

# It May Be Social, but Why Is It Capital? The Social Construction of Social Capital and the Politics of Language

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*Although the referents of the term social capital merit sustained inquiry, the term impedes understanding because of the historical association of the word capital with economic discourse. As a result of this association, applying the term social capital to civic engagement blurs crucial analytic distinctions. Moreover, there are important ideological consequences to considering things such as bowling leagues to be a form of capital and urging citizens to become social capitalists. The term social capacity, the authors argue, provides the same heuristic benefits as the term social capital without extending illusory promises of theoretical parsimony with the financial/human/social capital trinity.*

The word Capital had been part of legal and business terminology long before economists found employment for it. With the Roman jurists and their successors, it denoted the “principal” of a loan as distinguished from interest and other accessory claims of the lender. . . . Thus the concept was essentially monetary, meaning either actual money, or claims to money, or some goods evaluated in money. Also, though not quite definite, its meaning was perfectly unequivocal, and there was no doubt about what was meant in every

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Both authors contributed equally to the writing of this article; our names are listed in random order. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1999 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA. Smith’s work on the article is part of a larger project on urban education in Charlotte, North Carolina, that is funded by grants from the Spencer Foundation, the Parker Foundation, and the Winthrop University Research Council. Kulynych’s work on this article is part of an ongoing project on democracy and participation. For helpful comments on earlier versions of this article, we wish to thank Carl Boggs, John Bokina, Jennifer Hochschild, Hannah Britton, John Manley, Irving Leonard Markovitz, Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Marion Orr, Teresa Scheid, Michael Weinstein, and this journal’s editorial board. The statements made and the views expressed in this article are solely the responsibility of the authors.

POLITICS & SOCIETY, Vol. 30 No. 1, March 2002 149-186  
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particular case. What a mass of confused, futile, and downright silly controversies it would have saved us, if economists had had the sense to stick to these monetary and accounting meanings of the term instead of trying to “deepen” them!

—Joseph A. Schumpeter<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the merits of Schumpeter’s criticism of the use of *capital* in economic theory, his point holds true for political and social thought in which the term *social capital* has become a scholarly staple in the past decade. Although the widespread use of the term has triggered a range of scholarly critiques, little attention has been paid to the issue we address here: the analytic and ideological consequences of the use of the word *capital* in reference to the structures and relations that the term *social capital* purports to comprehend and describe.<sup>2</sup> Although we think the importance of these structures and relations is sometimes overrated, we agree they are worthy of sustained theorizing and empirical investigation. However, we question the use of the term *social capital* to conceptualize and describe them. The term, we argue, impedes understanding by blurring key analytic distinctions.

We can anticipate our argument by noting the various aspects and consequences of this blurring. One involves the analogies with financial capital that are found in both the seminal formulations of social capital as well as in many subsequent discussions. However, to view social capital and financial capital as merely different species of the same genus, capital, is to ignore the extent to which the deployment and operation of financial capital constitute the bowling leagues and neighborhood organizations that exemplify social capital in ways that are deeper and more significant than their operation constitutes financial capital. Similarly, actors with access to financial capital, especially large amounts of it, play a role in many aspects of social and political life that is profoundly and qualitatively different from that allowed by access to even extraordinarily large amounts of social capital.

A second aspect of this blurring arises from the historic roots of the word *capital* in economic discourse. As a result of these roots, to characterize civic engagement and the preconditions of democracy as social capital is to foster the view that community involvement and political participation are forms of economic activity, thus blurring important distinctions and, among other things, undermining the development of all-encompassing, genuine forms of democracy. Similarly, in addition to being rooted in economic discourse, the word *capital* has historically been associated with capitalism, an economic system in which individualism, competition, and the pursuit of wealth play a major role. However, in most political traditions, individualism, competition, and the pursuit of wealth are generally viewed as very different from, if not antithetical to, the civic virtues that discussions of social capital frequently seek to promote. Thus, to call on all citizens to become social capitalists, as Robert Putnam does in the conclusion of *Bowling Alone*, is to use the word in a manner that obscures many of its long-standing and

historic meanings.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as suggested by Putnam's use of the term *social capitalist* as well as by his claim that working-class solidarity is a form of social capital,<sup>4</sup> the term *social capital* imposes a universalizing logic on political activity that minimizes the historical context that gives much of this activity its meaning and impedes normative theorizing.

Employing a term that blurs these many distinctions adversely affects scholarly inquiry, whatever its implicit or explicit normative concerns. That adverse effect is sufficient, in our view, to justify the use of a term other than social capital. Adding to the case for an alternative are the ideological consequences of the term *social capital*. By giving the word *capital* so broad, pervasive, and honorific a meaning, the term *social capital* and derivatives such as social capitalist serve, we will argue, to make the social, economic, and political relations that characterize capitalism appear a largely natural and inevitable aspect of human activity, as well as to help legitimate these relations. As a result, the term *social capital* has important ideological consequences that, whatever one's normative position on the merits and demerits of capitalism, require acknowledgment. But such acknowledgment is almost entirely absent from the voluminous literature on social capital. That absence only serves to amplify the term's ideological consequences.

Underlying our discussion of the analytical and ideological consequences of the term *social capital* is a view that sees the language and categories of political and social inquiry as having wide-ranging consequences of the kind nicely summarized by David McNally:

Language is thus social *and* historical. Meanings exist for me only in my relations with others . . . and these social relations themselves are dynamic; they involve struggles over domination and resistance, shifting balances of force and power. . . . Language does not present me with a single structure of grammatical relations and meanings. On the contrary, my involvement in language entails my immersion in a social and historical field of themes, accents and meanings that are always contested and never closed. The word I choose, the utterances I convey, involve a positioning within that field. There are always alternative ways of expressing and articulating my experiences, my positions, and my aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to agreeing with McNally that meanings are the result of struggles and are always open to change and contestation, we would emphasize that these struggles reflect and constitute power relations in society. They are struggles, as Nancy Fraser explains, to "define social reality," and thus to "enshrine certain interpretations of social life as authoritative and to delegitimize or obscure others." Within this struggle:

Particular words and expressions often become focal . . . functioning as keywords, sites at which the meaning of social experience is negotiated and contested. Keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate—in part by constituting a body of *doxa*, or taken-for-granted commonsense belief that escapes critical scrutiny.<sup>6</sup>

Our inquiry is concerned with the way social capital functions as one such keyword in recent politics and scholarship. The rapidity with which the term *social capital* has migrated from magisterial but esoteric treatises on democracy in Italy and social theory to op-ed pages and think-tank agendas is ample evidence of the increasing importance of this concept.<sup>7</sup> We explore the context in which social capital has become such a keyword, as well as the taken-for-granted beliefs that underlie the term. Our concern is thus with what the term *means*.

Ultimately, our analytical and ideological critiques come together in this “politics of language.” To the extent that the terminology of social capital brings together contradictory ideas, ignores the history and context of those ideas, and makes evaluative or normative theorizing difficult, it also “enshrines” a certain definition of social reality. In making this critique, we thus see ourselves as following Theodore Lowi’s exhortation that scholars who study politics “should make ourselves part of our political analysis.”<sup>8</sup>

We develop our argument in three stages. The first discusses how the term *social capital* has come to loom so large in contemporary accounts of all that ails the United States by tracing the use of the word *capital* from Roman theorizing about economic issues up through the use of social capital by Bourdieu, Loury, Coleman, and Putnam, the four scholars whose work has done much to popularize this term. The second stage discusses reasons for this popularity, which cannot be understood, we argue, absent the term’s consonance with a wide range of intellectual, political, and social developments of the late-twentieth century. Among these developments are the heady economic atmosphere in the United States, the seeming triumph of capitalism over alternative ways of organizing economic activity, the bureaucratization of the policy-making process, and what has been called—both boastfully and scornfully—economic imperialism: the use of methods and concepts rooted in neoclassical economics to understand a wide range of political and social relations. The second section of the article also develops our arguments about the analytic and ideological consequences of the term *social capital*. Finally, in the third section, we explore the merits of alternatives to social capital. As umbrella concepts, the terms *social resources* or, especially, *social capacity*, we argue, have as much heuristic value as the term *social capital* without having broad ideological implications, obscuring key analytic distinctions, and extending illusory promises of theoretical parsimony with the trinity of financial/human/social capital.

#### I: CAPITAL, FROM THE ROMAN JURISTS TO ROBERT PUTNAM

##### *Capital*

For the Roman jurists and their successors, capital, as the article’s epigraph notes, “denoted the ‘principal’ of a loan as distinguished from interest.” Those origins dictated the word’s initial evolution as an “essentially monetary” concept, but

the work of Quesnay, Turgot, and Adam Smith enlarged the concept. It was further developed in the nineteenth century, but despite considerable variation in the definitions proposed during that century, they generally concurred, as Fisher noted in his comprehensive study of the use and meaning of capital,

in striving to express the important facts that capital is *productive*, that it is *antithetical to income*, that it is a *provision for the future*, or that it is a *reserve*. But they assume that only a part of all wealth can conform to these conditions. To the authors of definitions quoted, it would seem absurd to include all wealth as capital, as there would be nothing left with which to contrast it and by which to define it.<sup>9</sup>

Such frequent commonalities in the definitions of capital notwithstanding, the nineteenth century discussions of the topic involved a range of unsettled issues, two of which are especially relevant here. The first involves the consequences of the accumulation of capital and was raised most pointedly by Marx whose conception of capital involved the exploitative class relations between capitalist and worker. Absent exploitation, for Marx, there was no capital:

We know that the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They become capital, only under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as a means of exploitation and subjection of the labourer.<sup>10</sup>

Given capital's roots in the exploitation and subjection of the laborer, the growth of productive capital, in Marx's view, is essentially the "growth of the power of accumulated labour over living labour. Growth of the domination of the bourgeoisie over the working class."<sup>11</sup>

### *Human Capital*

The second issue relevant to our concerns left unsettled by nineteenth-century economic theory involves the extent to which human beings can be considered capital. In his 1960 presidential address to the American Economic Association "Investment in Human Capital," Theodore W. Schultz noted that a few economists such as Adam Smith had "included all of the acquired and useful ability of all of the inhabitants of a country as part of capital." But for the most part, he continued, economists had avoided treating humans as capital because the "mere thought of investment in human beings is offensive to some among us. . . . Hence, to treat human beings as wealth that can be augmented by investment runs counter to deeply held values. It seems to reduce man once again to a mere material component, to something akin to property. And for man to look upon himself as a capital good, even if it did not impair his freedom, may seem to debase him."<sup>12</sup>

Such considerations notwithstanding, Schultz argued that attributes of human beings such as their education, job skills, and health could be considered capital, and he called on his colleagues to theorize and study human capital in much

greater detail than they had previously done. The call was widely heeded, so much so that a third of a century later, Robert Solow, a Nobel laureate in economics, would look back, call attention to the pioneering work of Schultz and Gary Becker, and say that the concept of human capital “has been a brilliant success. It can be applied in a concrete way and it casts light.”<sup>13</sup>

Solow’s upbeat appraisal of the concept of human capital appeared during a review of Francis Fukuyama’s 1995 book *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*.<sup>14</sup> This book was one of the past decade’s many attempts to broaden the traditional understanding of capital even beyond human capital to social capital, of which trust is the most frequent example. As the title suggests, Fukuyama argues there is a strong relationship between economic prosperity and a culture (or subculture) of trust. But Solow doubts that social capital will have the explanatory power of human capital because of the difficulties in, among other things, measuring the stock of social capital and identifying the relevant investment processes. It remains to be seen whether Solow’s skepticism is justified; the putative relation between social capital and economic outcomes is the subject of ongoing empirical investigation. But whatever the problems of relating social capital to economic outcomes, they are dwarfed by those that arise when social capital is related to political ones. Unlike human capital, which is generally studied in relation to economic outcomes, social capital is increasingly studied and discussed in relation to explicitly political ones such as democracy and participation in public affairs. It is this latter relation that especially concerns us because its unfortunate analytic and ideological consequences are especially manifest and direct. We begin our argument by tracing the evolution of the concept of social capital.

### *Social Capital*

The first person currently credited with giving the term the meaning it now famously enjoys was Lyda Judson Hanifan, the state supervisor of West Virginia’s rural schools. Writing in 1916 about the importance of community involvement in education, Hanifan used the term *social capital* to refer to, “goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy, and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families.”<sup>15</sup> As Putnam notes, “Hanifan’s account of social capital anticipated virtually all the crucial elements in later interpretations but his conceptual invention apparently attracted no notice . . . and disappeared without a trace.”<sup>16</sup>

Forty-five years after Hanifan used the term, Jane Jacobs’s discussion of urban vitality off-handedly mentions social capital by noting that for self-government to work, there

must be a continuity of people who have forged neighborhood networks. These networks are a city’s irreplaceable social capital. Whenever the capital is lost, from whatever cause,

the income from it disappears, never to return until and unless new capital is slowly and chancily accumulated.<sup>17</sup>

Provocative as those sentences are, Jacobs is understandably more concerned with discussing the vitality of cities than elaborating on the concept of social capital, and it receives, as far as we can tell, no systematic exposition in her works.

More—much more—systematic discussion of the term appears in the work of Bourdieu for whom it is a pivotal theoretical construct. Like Jacobs, he conceptualizes social capital in terms of networks, but whereas her mention of networks relates them to urban vitality, his more systematic treatment relates them to the different theoretical concerns around which much of his work pivots: the structures and processes that facilitate the reproduction of power and privilege. The term *social capital* appears in Bourdieu's work at least as early as the 1970 publication of *La Reproduction*, the English translation of which was published as *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* in 1977.<sup>18</sup> However, his most systematic and accessible discussion of the concept can be found in the 1983 “Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital,” which appeared in English in 1985 under the title “The Forms of Capital.”<sup>19</sup> In this piece Bourdieu argues that one cannot understand the social world without considering capital, but it is “capital in all its forms and not solely in the form recognized by economic theory.”<sup>20</sup> The “three fundamental guises” in which capital can present itself are

as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title or nobility.<sup>21</sup>

Social capital, he further explains,

is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group.<sup>22</sup>

The volume of the social capital thus depends on the size of the network as well as on the capital of other agents in the network. Moreover the network is subject to change; while it is affected by kinship relations, it is the product of “investment strategies” aimed at, among other things, transforming contingent relationships in places like the neighborhood, workplace, and extended family into those that imply “durable obligations subjectively felt.”<sup>23</sup>

As indicated by the definitions of the three fundamental guises of capital, both cultural and social capital are convertible to economic capital, but the latter is primary. It has to be posited, Bourdieu notes,

that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words—but only in the last analysis—at the root of their effects.<sup>24</sup>

Like Bourdieu, Loury—another scholar whose early use of social capital is often cited—sees an overlap between various other resources, access to networks, and what he considers to be social capital. Discussing the life-chances of members of different groups, he discusses the importance of communities, which he views as representing

the private, voluntary associational behaviors common to all societies, in which persons choose their companions, often on the basis of common ethnicity, religion, or economic class. Since access to these “communities” could depend on parents’ social status, this provides another avenue by which parental background influences offspring’s achievement—another source of social capital.<sup>25</sup>

However, as this statement indicates, Loury is concerned with the attributes of family relations and local social organizations that facilitate a child’s social and cognitive development. Moreover, suggestive as his statements about social capital may be, they are generally passing comments unaccompanied by any broader theoretical or empirical effort. Consequently, Loury’s concept of social capital encompasses a much smaller set of social processes and structures than Bourdieu’s does, and his discussion of it is more limited.

Coleman, on the other hand, provides a discussion of social capital that is at least as comprehensive and systematic as Bourdieu’s, if not more so. As explicated in a series of publications culminating with *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman views social capital as a corrective to “the broadly perpetrated fiction in modern society” associated with the political philosophy of natural rights and classical and neoclassical economic theory that society “consists of a set of independent individuals . . . and that the functioning of the social system consists of the combination of these actions of independent individuals.”<sup>26</sup> The concept of social capital corrects this fiction by calling attention to certain aspects of social structure, and the concept’s value

lies primarily in the fact that it identifies certain aspects of social structure by their function, just as the concept “chair” identifies certain physical objects by their function, disregarding differences in form, appearance, and construction. The function identified by the concept “social capital” is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests.<sup>27</sup>

Calling attention to the way in which economists have used the concept of human capital in the past thirty years, Coleman extends the analogy to include social capital:

Just as physical capital is created by making changes in materials so as to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changing persons so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways.

Social capital, in turn, is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action. Physical capital is wholly tangible . . . human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations among* persons.<sup>28</sup>

Insofar as Coleman sees social capital as embodied in relations among individuals, there is an overlap between his perspective and Bourdieu's. Moreover, there are certain obvious parallels between the two scholar's trinities: Coleman's physical/human/social capital, and Bourdieu's economic/cultural/social capital. But the differences, only slightly less obvious, are at least as striking. For Bourdieu, social capital is crucial to the reproduction of prevailing class, power, and status relationships. Coleman, on the other hand, presents social capital as fulfilling functions that are much more benign. This presentation is exemplified by *all* of the examples that he uses to introduce his theoretical discussion. The first example involves radical student activists in South Korea whose similar geographic origins are a source of social capital. So, also do their "study circles themselves constitute a form of social capital—a cellular form of organization" that facilitates opposition to a repressive regime.<sup>29</sup> The second example concerns the sources of trust between doctor and patient; the third concerns the differences between Jerusalem and Detroit that allow a mother to allow her children to travel and play unattended in the Middle East but not in Motor City; and the fourth concerns the way that merchants in Cairo's central market cooperate to satisfy both their and their customers' needs and preferences.<sup>30</sup> Who but the likes of a member of the secret police, child molester, ambulance-chasing attorney, or usurer could take exception to these goals? Moreover, none of these examples raises the possibility that social capital is ultimately rooted in economic capital, a point on which Bourdieu insists. In fact, at one point Coleman comes close to saying that social capital and economic capital vary inversely.<sup>31</sup>

Together with our summary of Bourdieu's and Coleman's theoretical positions, these examples indicate that the differences between the men's conceptions of social capital reflect two long-standing differences in the history of political inquiry.<sup>32</sup> In contemporary discussions, the first is usually called the difference between pluralism, on one hand, and class analysis, stratification theory, or elite theory, on the other. Coleman's discussion falls largely on the pluralist side. For all the attention that Coleman pays to the manner in which relations among individuals affect the accumulation of, and access to, social capital, he pays very little to the way in which relations *among* different classes, strata, and groups affect and constitute these relations among individuals. For Bourdieu, on the other had, it is precisely these relations among classes, strata, and group that shape the accumulation and distribution of social capital and access to it.

The second difference is even more venerable and has been characterized and summarized in many different ways. Invoking the differences between Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau and Hobbes, and Hegel and Kant, Dahrendorf talked of the two faces of society and distinguished between theorists who held that integrative processes were the primary aspect of societal relations and those who held that coercive ones were.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Parsons distinguished between what he called the positive and zero-sum conceptions of power.<sup>34</sup> And more recently Stone has distinguished between a social production model that conceptualizes power in terms of *power to* and a social control model that conceptualizes power in terms of *power over*.<sup>35</sup> Social capital, in Coleman's view, is basically something that facilitates the attainment of collective goals, it is much more *power to* than *power over*. For Bourdieu whose project is understanding the reproduction of class, status, and power relations, social capital is much more *power over*.

Recognition of these fundamental differences between Bourdieu's and Coleman's understandings of social capital is helpful in understanding the concept's political trajectory and implications. Bourdieu's use of social capital antedates Coleman's by many years and was developed in a long series of publications available in English as well as French and German. However, it is Coleman's conception of social capital that has been picked up by scholars, to say nothing of journalists and policy wonks. We will thus focus our critique on Coleman's usage and the way it has shaped contemporary discourse. After developing that critique, we will discuss the extent to which Bourdieu's usage is similarly problematic.

The most important example of the prominence of Coleman's understanding and neglect of Bourdieu's is the work of Robert Putnam, who extends Coleman's empirical concerns with issues like child rearing and education to democracy and political participation. Putnam's celebrated attempts to understand democracy in Italy and civic life in the United States go a long way toward explaining the prominent place that social capital occupies on the agenda of many political scientists, foundations, and civic leaders.<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu's name does not appear in the index of Putnam's seminal book dealing with democracy in Italy, and the key footnote dealing with social capital cites Coleman, Loury, and several 1990s publications by other political scientists, without mentioning Bourdieu at all.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, until very recently, Bourdieu's name has been absent from Putnam's major publications dealing with civic engagement in the United States and when it does appear, we shall argue below, Putnam elides the crucial differences that distinguish Bourdieu's usage from Coleman's.

Like Coleman, Putnam sees a lack of social capital as responsible for a wide range of problems including faltering collaborative efforts to improve public education and public safety in the United States as well as the fragility of cooperative agricultural arrangements in the developing countries.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Putnam's most sweeping claim is the one contained in the final sentence of his study of Italy, *Making Democracy Work*, "Building social capital will not be easy, but it is the

key to making democracy work.”<sup>39</sup> That claim has been somewhat modified in Putnam’s recent book *Bowling Alone* to “The performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital.”<sup>40</sup> But this book, too, contains an expansive view of social capital, including the claim that

historically, social capital has been the main weapon of the have-nots, who lacked other forms of capital. “Solidarity forever” is a proud, strategically sensible rallying cry for those, such as ethnic minorities or the working class, who lack access to conventional political clout.<sup>41</sup>

In this book, Putnam also distinguishes between what he calls bonding and bridging social capital. The former is “inward looking,” tends “to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups,” and is exemplified by ethnic fraternal organizations and fashionable country clubs.<sup>42</sup> The latter is “outward looking and encompasses people across diverse social cleavages,” examples being the civil rights movement and ecumenical religious organizations.<sup>43</sup> But the two kinds of social capital are not mutually exclusive, and Putnam emphasizes there is no necessary relationship between a given level of either bonding or bridging social capital and the level of the other.

The distinction between the two kinds of social capital helps Putnam address one of the most frequent criticisms of *Making Democracy Work*, that the book neglected the extent to which networks and their norms reciprocity and trustworthiness can facilitate evil as well as good. For example, Timothy McVeigh’s bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City was facilitated by a network that may have been very high in bonding social capital but presumably ranked extremely low on bridging social capital.

In addition to that criticism, Putnam’s work and the entire social capital corpus have provoked a range of other concerns, one set of which involves the way social capital has been conceptualized. For example, in an earlier issue of this journal focusing on *Making Democracy Work*, Levi notes that Putnam views trust as an essential aspect of social capital, but his work does not adequately distinguish among different kinds of trust—interpersonal, organizational, governmental—or adequately specify the relations among them. Instead, Putnam too facilely assumes empirical and theoretical linkages between membership in the likes of bowling leagues, on one hand, and more generalized civic engagement and democratic political participation, on the other. Those assumptions reflect a society-centered analysis that, among other things, leads Putnam to pay insufficient attention to the conditions under which state institutions can contribute to the development of social capital.<sup>44</sup>

Another set of concerns involves the way social capital has been studied. For example, in a discussion of both Putnam’s and Coleman’s work, Edwards and Foley note the growing influence of economic models in all of the social sciences and thus view social capital “as the most recent in a string of efforts—including

human capital and cultural capital—to amend or overcome the failure of the predominant economic model to incorporate nonmarket factors into its accounts” of behavior.<sup>45</sup> In this respect, they see social capital, like the closely related concept of civil society, as a useful heuristic “for drawing attention to neglected nonmarket aspects of social reality.”<sup>46</sup> This accomplishment notwithstanding, social capital scholarship, they argue, is plagued by a variety of serious problems. For example, aspects of Putnam’s work are faulted because its use of survey data to study social capital reduces it to a property of individuals rather than a property of relations among individuals which, for both Bourdieu and Coleman, is the *sine qua non* of social capital. Since social capital is a property of relations among individuals, it is highly dependent on context, and thus cannot, Edwards and Foley note, “be measured directly in extant longitudinal survey data” in the way Putnam and others have frequently done.<sup>47</sup>

A third set of concerns involves the claim that the term *social capital* merely puts old conceptual and theoretical wine in a new terminological bottle. As past president of the American Sociological Association, Alejandro Portes, points out, the “term does not embody any idea really new to sociologists” but “simply recaptures an insight present since the very beginnings of the discipline” in, among other places, the work of both Durkheim and Marx.<sup>48</sup> Given that this insight has been around for so long a time, Portes attributes “the novelty and heuristic power of social capital” to two sources. First, it emphasizes “the positive consequences of sociability while putting aside its less attractive features.” Second, it allows these positive consequences to be viewed as

sources of power and influence, like the size of one’s stock holdings or bank account. The potential fungibility of diverse sources of capital reduces the distance between the sociological and economic perspectives and simultaneously engages the attention of policy-makers seeking less costly, non-economic solutions to social problems.<sup>49</sup>

Like Portes, we believe that part of the appeal of the term *social capital* is that it deflects attention away from other issues. However, we propose to take this point further by discussing how the mutually reinforcing relationship between the term *social capital* and the intellectual, political, and economic milieu of the late-twentieth century, especially in the United States, has also contributed to the widespread use of the term *social capital*. We applaud, as do Foley and Edwards, efforts “to amend or overcome the failure of the predominant economic model to incorporate nonmarket factors in accounts” of behavior. However, in our view, there are many problems with using a vocabulary—especially the term *social capital*—drawn from the predominant economic model to overcome the deficits of this model because, rather than reduce the distance between the economic and other perspectives, the term *social capital* dissolves the latter into the former, thus blurring some important political issues.

An analogy with the more established term *human capital* illustrates this point. What may make that term appealing to many economists is precisely what obscures understanding of many key political issues. Claiming, as Gary Becker does “that the growth of physical capital . . . explains a relatively small part of the growth of income in most countries,”<sup>50</sup> economists such as he and Schultz have sought to understand and quantify the role that education, job training, and so forth have played in economic growth. In inquiries into the causes of economic growth, there may be reason to view, say, a journeyman’s card as well as a lathe as capital. However, in discussions of political power, viewing a journeyman’s card and a lathe as merely different species (human and physical) of the same genus (capital) impedes understanding because actors who control and/or own lathes, especially large numbers of them, are typically able to exert political power that is very different in both magnitude and character from those who have only a journeyman’s card, no matter how much knowledge that card reflects and even if its possessors manage to act in concert.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the term *human capital* has important ideological consequences. As Karabel and Halsey have noted,

But what must further be remarked about the theory of human capital is the direct appeal to pro-capitalist ideological sentiment that resides in its insistence that the worker is a *holder of capital* (as embodied in his skills and knowledge) and that he has the *capacity to invest* (in himself). Thus in a single bold conceptual stroke the *wage-earner*, who holds no property and controls neither the process nor the product of his labor, is transformed into a *capitalist*.<sup>52</sup>

As is the case with human capital, the term *social capital* has both analytic drawbacks and unfortunate ideological implications, topics to which we now turn.

## II. SOCIAL CAPITAL, LANGUAGE, AND THE WORLD

Before discussing how the term *social capital* as developed by Coleman and applied most famously by Putnam impedes rather than advances understanding, it will be useful to emphasize how the term invokes ideas, values, sentiments, and beliefs that are intimately linked to the political, intellectual, and economic climate of the late twentieth century. Indeed, it would be surprising if such linkages did not exist because the many differing, vague, and contradictory uses of the term combined with the fact that, as Portes says it “does not embody any idea really new to sociologists,” make it hard to believe that the term’s popularity can be solely attributed to whatever heuristic value it may possess. Our discussion will thus highlight the complex interplay between language and the world—demonstrating how our language is in part shaped by our world and how our language in part shapes our world.

*How Language Reflects the World*

## Economic Imperialism and the Apolitical Study of Politics

We can begin to understand the political and intellectual climate of the late twentieth century by looking at the social sciences themselves. A key aspect of this climate is exemplified by the title of an edited volume that included one of Coleman's early discussions of social capital: *Economic Imperialism: The Economic Method Applied Outside the Field of Economics*.<sup>53</sup> Whether this imperialism is celebrated and promoted, as it was in this book, or criticized and resisted, as in others,<sup>54</sup> it is clear that the past fifty years have witnessed the growing application of concepts, methods, and modes of analyses traditionally associated with economics to a wide range of issues traditionally the responsibility of political scientists and sociologists. Given such economic imperialism, Putnam's claims about the importance to democracy of social capital—a concept ultimately rooted in economic analysis—is perhaps not all that remarkable. After all, one of the most influential books written in the past fifty years dealing with democracy was titled *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, and while social capital played no role in Downs's 1957 classic, the book was a seminal attempt to apply economic analyses to the study of democracy.<sup>55</sup>

While the spread of economic analysis is indisputable, the jury is still out on its causes and effects. Undoubtedly, there are intellectual benefits endogenous to political inquiry that account in part for the popularity of economic analysis in such inquiry. And certain applications of economic analysis have been extremely fruitful for the understanding of social and political phenomena. But the intellectual consistency, stability, and predictability provided by this form of analysis can by no means explain entirely its rapid rise to canonical levels. Rather, the popularity in political inquiry of both economic analysis, in general, and social capital, in particular, cannot be understood absent discussion of broader political and intellectual developments.

Theodore Lowi called attention to some of these developments in his 1991 presidential address to the American Political Science Association in which he argued that the increasing use of economic analysis by policy makers is paralleled by a "depoliticization" of politics. Economic analysis, Lowi claimed, "is politically useful because it closes off debate" and

economics rarely even pretends to speak truth to power. If substantive truths were claimed, there would be room for argument. But economics, particularly as a policy science, stresses method above all. And the key to the method is the vocabulary of economics, which is the *index*. An index is not a truth but an agreement or convention among its users about what will be the next best thing to truth.<sup>56</sup>

Much of Lowi's argument rests on the claim that the influence of economic analysis in political science is linked to the growing bureaucratization of the pol-

icy-making process. Hence the political climate Lowi describes is part of a general social trend toward bureaucratization and rationalization of society. While Lowi does not elaborate on this important social and political phenomenon, it has been discussed at length by many other commentators including the early Frankfurt theorists, Habermas, Cohen and Rogers, and Young.<sup>57</sup> For example, Habermas describes modern welfare states as characterized by an increasingly intertwined state and economy where the strategic interactions and instrumental rationality of the state and economy “colonize” and extend their reach into our private lives and into the public sphere of rational deliberation. As the economic system grows, the state is forced to compensate for its dysfunctions by providing an increasing number of regulations and social welfare supports. Managing the contradictions of capitalism is a difficult task and one that requires increasing administrative complexity. Hence the state becomes increasingly bureaucratized, and bureaucracy becomes the ideology of the state. Efficiency becomes the primary political value, replacing discussions of justice and interest with discussions of what is possible and practical, with means rather than ends, with method rather than truth. Divorced from substantive debate over the ends of politics, public decision-making becomes primarily a technical problem. Traditional political issues are redefined as technical issues to be solved by experts.

Unable to be experts in all areas and precluded from making broad normative claims by the very nature of bureaucratization, citizens find themselves consigned to consumer roles. As Iris Young describes, “the political game is defined in analogy with the market. Various interests compete with one another for people’s loyalties and those that amass the most members and money have the market advantage in lobbying for legislation.”<sup>58</sup> It does not matter if you are asserting a selfish interest or a “normative claim of justice.” The culture encourages citizens to “focus their energies on the [material] goods they want, and to evaluate their government’s performance according to how well it provides them with goods and services.”<sup>59</sup> Hence when Lowi asserts that there is “little substantive controversy” in political science discourse, his critique reflects the lack of substantive controversy in politics generally.

#### Valorization of Capitalism

To these long range trends contributing to economic imperialism in general can be added specific historical events of the late twentieth century that further explain the popularity of the term *social capital*. To begin with, the prospects for states and movements rooted in the Marxist tradition have diminished significantly. The Soviet Union has collapsed. China is increasingly characterized by capitalist relations of production and growing economic inequality. And, while insurgent movements calling themselves Marxist can be found in many parts of the world, their ability, either singly or *in toto*, to make any significant changes in global economic or political relationships seems significantly less than at any

time during the past hundred years. Insofar as the Marxist tradition has been seen, both by itself and its antagonists, as the major challenge to capitalism, the demise and decline of movements in that tradition make capitalism's sway and influence seem greater than at any time since the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The same years that have seen the decline, demise, and discrediting of movements and states claiming inspiration from Marx have also been ones of prosperity, at least according to conventional indicators, for the world's single most important capitalist economy, the United States. Moreover, whatever devastation has been caused on a world scale by the economic restructuring and increased globalization of the late twentieth century, the institutions and individuals who own, control, and/or have access to capital have done quite well during this period, as the upward climb of the stock market throughout the 1990s amply attested. While that climb especially benefited owners and managers of large amounts of capital, it also benefited individuals with access to small amounts, such as those typically possessed by people who think, write, and read about issues such as the relationship between trust and democracy. In the halls of academia it was difficult to read a quarterly statement from TIAA-CREF and not feel the warm glow that accompanied citizenship in the 1990s stockholder nation.

#### Social Capital in the Late Twentieth Century

When we examine the language of social capital against this background of general depoliticization and specific valorization of capitalism, it is apparent that our language is indeed a reflection of the world around us. The concept of social capital reflects both the long-term tendencies toward the bureaucratization of policy making and political processes described by Lowi and Habermas as well as specific historical events of the late twentieth century.

Talking about political life as if the accumulation of capital determines our performance in the public marketplace is understandable if we really have become consumer-citizens. The reification of method implied by social capital's economic interpretation of human behavior reflects the bureaucratization of public life and the consequent rise of technical expertise and strategic calculation in political decision making. Accumulating social capital becomes more important than the ends to which that capital is to be put. Lowi's description of economic political science as "dismal" or "dispassionate" is hardly surprising in a world where public decision making is largely devoid of normative content.

In addition to reflecting long-term trends of bureaucratization, rationalization, and depoliticization, the language of social capital also reflects the more specific historical valorization of capitalism in the 1990s, as is indicated by comparison with what is now considered the first occasions in which the term *social capital* was given the meaning it now has. Writing in 1916 and again in 1920, Hanifan may have self-consciously used the word *capital*, as Putnam claims, "to encourage hard-nosed businessmen and economists to recognize the productive impor-

tance of social assets,”<sup>60</sup> but there is little evidence of others picking up on Hanifan’s terminology however much concerns about civic engagement continued to animate popular and scholarly discourse. There are undoubtedly many reasons why Hanifan’s terminology failed to catch fire, but some of them almost certainly reflected the fact that during the decade in which he was writing, capitalism and capital lacked as widespread a cachet as they would enjoy eighty years later. Among that decade’s characteristics depriving capital and capitalism of such widespread cachet, it should be remembered, were an influential Progressive movement, a vigorous socialist party, a world war in which charges of war-profiteering were not uncommon, the strike wave of 1919, and a Bolshevik Revolution that to millions around the world portended, initially at least, a time in which the contours of so many aspects of social life would not be shaped by differential ownership and control of capital as the term was then widely understood to mean. In such a milieu, it is very difficult to believe that even if some other writers did pick up Hanifan’s usage of social capital, the term would have been as widely embraced in the 1910s as it was in the 1990s with so little commentary about the ideological and political consequences of using the term *social capital* to characterize an extremely broad range of social relations including working class solidarity and the political resources of the poor.

Social capital, we should add, is just one of many examples of how the vocabulary of the stock market has permeated social and political discourse in the late-twentieth century. Consider, for example, Putnam’s description of his methodology in *Making Democracy Work*. Discussing the importance of using several different methodologies for gathering data, Putnam states, “The prudent social scientist, like the wise investor, must rely on diversification to magnify the strengths, and to offset the weaknesses, of any single instrument.”<sup>61</sup>

Like the wise investor? Why not the cook who combines just the right amount of several different spices to get the desired taste? Why not the dietitian who chooses foods from several different groups to assure good health? Why not the savvy coach who knows the dangers of relying on one player to score all the points? Why not the farmer who knows the folly of putting all the eggs in a single basket? Surely, cooking, eating, participation in sports, and transporting fragile objects are more basic aspects of human experience than investing. But, in the heady economic atmosphere of the late-twentieth-century United States, Putnam could be confident that those who read about social capital would be as familiar with prudent investment strategies as those who write about it.

Consider also the announcement of the April 1999 annual meeting of the Urban Affairs Association (UAA), the theme of which was “The Social Reconstruction of the City: Social Capital and Community Building.” The opening paragraph of this meeting’s announcement read as follows:

As cities have responded to new economic, political, and policy contexts, they have begun to develop a portfolio of strategies for institution building and community revitalization.

These efforts have developed what can be seen as social capital, a partner to financial capital. Central to this portfolio is the education system. . . . Intellectual skills have become as central to the future of urban areas as manual labor was to the past; efforts to improve, develop and extend these skills are now entering the portfolio of development strategies.<sup>62</sup>

Portfolio? Would not *repertory* or the blander *group* have served equally well? As the economic implications of the language of capital reflect the apolitical character of public life, so too does the use of the language of the stock market to discuss research strategies and the amelioration of social problems reflect the seeming hegemony of capitalism as the twentieth century turns into the twenty-first.

### *How Language Shapes the World*

#### Thinking about Social Problems

Were it true that the term *social capital* merely reflects the sociopolitical context of the late twentieth century, we might find its use disheartening, but not necessarily worthy of sustained critique. But we believe that the use of the language of social capital is more than a reflection of an already existing world. The term *social capital* also helps to create and sustain that world: the language itself has pernicious consequences.

One of the reasons these consequences are pernicious is that the term *social capital* involves claims about social reality that are even stronger than those underlying generic economic imperialism. Generic economic imperialism generally involves the use of models in which self-interest is the key, if not the only, motivation underlying human behavior. In responding to criticism that such an approach reduces the richness of human motivation to the mere pursuit of self-interest, proponents of such models frequently respond that they do not deny the existence of benevolence, altruism, anger, and so forth. Rather, they claim, human behavior can be understood *as if* it were chiefly, or even solely, motivated by self-interest. But social capital is not an as-if concept. While social capital may not be palpable, for Coleman and Putnam it is every bit as real as any other non-physical aspect of social reality.

Lest there be any doubt that social capital is not an as-if concept, consider the numerous discussions of ways to increase the stock of social capital, such as the concluding chapter of *Bowling Alone* titled "Toward an Agenda for Social Capitalists."<sup>63</sup> Such discussions call attention to another difference between social capital and self-interest. Eighteenth-century theorists may have encouraged the pursuit of self-interest because, as Hirschman has pointed out, they viewed it as more benign than the pursuit of glory that, in their view, had ravaged European civilization.<sup>64</sup> But two hundred years after Adam Smith, very little of the literature rooted in neoclassical economics encourages the pursuit of self-interest in the way that the literature on social capital frequently prescribes an increase in its stock as a

way to improve democracy, child rearing, education, and deal with a broad range of social problems.

Consider again the announcement of the 1999 annual meeting of the UAA quoted above. Perhaps, as the announcement says, there is a great need for partnerships between social and financial capital in the reconstruction of the city. But surely any discussion of such partnerships must be framed by the recognition that the need for the social reconstruction of the city stems in no small measure from the way in which financial capital—through real estate speculation, development, deindustrialization, and so forth—has devastated many cities and eroded what is usually termed their social capital. Yet the linkage between the operation of financial capital and the erosion of urban social capital typically receives very little attention in discussions of the social reconstruction of the city, with no mention, for example, of this linkage appearing in the announcement of the UAA's annual meeting.

It is surely one of the great ironies of contemporary social thought that at the very time when the inequities of income and wealth of actually existing global capitalism are skyrocketing, there has been an explosion of both professional and lay literature that views a broad spectrum of social problems in terms of social capital. Such a view suggests that all parties can gain access to capital, just different forms, and that appropriate “investments” in social capital will compensate for gross inequities in financial capital. But whatever social capital might be embodied in a plethora of bowling leagues, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), church groups, and other neighborhood organizations is rarely sufficient to successfully oppose the sway of financial capital or even approximate the social capital (e.g., institutional affiliations and networks of powerful people) enjoyed by those with access to the most financial capital. Moreover, as the erosion of ghetto neighborhood organizations and networks by the loss of jobs indicates, the operation of financial capital constitutes the neighborhood and community organizations to which discussions of social capital typically refer much more than the operation of these organizations constitutes financial capital.

#### Thinking about Democracy

In addition to distorting understanding of social problems, the term *social capital* undermines the development of an all-encompassing, genuine form of democracy. Not content with protective and elitist versions of democracy, participatory and deliberative theorists have put forth rich and compelling alternatives that strive to engender genuine participation and to guarantee equal voice in public life. In these thick versions of democracy, genuine participation is qualitatively different from a market transaction, and public deliberation and reasoning are distinct from other types of social and strategic communication. Deliberative and participatory versions of democracy require an *atmosphere and attitude* where people see their political interactions as motivated by the search for the best, most

just, solutions to public problems. Thus, as Young points out, people must see themselves and their interests as capable of being transformed by the political process, and they must constantly strive to have their deliberations informed by as many social perspectives as possible.<sup>65</sup> As Rousseau first suggested, all must care about having everyone's voice heard.

Economic transactions, on the other hand, assume and require no such attitude of magnanimity and familiarity. Economic transactions generally begin with a fixed interest and work to achieve that interest. Such transactions make little "economic" sense if one's interests are fundamentally transformed in the process because economic transactions are instrumental not transformative ones. The term *social capital* ignores the emotionally rich world of meaning that has surrounded the idea of democracy and reduces that world of meaning to the very different language of economics.

In employing the language of economics, the term *social capital* privatizes public communication. Thinking about political participation in the language of the market encourages us to see political participation in a very limited, instrumental way. The terminology of social capital allows the language of economic transaction to describe public interactions, thereby integrating two distinct and opposing worlds of meaning. This terminology also equalizes these opposing worlds of meaning. If we think of political activity as just another type of economic transaction, as rooted in just another type of capital, then we easily attribute equal worth to these activities, putting economic activity on par with political activity. This normative sleight of hand eviscerates democracy—setting up two normatively different activities as equal and alike, and thereby elevating the value of one and diminishing the value of the other.

#### Thinking about Labor and Poor People's Organizations

In addition to undermining the development of thick versions of democracy, the term *social capital* calls to mind Marcuse's discussion in *One-Dimensional Man* of how certain types of language integrate their conceptual opposites, thus smoothing over the tension between contradictory concepts.<sup>66</sup> This problem is especially evident when the term *social capital* is used to describe labor and poor people's organizations. Consider, for example, Putnam's claim, noted above, that working-class solidarity is a form of social capital. Both the nature and magnitude of the problems arising from this claim can best be appreciated by recalling the song that gave rise to the slogan "solidarity forever," a rallying cry that Putnam views as a proud and strategically sensible one.

Trust may be an essential component of solidarity, but the solidarity celebrated in this song has aspects to which the term *social capital* cannot even begin to do justice. This is so for three reasons. First, the solidarity invoked by the song involves sentiments of all-for-one and one-for-all that are diametrically opposed to the competitive, individualist ones evoked by the terms *capital* and *capitalism*.

Second, the solidarity called for by the song involves a very sharp distinction between the “greedy parasite” with “untold millions that they never toiled to earn” and working people, standing “outcast and starving ‘mid the wonders we have made.”<sup>67</sup> Accompanying that sharp distinction are anger, resentment, and fury that cannot be comprehended by even the most updated language of social capital because while those sentiments evoke what Putnam now calls bonding social capital, the social context giving rise to this bonding is profoundly different from that which characterized the bonding social capital in, say, the networks with which Timothy McVeigh was affiliated, however much they too were characterized by anger, resentment, and fury. Nor can the sentiment of solidarity evoked by those verses be reduced to the quotidian trust and norms of reciprocity embodied in organizations more laudable than McVeigh’s (e.g., bowling leagues and PTAs) because the contexts giving rise to the various organizations’ norms of reciprocity are profoundly different. To say, as does Putnam, that “social capital has been the main weapon of the have-nots” is to emphasize form at the expense of content and to ignore the consciousness—whether trade-unionist, revolutionary, or whatever—that gives working-class solidarity its political meaning.

Finally, the song involves a revolutionary vision of “bringing to birth a new world from the ashes of the old” and this new world’s being the working class’s “not to slave in, but to master and to own.”<sup>68</sup> This revolutionary vision reflects the affiliation of Ralph Chaplin, the lyricist, who was the editor of *Solidarity*, the newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).<sup>69</sup> The IWW, it should be remembered, called for the overthrow of capitalism and began its constitution by claiming “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.”<sup>70</sup> To be sure, most of the song is typically skipped in contemporary union halls, few contemporary union members know the song’s origins or anything about the IWW, and Putnam has no obligation to help today’s labor movement better understand its history. However, he has a scholarly obligation not to obfuscate that history, especially because he fully understands, as *Making Democracy Work* makes clear, that history matters.<sup>71</sup> Indeed much of the power of the empirical analyses of both that book and *Bowling Alone* stems from the books’ sensitivity to history and to how the past, and people’s understanding of it, shapes the present. But to apply the language of social capital to working-class solidarity—especially the slogan “Solidarity Forever”—is to display extraordinary insensitivity to history. To say, as does Putnam, that “social capital has been the main weapon of the have-nots, who lack other forms of capital” is, in effect, to render the opening statement of the IWW constitution as “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common, except different forms of capital.” Moreover, for Putnam to conceptualize the solidarity in “Solidarity Forever” as a form of social capital makes a mockery of the song’s aspiration that working-class solidarity can help birth a new world not plagued by capitalist economic, political, and social relations.

All of these problems that arise from Putnam's viewing working-class solidarity as a form of social capital are especially ironic because in addition to recognizing that "history matters," Putnam also recognizes that names matter. After claiming in the what-is-to-be-done concluding chapter of *Bowling Alone* that "weakened social capital is manifest in the things that have vanished almost unnoticed," Putnam says,

Naming this problem is an essential first step toward confronting it, just as labeling "the environment" allowed Americans to hear the silent spring and naming what Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name" enabled women to articulate what was wrong with their lives.<sup>72</sup>

Just as naming something can be important, so too is applying an appropriate name. And to name or label the solidarity in the slogan "Solidarity Forever," a form of social capital is to obscure and confuse most, if not all, of what that slogan has meant.

Academics are not the only ones whose understanding of the political organization of the disadvantaged is distorted by the term *social capital*. The remarks of community organizers face similar difficulties, as evidenced by the comments of Ernesto Cortes, one of the leaders of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). Arguably, the IAF has more, and more successful, community organizing experience under its belt than any other organization in the country. Because of the IAF's importance and because we are sympathetic to its efforts, we discuss in depth how the language of social capital undermines the organization's goals.

The IAF grew out of the work of Saul Alinsky who, in his famous *Reveille For Radicals*, explains the conflictive action necessary to fight oppression. What he called a People's Organization is not "a social service's ameliorative gesture, but a hard-driving force, striking and cutting at the very roots of all the evils which beset the people." Such an organization, Alinsky continues, "thinks and acts in terms of social surgery and not cosmetic cover-ups" and is dedicated to "an eternal war" against, among other things, poverty, misery, injustice, and despair.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, in the 1990s, fifty years later, Ernesto Cortes, a regional director of the IAF and one of its most prominent contemporary theorists, uses a very different language to describe its activities. He describes community organizing as "reweaving the social fabric," saying that social capital is "crucial to the resolution of crises and the alleviation of poverty."<sup>74</sup> Part of the problem with Cortes's use of the term *social capital* is indicated by our earlier discussion of how the operation of financial capital has eroded urban social capital. To rephrase that earlier discussion in terms of Cortes's social fabric metaphor: there is no way that by itself social capital can mend what financial capital has torn, or that by itself social capital can prevent additional tears. The previous section about democracy indicates another part of the problem with Cortes's use of the term *social capital*. With its emphasis on how political activity can transform the thinking of poor people,

the IAF's concern with participatory democracy is, like all thick versions of democracy, undermined by the language of social capital. But Cortes's use of the term *social capital* involves even broader conflicts with the IAF's goal of empowering poor people.

That empowerment involves the recognition that, according to Cortes, "without strong countervailing institutions, the imperialism of the market will dominate and penetrate all relationships, in both public and private spheres."<sup>75</sup> Yet while Cortes seeks to build institutions capable of countering the imperialism of the market, his use of the term *social capital* contributes at a linguistic level to that imperialism. It does so because the unspoken assumptions and connotations of the word *capital* work against Cortes's vision of the collective empowerment of poor people.

We can see how the term *social capital* works against collective empowerment by noting that Cortes sees community organizations as helping create

an organized constituency with the power and imagination to initiate and support policies for change. If we are to create such a constituency and restore health and integrity to our political process, mitigating the distorting role and influence of organized concentrations of wealth, then we must be vigilant in the development of real democratic institutions.<sup>76</sup>

Those are important and laudable goals, but the language of social capital undermines them because the language of the market, of capital and capitalism, of investment and profit, is associated with a world where individuals compete to get ahead, where life is a race to the top, where people pull themselves up by their bootstraps. These are concepts that invoke cultural images of competition, self-reliance, and independence, revered traits in U.S. culture. As such, they reinforce a rugged individualist ideology with regard to success, citizenship, and progress. This discursive cultural context inevitably shapes the way we think about people. When we use terminology so rich in cultural meaning, we cannot avoid bringing these often prereflective meanings into our understanding. In many of the situations in which social capital terminology is used, the assumptions and connotations that accompany the term *capital* infect and distort our understanding.

By arguing that the disadvantaged need social capital, Cortes inadvertently argues that the disadvantaged need to be more competitive, self-reliant, and independent. Here, the discourse of social capital suggests that the powerlessness of the disadvantaged is a result of not enough capital (i.e., not enough independence and self-reliance). Indeed, Cortes's own language invokes the cultural image of independence and self-reliance:

To think of our relationships as "capital" suggests a different way of thinking about other people. To create capital we must invest labor, energy, and effort in the here-and-now to create something for later use. We must expend energy now in creating a tool, or learning a skill, or saving money, or building a relationship in order to put it to use in the future. Invest-

ment requires the ability and discipline to defer gratification, to invest energy not only in the needs or pleasures of the present, but also in the potential demands of the future.<sup>77</sup>

This is self-defeating and contradictory language. Certainly Cortes is not buying into the stereotype that poor people are lazy, undisciplined, and unable to defer gratification. Indeed this cultural stereotype is largely the result of a language of welfare that categorizes many poor people as passive clients of the state. By invoking the self-reliant imagery of capital, Cortes reinforces a negative image that portrays poor people as in need of discipline, hard work, and self-control. For people who already experience their lives as filled with unremunerated work and a lack of power, a vocabulary that reinforces those sentiments works against the IAF's stated goal of collective empowerment. Cortes is actually arguing for the "social" part of social capital: community, interdependence and collaboration, not individual self-reliance. Unfortunately, the contradictory juxtaposition of social (collaboration and interdependence) with capital (independence and self-reliance) allows us to continue to view the poor as not only in need of traditional individualist values, but also as largely to blame for their lack of a "stock" of social power. Thus, this language smoothes over contradictions in just the way Marcuse warned.

#### Thinking about Political Activity

Our comments about how the term *social capital* weakens discussions of labor and poor people's organizations can be expanded to a discussion of political activity in general. Although there is ongoing and considerable debate about the generic merits of transcontextual theoretical language, there is no need to take a position in this debate to recognize that the term *social capital* imposes a universalizing logic on political activity that impedes understanding. Our earlier discussion of working-class solidarity illustrates this point. Given the way that Putnam and Coleman define the term *social capital*, working class solidarity is perforce an example of it and must be included along with the relations that characterize bowling leagues, PTAs, and right-wing militias in the category social capital. But to view working-class solidarity as an example of social capital raises all the weighty problems noted earlier. Perhaps these difficulties might be addressed by developing additional categories of social capital just as the distinction that Putnam now draws between bonding and bridging social capital helps address the pernicious consequences of certain kinds of social capital. But what might these additional categories be? Working-class social capital and capitalist social capital? Those terms strike us as ludicrous and to even suggest them only further emphasizes the problem with using the term *social capital* to describe the wide range of social relations it purports to.

Beyond the many problems involved in using the language of capital per se to describe social relationships and networks, there are also problems and dangers that result from the attempt to group all the relationships to which the term *social*

*capital* refers under one unified category of political discourse. By purporting to contain so many elements of relationship under one concept while at the same time serving as a normative indicator of democracy and healthy society, the terminology of social capital oversimplifies the character of such relationships and actually obscures the vast differences in their effects. What makes bowling leagues, the civil rights movement, and militias all examples of one phenomenon is the term *social capital* that names them as such. While there may be good reasons to impose order and coherence on the world of social activity, it is also important to recognize that the term *social capital*'s claim to do so impedes understanding because the term's extraordinary breadth serves to highlight some aspects of that world but make it very difficult to see other aspects that are also very important.

The breadth of the concept of social capital is clearly evident in Putnam's contention that the term refers to both "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."<sup>78</sup> In other words, the term encompasses social relationships or networks generally (which may or may not have desirable outcomes), as well as norms (which by definition are things we value or desire). It is clear that Putnam wants the discourse of social capital to be a normative one, one that illustrates that "social networks have value."<sup>79</sup> Indeed the point of *Bowling Alone* is to reveal his discovery of what needs to be "restored" in political society. Yet Putnam also wants to do justice to the complexity of social relationships (as his typology of bonding/bridging social capital attempts to do). Unfortunately, it is impossible to do both without either obscuring those normative commitments or denying the complexity of social relationships that the term *social capital* purports to describe.

To begin with, the breadth of the concept of social capital makes it difficult to pin down exactly what Putnam is advocating. When describing why social capital is valuable, Putnam argues that it has "pro-social" consequences including "mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness,"<sup>80</sup> which lead to private goods such as better health and career success as well as public goods such as efficient community problem solving, tolerance, and effective democracy. On the other hand, Putnam acknowledges that social capital can also have "anti-social" consequences including "sectarianism, ethnocentrism and corruption,"<sup>81</sup> which lead to things like the Oklahoma City bombing. But Putnam has already acknowledged that trust and cooperation were crucial to McVeigh's bombing plan. Thus, the prosocial consequences of trust and reciprocity enable both militia groups and the civil rights movement. Consequently, the "norms" of trust and reciprocity cannot really be norms by themselves, but are actually defined as goods only to the extent that they contribute to some wider notion of the good. What Putnam is really advocating is healthy people, economic prosperity, and genuine democracy. But social capital, broadly defined, only sometimes contributes to these wider goods. So we are left wondering, why not simply advocate health, wealth, and democracy rather than social capital?

Because Putnam wants social capital to be understood normatively and because he wants to highlight mutual support, cooperation, trust and institutional effectiveness as goods (even though we can see that they do not always result in wider goods), he allows these “positives” to effectively stand in for the whole of social capital. By doing so, he makes it much more difficult to see networks and relationships that do not enhance democracy or contribute to healthy individuals and communities. If we use the term *social capital* to explain prosperity and democracy, and focus on the collaborative relationships implied by this concept as the source of democratic power, we divert attention from the ways that some networks of relationships work to imprison and oppress some people, demanding not a strengthening of those relationships but their eventual demise.

The breadth of the concept of social capital combined with its normative role also makes it difficult to see the complex interactions of networks and relationships. Relationships and networks do not simply have either prosocial or antisocial consequences. Sometimes, relationships may interact or evolve in a way such that social capital that might be initially understood as antisocial—or understood as antisocial in a particular context—might come to be seen as prosocial. It is simply impossible to talk normatively about social capital, generally, and still adequately grasp the complex nuances of social relationships.

Finally, when social capital with positive consequences is given a shorthand name such as trust or connectedness (a shorthand that Putnam routinely employs), then that language makes it extremely difficult to explain how noncollaborative, suspicious, nontrusting, conflictive relationships might also enhance democracy, create healthy individuals, or improve the lot of the disadvantaged. Again, the IAF provides an instructive example. Where Alinsky advocated “social surgery not cosmetic cover-ups,” the language of social capital implies rebuilding and reweaving as the key to action. Does this change of language indicate conflictive action aimed at tearing down relationships of oppression is no longer necessary? We think not. Yet, while Cortes may acknowledge the importance of conflict, it is very difficult for him to talk about it in the language of social capital.

#### Not Thinking about Capitalism

By minimizing those crucially important characteristics of action that are based on conflict as well as by smoothing out social contradictions and obscuring history, the term *social capital* serves to function ideologically. Terms function ideologically, according to Iris Young, when they “represent the institutional context in which they arise as natural or necessary . . . [forestalling] criticism of relations of domination and oppression, and [obscuring] possible more emancipatory social arrangements.”<sup>82</sup> This is exactly what the term *social capital* does, as is indicated by the agenda for social capitalists, which constitutes the concluding chapter of *Bowling Alone*.<sup>83</sup> In describing those who promote and/or participate in community service, family-friendly workplaces, the new urbanism, socially

responsible religious activities, community dance troupes, campaign finance reform, and of course, bowling leagues as social capitalists, Putnam's language not only blurs the historic meaning of the word *capitalist* but fosters the view that this extraordinarily wide range of practices exemplify what capitalists do and what capitalism is about. For activities as different as dance troupes, religious organizations, bowling leagues, and family-friendly workplaces to exemplify capitalism is to help make it appear part and parcel of the human condition (i.e., as natural and necessary in Young's words). Moreover, to the extent dance troupes, religious organizations, bowling leagues, and family-friendly workplaces are generally seen as good things, the term *social capital* not only makes capitalism seem natural and inevitable, but something to which it is difficult to take exception. Thus, the term *social capital* helps legitimate capitalism.

To suggest further how the term *social capital* functions ideologically, we draw on Gramsci's notions of hegemony and the literature it has spawned on what is often called the dominant ideology thesis. By most accounts, there is little evidence for what Bottomore has called a strong version of this thesis (i.e., that the ideology of dominant classes and strata is sufficient to secure the social integration of subordinate classes and strata).<sup>84</sup> Rather, as Gramsci noted, the consciousness of subordinate classes and strata is typically "contradictory," drawing on their experience with subordination, exploitation, resistance, and struggle, but still bearing witness, as Stokes has noted in this journal, to the "ability of the dominant to leave a deep mark on the consciousness and perceived interests of the dominated."<sup>85</sup> One aspect of that deep mark reflects what Bottomore calls a weak version of the dominant ideology thesis, the ability of a hegemonic ideology to "inhibit and confuse the development of the counter ideology of a subordinate class."<sup>86</sup>

The language of social capital does just that. By describing the political resources of ordinary citizens, the poor, and the working class as merely another form of capital as well as by applying the word *capital* to bowling leagues, dance troupes, church groups, and a wide range of other institutions, the term *social capital* makes it more difficult than it otherwise would be to conceptualize political and social life in a vocabulary other than that associated with capitalism. That difficulty helps, as Bottomore indicates, inhibit the development of ideological challenges to capitalism.

Of course, neither Putnam, Cortes, Coleman, nor anyone who uses the term *social capital* has an obligation to challenge capitalism. Our argument is independent of whatever views these writers may have on the merits or demerits of capitalism. We are simply calling attention to the fact that the term *social capital* has consequences for, to use Nancy Fraser's words, the unspoken assumptions, connotations, and taken-for-granted beliefs about capitalism. In fact, given that the merits of capitalism have been the focus of considerable controversy during the past 150 years, it is striking that the voluminous size of the social capital litera-

ture notwithstanding, so little attention has been paid to the possibility that the term just might have some ideological consequences. That one of the United States' most prominent and honored political scientists can apply the term *social capital* to working class solidarity and call on all citizens to become social capitalists without discussing whether his language may have ideological consequences exemplifies this lack of attention. The lack of attention to these ideological considerations by the scholar most prominently associated with social capital as well as a similar lack of attention by many other writers contributes to the term's functioning as a keyword in society at large and thus playing the ideological role that it does.

### *Bourdieu and the Language of Social Capital*

Having developed our critique of Coleman and Putnam's use of the term *social capital*, we turn now to Bourdieu's. Unlike Coleman and Putnam, Bourdieu, as noted earlier, sees social capital as ultimately rooted in economic capital, and he deploys the concept primarily to illuminate the reproduction of class, power, and status inequalities. Given these differences, Bourdieu's use of the term *social capital* neither euphemizes capital nor glosses over conflict in the way that Coleman's and Putnam's does. In these respects, Bourdieu's usage is less open to our critique than theirs is. However, *mutatis mutandis*, Bourdieu's usage is also very problematic.

We can get at these problems by noting that social capital is but one of Bourdieu's many key terms—interest, profit, and investment are others—that are most typically associated with economics. The importance of these terms in Bourdieu's oeuvre has engendered charges of economic imperialism. Bourdieu has emphatically denied these charges, claiming, "The only thing I share with economic orthodoxy . . . are a number of words."<sup>87</sup> That may very well be the way Bourdieu sees his work. However, it is worth noting, as Bourdieu does in another context in the same volume, that ever since Plato, "everybody" has realized that "there is always an extraordinary danger of losing control of what you write"<sup>88</sup> And that is exactly what has happened with his concept of social capital because, despite the many differences between the way Bourdieu and Coleman use the term, the two men are typically lumped together as progenitors of the concept with minimal, if any, acknowledgment of these differences. For example, Putnam whose early work made no mention of Bourdieu now cites him along with Hanifan, Loury, Coleman, and others as an example of how "the term social capital itself turns out to have been independently invented at least six times over the twentieth century, each time to call attention to the ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties."<sup>89</sup> That Putnam can so casually talk of *our* lives being made productive indicates how Bourdieu's concern with social capital as a source of "power over" gets swamped by Putnam's preoccupation with social capital as a source of "power to."

Moreover, while Bourdieu views his work as using only the same words—not concepts—as mainstream economics, others disagree. To be sure, there may be merit in Bourdieu's reply that some criticisms of his work are based more on the titles of his books than upon their contents.<sup>90</sup> However, even as careful and nuanced a reading as Swartz's supports the conclusion that

Bourdieu does share with human capital theorists—and rational actor theory more generally—the fundamental assumption that all action is interest oriented. . . . Moreover, though the types of interests can vary considerably, conduct always appears to be oriented toward accruing power and wealth. . . . In this sense Bourdieu's economy of practices indeed shares with human capital theory a key utilitarian dimension despite his disclaimers.<sup>91</sup>

On this reading, which we find persuasive, Bourdieu's work reflects much the same kind of economic imperialism whose unfortunate consequences were delineated above. It is thus hardly surprising that the critical aspects of Bourdieu's conception of social capital get lost as his work is cited by Putnam and incorporated into mainstream discourse because significant aspects of his (Bourdieu's) analysis as well as his vocabulary mesh quite readily with the increasing prominence of economic categories and modes of reasoning in so many aspects of social and political inquiry.

### III: ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIAL CAPITAL

In addition to indicating the ideological consequences of the term *social capital*, we have argued that the term impedes scholarly inquiry in several different ways. First, by suggesting that social and financial capital are merely different species of the same genus, capital; the term *social capital* ignores the extent to which social capital is constituted by financial capital as well as the extent to which access to financial capital confers social and political advantages that are profoundly different from those conferred by access to social capital. Second, to view the preconditions of democracy and civic engagement in terms of social capital is to foster the view that these activities are forms of economic activity, thus depriving these activities of much of their distinctive meaning. Third, given that the word *capital* is historically associated with individualism and the pursuit of wealth, to view civic engagement and the resources of the economically disadvantaged as social capital is to obscure the meaning of words such as capitalist and solidarity. Fourth, when applied to many aspects of political activity, the term *social capital* largely ignores the historical context that gives this activity its meaning.

These arguments make a compelling case for scholars of all normative persuasions to avoid the term *social capital* and seek alternative ones for studying these processes and relations, which, we agree, are certainly worth studying. How these alternatives are best conceptualized and phrased is a complicated issue beyond the

scope of this article, which is more concerned with critiquing today's vocabulary than providing a dictionary for tomorrow's. Nonetheless, we would proffer several suggestions.

Our discussion of the problems arising from the breadth and diversity of the referents of the term *social capital* indicates the importance of a more contextually based vocabulary. There have been various scholarly attempts to take context into account in dealing with the relations to which social capital typically refers. Among the most insightful of these is Clarence Stone's study of variations among localities in the education provided to low-income students. The concept of civic capacity plays a key role in this study, and we draw on this concept to illustrate the advantages of inquiry that pays even just a little more attention to context than does the term *social capital*.

Although Stone says that "civic capacity can be thought of as a category of social capital,"<sup>92</sup> his concept is sturdy enough to stand on its own. Indeed, much of the appeal of the concept of civic capacity derives from differences with the concept of social capital that make it (civic capacity) much less open to the kinds of criticisms that both we and many other scholars (e.g., Levi, Edwards and Foley, and Portes) have leveled at social capital. For starters, *civic* invokes the lofty notion of public activity rather than blurs the difference between public and private as does social capital. Moreover, the emphasis on public activity has important conceptual and empirical benefits. Social capital typically deals with the manner in which small-scale instances of cooperation can foster reciprocity and trust. However, as Stone emphasizes in a critique similar to Levi's noted above, these kinds of *interpersonal* habits do not necessarily translate into the kind of *intergroup* cooperation that is essential to the attainment of public policy goals. There may be cause for concern that so many people in the United States are currently bowling alone, but as Stone tellingly points out, "No matter how rich our associational life was in the past, it never yielded much in the way of a community-wide capacity for problem solving. The American city has always been 'the private city' in which little energy has been directed into serving the whole community and responding to its problems."<sup>93</sup> Civic capacity thus calls attention to the importance of developing and sustaining local political arrangements that are commensurate with the changes in policy that are being advocated. And these arrangements—it should be emphasized—are not confined to whatever flowers are blooming in the Tocquevillian garden. Rather, they also include occupants of important positions in the government (e.g., school superintendents and mayors) and economy (e.g., business executives).<sup>94</sup>

In situations where inquiry requires as transcontextual a term as social capital, the search for alternatives should begin, we would suggest, by recalling the heuristic and analytic benefits that the term purports to provide. Drawing on Portes's summary of the literature on social capital cited above, we view the term as claiming to benefit inquiry by

1. calling attention to those aspects of social structure that facilitate specified actions of individuals. This is why, as Coleman emphasizes, it is *social* capital.
2. indicating that these aspects of social structure are (a) productive, (b) a stock (not a flow) and (c) consequently can be conceptualized as a provision for the future. These are three characteristics which, as Fisher notes, are typically ascribed to capital as economists have traditionally used the term.
3. indicating “the potential fungibility of diverse sources of capital.”

It is this third point that raises problems. As Part II indicates, many of the analytic drawbacks and ideological implications of the term *social capital* arise from the term’s referents being viewed as too fungible—politically, ideologically, and practically—especially with other forms of capital. Consequently, we seek alternatives to the term *social capital* that provide the first two benefits without extending false promises of ready fungibility. Such considerations lead to the suggestion that either resources or capacity replace the *capital* in the term *social capital*.

Let us first consider *resources*, because support for its use comes from an unlikely source, Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work*, which says, “Most forms of social capital, such as trust, are what Albert Hirschman has called ‘moral resources.’”<sup>95</sup> However, Putnam’s attempt to comprehend these resources as a form of capital are undermined by Hirschman’s discussion, which argues that economics has done little more than put forward “simplistic and contradictory propositions” about such resources.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Hirschman’s account of economics’ difficulty in dealing with moral resources is one of three points in support of his essay’s main claim about the *inadequacies* of economic analysis. Titled “Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse,” the essay discusses how the economist’s parsimonious postulate of self-interested, isolated individuals has recently been applied fruitfully to noneconomic phenomena such as crime and the family, and then notes,

The “economic” or “rational-actor” approach has yielded some important insights, but its onward sweep has also revealed some of its intrinsic weakness. As a result, it has become possible to mount a critique which, ironically, can be carried all the way back to the heartland of the would-be conquering discipline. That the economic approach presents us with too simpleminded an account of even such fundamental economic processes as consumption and production is my basic thesis here.<sup>97</sup>

Ironic as the situation is to which Hirschman directs our attention, the juxtaposition of Putnam’s and Hirschman’s perspectives is even more so. Putnam, a political scientist, uses a term derived from economics to try to categorize something, moral resources, about which, according to the economist Hirschman, his discipline has put forward “simplistic and contradictory propositions.” What does Putnam gain from viewing these moral resources as social capital? Presumably, the ability to view them as one of the three species of the genus *capital*. To be sure, that neat typology is one of the things that parsimony—a frequent goal in scien-

tific explanation—is all about. However it is the very quest for parsimony that, Hirschman notes, has made it impossible for economic analysis to comprehend production and consumption, dependent variables that, virtually by definition, are more amenable to economic analysis than democracy, which is Putnam's concern.

To the extent the *moral* in *moral resources* conveys a normative judgment, some may view the term as inappropriate for empirical analysis. Another problem might be that *moral* could imply that such resources are largely, if not exclusively, the attributes of individuals rather than largely embedded in relations among them. Because of these possible objections, we view social resources as a more useful term than moral resources.

Additional support for preferring *social resources* to *social capital* as an umbrella and, per force, decontextualized term comes from Coleman's discussion of the latter in which, it will be recalled, he said,

The function identified by the concept "social capital" is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as *resources* that can be used by the actors to realize their interests.<sup>98</sup>

Again, what is gained by calling these resources *social capital* rather than *social resources*? A parsimonious and facile conceptual trinity of economic/human/social capital, to be sure. But absent a specific context—which can be supplied equally well for *social resources* or *social capital*—the latter's theoretical pretensions do more, as we have argued, to retard inquiry than advance it.

To the extent *social resources* has a significant drawback it may be that it implies the realization of desiderata more than it implies the potential for such realization. Thus, the objection would continue, the word *resources* does not adequately reflect the aspect of capital that is a "provision of the future" or a "reserve," to draw on Fisher's definition quoted above.<sup>99</sup> To the extent that objection has weight, the term *social capacity* addresses it. Moreover, *social capacity* has the various advantages of *social resources* and few of the drawbacks of *social capital*. We thus view *social capacity* as a term that can be employed in all contexts where *social capital* is presently used. A fringe benefit of using social capacity is that civic capacity could then be understood as the explicitly political and public aspect of social capacity.

Our argument can be summarized by comparing it with the analysis developed by Portes in the review article that we have cited earlier. As probably befits an article written by a president of the American Sociological Association, the article deals, as the title indicates, with the origins and applications of social capital in modern sociology. It concludes by saying that "as a label for the positive effects of sociability, social capital has, in my view, a place in theory and research," but several sentences earlier, it also notes that the concept's popularity is

partially exaggerated for two reasons. First, the set of processes encompassed by the concept are not new and have been studied under other labels in the past. Calling them social capital is, to a large extent, just a means of presenting them in a more appealing conceptual garb.<sup>100</sup>

Perhaps for inquiry into the causes, consequences, and characteristics of sociability, social capital does provide more appealing conceptual garb. However, for inquiries into the public and political aspects of human activity—of which such inquiries are necessarily a part—this new garb may be quite fashionable, but it is too stained both ideologically and analytically to be appealing.

#### NOTES

1. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 322.

2. Among such critiques are Bob Edwards and Michael Foley, "Social Capital and the Political Economy of Our Discontent," *American Behavioral Scientist* 40 (1997): 669-78; Bob Edwards and Michael Foley Edwards, "Civil Society and Social Capital Beyond Putnam," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1998): 124-40; Ellis Goldberg, "Thinking About How Democracy Works," *Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (1996): 7-18; Margaret Levi, "Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*," *Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (1996): 46-55; and Alejandro Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 1-24.

One critique that does challenge the use of the term *social capital* is Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's "Social Capital and Community Governance" (*Economic Journal*, forthcoming, 2002). However, their critique of the term is based on the fact that "capital refers to a thing that can be owned," but social capital refers to relations among people and, furthermore, has too many disparate meanings to be useful. They argue that the term should be replaced by community governance, a claim that parallels in many ways our suggestion (see below) that in many contexts civic capacity is more appropriate a term than social capital.

3. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

4. *Ibid.*, 359.

5. David McNally, "Language, History, and Class Struggle," in Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster, eds. *In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 39, emphasis supplied.

6. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," in Nancy Fraser, ed., *Justice Interruptus* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 122. Their discussion of keywords draws on Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976).

7. James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

8. Theodore Lowi, "A Review of Herbert Simon's Review of My View of the Discipline," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 26, no. 1 (1993): 52.

9. Irving Fisher, *The Nature of Capital and Income* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965[1906]), 57.

10. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1967[1867]), 767.

11. Karl Marx, "Wage, Labour and Capital," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978[1847]), 210.

12. Theodore W. Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," *American Economic Review* 51, no. 1 (1961), 2.

13. Robert M. Solow, "But Verify," *The New Republic*, September 11, 1995, 37. The extent to which human capital theory facilitates economic inquiry is, however, open to debate. See, for example, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "The Problem with Human Capital Theory—A Marxist Critique," *American Economic Review*, 65, no. 2 (1975): 74-82.

14. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

15. L. J. Hanifan, "The Rural Community Center," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67 (1916): 130.

16. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19. Until one of Putnam's colleagues located Hanifan's article, most commentators credited Jane Jacobs with employing the term *social capital* in a manner similar to its current usage. It is, of course, unclear whether usages earlier than Hanifan's will eventually be discovered.

17. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 138.

18. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude-Passeron, *La Reproduction* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1970); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude-Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977).

19. Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital, Kulturelles Kapital, Soziales Kapital," in Reinhard Kreckel, ed., *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (Goettingen, Germany: Otto Schartz & Co, 1983); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985).

20. Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 242.

21. *Ibid.*, 243.

22. *Ibid.*, 248.

23. *Ibid.*, 249.

24. *Ibid.*, 252.

25. Glenn Loury, "Why Should We Care about Group Inequality?" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 5 (1987): 255. See also his earlier "A Dynamic Theory of Racial Income Differences," in Phyllis Wallace and A. LeMund, eds., *Women, Minorities, and Employment Discrimination* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1977), 153-86.

26. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 300.

27. *Ibid.*, 305.

28. *Ibid.*, 304.

29. *Ibid.*, 303.

30. *Ibid.*, 304.

31. At the close (p. 321) of the theoretical chapter on social capital in *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman claims that "the class of factors which make persons less dependent on one another . . . allows whatever social capital is generated to depreciate and not to be renewed." The two examples of this class of factors that he gives are "affluence" and "government aid of various sorts."

No evidence is presented in support of these claims, and it is difficult to know what to make of them because of their problematic, if not counterintuitive, implications. Among such implications are that social capital is lower among the rich than among the poor, as well as that it is lower among networks of people who receive social security, welfare, and tax breaks compared with networks of people with similar demographic and socioeco-

conomic characteristics who do not. These claims would also seem to conflict with other theoretical schema such as Maslow's well-known hierarchy of human needs. Finally, these claims would also seem to conflict with later sections of the book (Part IV) where Coleman contends that conflicts between the family and corporate actors (of which the corporation is a prime example) erode social capital and thus, he says, adversely affect a variety of social outcomes such as effective child rearing. This later discussion, it should be noted, lacks any sustained discussion of how social capital might be adversely affected by the priorities and activities of financial capital.

32. The differences in their conceptions of social capital are paralleled by those between Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital and Coleman's treatment of human capital. While Bourdieu's cultural capital and Coleman's human capital are basically attributes of individuals, for Bourdieu the dominant class's greater access to cultural capital helps reproduce the prevailing class, power, and status relations. By contrast, Coleman's discussion of human capital parallels that of Schultz and Becker in that it pays relatively little attention to the manner in which these relations affect individuals' ability to benefit from whatever "investments" have been made in their education, vocational skills, health and so forth.

33. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), 157.

34. Talcott Parsons, "The Distribution of Power in American Society," *World Politics* 10 (1957): 123-43.

35. Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 229.

36. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65-78; Robert D. Putnam, "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28, no. 4 (1995): 664-83; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

37. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 241, n20.

38. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 35. More recently, as in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam has tried to deal with what he calls the "dark side of social capital," by discussing the consequences of the social capital embodied in groups such as the right-wing militias with which Timothy McVeigh, convicted of bombing the Oklahoma City Federal Building, was associated. We consider Putnam's discussion of this dark side below; here we simply emphasize that he continues to focus heavily on the extent to which variations in social capital affect political desiderata such as democracy and a vigorous civic life. Moreover, he continues to take the same pluralistic approach to social capital that Coleman does. Neither pays adequate attention to how the relations among classes, strata, or groups constitute the relations among individuals that are said to embody social capital.

39. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 185.

40. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 349.

41. *Ibid.*, 359.

42. *Ibid.*, 22.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Levi, "Social and Unsocial Capital."

45. Edwards and Foley, "Civil Society and Social Capital Beyond Putnam," 128.

46. *Ibid.*, 124.

47. *Ibid.*, 131.

48. Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications," 2.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 1.

51. We choose examples (a lathe and journeyman's card) from what is fashionably called the old economy for ease of exposition and because much contemporary economic activity still falls under that rubric. Whatever the differences between the old and new economies, they do not materially affect our point. The role that Bill Gates and Microsoft play in national and global politics is very different from that played by the company's many highly skilled workers, no matter how well they are paid and even under the (presumably infrequent) circumstances when they are able to act in concert.

52. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, "Educational Research: A Review and Interpretation," in Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, eds., *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 13.

53. James S. Coleman, "Norms as Social Capital," in Gerard Radnitzky and Peter Bernholz, eds., *Economic Imperialism: The Economic Method Applied Outside the Field of Economics* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

54. For example, Jane Mansbridge, *Beyond Self-Interest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

55. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

56. Theodore J. Lowi, "The State in Political Science. How We Became What We Study," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (1992): 5.

57. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I and II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) and *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (New York: Penguin, 1983); Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

58. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 72.

59. *Ibid.*, 71

60. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 445. Given Putnam's recognition that Hanifan was self-consciously using the term *social capital* to appeal to "hard-nosed businessmen," it is ironic how little of either Putnam's work or the burgeoning social capital literature addresses the ideological and political implications of the term.

61. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 12.

62. Urban Affairs Association, *Urban Affairs*, June 1998, 5.

63. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

64. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

65. Iris Young, "Difference as a Resource in Democratic Communication" in James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

66. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

67. Joyce L. Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1988), 26-7.

68. *Ibid.*

69. John R. Salter, Jr., "Ralph Chaplin," in Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 127.

70. Joyce L. Kornbluh, "Industrial Workers of the World," in Buhle et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 355.

71. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 13.

72. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 403.

73. Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989[1946]), 133-5.

74. Ernesto Cortes, "Reweaving the Fabric: The Iron Rule and the IAF Strategy for Power and Politics" in Henry Cisneros, ed., *Interwoven Strategies* (New York: Norton & Co., 1993), 305. Our argument should not be construed as an unqualified endorsement of the strategy represented by Alinsky's language or as outright dismissal of the strategy represented by Cortes's. Strategies to improve the well being of low-income communities may very well have both conflictual and "reweaving" aspects. For reasons too complex to be discussed in a note, we view the conflictual aspects as generally being primary. But even if they are considered secondary, the language of social capital serves to impede rather than advance understanding of the causes of, and remedies for, the plight of the poor.

75. *Ibid.*, 316.

76. *Ibid.*, 319.

77. *Ibid.*, 305.

78. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 22.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 74.

83. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

84. Tom Bottomore, "Introduction" to Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

85. Susan C. Stokes, "Hegemony, Consciousness, and Political Change in Peru," *Politics & Society* 19, no. 3 (1991): 287.

86. Bottomore, "Introduction," x.

87. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118.

88. *Ibid.*, 62.

89. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

90. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation*, 79.

91. David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 78.

92. Clarence N. Stone, "The Politics of Urban School Reform: Civic Capacity, Social Capital, and the Intergroup Context" (paper presented at the 1996 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco), 4.

93. *Ibid.*, A16.

94. Useful as civic capacity is, the term is not without problems. In particular, its roots in the conception of power as *power to* makes it easy to overlook the importance of addressing the question, Civic capacity for whom? The question is especially important in studies of the transfer of civic capacity from one policy arena and is discussed in Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte* (State University of New York Press, forthcoming, 2003).

95. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 169.

96. Albert O. Hirschman, *Rival Views of Market Society and Other Recent Essays* (New York: Viking, 1986), 159.

97. *Ibid.*, 142.

98. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 305, emphasis supplied.

99. That objection seems to be the gist of Portes's comments about the difference between resources and social capital. He discusses this issue after calling attention to con-

fusion in Coleman between the origins, consequences, and the structures that embody social capital. It is important, says Portes,

to distinguish the resources themselves from the ability to obtain them by virtue of membership in different social structures, a distinction explicit in Bourdieu but obscured in Coleman. Equating social capital with the resources acquired through it can easily lead to tautological statements ("Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," 5).

There is undoubtedly a difference between resources acquired by individuals and social capital, as Portes uses both terms. The difference largely parallels that between income and capital in the economist's understanding of those terms. But *social resources*, as we are suggesting the term be used, is an attribute of social structures and relations in the same way that social capital is considered to be. Social resources, as we are using the term, thus differs from whatever resources or benefits accrue to individuals from these structures and relations. Whatever difficulty arises from the various ways that *resources* can be used is no greater than that from the many analytic and ideologically laden difficulties with the term social capital.

100. Portes, "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology," 21.