commercial life with the glue of cultural solidarity. Civil society cohered in this story through what we today call "informal social control" – rather than in any recognizably institutional form. Thus the social foundations of liberalism and freedom were found in Locke's story of the private world of civil society, held together through commercial property exchange and a normative political culture.17

An epistemological infrastructure of social naturalism

The privatization of freedom, moral order, and normative justice in tandem with fear and loathing of the public sphere have shown remarkable resiliency over the years, despite multiple challenges from both history and theory. Why has this Lockean Anglo-American citizenship theory been so invincible to direct empirical criticism – even in the face of evidence to the contrary? The answer lies in the epistemology of social naturalism.

In social naturalism, as I discussed above and as figure 7.2 demonstrates, the world of knowledge is divided into a set of binary relationships along the classic axis of nature/culture. Power is established through a matrix of internally constituted epistemological divides that ranks things located on the "natural" (and antipolitical) side of the divide as privileged over (i.e. as more valid than) those located on the cultural (and political) side. In this dichotomy culture and politics are nonnatural dimensions of knowledge. In Anglo-American citizenship theory, the division is articulated through a hierarchical delineation between that which is designated as "given" in the nature of things — unchanging, spontaneous, voluntary, natural, God-given, lawlike; and that designated as "contingent" — politically constructed, temporally contingent, coercive, arbitrary, vulnerable to change or manipulation. Most importantly, that which falls on the natural side of the epistemological divide exists ontologically independently of political or human intervention. It is thus deemed epistemologically more valid — more foundational — for knowledge and science, and hence becomes the criterion for epistemological adjudication. Knowledge is scientific, admissible, and true to the extent that it corresponds with these natural foundations — whether natural law (in the seventeenth century), natural liberty (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), or the natural science of political economy.

17 For a similar vision of liberalism's constructed "social imaginary," see Taylor (2004).
7.2 Table of social naturalism's binary oppositions

(in the nineteenth century). And although social naturalism is usually thought to begin with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century's discovery of political economy, it is the social naturalism of Locke's inscription of prepolitical society that is the defining moment in modern political thought. Social naturalism became the basis for imputing a natural, rather than a contingent, logic to the workings of the market and the private sphere of civil society.

The metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory

When a narrative structure is grafted onto the binary code of social naturl

7.3 The making of a metanarrative: epistemological grid of social naturalism mapped onto the narrative structure of Anglo-American citizenship theory

range of rational argument and worthwhile questions but also the rules of procedure by which those questions can rationally be answered.

Anglo-American citizenship theory exercises its adjudicative authority through firm epistemological divides between civil society and the state, representative government and regulative law, spontaneity and domination, private and public, and so on. These boundaries assign evidence, argumentation, and hypothesis-formation into prestructured categories. Arguments that fall on the "wrong" side of an epistemological divide do not enjoy the privilege of being considered reasonable candidates in the competition to count as knowledge. In fact when a metanarrative is challenged by what should be disconfirming evidence it is able to subvert the challenge by ruling the evidence inadmissible by the metanarrative's standards of rationality. Social naturalism -- an epistemological modality that adjudicates the truth of falsehoods of knowledge claims according to the regularities of nature -- thus becomes embedded in the substantive onontological content of the story: Locke's antipolitical private sphere of civil commercial society actually becomes a natural, foundational, and privileged entity that has been constituted by, and functions according to, the laws of nature.

Figure 7.4 shows the outcome of this naturalizing process in its skeletal binary form. The temporal sequences and spatial mappings of the narrative
7.4 The Great Dichotomies of Anglo-American citizenship theory

The natural - self-regulating and autonomous (functions: independence of political interventions) and cultural/historical - artificial and constructed (functions: through arbitrary political power) dichotomy have been redistributed across the binary nature/culture divide to become mutually exclusive naturalized oppositions (private versus public, civil society versus state, modernity versus tradition, the free/autonomous versus unfree/dominated agent). The meaning of any one entity does not reflect an external object but presupposes its oppositional other. Bobbio's great dichotomies of modern social and political thought emerge from this process - zero-sum dichotomies in which each term is the negation of the other: "From the moment that the space defined by the two terms (public and private) is completely covered they arrive at the point of mutually defining themselves in the sense that the public domain extends only as far as the start of the private sphere (and the reverse is also true)" (Bobbio 1992: 2). The naturalism of the private sphere, of modernity, of civil society, and of markets is fixed in opposition to the arbitrariness of the public sphere, of tradition, of the state, and of legal regulation. Markets, political cultures, and civil society all become natural entities. Locke's ascription of civil society as natural thus became the defining moment in modern political thought.

Figure 7.5 shows how Anglo-American citizenship theory arranges its political and sociological categories and organizes its temporal and spatial relationships across its epistemological divides. On the vertical axis the either/or of freedom and unfreedom is represented. On the horizontal axis, space is divided between the private naturalism of society and the arbitrary power of the public state. Locke's narrative begins with the

7.5 The metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory

"golden age" version of the state of nature in cell 1. Because it is natural and God-given, for Locke its time is the "abstract past" rather than the "concrete past." For the Scottish civil society thinkers it is the early "primitive" stage of eighteenth-century social theory, and for classical sociology it is the "traditional/feudal past" of modernization theory. The naturalism and God-given qualities of cell 1 give it narrative, moral and epistemological primacy as the original takeoff site for Locke's rights-bearing individuals to sign the first social contract to enter civil society. It is in cell 2 that the state of nature transforms into a naturalized civil society. Civil society is here an autonomous self-activated natural sphere based on noncoercive political culture and prepolitical market interchange. It was the naturalized commercial exchange of civil society that served as the seventeenth century's first social embodiment of a natural moral order based on freedom and natural rights. The private sphere of civil society thus assumed a privileged normative and epistemological status. Cell 3 represents the socially contracted political domain of representative government. As the locus of liberal democratic political institutions and the rule of law, this tamed government could be recalled and
resisted when necessary by the social contractarians who created it. Although situated in the public zone, it is firmly tethered to the private sphere of the people in the epistemologically, historically, spatially, and morally anterior realm of civil society. Its publicness, however, means it is always on the brink of becoming coercive. This danger is kept in check by civil society’s right to revoke its consent. Cell 4, by contrast, is the site of the permanently threatening administrative state — public, institutional, arbitrary, dangerous, nonnatural — but no less crucial to the metanarrative for all of that: its ever-threatening presence justifies a vigilant and fierce protecting of the private sphere of civil society.

By the eighteenth century, cell 1 bursts out of the abstract state of nature and becomes the real-time historical other of “primitive society.” It is portrayed alternatively as either a full-blown “savage society” without private property (as in the Scottish “four-stages theory”), or as a generalized archaic feudal past from which the modern world of natural liberties (cell 2) evolves through the natural civilizing process. It is then an easy transition from this eighteenth-century version to the more starkly posed nineteenth-century binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, feudalism and capitalism, preindustrial and industrial life, status and contract — each represented by cells 1 and 2 respectively. Note that when the past is specified as a traditional community organized through kinship, it is viewed as a natural, hence a necessary stage, of progression to modern freedom. This contrasts with cell 4’s nonnatural arbitrary domain of public rule in the absolutist state whose threatening presence lurks in the background of Anglo-American citizenship theory. Finally there is cell 3 — the tamed and deinstitutionalized public arena of representative government where the rules that govern are those necessary to ensure the protection of civil society’s essential natural freedom (e.g., criminal, contract, and civil law).

The privatization of citizenship

The privatization of civil society can be traced back to the metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory. Driven by a fear of the tyranny of the state, Locke invented a private antipolitical sphere of social organization and market exchange separate from the state and strictly limited to the site of the private. His moral vision of a political culture within an autonomous civil society supplied liberal theory with a mechanism of social cohesion that could not be found in market exchange-based notions of community alone. It is within this self-regulating and prepolitical site of civil society that Locke locates the origins and practices of citizenship. In this paradoxical sense, what is “political,” “public,” even “civil” about citizenship in Anglo-American citizenship theory is that public opinion and individual rights are firmly rooted in the private sphere of civil society, despite their being contingently entrusted to a representative government accountable to the private interests from whence it came and from which its authority exclusively derives. The invention of a civil society inhabiting a space outside of and anterior to the public sphere of political institutions privatizes citizens and renders citizenship disembodied. It is devoid of the power and practices characteristic of public decision-making activities (Taylor 1990). The kind of citizenship born of liberal civil society may culminate in a government, but it is nonetheless decidedly antipolitical in the sense commonly associated with citizenship.

Constrained within this metanarrative network, the concept of civil society is frozen in its place — firmly on the nonpolitical, naturalistic, and antistatist side of the epistemological divide between public and private, nature/rationality and the arbitrary power attributed to the public sphere, as illustrated in figure 7.4. The demonization, the fear and loathing, of the public sphere and the state is what makes a nonpolitical private sphere a necessity. The concept of civil society endows the private sphere with the capacity to thrive independently of the state. The privatization of citizenship through civil society solidifies the bulwark against the constant threat of the public sphere. For Anglo-American citizenship theory, this inherently anti-institutional, antipublic form of authority becomes the normative guide for political organization, as democratic political structures are seen to emanate from the private anti-institutional political culture of civil society. From the needs and opinions of this marketized political culture — the social glue of civil society — putatively derive the ideas about politics that were the first expressions of liberal democratization. Where do democratic ideals come from? asked Locke. From the private norms of society, he answered. The “public-spirited man,” Adam Smith echoed a century later, was he who respected the powers and opinions that operate in everyday life, not he who wanted to legislate and rearrange through institutional interventions (Wolin 1960: 299). It is much the same answer, and the same metanarrative structure, given some three hundred years later.

The metanarrative as gatekeeper

By grafting social naturalism to his story of civil society and the state, Locke hardened his story’s temporal and spatial divides into a set of
impenetrable epistemological criteria for legitimate theories of democratization and freedom. The effect was paradigmatic, as the metanarrative took on the role of an epistemological gatekeeper adjudicating how evidence would rationally be distributed across the epistemological spectrum. If a historian’s research into the premodern world, for example, points to evidence of the existence of political rights in the wrong temporal or spatial frame—the rights of citizens in the medieval countryside, say—she learns very quickly that historiographical legitimacy is only accorded when these same rights have been renamed and redefined as “traditional,” “premodern” rights, “prepolitical,” “paternalistic” forms of a “moral economy,” or the “lagging” remnants of a feudal order—thus stripped of any potentially destabilizing impact on the metanarrative’s story of political rights. The hallmark of an epistemological gatekeeper, like that of a paradigm, is the capacity to arbitrate the boundaries of what counts as rational (hence admissible) investigation into truth or falsehood. Not just the answers, but more important, the criteria for what counts as reason and rationality are defined by the gatekeeping parameters of the metanarrative—hence Anglo-American citizenship theory’s gatekeeping power over the distribution of evidence and the adjudication of what counts as knowledge and truth. Once this kind of closure has been established, evidential competition always runs the risk of being neutralized by allegations of irrelevance or illogic. No alternative empirical challenge to the privatization of citizenship or the antistatism of Anglo-American citizenship theory has a chance of success until the gatekeeping power of the dominant metanarrative is challenged and transgressed.

The contemporary legacy

The epistemological divides and the gatekeeping demarcations depicted in figure 7.5 represent the original seventeenth-century metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory. The institutionalized public sphere is depicted as the site of external coercion, domination, and constraint, backed up by physical compulsion and arbitrary personal dependencies. It is thus the domain of unfreedom. Private prepolitical/civil society is the realm of freedom because it is autonomous from the state, impersonal, self-activating through commercial exchange (e.g. property contracts, division of labor, markets), and natural. It is a robust entity whose normative roots and coherence are in the idealized state of nature, the harmony of its political culture, and the civility of the market. In lieu of government authority in the work of maintaining social cohesion, the norms and pressures of public opinion provide the means for both order and freedom in civil society. Combined, these characteristics constitute the essential infrastructure of Anglo-American citizenship theory with its binary opposition between the spontaneous free forces of prepolitical/civil society and the normative order of civil society on the one side and the tamed representative state on the other—and, in the background, always the potentially coercive, dominating, and enforced dependencies of public administrative power. It is a metanarrative born out of the ongoing “itch” to find the solution to the fear and loathing of the public sphere in a spatial domain of civil society where liberties and rights of representation could be organizationally grounded outside the powers of the coercive state (Baker 1990: 6). To ensure that these rights were themselves foundational and not granted at the behest of the crown or positive statutory laws, Locke made them natural rights, hence God-given and part of the prepolitical natural community. By this means he naturalized the organizational autonomy of society.

From this legacy, we have inherited the ineluctable connection between freedom, market exchange, and individual rights on the one side, in opposition to potential tyranny in the institutional domain of the state on the other. Since the seventeenth century, Anglo-American citizenship theory has proclaimed the normative guide for political organization to be the anti-institutional privatized market-based norms of civil society. Only by the criteria of the commercial culture of civil society can democratic political structures be judged as legitimate. Locke theorized and empowered a domesticated privately generated version of the law—rather than the command of the state—as the “constant and lasting force”: “And so, whoever has the legislative or supreme power of any commonwealth, is bound to govern by established standing laws, promulgated and known to the people, and not by extemporary decrees” (Locke 1667: 191, 182). Habermas thus argues that ever since Locke the normative discourse of public opinion and political culture (Habermas’s public sphere) has been articulated through the noninstitutionalized conception of the law as a cohesive force deriving from social norms. Law becomes a symbol not of the state but of society, and celebrated as the legitimate institutionalization of public opinion. But this was less an understanding of the law in the institutional form in which it had developed from medieval rule of law (e.g. administrative courts, and doctrinal principles of justice such as the “just wage”) and more a vision of the law as embodying general and abstract norms (Habermas 1989: 53). Habermas brilliantly captures the processes of the law’s conceptual deinstitutionalization as it proceeds from Hobbes through Locke and
Montesquieu: “In the law the quintessence of general, abstract, and permanent norms, inheres a rationality in which what is right converges with what is just; the exercise of power is to be denoted to a mere executor of such norms” (Habermas 1989: 53).

To a striking degree ensuing social science and liberal political theory fit the parameters of the original seventeenth-century metanarrative. In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, although Adam Smith maintained that political economy was a branch of statesmanship to be nurtured for the public good, he nonetheless insisted on the market as a “natural system of liberty” with a lawlike essence, and hence the inherent danger in any institutional “meddlings” from the public sphere (Winch 1978). From the physiocrats’ notion that public opinion reflected the “ordre naturel” emanating from civil society (Callon 1992), to Marx’s utopian postulate of freedom as emancipation from both the exploitation of capitalist labor and the domain of institutional politics, we can observe a continuity in the idea that the rationality, naturalism, and civility of private exchange in civil society give rise to democratic beliefs, values, and even practices of public discourse. For Locke, Smith, and Marx, the freedoms of the liberal state embodied private interests alone. And although Marx saw these as bourgeois freedoms supporting the exploitation of labor, this contrary judgment did not in any way affect his deinstitutionalized view of the state. In perfect harmony with Anglo-American citizenship’s metanarrative, Marx’s source of freedom was also found in civil society—only in his case there is a normative reversal. Civil society is the site of capitalist exploitation and its “freedoms” are illusions of the bourgeois democratic state.

I cannot trace in this chapter the entire historical trajectory of Anglo-American citizenship theory and its associated arguments in liberal theory. Suffice it here to show that the Lockean invention set a template and that recognizing this template makes it possible to find iterations in later arguments. In so doing, I have tried to show how a historical sociology of concept formation differs from the usual approach to intellectual history. Intellectual historians tend to operate on the assumption that ideas are passed along in chains from one individual thinker to another, so the proof of continuity is to demonstrate these explicit links of influence between individuals or schools of thought. But influence does not necessarily work in quite that way. While finding direct connections does not hurt, they generally are not one-to-one but rather mediated by larger currents of thought. To demonstrate influence, a historical sociology of concept formation must find a basic similarity between the organizing assumptions and conceptual imagery of the modern approaches and those of earlier ones. It must show, for example, how the Anglo-American citizenship metanarrative’s epistemological divides and narrative presuppositions remain the adjudicators of valid empirical argument in modern social science. Recursive use of the metanarrative, from this perspective, occurs not necessarily through chains of influence but through a constrained process of appropriation and evaluation from a limited number of available choices to the “exclusion of competing aspects that might turn choice in another direction” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 19). Metanarratives overdetermine data by working through the quasi-automatic self-activation of naturalized boundaries, classifications, distinctions, and assumptions. For the task at hand, then, reconstructing the inner logic of the arguments and demonstrating a similarity in that underlying logic is more important than pointing to the possible direct influence of one argument on another.

The paradoxical puzzle I set forth at the outset was how and why the newly rejuvenated civil society concept—recalled to normative and sociological service to represent a participatory third sphere between state and market—has again been privatized in political argument. The social revolutions it was called to explain now seem reduced to a cluster of prepolitical, antipublic, and naturalized attributes of the market, mechanisms of global commerce, and a political culture of privatism. This now prevailing antistatism use of civil society fails to provide an adequate theorization of a social sphere of citizenship— one characterized by reciprocity, solidarities, and a robust public discourse and political culture of rights. Instead, citizenship has been reduced to only those rights hailed as derived from the morally superior natural private sphere of the market. But not only is this privatization of citizenship deeply counterintuitive; it is also deeply paradoxical. The concept of civil society can no longer explain the very historical events that precipitated its revival.

One purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate how a historical epistemology and a historical sociology of concept formation can help to explain this paradox. The method suggests that the privatization of citizenship concepts can best be understood by making the primary subject of analysis not the isolated concept of civil society but the historically constituted larger knowledge culture of Anglo-American citizenship theory in which it is embedded. For a historical sociology of concept formation, concepts are best understood as words in their historical sites, and the sites most useful for making sense of knowledge are knowledge cultures. By deconstructing its making, narration, and naturalizing strategies we can see how the knowledge culture qua metanarrative of Anglo-American citizenship theory mediates knowledge through a narrative
cultural structure with its own gatekeeping criteria and normative prescriptions, which because they have been naturalized are not answerable to disconfirming evidence. The metanarrative's epistemological authority is established by grafting its temporal and spatial logics to the dichotomies of social naturalism.

For some three hundred years, what is natural and what is marketized have been inexorably conjoined and epistemically privileged. Linking the epistemology of social naturalism to the historicity of its production enables us to question the "primordial" distinctions between nature and culture. It also demonstrates the cultural roots of epistemic naturalism. And if social naturalism's very standards of validity are culturally and historically constructed, then so too are the hierarchies between nature and culture, private and public. Perhaps, then, the greatest payoff of exploring the privatization of citizenship through a historical sociology of concept formation is the challenge it poses to the idea that epistemological boundaries and political hierarchies are given in the nature of things. No political, social, conceptual, or epistemological boundary comes without a history.

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