It Ain't Social, It Ain't Capital and It Ain't Africa*

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Two concepts have dominated the social sciences over the past decade. In the lead is globalisation. Not far behind is social capital. One attempts to deal with contemporary realities at the international level; the other at national or lower levels. The two rarely meet. For, as has been frequently observed, in raising the virtues of civil society to pedestal status, social capital has studiously ignored questions of power, conflict, the ruling elite and the systemic imperatives of (contemporary) capitalism. Though fundamentally flawed as a concept and equally flexible as the global financial system that it takes as its metaphor, globalisation cannot be so indicted.[1] For globalisation seeks to address the nature of the world at the turn of the millennium, by grounding concepts in prevailing empirical realities, and unavoidably confronts issues of control and dissent. By contrast, social capital purports to reign over a domain that ranges, even for a single author and leading promoter of social capital, Robert Putnam (1993 and 2000), from twelfth century Italy to twentieth century United States. Concepts with such scope of ambition should be treated with caution if not contempt. At a more polemical level, in drawing comparison with globalisation as conceptual fashion currently in vogue, social capitalists do not demonstrate at Seattle, for they look for win-win co-operation and neglect underlying and inevitable conflicts of interest.

How then has such an anodyne concept as social capital come to the fore? What are its implications? Can it be turned to more radical and progressive uses? I am far from optimistic and will draw the conclusion that social capital should, in general, be rejected rather than adopted and adapted. Before doing so, I begin by providing a critical overview of the emergence and content of social capital as an analytical category, followed by an equally critical review of its application to Africa, although reference is made to African studies elsewhere in the text.

Twixt Bourdieu and Becker

It is worth, at the expense of some personal indulgence, explaining how I came from an early stage to follow closely social capital's meteoric rise. In the mid-1990s, I came to the conclusion, on the basis of the new information-theoretic micro-foundations (to be explained below), that economics was colonising the other social sciences as never before. Whilst, especially through the likes of Gary Becker, a leading mainstream neoclassical Chicago economist, such self-confessed economics imperialism had long been on the agenda, it had primarily depended upon the non-market as if market, and the market as if utility maximising individuals facing resource and price constraints. In this way, for example, all exchanges within the household become treated as equivalent to market exchanges even though the market is notably absent.[2] Not surprisingly, despite some notable successes, especially but not exclusively through human capital theory, such assaults by economics previously only made limited territorial gains across the social sciences. Social theory has not generally been prepared to commit analytical suicide by accepting such alien methods as those proposed by mainstream economics and to reduce the social to the individual and the economic.

However, over the past two decades or so, a silent revolution has been taking place within mainstream economics. It is only just being brought to the attention of other social sciences as it has begun to invade their territories. In brief, particularly during the era of neo-liberalism, economists have been presumed to have been committed to the market with limited reservations. But this has not been so for many of those currently at the forefront of theoretical innovation in what one of its leading practitioners, Joe Stiglitz (1994),[3] dubs the new information-theoretic approach. This stresses that markets are imperfect, especially in terms of information available to buyers and sellers. Further, the information available to the two sides standing either side of acts of exchange is asymmetric. As the old adage goes, "buyer beware". Without going into technical details, the new approach uses imperfect information to explain three possible outcomes: why markets might clear but be inefficient (supply equals demand but more transactions could advantageously take place); why markets might not clear (supply exceeds demand without prices falling); and why markets might be absent altogether (classic examples include small-scale rural credit[4] and health insurance for the old or sick).

These results might be thought to be empirical commonplaces but to mainstream economists they are remarkable for explaining how economies can function imperfectly even though there are no constraints imposed on the market unless they are freely chosen by optimising individuals. But there are further, striking results that follow. For it is not simply a matter of explaining how the market does or does not work perfectly. The presence and results of market imperfections is also used to explain non-market behaviour – institutions, customs, culture and so on – as the rational response of optimising individuals. This allows the new approach to purport to explain what has traditionally been the concern of other social sciences. The non-market (or non-economic) is perceived to be the result of optimising behaviour in face of market imperfections. If war is politics by other means, economics holds the same relationship to politics! The social is the market imperfection counterpart to the economy – as opposed to its perfection's reflection as for Becker.

In its own terms, then, the new micro-foundations claims both to accept and to explain institutions, structures, customs, etc, albeit on the basis of a more circumspect methodological individualism than previously. It has given rise to a whole range of new fields within economics. These have had knock-on effects to a greater or lesser extent and in varied ways in the other social sciences - the new institutional economics, the new household economics, the new economic sociology, the new political economy, the new growth theory, the new labour economics, the new economic geography, the new financial economics, the new development economics, and so on, with "new" the operative word.[5] In short and drastic summary especially for the non-economist, economics has been colonising the other social sciences as never before over the past two decades, forging an alliance with, and advancing alongside, rational choice theory.

In this light, I was intrigued to find that two scholars at the opposite extremes of the social science spectrum were both using the term social capital. One was Gary Becker (1996), who extended the notion of capital as an asset from physical things to human capital, and from human capital to personal capital (any characteristic that directly or indirectly contributes to welfare), and from personal capital to social capital (non-market interactions between individuals). The other was Pierre Bourdieu, the progressive French sociologist, who had first used social capital in the early 1980s, alongside cultural and symbolic capital, to explain how non-economic forms of domination are linked to the reproduction of social stratification and interact with one and another and the economic. I was determined to find out why and how these two totally different theorists could find themselves as social capital bedfellows, and with what significance for economics imperialism. But I found myself deluged in an evolving tidal wave of academic fashion. Far from confronting the apparently simple question of why Becker and Bourdieu should share the same terminology, I was faced with a far heavier issue – how could social capital have become so widely and rapidly adopted especially in view of its commonly acknowledged deficiencies. Here are my conclusions, laid out in detail and with detailed justification in Fine (2001a).

Social Capital Exposed: Its Meteoric and Chaotic Rise

First, what is striking about social capital is not only the extent of its influence, and the speed with which this has been achieved, but also its ready acceptance as both analytical, empirical and policy panacea. These features are aptly captured, respectively, by the World Bank's notion of social capital as "missing link", its flush of dedicated household surveys, and its view of social capital as "the glue that holds society together".[6] Further, most worryingly for some, the World Bank is heavily committed to social capital as it moves, at least in rhetoric, from the neo-liberal Washington consensus to the apparently more state-friendly post-Washington consensus.[7] Under the Washington consensus, the market, with austerity, is deemed to reign supreme and informed and justified structural adjustment and stabilisation in the 1980s and 1990s. At the end of the latter decade, though, the rationale began to shift towards the post-Washington consensus, pioneered by Stiglitz. For him, developing economies are simply characterised by high incidence of market imperfections and poor institutions to resolve them. Stiglitz (1989) provides an early statement of the new development economics. More recently, Stiglitz and Hoff (1999) take the old neoclassical model of perfect competition as point of departure, for:

> In leaving out history, institutions, and distributional considerations, neoclassical economics was leaving out the heart of development economics. Modern economic theory argues that the fundamentals {resources, technology, and preferences} are not the only … determinants of economic outcomes …even without government failures, market failures are pervasive, especially in less developed countries.

Further, with casual reference to the Black Plague, as an illustrative accident of history, and multiple equilibria, an explanation is provided for the fundamental problem of why "developed and less developed countries are on different production functions":

> We emphasize that accidents of history matter … partly because of pervasive complementarities among agents … and partly because even a set of dysfunctional institutions and behaviors in the past can constitute a Nash equilibrium from which an economy need not be inevitably dislodged.

This is the light in which to view Stiglitz's Nobel citation for "being one of the founders of modern development economics", Nobel (2001, p. 10). The implication is that both markets and institutions must be the targets of economic and social policy, together with less austerity and less extreme stance towards the state than for the Washington consensus. In the event, such perspectives have proven too radical for the World Bank, and Stiglitz was forced to resign. But the rhetoric of post-Washington consensus, and its information-theoretic approach to development, have survived and prospered. This has allowed the IFIs to negotiate and survive their crisis of legitimacy during the mid-1990s, to present themselves as more people-friendly, to extend their scope of interventions from the economic to the social, and to leave adjustment policies otherwise much as before.[8]

Against this background, the attraction of social capital for the World Bank is transparent.[9] It allows the social to be mopped up in an all-embracing notion that complements rather than challenges its economic analysis, albeit one now based on market imperfections. More generally, for the World Bank and others, social capital explains what is otherwise inexplicable and is the factor that allows society to function successfully. In limited respects, parallels can be drawn with utility as used by economists. For this is also all-embracing - putatively explaining why we behave the way we do as well providing us with our welfare. In the case of social capital, however, our sights and ambitions are raised from the level of the individual to the level of society, from the market to the non-market, and from narrowly defined individual motivation to customs, norms, institutions and rules. In short, social capital is attractive because of the scope of application that it provides as well as its capacity to do so whilst not necessarily being critical of what has gone before. It can both generalise (add missing link and glue) and incorporate (reinterpret existing scholarship as an earlier unwitting use).[10] Robert Putnam, Putnam (2000) most recently, the leading social capitalist and reputedly the single most cited author across the social sciences in the 1990s, even suggests that Marx embraces social capital when he exhorts workers of the world to unite, having nothing to lose but their chains. And, policy-wise, social is to complement economic engineering, with the principle of supporting self-help raised from the individual to some collective level of "community". As Moore (2000, p. 11) puts it in, even in the harshest conditions of so-called or imagined post-conflict societies:

> Thus, the World Bank and similar agencies are able to enter the killing fields even during conflict to lay the seeds - or "embed", to use a reversal of Polanyian perspectives - of individual property rights and other aspects of neo-liberal economic, social and political good governance. Perspectives from "social capital" discourse also buttress this view. Such ideologies coincide with and justify the diminishing material resources allocated to a more traditional agenda for post-war reconstruction, as well as sidelining alternatives.

Second, despite what is already a rush of survey articles, even those who are not using the term for the first time accept that social capital is difficult to define. The more established social capitalists in an enterprise that is, admittedly still in its precocious infancy, have been forced to compromise with the expanding scope of social capital. More and more variables are included, from the horizontal to the vertical, from the bonding to the bridging to the linking, from social values to networks and associations, and so on. In detailed household surveys seeking to measure social capital, as many as a hundred variables can be included from associational membership through to communal weeding of paths. Alternatively, such proliferation of content can be rendered manageable by a re-composition into broad categories to question whether social capital is, for example, complementary with, or a substitute for "real" capital or the state. The scarcely acknowledged fault-lines across such re-aggregation of social capital is that they are long-known to be fractured by divisions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. At best social capital renames old problems associated with the multi-dimensional and conflictual nature of social stratification; at worst it glosses over them.

The result is to create a field for what has previously been termed middle-range theory, analysis suspended somewhere between grand systemic theory and mere description. Not surprisingly, more recent and less circumspect contributions may acknowledge the ambiguities in the definition of social capital, simply pass on, and choose or add a definition of their own to suit their purpose. Social capital thereby becomes a sack of analytical potatoes. The notion is simply chaotic as is also reflected in frequent suggestions that it is merely a metaphor or a heuristic device. It is also acknowledged to be difficult to measure (tellingly revealed by World Bank projects that seek to define it by the process of measuring it). What is social capital is readily confused with what it does as if these needed to be conceptually distinct (as is so for functionalist approaches to social capital as opposed to those more seeking to reflect a relational approach). Deepening the confusion and the wish to distinguish what social capital is from what it does (like a weapon or a machine) is the early and mounting recognition that social capital is subject to the perverse, dark, negative and downside so that it can be bad as well as good depending on circumstances, as in the Mafia, fascism and so on. Whilst these features of social capital might be thought to render it unacceptable and subject to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions and inconsistencies, exactly the opposite is the case. Having established a sufficiently weighty presence, it also has the logical capacity to absorb any criticism in the form of refinement by, for example, addition of another variable for consideration, even conflict or revolution!

Third, then, social capital has a gargantuan appetite. On the one hand, it can explain everything from individuals to societies whether the topic be the sick, the poor, the criminal, the corrupt, the (dys)functional family, schooling, community life, work and organisation, democracy and governance, collective action, transitional societies, intangible assets or, indeed, any aspect of social, cultural and economic performance, and equally across time and place.[11] On the other hand, social capital has been deployed across theories and methodologies as diverse as postmodernist Marxism and mainstream neoclassical economics, addressing the conceptual, empirical and policy. In this respect, social capital is like other all-encompassing notions that have swept, if not uniformly, across the social sciences, such as flexibility and globalisation. All can participate from their own perspective. Social capital is truly democratic, not only amongst the community of scholars but, as middle-range theory, it is also able to engage (with) the wider community of activists, politicians and media gurus. This is especially so in terms of its capacity to exploit popular prejudices about the role of television, the family and moral fibre, to touch the nostalgia for a lost world, and to address demise and failure that can be ever more demanding of attention than success.

Yet, as already hinted at by reference to globalisation, the emergence of social capital to rapid prominence is a familiar phenomenon in terms of academic fashions. It is most disturbing as evidence of a more general trend towards the popularisation and degradation of scholarship, although this can be accompanied by an equally disturbing descent into specialisation and scholasticism that is, however, notable for its absence in the vulgar scholarship that marks most of the work on social capital. The analytical paths and patterns are all too familiar by now. A case study or two leads to the invention of grand concepts and generalisations. These are refined in light of theoretical and empirical critiques that point to omitted theoretical variables and/or case study counterexamples. Existing and new knowledge is run through the evolving framework. Ultimately, the whole edifice becomes too complex and succumbs to the critical heretics or others who have remained or become cynical. It is then time for a new fashion to emerge.

Its Trajectory and Impact as Category of Social Theory

Despite this intellectual cycle, the effects are significant. Quite apart from the waste of scholarly resources, the impact of such fashions over the longer term is not necessarily negligible nor is it even across disciplines and topics. We have yet to see what the long-term effects of social capital will be on the social sciences, although some of the short-term effects are already discernible. Fourth, in particular, although social capital is unlimited in principle in terms of what it can incorporate and address, and how it does so, the evolution of the literature in practice is far from neutral in its content and direction. It reflects general intellectual fashions, the stimulus of external events, and even the idiosyncrasies of particular participants. What is equally important is what has been left out. As much of the critical literature has observed, contributions to social capital have tended to focus on civil society and its associational forms and ethos. This has been in isolation from, and exclusive of, serious consideration of the economy (and global corporate and other power), formal politics, trade unions, the role of the nation-state, the exercise of power, and the divisions and conflicts that are endemic to capitalist society although, of course, these can be added if you want them.

Fifth, more specifically in this intellectual trajectory, although Bourdieu is a (decreasingly) acknowledged initiator of the theory of social capital, the critical aspects of his contributions have been excised in deference to the tamer versions associated with the likes of James Coleman,[12] rational choice founding father of the social capital phenomenon and Chicago collaborator with Becker, and Robert Putnam, its most ardent populariser. In particular, Bourdieu emphasised the social construction of the content of social capital (what is its meaning and how does this relate to its practices), that it is irreducibly attached to class and other forms of stratification which, in turn, is associated with the exercise of economic and other forms of exploitation, and the relationship between them. Why, other than its awkwardness for less radical and serious scholarship, should Bourdieu's contributions have been neglected in the evolution of social capital? It is worth noting that, for him, social was just one form of non-economic capital, alongside the cultural and symbolic. Whilst these latter categories do persist in specialised research around artistic endeavour, for example, they are not able to perform the general, universal role assigned to social capital, the terminology itself being sufficient to preclude them. So social capital is adopted but Bourdieu is disinherited.

Further, as already indicated, Bourdieu's approach is far too radical and intellectually demanding for the wide-ranging and superficial postures currently attached to social capital. Bourdieu is concerned with the nature of culture, how it is reproduced and transformed, how it connects to social stratification and the reproduction and exercise of power, and the relationship or "exchange" between different types of such "capital". These primarily lie outside the concerns of social capital as it has now emerged, not least because of Bourdieu's emphasis upon the fluidity and specificity of his objects of study as each forms what he terms a habitus and corresponding fields of practice.[13] Finally, those who have sufficient finesse to appreciate the content of Bourdieu's contribution can also recognise its weaknesses, pointing to rejection rather than refinement of an approach that incorporates an ever-expanding "plethora of capitals".[14] These weaknesses are, in particular, an exaggerated and economistic notion of the fluidity or exchange between different types of (non-economic) capital, their transposition across time and place (for Bourdieu, from the symbolism of the Sun King to the elite art of contemporary capitalism) and a corresponding lack of depth in the treatment of "economic" capital itself. But the mainstream social capital literature cannot even begin to address these issues, let alone interrogate itself critically as a result of them.

Occasionally, however, more nuanced analyses do appeal to social capital. At times, this is casual, bordering on the ignorant and irresponsible. For Hibou's (1999) piece entitled "The 'Social Capital' of the State as an Agent of Deception", worthily concerned with the complicity between state corruption and neo-liberal policymaking in Africa, social capital never appears in the text itself! In the same volume, Bayart's (1999, p. 32) "The 'Social Capital' of the Felonius State" reveals a lack of familiarity with the literature by referring only to Bates and Coleman,[15] and also to the latter as a renowned Africanist![16] In his own practice, Bayart (1999, p. 32) uses "the term 'social capital' to refer to the ensemble of configurations and the texture of relationships which are the outcome of sub-Saharan Africa's long historical trajectory, or rather of the cluster of historical trajectories, distinct but acting upon one another over long periods, of an entire sub-continent". There is, however, no reference to Bourdieu despite the fact that "we would emphasize the abundance of distinct and sometimes contradictory cultural repertoires". It is apparent that social capital plays a symbolic role alone in these analyses, and may even be being used ironically, always appearing in inverted commas. Irrespective of the merits of the thesis of The Criminalization of the State in Africa, Bayart et al (1999), it reveals little awareness, if any at all, of the social capital enterprise to which it has attached itself and, from which, there would otherwise be something of a recoil.[17]

Other, more sophisticated uses of social capital are explicit about their ties to Bourdieu-type interpretations and uses of the concept. Shetler (1995) focuses on as limited an object as a Kiroba text of popular history as a form of social capital in Tanzania since it depicts a constellation of networks and social relations that can inform and sustain those who draw upon it. Putterman (1995), also in a Tanzanian context, seeks to expand and generalise the idea of social capital as culture in going beyond a set of individual ties "to encompass the repertoires of entire material cultures", p. 15. Indeed, "a society's division of labour with respect to the holding of its overall cultural capital stock can be regarded as a kind of collective memory algorithm". Most sophisticated in this regard is Fisiy and Goheen (1998), whose Cameroonian study follows Bourdieu by deploying different forms of capital (cultural and symbolic as well as social) in seeking to avoid the functionalism attached to Coleman. In tracing the tensions attached to the formation of new urban elites in their relations to, and origins within, rural communities, some emphasis is placed on corresponding economic processes, p. 389:

> Rampant "commoditisation" of traditional titles may eventually lead to a sclerosis of local customary institutions. This could happen when economic capital, devoid of any social responsibilities (seen in terms of non-accumulation of social capital) is given pre-eminence in local processes of social stratification and access to resources.

This represents too limited and one-sided a view of commoditisation, one in which the result is perceived to be to strip out non-economic social relations (or social capital), Zelizer (1994),[18] although this is implicitly recognised by reference to the privilege of economic capital in stratification and access to resources. It is not simply a matter of the destruction of customary institutions but the ones with which they are to be replaced, and for which social capital offers itself as candidate par excellence. But the literature, African or otherwise, whatever his weaknesses, does not include Bourdieu on the manifesto.

Significantly, even with Bourdieu set aside, the functional approaches to social capital attached to the founding empirical studies of Coleman and Putnam have both been shown to be questionable to put it mildly (savaged might be more accurate) - respectively, catholic community as a positive influence on US schooling outcomes and the incidence and impact of associational activity on differential regional development in Italy[19] (and the same applies to Putnam's US work that magically rejects the long-run pessimism of the Italian study that would render it less marketable to a US audience). In other words, false empirical analyses have given rise to a theory that has subsequently taken on a life of its own as if both theory and data were mutually supportive. Such are the shaky foundations for the evolving knowledge attached to social capital. This indicates that the attraction of social capital derives less from the unconsciously scurrilous scholarship of its founders and more from their having tapped the intellectual nerve of social theory at the turn of the millennium.

This has a dual aspect. For, sixth, one particularly important feature of the intellectual environment in which social capital has flourished has been the retreats both from neo-liberalism and from post-modernism. On the one hand, neo-liberalism has run out of scholarly steam although, like a bad smell, its effects linger and you can never be sure that it has gone away for good. But, in the academic world, you can only say a limited number of times and for a limited time, that it is safe to leave things to the market, do not allow rent-seeking, and reduce corruption and (bad) government. How much better to be able to react against neo-liberalism by positing a world of market (informational) imperfections in which there is a role for the state, and in which social capital can correct for absence of economic capital and imperfectly working markets. In many ways, social capital simply turns rent-seeking upside-down. Where one praises the market, the other embraces the non-market. Where pursuit of collective self-interest is designated as inefficient and conducive to corruption, social capital renders it as an asset that is a prerequisite for economic and social progress. So, if rarely put in these terms, social capital is rent-seeking made good. It is one way of jumping on the anti-neo-liberal bandwagon.

The corresponding tension between the common basis of both rent-seeking (negative social capital after all) and social capital is neatly, if unwittingly captured by Fafchamps (2000) in a study of ethnicity and entrepreneurship (access to credit and markets) in Kenya and Zimbabwe.[20] For, p. 232:

> Attempts by governments to alter the ethnic makeup of business through forceful removal of non-indigenous groups and other strong-hand approaches can result in a massive loss of network capital and result in a significant deterioration in the level of market sophistication … One way to assist indigenous business could thus be to ensure that credit reference information circulates widely, so as to minimize the role of old boys networks.

So network capital is good if ethnic but bad if old boy. What about old boy ethnic – oops? This piece, though, is more notable for its functionalist understanding of ethnicity and the failure of social capital to appear in the text despite being cited as a keyword. In addition, Fafchamps and Minten (1999) reduce social capital to the network means of sharing price information, locating it as a variable in a production function, indicating the crudest economistic appropriation of the concept.

On the other hand, alongside cautious retreats from neo-liberalism, the triumphs of the extremes of postmodernism have also passed their peak. There is now a wish for renewed confrontation with the real. By its very name, despite its conceptual chaos, social capital appears to get to grips with both the social and with capital. Nothing could be further from the truth. For, the very terminology of social capital signifies its weaknesses. That the notion "social" needs to be attached to capital to mark a distinct category is indicative of the failure to understand capital as social in what is taken to be its more mundane economic, putatively non-social, form. What is adopted, however, with use of "capital", especially with the physicalist overtones attached to mainstream economics, is the failure to incorporate the most important insight for social theory to be derived from postmodernism - that concepts need to be historically and socially grounded, if not always subjectively so. In this vein, universal concepts such as social capital would be ruled out of court. Precisely because social capital has no historical grounding, like utility for example, it both excludes specificity at the outset and, like a blank canvas, allows the historical or socially specific to be added to order from an ever-expanding menu of variables to an equally exhaustive range of methodological recipes.

The Economic Dimension

There is, however, one, or two, major exceptions – the economic and economics. For, seventh, as social capital is ahistorical and asocial, so it is fundamentally complicit with mainstream economics with which it shares these features, especially in the form of its new information-theoretic micro-foundations. Developments within and around economics on this basis have allowed it to understand both the economic and the non-economic as the consequence of market imperfections. As a result, as argued, economics is colonising the other social sciences as never before, with an as if market imperfection world as opposed to the as if market perfection world that previously proved a colonising tool of significant if limited impact. Not surprisingly, social capital has proved attractive to some mainstream economists in such endeavours, paradoxically with Gary Becker in the forefront. In this light, for economists, social capital is simply everything else after other, more traditional forms of capital have been taken into account, with these understood as in the mainstream as physical, natural, financial or human. Transparently, the effect is to add the social to an otherwise unchallenged economic, albeit made up of market imperfections. Such a ludicrous posture is at its most extreme in the case of mainstream economics for which capital is a physical or other asset that ultimately provides a stream of utility to individuals, a universal, ahistorical and asocial thing rather than a definite economic relationship, with associated structures and processes for the generation of profit. This all reflects a profound misunderstanding both of the social and of capital(ism). In a word, economists can bring in the social to complement the individual, only because the social has been omitted in the first instance, not least with capital understood as a resource rather than as a relationship.

Of equal significance, however, is the response of non-economists both to social capital and to the colonising designs of economics. Here, eighth, a crucial aspect of social capital is the demonstration that its intellectual origins and motivation have been provided by a renewed and revitalised attempt to establish rational choice within social theory (and to swing it towards economic as opposed to psychological reductionism). Significantly, with Coleman, social capital evolved out of a literature (social exchange theory), that was initially designed to address the relationship between the macro and the micro in the context of the relationship between the social and the individual. To a large extent, if not completely, these origins - and their generally strong affinities with rational choice methodology - have been glossed over in the ready reception granted to social capital as the cure-all for social theory. Thus, whether influenced by a colonising economics or not, the use of social capital across the other social sciences is equally uncritical of mainstream economics and its total dependence upon methodological individualism of a special type (utility maximisation). The only, at times insidious, difference from the dismal science as now practised is that the same analytical content is disguised and tempered to a greater or lesser extent by more informal types of arguments, adopting and adapting the traditional concepts of social theory. Institutions, customs, culture and so on, social capital especially, become the response to market (informational) imperfections as opposed to the form and means of expression of economic and social relations, processes and structures.

Ninth, ironically and perversely, social capitalists from outside economics are attracted by the notion because they perceive it as an assault upon economics. Economists are thought of as being civilised by being forced to take account of the social. In addition, social capital is widely and proudly praised for placing interdisciplinary endeavour upon the agenda. Significantly, however, this is only asserted, never demonstrated nor critically examined. And the only economics on the agenda is that of the mainstream. Essentially, would be civilisers and critics of a colonising mainstream economics are working critically against a model of the discipline that is a hundred years old, that of perfectly competitive and efficient outcomes. They do not recognise the implications of the more recent revolution in and around economics that positively embraces the social by way of extension of the unchanged economic principles (or the economic approach as Becker dubs it). In this light, the role of social capital in social theory's response to a colonising economics is completely clarified. On the one hand, by way of analogy, it can be understood as a form of peripheral colonisation, incorporating all social theory other than economics. On the other hand, it presents itself as the opposition to a colonising economics whereas, at most, it offers feeble resistance because it has no alternative economics of its own - at worst, it prepares social theory for the colonising advance of the economic approach.

In short, whilst, social capital purports to fill out the analytical space in which to construct social as a complement to economic policy, it is a particularly weak foundation of shifting sands for doing so. As even a sympathetic commentator on social capital observes, Temple (2000):[21]

> What can a policy-maker in Mexico or Turkey actually do, confronted with the evidence from the World Values Survey that they govern a low-trust society? Standard recommendations, such as attempting to eliminate corruption and improve the legal system, are nothing new, and make good sense quite independently of any emphasis on social capital.

Social Capital In Action or Inaction?

The pioneering study of social capital for the World Bank was one of Tanzania undertaken by Narayan and Pritchett (1996).[22] Irrespective of its merits, it is notable how little social capital is mentioned in the study except as an analytical afterthought. Much the same is true of other early studies such as Moser and Holland (1997) in their study of violence in Jamaica. Thus, before it became established, social capital was only referenced after the event, essentially revealing its redundant as well as its prospective umbrella role for it to be almost anything you want it to be. Even the highly cited Putnam (1993) study of Italy only first mentions social capital in its final chapter (despite arising out of decades of research). As late as the draft of the 2000 World Development Report on poverty, distributed for email debate, the free-floating, yet targeted, role of social capital is sharply, if unwittingly, revealed in two different ways. On the one hand, when moving to consider discrimination (by gender and ethnicity) in the very same chapter in which social capital first sets the analytical and policy framework, the term social capital scarcely appears again in the remaining thirty paragraphs devoted to the topics. It is simply superfluous. On the other hand, in Chapter 9, when considering a particularly narrow (those that are least contentious) range of so-called international public goods, it is simply forgotten that public goods are themselves a key component of social capital. Perhaps this is not so surprising since networks, trust, linkages and the like at the international level are dominated through the economic and political power of the developed countries. The poor and developing countries possess little of such social capital, and the connections of the social with the economic are transparent in the dominance of national, international and global elites. In short, the rich gets power the poor gets social capital.

At the more mundane level, the Tanzanian study covers villages through a Participatory Poverty Assessment, PPA, of 6,000 people in 87 villages. Data are collected on associations - do you belong to a burial society, for example - and cultural attitudes such as compassion, altruism, respect and tolerance. These elements of social capital are perceived to be a source of higher income for individuals who possess it but, just as important, for inhabitants of villages that possess it irrespective of its individual incidence within the village. If a village has a well-supported burial society, there are spin-offs in trust so that everyone benefits - even those who do not belong!

PPAs are the World Bank's way of undertaking surveys so that the poor can supposedly define for themselves what are the key factors in identifying who are the poor and what causes their poverty. This is to be welcomed in principle, although when basic needs are really basic, participation in defining poverty, rather than alleviating it, is something of a mixed blessing. As Brecht put it, "First grub, then ethics"! But there is one glaring contradiction in the relationship between researcher and the poor in this respect that needs to be negotiated. It is impossible for the researcher not to bring analytical preconceptions to the sample survey, and also to its interpretation. I suspect that none of the poor, in Tanzania or elsewhere, has ever identified their condition to be a consequence of inadequate social capital![23] Yet the huge World Bank participatory study of poverty, admirable in terms of its conclusions concerning heterogeneity of causes, consequences and content, continues to impose the universal notion of social capital on its conclusions and interpretations, Narayan et al (1999). The inevitability of researcher's preconceptions cannot be avoided, but social capital leans much too far, indeed falls over, in deploying a notion that is empty of specificity and hence participation except as afterthought.

The irony of "participation" as a means of measuring social capital as an aspect of poverty runs deeper across the shifting rhetoric of the World Bank, especially in an African context. Previously, under the Washington Consensus, those famed African traditions and customs – exposed to the point of cliché – were presumed to be an obstacle to the efficacy of the market and the prospects for development, the rent-seeking syndrome. Now, they are to be positively embraced as individual and systemic support to poverty alleviation, the social capital syndrome. In addition, as already suggested, the all-embracing pretensions of social capital render it a homogenising notion, reducing African cultures to African culture.[24] In more polemical terms, social capital is yet another concept extrapolated from inappropriate application in the developed to the doubly inappropriate developing worlds. Significantly, if crudely, a literature search of social capital over the past decade reveals that of over five hundred articles keywording social capital, less than twenty concerned Africa.[25] This probably less reflects a sensitive reluctance to transpose categories from developed to developing countries and more the time to be taken for social capital to get a fuller hold on Africa. But why should it do so? Coleman, Putnam, even Bourdieu, are after all not noted for their insights into the problems of development, African or otherwise.

More specifically, consider, for example, the headline claim made by a senior World Bank figure from the study of Tanzania, Serageldin (1997, p. vii):[26]

> This study provides quantifiable evidence that village-level social capital - membership in groups with particular characteristics - significantly affects household welfare. In one telling statistic the study finds that one standard

> increase in village-level social capital increases household income per person by 20 to 30 percent. By comparison, a one standard deviation in schooling - nearly three additional years of education per person - increases incomes by only 4.8 percent.

As I have argued at length in Fine (2001a), such conclusions cannot be legitimately drawn from this study (or similar from others of the same ilk). In a nutshell, in formal terms, the estimation techniques are flawed in view of model specification, multicollinearity, omitted variables, multiple equilibria, cross-section as representative of time series, and so on. In informal terms, the study is equivalent to finding that urban ghettos in the USA, or elsewhere, exhibit low income and poor infrastructure, etc, compared to white middle-class suburbs. But it tells us nothing about why one is one and the other is the other or how to get from one to the other, or even if the two are different sides of the same coin of privilege and deprivation. Nor is a solution to these conundrums to be found in finer and more sophisticated estimation techniques or ever more detailed data sets (useful though these can be)[27] since the "marginal product" of these is liable to be swamped by the returns from a serious study rooted in the social and historical realities of Tanzania itself.

Further, consider the policy implications that inevitably flow from the panaceas offered by social capital. These are fourfold. First, commitment to education is lessened as other aspects of "civil society" are targeted for their high returns. Having promoted primary education across education until recently, with loans to fund it, new areas for lending are opened up. The Bank is, after all, a bank and, as such, has been unremarkably casual about switching its policy stances from time to time (not least away from higher education and now back again).[28] Second, social capital provides the Bank with the ideology and rhetoric with which to justify intervention more widely across civil society, thereby preserving its bias against state provision and the participation of trade unions and the like. Third, by the same token, the Bank can intervene selectively and with discretion from its widened range of choice – in whatever area of social capital it finds conducive and for whatever social grouping that it favours.[29] Finally, this all serves to remove attention from fundamental questions of economic and political power; "social" is the complement to "economic" capital, at most a source of correction but not of interrogation and challenge.

To my knowledge at time of writing, the Tanzanian study of social capital remains the most serious of those attached to the World Bank that focuses on Africa. But there are others. These illustrate the nature and deficiencies of social capital. Consider first that of Robert Bates (1999) concerning ethnicity. As a Social Capital Initiative Working Paper of the World Bank, it has a standard preface of six or so pages that mentions social capital over thirty times, including a list of other papers in the series. Bates mentions it the second sentence of his paper:

> Ethnicity is double edged. On the one hand, ethnic groups promote the forces of modernization; phrased more fashionably, they constitute a form of social capital.

The term does not appear again throughout the thirty-three page paper, including the conclusion! Nor is this an isolated instance of social capital's fleeting appearance in

World Bank research. For the study of Francis et al (1998) of primary schools in Nigeria, social capital appears in the title, and on page 3:

> Community participation in education may be thought of as a manifestation of social capital. Formed through repeated transaction and interaction …

It is rounded up with (community) participation and (public/private) co-production but then does not appear again until the conclusions on page 56. Here, the message seems to be that as long as everything else is in place ("fundamental and far-reaching change in the financing and administration of the primary education sub-sector"), then there is a chance of "'social capital' or 'coproduction' filling the growing gap" in provision. To revert to our ghetto analogy, such communities have the chance to be functional if only there was proper housing, facilities and full employment![30]

What these two examples illustrate particularly sharply is that all social variables are being understood as forming social capital. It is simply taken for granted whatever the variable, context or content. In other words, ethnicity is social capital, as is community, and any other variable or factor that is up for grabs. [31] Similarly, if not so extreme in use of the term, Reid and Salmen (1999) on Trust and Social Cohesion for Agricultural Extension in Mali, mention social capital just eleven times, three of which are in headings and another three in the final paragraph. Like Bates' study of ethnicity, whatever their merits, this paper is not about social capital at all, merely bandwagoning on its fashionable phrasing and, thereby, indicative of the capacity of social capital to mean more or less anything.

These examples, from Bates through to the previously mentioned World Development Report draft, illustrate particularly powerfully how social capital is being used as a filter for all social theory, analysis and policy without regard to place, time, context or topic. That this is so can only be concealed, rather than remedied, by those contributions that are more consciously aware of integrating social capital more fully into their texts. For Gugerty et al (1999), for example, to persist with the crude method of social capital count, the term appears seventy times in a text of twenty-three pages. They are concerned with the source as well as the use of social capital in Kenyan local communities. They conclude that:

> In women's groups, [donor] funding strengthens the groups' visibility and ties to the community, but has more ambiguous effects on the internal solidarity of groups. In primary schools, funding appears to strengthen internal solidarity and motivation but has a negligible impact on external ties.

They also, to coin an old refrain or two, call for more research and for context to be taken into account. Whilst social capital may have funded and even motivated their project through the World Bank initiative, it adds nothing to their research that could not already have been done. In addition, the presence of synergy between this and other social capital research must be doubted, be it bowling alone or agricultural extension.

I have not sought to comment on the merits or otherwise of these studies of Bates and others, merely to observe how social capital is essentially superfluous to their concerns. But a striking illustration of how social capital is positively misleading occurs in case of a study of social capital in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, Maluccio et al (1999).[32] It is found that the incidence of social capital has an effect on poverty in 1998 but not in 1993, concluding that abolition of apartheid allowed social capital to function beneficially. This is, however, to neglect three important factors. First, the intervening period has seen little or no challenge to entrenched inequalities in income and wealth, especially those deriving from highly concentrated corporate control, Fine and Rustomjee (1997) and Fine (2000b). Second, one qualification to this generalisation is in the enrichment of a black elite with inequality increasing <u>within</u> the black population. Third, there are special circumstances prevailing in Kwa-Zulu Natal in view of the role played by Inkatha and its system of patronage. Together, these and other factors, render simplistic conclusions about the impact of, and potential for, social capital not so much wrong as tangential.[33] Of course, civil society is important to economic and social performance. But it needs to be set against an appropriate and deep understanding of underlying economic and political interests, stages of development, the dynamic of capital accumulation, the corresponding state and evolution of institutions, etc. There are much more important issues to examine around economic and social provision than the parameters prompted by social capital.[34] Exactly the same applies to White's (1998) study of social capital in a South African township that seeks to emulate Putnam-type work for Italy, appropriately raising the issue of (social capital as) a counterbalance to a somewhat vague and demonised political elite and its corresponding bureaucratised and non-participatory local state. But there is no discussion whatsoever of corporate economic power that is the key determinant of the fate of the vast majority of South African's citizens – quite apart from the role of the central state and international agencies.[35]

The power of social capital over common sense and contextual sensitivity is illustrated by two very different applications to Africa. Marjoribanks and Mboya (2001) deploy Coleman's initial ideas concerning social capital in order to assess sources of self-esteem in eighteen year old black South Africans. They seek to assess the impact of close as well as more distant family ties and networks. Their sample of 700 females and 605 males, however, are taken from senior secondary schools without regard to the fact that the vast majority of black South African children do not make it to this level of education. The reasons for this might be thought to have more impact on self-esteem of those who do, as well as those that do not, make it. Nonetheless, they are able to conclude that other concerns should attract our research efforts, p. 137:

> What is required now are longitudinal studies, in Western and non-industrial societies, that examine the complexity of the relations between family capital, defined along the remoteness-nearness continuum, and other measures of students' school-related outcomes. In such investigations, the survey findings need to be complemented by more sensitive qualitative analyses that examine the understandings that young adults from different distal and sibling contexts have of their interactions with parents and other family members. It is possible, for example, that such interpretive (sic) analyses would show that many students develop relationships with adults and peer group members from outside the family, and that such social capital which is formed is more important for schoolrelated outcomes than is their family social capital.

Indeed, it would be appropriate to examine "non-industrial societies" for the relations between young adults and non-family members that prevent access to (secondary) school. I suspect, however, that it would not draw upon the notion of class preferred by the authors in drawing upon Reay (1998, p. 272) and cited on page 137. For "conventional measures of socioeconomic status no longer capture the complexities of family background in postmodern society":[36]

> Class is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions.

With class defined in such a way, it is hardly surprising that (social) capital should be equally liberal in its compass.

Bonnel's (2000) use of social capital is no less ambitious in addressing AIDS and growth from a global perspective. Social capital enters as a determinant of growth for, as a subheading suggests, "*AIDS destroys social capital because it is tearing away at existing institutions*", p. 823.[37] But the piece is less interesting for the light that it sheds on social capital and AIDS than for its exemplary illustration of the poverty of much World Bank research.[38] First it deploys endogenous or new growth theory. This has been used to throw any variable into a regression in order to be able to explain its contribution to growth.[39] Despite mounting, if ineffectual, criticism of such models from theoretical and empirical stances, Fine (2000a) and Kenny and Williams (2001) for example, they are taken as well-established and unquestioned.[40] Second, whether for this or other issues, reference is essentially only made to World Bank or World Bank friendly literature. Third, the conclusions are always the same for issue X irrespective of what X is. In this case, they are so astonishing that they literally take the breath away in terms of their apologetics and irrelevance. For, in closing, p. 849:

> Reversing the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemics and mitigating its impact will therefore require three sets of measures:
> (i) *Sound macroeconomic policies …*
> (ii) *Structural policy reforms …*
> (iii) *Modifying further the system of incentives faced by individuals.*

Fourth, scholarship in detail is often deficient, not least because it is the conclusions that count more than the means by which they are reached. Thus, for example, on a simple technical matter if only for the expert, an annexure explains why the rate of change of prevalence of HIV/AIDS can be substituted for by its level and the level squared, with the coefficient on the level being positive and equal but of opposite sign to the level squared. But no restrictions are placed on the two coefficients in the estimates, invalidating the conclusions drawn on their values and their significance (and the regressions as a whole). Fifth, the search for generalised, acceptable truisms leads to insensitivity to context and specificity. It is surely a great irony that this piece should appear in The South African Journal of Economics. For, whilst South Africa has bent over backwards to satisfy conditions (i) to (iii), it has, unfortunately, appeared to fall foul of the southern African dummy (variable not author) when it comes to AIDS!

Although seeking to assess the impact of AIDS on growth, and so not directly concerned with social capital, Bonnel's study is typical of those that incorporate the variable as an explanatory factor (in formal statistical work or not), with little or no reference to the conceptual and empirical issues concerned. As with human capital in the past, with the passage of time, reservations are aired, noted and, ultimately, disregarded. Much the same is already true of other applications incorporating social capital, as in the study of politics in general and of democratic transitions in particular. The latter has been taken up by Vengroff and Magala (2001) in their application to Senegal's 2000 Presidential election, with social capital as one amongst a number of variables. In following the work of Inglehart (1997), which itself scarcely mentions social capital, this raises two issues. First is social capital adding anything other than a new name to old analysis (how individual and social variables impact upon the political process) and, second, how legitimate is such an approach to the political process given its bias towards being insensitive to context, content and contingency? Of course, the simple transposition to Africa of analyses developed for western democracies is taken for granted.[41]

However, Vengroff and Magala do cite the work of Bratton and van de Walle (1997). Whilst not reliant on social capital themselves, they capture its weaknesses with remarkable regularity, so it is hardly surprising that they can be incorporated alongside social capital. In opening, they claim, "this book offers a systematic account of political regime changes in Africa, 1990-94", p. xiii. In covering well over forty countries, this reveals no lack of ambition. They lay out their methodology as follows, drawing upon, p. 41:[42]

> A "new institutionalist" approach [that] has brought together methodological individualists and historical materialists around a common concern with the interactions of political institutions and processes. Starting from rational-choice assumptions, Douglass North [1990, p. vii] concludes that "history matters … because the present and the future are connected to the past by the continuity of today's institutions. Today's and tomorrow's choices are shaped by the past".

They also appeal to middle-range theory, p. 43, "terrain between elegant general theory and idiographic case histories", p. 269, and "insist on having the best of both worlds" neither "overly deterministic or excessively voluntaristic", p. 45. Their final chapter avoids sweeping generalisation from case studies, p. 268, emphasising diversity and the need for comparative study but posits the thesis of the book that "the institutional heritage of neopatrimonial rule has shaped regime transitions in much of Africa", p. 269. This is followed by a generalised narrative drawn from many case studies; "most distinctively, the trajectory of regime transitions in Africa hinges on the way that personal rulers exercise power", p. 270. Emphasising politico-institutional factors and structured contingency, the authors ultimately at least have the modesty to restrict their conclusions to regime transitions in "like selected countries in Central Asia, Central America, and the Caribbean - where neopatrimonial rule is the norm", p. 275. For, "We cannot claim to have elaborated a unified field theory of democratization; we doubt whether such is even feasible", p. 274. This all has the whiff of tautology, where inconsistency, chaos and lack of clarity can be smoothed away. No wonder it is fertile ground for social capital to enter the stage!

Thus, in the applications to growth and politics, social capital is used like any other variables in regressions of greater or lesser complexity and sophistication, with more or less reliable and apt data, but, necessarily, without regard to context and specificity. This is not to push for the futility of empirical work but for its limitations to be honestly confronted and confessed rather than ruthlessly hidden, and more likely, overlooked and unknown. With regressions, across what are often massive data sets for variables that are contextual, two major drawbacks are paramount. The first is the presumption that significance in the statistical sense is attached to causation. Social capital causes this or that to be so. At most, though, correlation can be inferred. Accordingly, other statistical techniques might be more appropriately employed, those involving analysis of variance as in factor analysis for example. In principle, these merely claim to discover what factors are associated with one another, leaving mechanisms of causation to be identified and established. Such techniques have been reasonably used with social capital (to reduce its many dimensions to a few) but generally only where authors are already wedded to social capital as explanatory variable, Putnam (2000) most notably.

Second, all this aside, and in presence of appropriate statistical analyses, the overriding problem remains one of the comparative worth of what will have been achieved. To the extent that "social capital" structures and is structured by other variables, with particular effects in one context, there can be no presumption that structures, processes, relations and meanings can be transposed in time and/or place unless guided by detailed examinations. In short, social capital tends to undermine rather than to contribute towards comparative understanding.

Whither Social Capital?

It is apparent from the literature covered, if unsurprising, that South Africa should provide fertile ground for social capital studies. For it has one foot in the developed world for the minority and one in the developing for the majority. And there has been long tradition of understanding the dark continent as the other, the alter ego, of its enlightened counterpart in the west. As Carrier (1992 and 1995) has argued for orientalism and its own Janus face, occidentalism, such constructs reflect back upon their origins revealing as much about how we perceive ourselves as the other's other, the voyeur exposed. Indeed, there is even a dialectic in which perceptions of self and other mutually condition one another, if scarcely on equal terms. On the one hand, in emulating the west, how can African social capital be built and deployed? On the other hand, what can we learn about social capital from the peculiarities of African customs and conditions?

Social capital, like the godliness, civilisation, modernisation, freedom, democracy, good governance, harmonious markets, and so on, that have gone before, is only one more telling, if contemporary, example of reconstructing and reconstruing Africa. We now no longer perceive ourselves as in pursuit of a virtual world, Carrier and Miller (eds) (1998), in which neo-liberalism in principle is to be put into practice.[43] No, we now inhabit a new virtual world and have come to recognise the incidence of market imperfections, the need for social institutions, cultures and customs to overcome them, and the the potential for positive sum outcomes for all across economy and society. We have the right sorts of markets and non-markets (although there is always room for improvement), they do not. That is why we are developed and they are not. Issues of power, conflict, and underlying economic and political interests do not otherwise arise.

Social capital, however, is not only a source of self-reflection for the west back upon itself, for the developed as not the developing. Social capital can be reflected back upon itself. Who are the social capitalists, from academics through to World Bankers, with NGOs caught happily somewhere in-between? Clearly social capital is a wonderful construct for concerned but uncritical NGOs with limited resources and independence. [44] More generally what are the social capital networks? What is their ethos? And so on. The picture I have painted in this respect is both scathing and cynical but there is good reason to be angry.

More generally, despite its popularity, social capital has created an undercurrent of opposition from progressive scholars with intellectual integrity. Why have they not been more numerous and outspoken? My own experience from presenting the critical views on social capital outlined above is that it is very hard to generate serious debate and disagreement. Instead, apologetic social capitalists argue that they are civilising economists, combating neo-liberalism, and able to outflank the least desirable features of social capital by bringing in what would otherwise be omitted by other less progressive users than themselves. Last, and by no means least, it is claimed that funding and research depend upon playing the social capital game, and at least this is a way of addressing the role of civil society in practice and of avoiding economism.

Let me deal with each of these claims in turn for, whilst each contains an element of truth, the weight of opposing argument is very much stronger. First, the idea that economists are being civilised by social capital is simply wrong. As briefly outlined, the new information-theoretic approach to economics already contains all that social capital has to offer. Far from being civilised, economists are plundering the other social sciences for outlets for their new approach. Further, their fanatical opposition to any other form of economics than their own orthodoxy can only be strengthened by purveying the proposition that social capital corrects the discipline's deficiencies by adding the social to the economic. In short, social capital serves to strengthen mainstream economics at home and facilitates its colonising mission abroad.

Second, exactly the same arguments apply to the assault upon neo-liberalism. Mainstream economics already incorporates market imperfections as the basis on which to reject simplistic dependence on the market. In other words, the issue is not whether to support laissez-faire or not, with social capital honourably dissenting through its faith in the role of civil society. Rather, there is the matter of what sort of economics is to replace neo-liberal dogma. Social capital is extraordinarily conservative in this respect, ready either to neglect the economy altogether or to draw exclusively upon the market imperfections model.

Third, social capital is surely more progressive than neo-liberalism. But is it progressive enough as opposed to being too limited in its ambition? A comparison can more appropriately be made with the McNamara approach to development than with an easy opponent such as neo-liberalism. In the 1980s, the latter displaced the approach based, however successfully, on Keynesianism, welfarism and modernisation, thereby equally setting aside systemic analysis of development and a significant role for the state (for the developing to emulate the developed countries). The social capital approach, as part of the post-Washington consensus, is a pale shadow of a restoration of the McNamara approach, merely seeking to identify and correct market imperfections as long as the cure is no worse than the disease. It is surely doomed to be no more successful than the more ambitious McNamara approach, especially given the less favourable circumstances in which it is seeking to promote development.

Last there is an extraordinary myth surrounding social capital – that it is innovative and, at least, addresses what has never been addressed before, the role of civil society or whatever in development or economic and social performance more generally. On the one hand, there is the irony that social capital has risen to such prominence because it has parasitically and widely drawn upon previous analyses. On the other hand, the irony is deepened by the extent to which social capital reduces and homogenises the content of those diverse earlier analyses.

Again, to refer to my own experience, I am astonished by the willingness of scholars to march under the banner of social capital without considering these issues surrounding its wider significance, reflecting a belief that if they do the right thing with social capital then that is OK. But it has to be recognised that even dissent within the social capital enterprise seems to strengthen rather than to weaken it. Individual advancement aside - an important factor in the rise of social capital - this all reveals much by way of collective intellectual bankruptcy. There is a failure to recognise how social capital's ready accommodation of opposition represents a highly successful form of a legitimising repressive tolerance, something – to draw the contrast again – that is not and cannot be true of globalisation and its effects. The most appropriate answer to social capital is to reject it altogether and to construct a rigorous theory of the social and of capital and of capitalism, building upon the intellectual traditions that we have rather than reducing them to fashionable concepts inspired by a disguised rational choice. With apologies to Philip Larkin:[45]

They fuck you up with social cap.
They may not mean to but they do.
They fill you up with faults on tap
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in rational hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on social cap to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any for yourself.

Footnotes

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[1] See Fine (2002, Chapter 2) for a discussion.
[2] For an ethical critique of such "commodification" as self-promoting, see especially Radin (1996).
[3] This book contains over one hundred references to Stiglitz's own work, indicating how well-established is the approach. Stiglitz, alongside Akerlof and Spence, were awarded the 2001 Nobel Prize for Economics for their contribution to analyses of markets with asymmetric information.
[4] To anticipate, despite becoming one of, if not the, leading social capitalists of the World Bank, Woolcock's (1999) review of informal finance fails to mention social capital at all! For a review of such finance (never large-scale or conglomerate networks) and social capital, see Schrieder and Sharma (1999).
[5] See Fine (1997) for my first critical contribution against this vein and Fine (2001a and 2002) for the more recent, with reference to earlier work and debates. For evidence from the mainstream itself, see Becker (1990) and Lazear (2000), both of whom refer to economic imperialism and Olson and Kähkönen (2000) who explicitly prefer the telling metaphor of economics as metropolis and other social science as the suburbs. See also Frey (1999) who attracts praise from Nobel Laureates Becker, Stigler and Buchanan. Lindbeck (2000), formerly Chair of the Nobel Committee for Economics, explicitly refers to economic imperialism as a criterion for the award. I prefer the term economics imperialism, as well as colonisation of the other social sciences, as opposed to economic imperialism.

The latter is favoured by the mainstream although the discipline has a long history of overlooking its incidence in reality, as demonstrated by Perelman (2000) for Adam Smith onwards.
[6] For the World Bank's treatment of social capital, visit its dedicated website http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital. For a timely attempt to reintrepret debate over Kenyan ethnicity and entrepreneurship in terms of a marriage between the post Washington consensus and social capital, see Chege (1998).
[7] Rhetoric for the post-Washington consensus has been provided by Joe Stiglitz (1998a and b), prior to his sacking as Chief Economist at the World Bank at the end of 1999 for taking its logic to policy conclusions. For an account, including discussion of Ravi Kanbur's resignation as lead author of the World Bank's 2000 World Development Report on Poverty, see Wade (2000). For a useful collection of Stiglitz's writings on development following his appointment to, and departure from, the World Bank, see Chang (ed) (2001). See also Stiglitz (2001) for a clear statement of his intent to organise the alternative to the Washington consensus and neo-liberalism more generally. For critical exposition of the post-Washington consensus, see Fine et al (eds) (2001), Hildyard (1998) and Standing (2000).
[8] "Mission creep" in other words, Moore (2000, p.15). Indicating how shifting rhetoric can be misleading, consider the World Bank's (2001) proposal to reallocate billions of dollars for infrastructural funding from IDA, International Development Assistance, which makes concessional loans to governments, to the IFC, International Financial Corporation, which lends exclusively to the private sector.
[9] In Fine (1999), I argued that Stiglitz would not use the term social capital because of his integrity as a mainstream economist. I was proved wrong before the piece could be published, Stiglitz (1998b). See Moore (2000) for some critical commentary on Stiglitz in this respect.
[10] A stunning illustration of the designs of social capital on social theory is provided by the World Bank's annotated bibliography. It is astonishing to find that the term social capital does not appear in most of the articles included! This is eventually explained by entries, honest enough to confess, that the term is not used but is implicit. The bibliography ranges over authors as diverse as Marxist historians and neoclassical economists, and topics such as class action and historical change and holocaust survival of one or other of two brothers!
[11] Thus, Rotberg (1999) edits a, not uncritical, two volume historical collection with an introduction entitled, "Social Capital and Political Culture in Africa, America, Australia and Europe"!
[12] See the posthumously published Coleman (1997) for crudely clear exposition of his views on social capital (and education), drawing on examples both of Bertrand Russell and his grandmother and of John Stuart Mill and his father. His preoccupation, also to be found especially in Coleman (1993), over and above rational choice, is with a reactionary nostalgia, for he closes, p. 625:

> A number of authors have used the concept of social capital in various ways … With the decline in strength of family and community, the social capital held by a child and available for its development has become problematic, even when other forms of capital – human, financial, and physical – have become more abundant in the child's environment.

Can it really be possible that such a prognosis has inspired so much social capital literature? It is simply a matter of substituting TV and bowling clubs or whatever for family and community and the deed is half done. The other half is to displace education by some other achievement. If Coleman (1997) is consulted, it is worth, in passing from sublime to ridiculous in relative terms, glancing initially at the preceding entry by Collins and Thompson (1997) in Saha (ed) (1997) that addresses cultural capital and corresponding issues a more rounded assessement.
[13] For a sympathetic account of Bourdieu in these terms, see McLennan (1998). For a full account, see Fine (2001a, Chapter 4).
[14] The expression originates with Baron and Hannan (1994) just as social capital was beginning its rise to fame. Note that the most sophisticated supporters of social capital do accept its contextual content and seek a return to Bourdieu. But, by doing so, they are transforming it or reducing it to the status of the other capitals deployed by Bourdieu, the symbolic and the cultural for example, thereby wiping out most of the social capital literature as such.
[15] But see also sub-titles of his and Hibou's (1999) articles.
[16] As will be seen Bates is to social capital as Coleman is to Africa!
[17] To be fair, the French edition of the English translation first appeared in 1997 before social capital was so prominent and transparently mainstream.
[18] But see Fine and Lapavitsas (2000) in debate with Zelizer (2000) and also Fine (2002).

[19] As Bayart (1999, p. 32) diplomatically suggests, "the use made of this concept by Putnam to analyse the governance of the Italian peninsula has captured the imagination of World Bank experts, even if it has not convinced every specialist on Italian affairs". This includes his Harvard colleague, Tarrow (1996), who offers a devastating critique.

[20] In contrast to the positive ethnic network effects suggested by Fafchamps (2000), Vandenberg (2001) concludes for Kenya that, "firm size is a more important determinant of credit access than ethnicity and that size is determined predominately by access to starting capital. This suggests that the advantages which Asian firms possess in accessing credit is based on their historical and contemporary capacity to accumulate initial capital". See also Barr (1998) on Ghana.

[21] In similar vein, Temple (1998, p. 309) concludes:

> Should the origins of slow growth be traced to Africa's social arrangements, high inequality and ethnic diversity? Based on cross-country empirical work, this paper argues that the best answers are yes, no and maybe.

[22] See also Narayan (1997).

[23] Similarly, I suspect that it will come as a surprise to most locals that, "In Africa, local wisdom takes social capital seriously", Widner and Mundt (1998, p. 1). Their study begins by observing that "social capital is unobservable and multi-dimensional", p. 2 but seeks to measure it - for Botawana and Uganda. It claims "little pretence of originality in this regard", p. 3, merely seeking to parallel Putnam (1993). Even on this limited basis, it concludes that, "the norms and behaviour typically included in the concept of social capital do not cohere in the two African contexts studied in the way they do elsewhere in the world", p. 21. All other difficulties and problems aside, this raises the issue of what is the point of the exercise? What lessons do we draw? Social capital is different and has different effects from one place to the next.

[24] Such homogenisation is typical of the World Bank, and others, in seeking to deal with phenomena as diverse, multidimensional and contextual as poverty, ethnicity, governance, community and trust (as an element in social capital). Hence, for the latter, Barr (1999) can have Zimbabwean entrepreneurs play experimental games with one another as a proxy for how they will go about business.

[25] Of course, especially with new and fashionable concepts, such counts are crude. Casual experience and anecdotes of others, for example, would suggest that many students are using social capital in essays, dissertations and the like. But the comparison with the literature search for globalisation and Africa over the same period is telling, with over 220 hits.

[26] But see also Narayan (1997, p. viii).

[27] As is attempted by Grootaert (1998) for Indonesia.

[28] See Fine and Rose (2001) for the shifting policy stances and rationales for World Bank education policy across the recent transition from Washington to post Washington consensus. Note that, whilst social capital is a crass extension of the economic reductionism of human capital (via personal capital) to social theory, some such as Schuller (2000a and b), Schuller and Field (1998) and Schuller et al (2000), see it as complementing human capital and correcting its deficiencies. See Fine and Green (2000).

[29] This is sharply revealed by NGO reports on the World Bank social capital project in India, designed to smooth the imposition of new coal mining sites. As the Berne Declaration (1998) puts it:

> The problem seems to be that in micro projects (building a village road) the people are encouraged to decide and implement, but in the wider macro context (issues of future livelihood, legal recognition, land and water control), their opinions are ignored. The Bank, government and CIL (Coal India Limited) are selective as to when/on what terms they will give participation. It is they who claim power to decide. Thus, in the context of macro projects (and peoples' economic dispossession, felt helplessness), the micro-project participation is largely irrelevant. Everybody, from top company management to village simpleton, knows this.

[30] The ghostly presence of social capital is not confined to, nor initiated by, the World Bank. Cooper's (1993) study of clothing production in Maradi, Niger, points to the mixed relations across market and social ties as women attempt to retain power and income with shifts towards commodity production. Social capital appears in her title, one subheading and once in the text. See also Kibreab (2000) whose study of Eritrean's in Sudan suddenly takes off on a one-page social capital tangent in the middle of a lengthy article, without the term ever appearing again.

[31] This is strikingly illustrated by the World Bank's annotated bibliography on social capital, see footnote 10. In case of the fifty or so entries for Africa and social capital, only a third or so of their own

(double) abstracts actually mention social capital. Even so, the abstract for Agbese (1996), for example, suggests that it "explores the formation of social capital based along ethnic and regional lines, and how these relationships can be drawn on to obtain aid in times of ethnic conflict". In fact, the article is concerned with how ethnicity may be represented in regional terms as a strategy to render interests more palatable to outsiders and never mentions social capital. The same is true of McFerson's (1996) argument for Somali and Fiji that pressures behind modernisation can lead to deepening ethnic conflicts but is interpreted as showing how "the state can dismantle social capital". And also for Kuperman's (1996) warning that international mediators in Rwanda may have promoted extreme but organised response by disadvantaged elite groups – "social capital in this case was used by social elites in one ethnic/political group to galvanize support for their interests and cause a civil war".

[32] See also Maluccio et al (2000). This astonishingly suggests that Coleman (1988) provides a review of how the concept is "well grounded in the sociology literature", p. 54/5, and provides a review of its own of "Social Capital and South Africa" that I suspect does not include a single article on South African that uses the term, but does appropriate "ubuntu" under its umbrella.

[33] Similarly, the World Bank's social capital project on health (and poverty) in Russia, Rose (1999) for example, is essentially marked by disregard for the role of unemployment and economic collapse in causing an unprecedented loss of life expectancy. This is the starting point - in which the Washington institutions might, to put it mildly, be thought to be complicit - from which social capital at most might explain some variation in incidence.

[34] See MERG (1993) for example that, by ironical coincidence, has the same title as Putnam (1993). It shows that the provision of social and economic infrastructure in South Africa, in the past as well as prospectively, depends upon the specific nature of the issue concerned, whether it be health, education, housing or electrification. This is so despite shared features arising out of the heritage of apartheid.

[35] Slightly more penetrating in these respects is Charlick's (2001) attempt to explore the tensions between local level participatory democracy and the provision of external funding to corresponding communities, in case studies attached to Guinea and Mali. Once again, "social capital" is only offered as an afterthought in the conclusion – to the effect that the tension is satisfactorily, if tautologically, resolved in the presence of social capital.

[36] This view of the rescuing of class prompts the following observation. Merton (1967, p. 442) argued that there has been a divorce between US and European traditions in sociology, reflecting undue preoccupation with facts and theory, respectively:

> The loose impression emerges which can be baldly and too simply summarized thus: the American knows what he is talking about, and that is not much; the European knows not what he is talking about, and that is a great deal.

The rise of social capital signifies something of a synthesis and a partial triumph of Americanisation, if not as far as for economics, with rational choice as its blunted and veiled spearhead.

[37] On the other hand, sexual activity (an input to AIDS/HIV) is perceived to be an output of social capital in Djamba's (1997) study of premarital sexual activity in Zambia. On a narrow and peculiar interpretation of Coleman's appeal to family, social capital is understood as number of household members. The conclusion is drawn that, "the effect of social capital on sexual activity becomes significantly positive only if there are more than six children in the household. This effect disappears when age is added in the regression … the most important predictor of sexual activity", p. 254. Further, "the results suggest that many girls may be using sexual relations to obtain money and material goods they cannot get within the financial capital of their families", p. 255. It's the same the whole world over …

[38] Bonnel is described as a Lead Economist at the World Bank.

[39] Superbly and honestly revealed by the title of the paper of one of the leading practitioners, "I Just Ran Four Million Regressions", Sala-i-Martin (1997).

[40] See also Jackman and Miller (1996b, p. 712) who argue in debate over the mechanical calculation of the impact of non-economic variables on growth that, "further attempts to refine and test the case for political culture along the[se] lines … seem unlikely to be productive".

[41] As represented with social capital present by van Deth et al (eds) (1999) for example, quite apart from Putnam. Note that Vengroff and Magala cite Jackman and Miller (1996a and b) but, not surprisingly, do not heed the advice offered in the previous footnote, equally relevant to political as economic outcomes, and unreasonably conclude that these contributions represent a critique of, not a complement to, Inglehart. See also Jackman and Miller (1998) for social capital.

[42] For critique of North's understanding of history matters, see Fine and Milonakis (2001) and Milonakis and Fine (2001).
[43] See Chang (2002) for an outstanding account of how current social and economic norms being imposed on developing countries are diametrically opposite to those historically prevailing in the developed countries at their corresponding stages of industrialisation.
[44] See Brown and Ashman (1996) for an early example of the idea that social capital can mediate conflicts, with NGOs serving as facilitating agents.
[45] A parody first deployed in Fine (2002b). See the other contributions to the roundtable discussion of social capital for evidence of its seductive attractions.