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Trust (and Social Capital) in Cultural Theory

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TRUST (AND SOCIAL CAPITAL) IN CULTURAL THEORY

Abstract

I sketch the contributions that the cultural theory developed by Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, Aaron Wildavsky and others can make to the debate on social capital. I do so in two steps. First, I list the revisions and refinements of Robert Putnam's original social capital-thesis that have been advocated during the last ten years. Thereafter, I argue that cultural theory is the only elaborate framework that offers an explanation of the rise and decline of social capital that is in full accordance with all these proposed revisions and refinements.

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TRUST (AND SOCIAL CAPITAL) IN CULTURAL THEORY

In the 1990s, the study of social capital and trust captured some of the theoretical high-ground in social and political science, on the wings of the success of Robert Putnam's book *Making Democracy Work*. These writings have served to remind us of the widespread need to overcome and avoid a dire set of social conditions: those under which people find it very hard to cooperate and trust each other. When people see no reason at all to put trust and effort into collective enterprises, then it is unlikely that democracies can flourish, economies grow, environments survive, development aid function, and the rule of law reign.

In this article, I trace the contributions that the cultural theory developed by Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, Aaron Wildavsky and others can make to the debate on social capital. First, I sketch the various revisions of Putnam's social capital-thesis that have been proposed since the publication of *Making Democracy Work*. I note that these revisions are illuminating in and of themselves, yet do not constitute a full-fledged theory of the dynamic processes through which trust and cooperation between people can flourish or flounder. Thereafter, I argue that the cultural analysis of Douglas and co. is compatible with the revisions that have been advocated, while also offering an interesting and policy-relevant account of how people can collectively slide into, and emerge from, social relations that are incapacitated by very low levels of trust and cooperation.

The Social Capital Thesis

As originally formulated in the first half of the 1990s, the study of social capital (Coleman 1990: 300-21; Putnam 1993; Fukuyama 1995; Taylor 1996) held that collective action will not take place if the persons involved do not trust the other participants to put in their share of the work. It offered lack of trust between people as a major explanation for why collective actions that would benefit all are at times not undertaken. According to this view, only groups of people endowed with enough "social capital" (made up of norms, networks and mutual trust) are able to escape this perennial social dilemma. Furthermore, in particular the work of Putnam offered a view of how norms, networks and trust combine to produce collective action. He argued that the social norms, and trust in other people, that enable collective action are learned through participation in "intermediary" organizations, *i.e.*, voluntary associations of citizens that are larger than families and clans, but smaller than nations or states. Examples are sport clubs, local religious organizations, and choral choirs. He maintained that the sociability and trust learned in such organizations spill over into other arenas, thereby raising the general civility of life in for instance the legal, political and economic domains.

Empirical evidence has suggested that social capital can explain the presence, or absence, of economic growth (Helliwell and Putnam 1995; Burt 1997; Whiteley 2000), human well-being (Helliwell and Putnam 2004); low crime rates (Rubio 1997; Winkel and Saegert 1998), healthy populations (Kawachi, Kennedy and Lochner 1997; Veenstra 2001; Hendryx, Ahern, Lovrich and McCurdy 2002), entrepreneurship and innovation (Svendsen and Svendsen 2005), environmental protection (Pretty and Ward 2001), as well as satisfactory democratic policies and procedures (Badescu and Uslaner 2003; Putnam 1993; 2002; Inglehart 1999). Much effort has therefore gone into monitoring whether social capital within particular countries has been in decline as of late (*e.g.*, Hall 1999; de Hart and Dekker 1999;

Cusack 1999; Putnam 2000; Costa and Kahn 2001; Stolle and Hooghe 2005), as it is suspected that such a fall could be the harbinger of hard times.

Revisions and Refinements

The proposition that within civil society the trust and social norms are bred without which democracies would not function, nor economies prosper, has received a lot of scholarly attention. At least four sets of revisions and refinements have been advocated. A first set of revisions has concerned the direction of the causal arrows of the original social capital-proposition:

> *massive participation in voluntary associations —> trust between people, as well as social norms favoring cooperation —> well-functioning democratic polities and economies.*

Many have argued that the *reverse* causality also holds. In their view, social capital (in the form of mutual trust, social norms and networks) will only accumulate, and civil society thrive, if the right public policies are followed (Tarrow 1996; Paraskevopoulos 1998; Cohen 1999; Warren 1999; Harriss 2002; Edwards, Foley and Diani 2001; Encarnacion 2003), and if the appropriate democratic institutions are in place (Barber 1983; J. Braithwaite 1998; Knack and Keefer 1997; Maloney, Smith and Stoker 2000). The public policies that have been advocated are inclusive ones: civic groups flourish when the governments involved are felt to take their concerns seriously and are perceived to treat these associations in a supportive and fair manner. Piotr Sztompka (1999: 26-27) has summed up the political institutions that appear to make democracy and interpersonal trust blossom: legitimacy, periodic elections and terms of office, division of powers, checks and balances and limited competence of institutions, rule of law and independent courts, constitutionalism and judicial review, due process, civic rights, law enforcement and open communication.

A second set of proposed revisions questions the strength and validity of the causal links that make up the social capital-thesis. Why assume that the trust and collaborative norms that can be learned within civic groups are so easily extended to outsiders? The formation of groups often involves the carving of sharp boundaries and the nursing of distinct identities. What, therefore, stops group members from joining forces in an effort to further their own particularistic ends – at the expense of other people? Indeed, it may be plausible to assume that the formation of trust and cooperation within civic associations may have malign, rather than benign, effects on the common good (Levi 1996; Rubbio 1997; Portes 1998; Quibria 2004). Bonds of trust and cooperation forged in civic groups cannot be expected to magically spread trust between members and non-members of these associations as well. And, arguably, it is precisely this latter kind of trust, *i.e.* trust among strangers, which makes complex societies (such as democracies and advanced economies) tick (Luhman 1973; Arrow 1974; Misztal 1996).

One specification of this argument is that "horizontal" social capital (trust and norms generated among equals in citizens' associations) may not necessarily bring forth "vertical" social capital (trust between, and cooperation among, governments and citizens). Many have argued that the latter brand of social capital is as important as the former, and that only the integration of both kinds of social capital ushers in democracy and prosperity (Evans 1996; Grootaert 1998; Woolcock 1998; Cusack 1999; Knack 1999). Another specification consists of Pierre Bourdieu's usage of the term social capital. In Bourdieu's view (1980), a person's social capital depends on the nature of one's social obligations, and the strengths of one's networks and connections. Moreover, the members of the ruling social classes depend on their social (and other forms of) capital to perpetuate their dominant position at the expense of less-connected groups in society. Hence, at least according to Bourdieu, social capital is just another tool of class domination and exploitation, and certainly not a common good. Several authors (Siisiäien 2000; Li, Pickles and Savage 2003) have argued that this particular take on

social capital (which predates Putnam's and Coleman's conceptualizations) is a more appropriate one. It follows from these various considerations that if the trust that supposedly oozes out of civil society is not a panacea for good government, then a healthy dose of *distrust* may be imperative for the proper functioning of democracy (Shapiro 1987; Levi 1996; Hardin 1998). This line of thought leads us back to the conclusion of the first set of refinements discussed above, as distrust can be institutionalized by building all kinds of checks and balances into a polity: transparent public decision-making procedures, rule of law, parliamentary oversight, freedom of press, *etc*.

A further set of advocated changes to Putnam's thesis zooms in on the second element in the causal chain of the social capital-thesis: interpersonal trust. This argument holds that there is no single way in which people confer their trust upon others. Instead, people have various ways of trusting and collaborating, something which the original social capital-thesis overlooks. The authors who have made this point have usually distinguished between two types of trust or social capital. Interestingly, the dichotomies that have been proposed sail under different flags, but often carry the same meaning. The first kind of trust that has been highlighted is rather limited in scope: person A will only trust person B to undertake action X if A has ample reason to assume that B will keep his or her part of the deal. A's informed guess can have different sources, including the probability that B will get caught in an act of wrongdoing; the legal, social and financial penalties that can be imposed on B for a breach of trust; the costs to A of seeking recrimination; the trustworthiness of B in the past, and so on. This kind of trust under-girds atomistic, individualistic social relations in which people must always be weary of traps set by self-centered others. Valerie Braithwaite (1998) calls this "exchange trust", while Tom Tyler and Roderick Kramer (1996) speak of "instrumental trust". Russell Hardin (1993) dubs this "trust-as-encapsulated-interest" and argues that "rational" people cannot display any other kind of trust. Oliver Williamson (1993) names this phenomenon "calculativeness", and posits that this is no trust at all.

The other form of trust that has been highlighted is interwoven with shared identities. It grows among those who feel part of the same community, such as a nation or ethnic group, region or social class. The conferring of this kind of trust is much more based on the desire to feel part of a community than on an all-out drive to reduce the chances that one is being played for a fool. Extending this second type of trust reinforces group ties and reaffirms that the trust-giver is a signed-up member of the community. When this form of trust is offered, it will usually not be restricted to a single act by a lone individual or organization. Rather, it typically covers a variety of actions by those who are perceived to be members of the community involved. And this is also the drawback: this type of trust is usually given to insiders, not to outsiders. Valerie Braithwaite (1998), as well as Tom Tyler and Roderick Kramer (1996) have named this form of trust, “communal” and “relational” trust, respectively. Those who have distinguished between alternative types of trust have asserted that different social domains and institutions rely more on one type of trust than on the other, and that different cultures are characterized by alternative combinations of forms of trust.

Extending this line of argument, Simon Szreter and Michael Woolcock (2002) have recently argued that the literature on social capital can be summarized by distinguishing between *three* types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. “Bonding” social capital stands for trusting, cooperative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar, as sharing a common identity. “Bridging” social capital is made up relations of respect and mutuality between people who feel that they are not alike in some socio-demographic sense (such as age, ethnic group, class, *etc*). These two forms roughly (and respectively) correspond to the communal/relational and exchange/instrumental types of trust and social capital that I mentioned above. To these two types, Szreter and Woolcock add a third one, namely “linking” social capital, which connects people across power differentials. (In terms of the other distinction that I discussed earlier –the one between horizontal and vertical social capital– Szreter and Woolcock argue that horizontal social capital comes in

two packages, bridging and bonding, and vertical social capital in one version, namely linking).

A last collection of revisions of Putnam's social capital-hypothesis replaces the first factor in the causal link (participation in voluntary associations) with another one, namely shared norms of justice. It has been argued that a willingness to trust, and collaborate with, relative strangers is not so much the result of membership in civic associations, but is instead enabled by the institutionalization of widely shared moral perspectives, *i.e.*, collective ideas about how social relations should be organized (Tyler and Kramer 1996; V. Braithwaite 1998; Offe 1999; Whiteley 1999). According to this view, people are willing to contribute to a collective enterprise when they feel that the enterprise is in accordance with their perceptions of how human relations should be structured. The validity of this view was confirmed in experimental research on different patterns of trust and cooperation within the United States and Japan undertaken by Nahoko Hayashi, Elinor Ostrom, James Walker and Toshio Yamagishi (1999). Their conclusion (p. 42) was that:

> the results of the present experiment demonstrate that it is differences in beliefs regarding the nature of social relations and of human nature, rather than differences in motivation to be altruistic or cooperative, that have a profound influence in the way people behave when facing interdependent social situations.

A potentially large problem stares this brand of criticism in the face: within any region or social system, quite a few groups of people can be found with opposing moral perspectives. And each of these opposing moralities will offer alternative prescriptions for how political institutions and collective action should be organized. In that case, the question becomes: which of these alternatives should be followed? And if a single one of these alternatives is chosen, then how to motivate those people whose values conflict with this particular set of institutions? A possible answer to this question is that the existence of alternative moral perspectives should not be seen as the problem, but rather as the solution. According to this idea, collective action will especially blossom when it takes place against the background of a

constructive mix of alternative moralities and concomitant institutional patterns. In a perceptive contribution to the study of social capital, economist Partha Dasgupta (1999) has defended the notion that only hybrids of alternative institutional patterns facilitate widespread collective action. Kenneth Arrow (1999: 4) has supported this idea:

instead of thinking of more and less [social interaction], it may be more fruitful to think of the existing social relations as a pre-existing network into which new parts of the economy (for example, development projects) have to be fitted. We would want to fit new projects so as to exploit complementarity relations and avoid rivalries.

Szreter and Woolcock (2002: 25) have advocated a similar idea:

A "healthy society", capable of consistently promoting the population health of all its citizens, will be characterized by a balanced distribution of a relatively rich endowment of all three of [bonding, bridging, and linking] forms of social capital. In these circumstances it will be constituted by a vigorous, open and politically-conscious civic society of mutually respecting and highly varied (in terms of their social identities) citizens and their many associations in active dialogue and negotiation (there are certain to be conflicts requiring negotiation) with both their elected local government and their central state.

The view that quite diverse ways of organizing and justifying social relations exist, and that only a balance between these different institutional forms enables collective action, has repeatedly appeared within social theory. For instance, it is a central plank in the pioneering work of Almond and Verba (1963) on civic culture.

The conceptual revisions of Putnam's proposition have turned the study of social capital into a lively debate. Nonetheless, they have not added up to a full-fledged dynamic account of how to break vicious circles of massive distrust, lack of cooperation, destitution, corruption, and tyranny, and how to move towards greater democracy and a more effective alleviation of poverty (Harris and de Renzio 1997; Foley and Edwards 1999; Grote 1998). Alejandro Portes is rather pessimistic (1998: 22):

..there is little ground to believe that social capital will provide a ready remedy for major social problems, as promised by its bolder proponents. Recent proclamations to that effect merely restate the original problems and have not been accompanied so far by any persuasive account of how to bring about the desired stocks of public civicness.

However, this lack of a dynamic and policy-relevant account of social capital may at least partly be overcome with the help of a novel theory of social and political life.

The Theory of Socio-Cultural Viability

During the last two decades, a new theoretical framework has emerged that is compatible with the latest insights in the study of social capital, while also providing a fresh perspective on how groups of people can slide into, and emerge from, widespread distrust and lack of collective action. This theory –labeled "the theory of socio-cultural viability," or, for short, "cultural theory"– is based on the seminal ideas of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1978; 1982; 1987; 1992), which have been clarified, systemized and extended by a group of anthropologists and political scientists (Wildavsky 1987; 1998; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990; Schwarz and Thompson 1990; Coyle and Ellis 1994; Adams 1995; Thompson 1996; Hood 1998; Thompson, Grendstad and Selle 1999).

The original aim of this approach was to devise a typology of social forms that fit the classificatory schemes developed by the grand old social theorists (Durkheim, Marx, Weber, *etc*.), as well as the evidence collected in ethnographic studies. According to cultural theory, four primary ways of organizing, perceiving, and justifying social relations exist: *egalitarianism*, *hierarchy*, *individualism* and *fatalism*. It is postulated that these four "ways of life" are in conflict, as well as continuously wax and wane, in every conceivable domain of social life. As many social domains can be distinguished within and between societies, the theory allows one to perceive a wide and ever-changing cultural and social variety, while still enabling one to formulate general propositions.

Each way of life consists of a specific way of structuring social relations *and* a supporting cast of particular perceptions, values, emotions, and interests. The fourfold typology is derived from two dimensions of sociality called "grid" and "group". Grid

measures the extent to which ranking and stratification constrains the behavior of individuals. Group, by contrast, measures the extent to which an overriding commitment to a social unit constrains the thought and action of individuals. Assigning two values (high and low) to the two dimensions gives the four ways of organizing social relations. *Egalitarianism* is associated with a low-grid score (little stratification) and a high-group score (strong group boundaries and solidarity). The combination of a high score on the grid dimension (lots of stratification) with a high score on the group dimension (much solidarity) gives *hierarchy*. The third way of life, *individualism*, is associated with low scores on both the grid and group scales. Last, *fatalism* is characterized by a high-grid and a low-group score.[1]

These four ways of organizing tend to produce different ways of perceiving and justifying. In an egalitarian social setting, actors see nature as fragile, intricately interconnected and ephemeral, and man as essentially caring (until corrupted by coercive institutions such as markets and hierarchies). We must all tread lightly on the earth, and it is not enough that people start off equal; they must end up equal as well – equality of result. Trust and leveling go hand-in-hand, and institutions that distribute unequally are distrusted. Voluntary simplicity is the only solution to our economic, environmental and other problems, with the Precautionary Principle being strictly enforced on those who are tempted not to share the simple life. Egalitarianism also instills a preference for a participatory model of democracy. In this model there is no place for deference, nor support for indirect or majoritarian modes of decision-making. Democratic decisions should be agreed upon by all affected, ideally in a small-scale, face-to-face manner at the grassroots level.

In a hierarchical social setting, actors see the world as controllable. Nature is stable until pushed beyond discoverable limits, and man is malleable: deeply flawed but redeemable by firm, long-lasting, and trustworthy institutions. Fair distribution is by rank and station or, in the modern context, by need (with the level of need being determined by expert and dispassionate authority). "Rational" resource management requires certified experts to

determine the precise locations of nature's limits, and statutory regulation to ensure that all economic activity is kept within those limits. As only those with superior insight and virtue should make public decisions, democracy should be indirect, representative and majoritarian, with the political class being given primacy over public affairs on the basis of popular elections every few years. This political elite should act as trustees focused on the long-term general interest, and are not to be influenced by short-term individual or factional claims.

In an individualistic social setting, actors view nature as benign and resilient –able to recover from any exploitation– and man as inherently self-seeking and atomistic. Trial and error, in self-organizing ego-focused networks (unfettered markets), is the way to go, with Adam Smith's invisible hand ensuring that people only do well when others also benefit. The upholders of the individualistic way of life, in consequence, cooperate until others give them reason not to and then retaliate in kind (the winning "tit for tat" strategy in the iterated prisoner's dilemma game), and see it as only fair that (as in the joint stock company) those who put the most in get the most out. They think institutions that work with the grain of the market (that get rid of environmentally harmful subsidies, for instance) are what are needed. Individualism extols a protective model of democracy. According to this way of life, individual choice is sacrosanct. Democracies should enable individuals to carry out their own plans. The main *raison d'être* of government is the protection of individual rights, life, liberty and estate. To enable this, regular general elections are necessary, but not sufficient, as these processes tend towards crude majoritarianism, which can result in even large minorities being denied self-determination. Hence, the pressing need exists for checks and balances to protect individual and minority rights and interests.

In a fatalistic social setting, finally, actors find neither rhyme nor reason in nature, and suppose that man is fickle and untrustworthy. Fairness is not to be found in this life, and there is no hope of effecting change for the better. 'Defect first' –the winning strategy in the one-off prisoner's dilemma– makes sense here, given the unreliability of communication and the

permanent absence of prior acts of good faith. Without the possibility of ever getting in sync with nature, or of building trust with others, the fatalistic world –unlike the three others– is one in which learning is impossible. 'Why bother?' therefore is the rational management response. Fatalism breeds a belief that democracy may be a good thing, but will not be established in this life. This way of organizing, justifying and perceiving social relations closely corresponds to Putnam's (1993) depiction of regions with low social capital, as well as Banfield's (1958) "amoral familism", and Lewis's (1968) "culture of poverty".

This fourfold classification of alternative ways of organizing and perceiving social relations has captured the contradictory ways in which people approach all kinds of public policy issues. Indeed, these alternative ways of organizing and perceiving, in varying strengths and patterns of pairwise alliance, are discernible almost anywhere you care to look – from debates over the wisdom of prescribing safety seat belts, via the different ways in which international regimes cope with transboundary risks such as water pollution, to the changing definition and treatment of the mentally ill by public authorities (*e.g.*, Swedlow 1994; Adams 1995; Verweij 2001). The theory does not assume policy domains to be static. Rather, it portrays such domains to be in constant flux, caused by the continuous waxing and waning, splitting and merging of alternative ways of life, as well as by the ceaseless, mutual criticisms exchanged between adherents to alternative ways of life which force all stakeholders to constantly update and revise their arguments and claims.

Cultural theory has several normative implications. First, there is the realization that people are arguing from different premises and that, since these premises are anchored in alternative forms of organizing, they will never agree. Second, in line with the 'argumentative turn' in policy analysis (Morone and Woodhouse 1986; Collingridge 1992; Winner 1992), this contention, as well as being unavoidable, is all to the good: something to be harnessed through constructive communication. Each way of organizing and perceiving: (1) distils certain elements of experience and wisdom that are missed by the others; (2) provides a clear

expression of the way in which a significant portion of the populace feels we should live with one another and with nature; and (3) needs all the others in order to be sustainable.[2] As Barry Schwartz (1991: 765) has put it:

> Each way of life undermines itself. Individualism would mean chaos without hierarchical authority to enforce contracts and repel enemies. To get work done and settle disputes the egalitarian order needs hierarchy, too. Hierarchies, in turn, would be stagnant without the creative energy of individualism, uncohesive without the binding force of equality, unstable without the passivity and acquiescence of fatalism. Dominant and subordinate ways of life thus exist in alliance yet this relationship is fragile, constantly shifting, constantly generating a societal environment conducive to change.

According to cultural theory, the four ways of organizing, justifying and perceiving are present in any social domain. However, fatalism –*i.e.*, social relations characterized by low levels of inter-personal trust and cooperation– will come to dominate the other ways of life, whenever extensive efforts are made to promote *any* single way of life at the expense of the others. If persistent attempts are made to re-organize social domains along purely hierarchical, individualistic, egalitarian or (less surprisingly) fatalistic lines, then an increase in fatalism will result. This is cultural theory's explanation of how social capital is diminished within societies or specific social domains. Empirical examples taken from the literature would include the failed, and almost purely hierarchical, efforts to turn Nepal into a second Singapore with the help of massive levels of development aid and huge dams (Gyawali 2002); the much-lamented, and predominantly individualistic, attempts to create a competitive economy in Russia by administering a "shock therapy" of rapid privatisation (Intriligator, Wedel and Lee 2006); and the largely egalitarian Danish social housing policies of the 1990s that aimed (but did not achieve) to "empower" public housing-tenants (Jensen 1999). Inversely, fatalism will be reduced, and collective action and social capital will be allowed to flourish, when all the ways of life are carefully taken account of in the policy and governance processes that shape social domains. Real-life instances discussed in the literature include the urban development of Munich since 1945 (Hendriks 1999); the management of flood risks in

eastern Hungary (Bayer and Vári 2002); and the creative design of the Internet (Tranvik, Thompson and Selle 2000).

Trust, Social Capital and Cultural Theory

Cultural theory therefore presents an account of how societies can slide into, or emerge from, vicious circles of low trust and cooperation that is not primarily cast in terms of participation within civil society. Furthermore, I would argue that this account is compatible with the four major revisions of Putnam's thesis that have been advocated during the last ten years and that I presented above. Compressed, these revisions entail that: (1) carefully crafted public policies, forged in open, deliberative democratic institutions, are important in creating social capital; (2) social capital does not only consist of patterns of trust, but also of patterns of distrust; (3) three different types of social capital abound, each of which is necessary for collective action to thrive; and (4) these different types social capital represent alternative moralities, which are rooted in different types of social relations. At face value, these four revisions seem a bit disjointed and unrelated. Interestingly, however, cultural theory combines all these features in its representation of how high levels of collective action can be maintained.

Cultural theory posits that sustainable collective action (and, therefore, a high level of social capital) requires maintaining a dynamic, ever-changing balance between four alternative ways of organizing, perceiving, and justifying social relations. From this, it immediately follows that the theory is in accordance with the fourth proposed revision, namely to seek for the causes of social capital among collectively held moralities that are rooted in alternative patterns of social organization. Individualism, hierarchy, egalitarianism, and fatalism all encompass alternative views on what is (and is not) fair and just; views that stem from, and legitimize, distinct ways of organizing social relations.

In addition, it should be noted that cultural theory's four ways of life encompass both patterns of trust and patterns of distrust. The one exception to this is fatalism, which is mainly characterized by high levels of various forms of distrust –of the willingness of people to cooperate, of the possibilities to improve one's lot, of justice being carried out, *etc*.–, and low levels of any type of trust. But the other three ways of life all incorporate both patterns of trust and distrust. In an egalitarian setting, people put their trust in consensual, local decision-making, closely-knit, small-scale communities, simplicity of life-style, as well as equality of condition, and they distrust any form of power inequality (including "big government" and "big business"), capitalism, and the wanton exploitation of natural resources. Hierarchy inspires people to put their confidence in wise and virtuous leaders, long-term, central planning, and social harmony and graciousness, while remaining highly suspicious of "the rule of the mob", self-made, upstart leaders, an "unnatural" leveling of differences, and rash, bold actions undertaken without a care for the morrow. In an individualistic social setting, people tend to convey their trust upon checks and balances that maximize individual freedom, unambiguous rewards and punishments that appeal to Man's more basic instincts, the willingness of people to cooperate (as long as that is to their advantage, and non-cooperation can be detected), nature's resilience, the ability of individuals to overcome the odds through hard work and ingenuity, and whoever has managed to build up a reputation for being able to "deliver the goods" (regardless of age, education, gender or race), and they tend to be wary and distrustful of rigid, centrally imposed rules and regulations, people who claim to be more virtuous than others, and any concentration of power. It can therefore be concluded that cultural theory is also in agreement with the second revision that has been advocated in the study of social capital. In positing that high levels of social capital requires a (dynamic) balance between four ways of life (almost all of which include distinct patterns of both trust and distrust), the theory stipulates that the institutionalization of both trust and distrust is vital for the production of social capital.

Furthermore, cultural theory fulfills the requirements of the third proposed revision – to distinguish between bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capital. Two observations are important in this regard. First, in distinguishing between these three forms of social capital (and tying each of these to a different branch of the literature), Szreter and Woolcock provide a comprehensive overview of the current writings on social capital. Furthermore, the three forms of social capital that Szreter and Woolcock distill from the extant literature almost seamlessly overlap with three of the four ways of organizing, perceiving and justifying social relations that cultural theory sets out. Linking social capital, which is supposed to create trust between people across power differentials, is clearly the form of social capital that underpins, and is produced by, the hierarchical way of life. Bonding social capital, which connects people belonging to the same group, is the type of social capital that is most prevalent in the egalitarian way of organizing, justifying and perceiving social relations. And bridging social capital, which brings together individuals who are equal in terms of status and power but who do not feel that they share the same social identity (such as "ethnic traders seeking counterparts in overseas markets, ..or professionals exchanging business cards at international conferences" – Szreter and Woolcock 2002: 14) is produced in individualistic social settings. (And keep in mind that cultural theory's remaining category –fatalism– closely corresponds to social situations in which there is very little social capital). Hence, cultural theory is in compliance with the requirements of the third refinement of the social capital-thesis that has been suggested.

Finally, cultural theory meets the conditions of the one remaining revision that has been called for, namely to recognize the importance of carefully crafted, deliberative public policies. This is precisely the governance ideal that has been advocated by cultural theorists (*e.g.*, Schwarz and Thompson 1990; Hendriks 1999; Gyawali 2002). To foster the creative and adaptable mix of the four ways of life that is needed to sustain high levels of collective

action, they have recommended making use of open, consultative decision-making processes in which all four "voices" are heard and responded to.

Conclusion: **Why Trust in Cultural Theory?**

To argue that a theory is compatible with other approaches is of course not necessarily to establish that it is preferable to those other approaches: it may, for instance, merely be equivalent. For three reasons, I believe that cultural theory provides a more useful and satisfactory framework for studying the rise and fall of social capital than other approaches which have been on offer.

The first of these considerations concerns parsimony. Cultural theory offers a simple and elegant analysis of social capital that does the work that a variety of other theories, approaches and concepts can only do in tandem. As I have shown above, quite a number of revisions and refinements of Putnam's social capital-thesis have been put forward during the last decade, but only the theory of socio-cultural viability incorporates all of these proposed changes into a single, systematic framework. That is the essence of the ideal of parsimony.

Second, cultural theory has been fleshed out to larger extent than other approaches in the study of social capital. Quite a few of the terms circulating in the social capital-literature – such as horizontal social capital, or trust-as-encapsulated-interest– do not always have much conceptual meat attached to them. In contrast, cultural theory's four ways of organizing, justifying and perceiving social relations are not only defined clearly, but also come with a long list of distinct predispositions that have been formulated *a priori*. The latter would include views of nature, views of human nature, risk attitudes, perceptions of time and space, governance ideals, technological preferences, ways of making ends meet, patterns of blame, information processes, aesthetic styles, *etc*. In other words, cultural theory represents a more elaborate conceptual framework than its competitors.

Last, cultural theory appears to have more relevance to policy-making and governance. As the earlier quote from Alejandro Portes indicated, it is rather difficult to see how one could put into practice the injunction to produce more social capital, or to get people to trust each other more, or to motivate individuals to join voluntary associations. By comparison, cultural theory's implications for sustaining, or reaching, high levels of collective action and social capital appear more straightforward and practical. This is the case, as the theory sets out which alternative perspectives typically abound in public debates about pressing social ills, and as it offers various reasons for why successful solutions to these ills must consist of flexible, creative combinations of all these perspectives. This then becomes the basis for its claim that decision-makers should proceed in a consultative, deliberative manner that carefully takes into consideration the arguments and proposals of the adherents to all ways of life. For most contemporary policy-makers, it should not be overly complicated to grasp this relatively simple idea, and (if they were so inclined) to put it into practice.

For these various reasons, I would like to conclude by asserting that more heed should be paid within the study of social capital to the cultural theory-literature. As four wrongs can make a right.

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[1] The theory of socio-cultural viability distinguishes a fifth way of life, usually called the way of the hermit.The way of the hermit represents not so much a way of organizing social relations, as a way of *disassociating* oneself from social relations. As a consequence, the hermit has usually been left out of policy studies based on cultural theory – a practice that I follow here for simplicity's sake.

[2] With the exception of fatalism. While the other three forms of organizing need a minimum amount of fatalism, the reverse does not hold true. Fatalism, unlike the others, can feed on, and sustain, itself.