

Modeling the Effects of Economic Behavior in Determining the Organization of Society

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Abstract

The three “spheres” of society (governments, markets, and communities) are widely acknowledged yet the overall organization is analyzed only rarely, and interactions between the spheres have perhaps never been modeled. Fiske’s four relational models (community-sharing, authority-ranking, equality-matching, and market-pricing) are used as the theoretical underpinning for a model of these three spheres, which is then used briefly to examine the effects of economic behavior (including economic thinking and theorizing) in determining the balance between them. Each of the spheres is assumed to have a fairly fixed core, plus some space between the cores which may be designated to one or another sphere. In the long run, this designation may reflect meta-economic efficiency, influenced by changes in physical, social, psychological, and information-technology. In the short run, however, the outcome depends on human choice and will, in evaluating uncertain information about technologies and the meta-economic efficiency of changing sphere-assignments (including possible changing cultural and historical differences in the relative evaluation of public, private, and social goods produced in the three spheres). It can thus be influenced by ideology, specifically through the application of inappropriate relational models to any particular social function or situation. For example, applying economic thinking to communities may undermine them, especially if the social sphere of communities operating under its own relational models is not acknowledged.

JEL: A0, D2, H1, N0, O0, O3, P0, Z1.

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Contents

The three spheres: political, economic, and social	1
Fiske’s four relational models and the three spheres	1
A model of the political, economic, and social spheres	2
Figure 1: Political, economic, and social spheres, showing essential cores and potential areas of expansion/contraction	4
Historical allocation of social space to the three spheres	5
The effect of economic behavior on the social sphere of communities.....	6
Appendix A: Communities and social goods defined.....	7
Appendix B: The three spheres in common usage and uncommon analysis	9
Table 1: Various terms applying to the three spheres, preliminary sample	12
Other logical underpinnings of the three social spheres	14
Figure 2: Douglas & Ney’s “cultural map”	16
The three social spheres seem fundamental and exhaustive	13
References	17

The three spheres: political, economic, and social

The three “spheres” (or “realms” or “domains”)¹ of society: political (*governments*); economic (*markets*); and social (*communities*) – each producing a characteristic type of goods: *public* (by governments); *private* (for markets); and “*social*” (in and by communities)² – constitute the fundamental organization of modern society (Appendix A defines communities and social goods). The three spheres are widely acknowledged as fundamental and exhaustive (as shown in Appendix B), yet the overall organization or system is analyzed only rarely, and interactions between the spheres have perhaps never been modeled. The simple model proposed here will be used briefly to examine the effects of economic behavior (including economic thinking and theorizing) in determining the balance between the three spheres in the organization of society, and specifically, its effect on communities (the social “third” sphere).³

Fiske’s four relational models and the three spheres

Alan Paige Fiske (1991) started from a few notable references to various aspects of the three spheres just mentioned (in the work of Max Weber, Jean Piaget, and Paul Ricoeur), but realized after careful anthropological fieldwork among the Moose (pronounced MOH-say) people of Burkina Faso in Africa that there were actually *four* distinct cognitive and emotional relational models or modes (RMs). He and other researchers have since found that, in societies worldwide, the four RMs are combined in a multitude of ways in any given situation or for any particular purpose, with more emphasis on one or another of them in any given society, yet ultimately all social interactions seem to be analyzable in terms of them and the relations between them (see also Fiske, 2004, and Haslam, 2004). Fiske designates the four RMs as:

“community-sharing” (CS);

“authority-ranking” (AR);

“equality-matching” (EM); and

“market-pricing” (MP).

¹ These terms seem to be used interchangeably (also “facets”; Heilbroner, 1985:79); I will arbitrarily stick to the term “spheres”.

² I call the latter “goods”, a formulation with which economists are familiar, to stress that communities provide something which enters our “utility functions” directly and positively (which is why we call them “good”). It thus seems that any complete “economic” analysis (of revealed preference and utility, not just market goods) must somehow account for them. The term “social goods” has also been used – quite inappropriately, in my opinion – for what are now more generally referred to as “public goods” (e.g., Bowen, 1943; Musgrave, 1969, 1986). There have been other usages of the term “social” as well – for *collective* welfare, or for *comparison* goods – which also haven’t reflected the full meaning of the term. I suggest that the usage advocated here does so and is thus more appropriate. Otherwise, as Mirowski (1994:54) says: “What is so ‘social’ about social science?” “I hate to say it, but economist terminology is terrible” (Hal Varian, 2001:133). Myrdal (1969:42) also noted a trend towards “scientism”, of social scientists increasingly using “strange terminology”. It seems better, when possible, to let words mean what they normally mean.

³ With no necessary importance attached to its being in the third position; as noted in Appendix B, the order can be, and often is, varied through all six possible permutations. But the residual community sphere (which is also the presumed primordial source of the government and market spheres) is often ignored, and therefore third. In political theory, the “third way” also represents an alternative emphasis to either governments or markets, focussed more on communities (Giddens, 1998).

These four RMs exemplify a unique progressive set of mathematical properties (Fiske, 1991:48-9):

CS = the elements of a set (i.e., who is recognized as *in* the community);

AR = an ordinal ranking of the elements of the set (who's in charge);

EM = placing values on an interval scale as an "Abelian group" (e.g., keeping track of how much one is ahead or behind, i.e., debts);⁴ and

MP = allowing ratios among values of an "Archimedean ordered field" (and thus facilitating exchange; as money, for example, equilibrates between types of debt).⁵

Thus there seems to be something quite fundamental about these four RMs, which have also been shown to develop *spontaneously* in children (regardless of the differing cultural emphases in the surrounding society); in the same order; and normally at about the same ages (CS during infancy; AR by age 3; EM soon after turning 4; and MP while 8)⁶. So it seems likely that the four RMs developed evolutionarily in the same sequence, and may well represent stages of brain development and even different structures and circuits in the brain.⁷

While any type of social interaction typically utilizes more than one of the four RMs (or even all of them), it seems clear that the sphere of politics and government – the arena of authorities exercising power – can be primarily identified with AR (authority-ranking), while the economic sphere of markets can be primarily identified with MP (market-pricing). That leaves two more RMs: CS and EM. Although Fiske eventually found these *four* distinct RMs, it seems likely that the social sphere of communities (taken as a whole) can be primarily identified with *both* community-sharing (i.e., taking care of those who are identified as being in the community) and equality-matching (i.e., a sense of equality with, and fair play towards, those in the community).⁸

A model of the political, economic, and social spheres

The political sphere is designated "Governments" in Figure 1 (below), the economic sphere "Markets", and the social sphere "Communities". For each sphere we'll assume that there is some essential, irreducible core (here in white, the inside of each "doughnut") representing types of social activities that seem to appear spontaneously, and would remain or return even if, for example, efforts were made to completely eliminate that sphere.

⁴ An *Abelian group* – named after the Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel – is a *commutative group* $(G, *)$ such that $a * b = b * a$ for all a and b in G . (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abelian_group)

⁵ *Archimedean* adds the property that, for any a which is a member of \mathbf{R} , there exists an integer n such that $n > a$. (<http://www.naturaltheology.net/Glossary/realNumber.html>)

⁶ Fiske (1991:48-9).

⁷ Fiske (2004) explores possible evolutionary mechanisms and discusses ongoing experiments relating the RMs to neural functioning.

⁸ If we take CS as the most fundamental RM (as *defining* community), then perhaps it is the case that communities can additionally transfer resources through *any* of the *other* RMs. But since in modern society the AR mode has generated a separate sphere of governments, and the MP mode has generated a separate sphere of markets, what remains is an agglomeration of CS and EM. We don't seem to have evolved *separate* spheres, primarily characterized by *either* CS *or* EM. (The characterization of communities here is not intended to ignore the possibilities that those in any given community may treat those "outside" the community quite badly, and that AR may override any sense of equality.)

Thus even the most egalitarian consensus-minded communities seem to find that some political structure of authority also emerges (and has done so throughout history), while economists have long recognized that the market-sphere could not function without secure property-rights established and guaranteed by governments.

Markets themselves emerged far back in prehistory because they could handle some situations more efficiently (and perhaps more harmoniously) than simple community-traditions (or authority-relations);⁹ and black markets emerged even in the Soviet bloc under a communist regime ideologically dedicated to eliminating markets, because markets could do things that the command economy was incapable of accomplishing.

And finally, recent research on “social capital” has shown the importance of communities and their values for the functioning of both markets and governments; while it would be hard for either of them (or even for both together) to provide completely for human reproduction (the perhaps quintessential community-function).

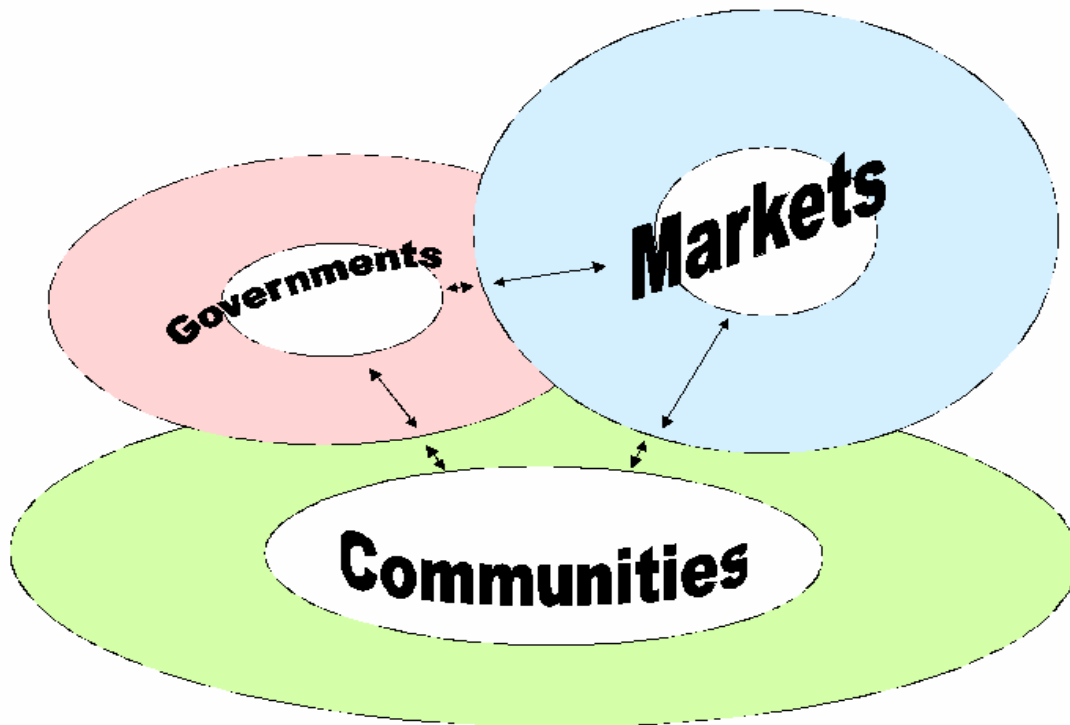
These examples are of course illustrative, not exhaustive of core activities. And to repeat a point made earlier, it is not being asserted that core activities in any sphere are necessarily “pure”: for example, that human reproduction could or should be carried out totally without authority or exchange.

While we can accept that all (in fact four) RMs may be involved to some extent in each of the three spheres, we thus assume that there are some situations or functions which are inescapably political; others which naturally elicit markets; and still others which essentially require communities.¹⁰

⁹ Smith (1776/1996) famously referred to humankind’s natural “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another”. Markets appeared very early in socio-economic development – in fairly primitive societies, in response to social scarcities – with physical commodity-markets generally appearing first, then labor- and credit-markets, and finally land- and land-rental markets (Pryor, 1977).

¹⁰ Corner solutions – with *none* of one or more of the spheres – are thus ruled out.

Figure 1: Political, economic, and social spheres, showing essential cores and potential areas of expansion/contraction



While comparing the sizes of the three real-life spheres is undoubtedly problematic, they were drawn here to reflect both the common perception that we live in a “market society” – so markets are drawn quite large, and in front – and the fact that both markets and governments have taken over many functions formerly performed by families and other communities, which are thus drawn behind; this also reflects the fact that economics takes *markets* as given – and *governments* to some extent as necessary – but less often even recognizes *communities*, let alone acknowledging them as a separate sphere organized according to different principles. Nevertheless, communities seem inherently most essential, so are drawn largest (and green). Reflecting political convention, governments are drawn to the left (and slightly “red”), and markets to the right (and blue). But nothing in what follows depends on the relative sizes or positions (or colors) of the “spheres”.

The colored areas in the figure indicate potential areas of contraction of each of the spheres, which can also expand (as indicated by the double-headed arrows). So we assume some flexibility in dividing the space between the cores, which must be designated as belonging to one sphere or another, because the three spheres are assumed to be exhaustive of social space. The spheres are represented as ovals totally for convenience; no implication should be drawn that expansion of one sphere necessarily implies *equal* contraction of each of the other spheres. For example, shifting the boundary between markets and government in dealing with, say, the environment, would not necessarily impact communities very much (though it might).

So we have a model of social reality (social space) made up of three spheres in tension with each other, an expansion of one implying a reduction of (at least *one* of) the others. Beyond the minimal core-area of each sphere, its size may be influenced by many factors, including government-decision (i.e., political evaluation), which may

be based upon persuasion and ideological commitment (moral or communitarian evaluation), which may in turn be based upon the perceived efficiency of one or another sphere in dealing with any particular function or type of situation (an economic or “meta-economic” evaluation). Presumably the (perceived) efficiency of social-space allocations among the three spheres can be influenced by technology, not only physical but also information-technology and even (or perhaps especially) social (or organizational) technology – perhaps even “psychological technology”.¹¹

So this is clearly not a “deterministic” model in which one can plug in starting values and have *certain* (or even stochastic) results fall out. Instead it is a “moral model”, for the same reason that economics was originally called a “moral science”. Within limits, the outcome depends on human choice and will, in evaluating uncertain information about various technologies and the meta-economic efficiency of various sphere-assignments (including, for example, possible differences in the relative evaluation of public, private, and social goods – just as individuals might choose different consumption-bundles because of differing preferences).¹²

In the long-run, meta-economic evaluation of efficiency – taking into account needs and desires for public, private, and social goods – may thus assign some particular situations or functions to the political sphere, others to the market sphere, and may leave (or return) others to the community sphere. Without perfect information, real (non-probabilistic) uncertainty about the future means that historical experiments will probably be required, however, to discover what is truly most meta-economically efficient at any given time and place (*a priori* deductive speculation – not to mention revelation appropriate to far different times and places – can go only so far). And with all types of technology continually changing, there may be no *lasting* long-run equilibrium-allocation of social-space at all (no “end of history”), but rather continuing moral and political struggle, and continuing change.¹³

Historical allocation of social space to the three spheres

All social functions and situations seem to have originally been in the community sphere, which was thus the original primordial “default setting” for society. Under the influences just mentioned, some functions and situations gradually became open to overt political and economic evaluation, then coalesced into separate spheres which hived-off from the all-embracing community sphere (governments first, markets later). In terms of the model (though it’s not essential for any results here), we can perhaps imagine this as total social space *expanding* to allow for more explicit and comprehensive governments and markets. The overall assignment-mechanism probably long remained essentially communitarian (i.e., morality and tradition), albeit

¹¹ Thus, for example, advertising can contribute to the commodification and commercialization of many aspects of life formerly reserved to communities (Heilbroner, 1985:118).

¹² Thus, for example, the first great historical task of economics, in the time of Adam Smith’s (1776/1996) *Wealth of Nations*, was to help in the intellectual and moral (ideological, communitarian) debate – as well as in the political struggle – to push back the political sphere (and the community sphere too) in order to create more space for markets (and thereby more wealth). And clearly this struggle over proper sphere-boundaries continues, reflected for example in the concern with “family values” in U.S. political debate (i.e., concern for maintaining the integrity of communities, and for the best ways to use governments and markets to support them).

¹³ Thus this is not an equilibrium system, but – like markets themselves – is more likely a self-organized critical system (Bak, 1997) in which “avalanches” of all intensities and durations can occur.

with some perception of meta-economic efficiency underlying it, reflected also in some political debate.

Plumb (1972/88) argues that we're now at the "end of an epoch" – specifically the Neolithic epoch. Our basic social structures – family, religion, government, schools, cities – have lasted since the development of agriculture and civilization 5,000-10,000 years ago. But recent changes in technology – driven by and reflected in markets – have called those basic social structures into question. We're at the point where social organization has become largely conscious (or, put another way, where the proper sphere for almost all situations and functions has come into question), so that we feel the possibility (or necessity) of deciding for ourselves – which is both exhilarating and scary. As Mishan (1967/93) points out, there are "costs of economic growth" far beyond the simple opportunity-costs involved in market-choices, affecting both our physical and our social environment, for example. Given the repeated attempts in recent history to return to an earlier age of certainty (under Nazis, Communists, and now Islamic Fundamentalists), the similar current attempt of market-fundamentalists is not surprising, though undoubtedly equally doomed.¹⁴

The effect of economic behavior on the social sphere of communities

Markets are clearly central to modern societies, and their effects on communities in particular have been widely recognized for centuries, at least by market-skeptics (including, most recently, feminist economists, and Putnam, 1995, 2000; see also Mishan, 1967/93; Plumb, 1972/88; Bell, 1976; and Etzioni, 1988), but the nature of the interaction has not been widely understood. Using RMs inappropriately (i.e., for transactions which don't "properly" belong to that sphere, whether in the core or simply by settled tradition) tends to cause cognitive and emotional dissonance which can undermine the sphere in question – causing it, in terms of the model above, to shrink back towards (or even into) its core. Fiske (1997) discusses this issue in detail, summed up in his statement "to compare is to destroy" (when comparison is inappropriate). Of course comparison may be appropriate, for example if technologies (of any or all sorts) have changed so that a corresponding change in the balance between the spheres will be meta-economically efficient. But paradoxically, even acknowledging that fact may tend to undermine communities inappropriately as well – at least if the full relationship between the spheres is not explored and understood.

Seeing *everything* as markets – that is, using MP exclusively in social analysis ("economics imperialism", *à la* Becker, 1976, or Iannaccone, 1998) – can undermine the practice of CS and EM on which communities and the production of social goods depend (Marwell & Ames, 1981; Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993). Since governments and firms are also communities which depend on those RMs at least in some aspects – e.g., via social capital (Platteau, 2000) – it can even undermine production of public and private goods. Understanding the importance of *markets* and *private goods* for modern societies thus also implies understanding the importance of *communities* and *social goods*, the interactions between the three fundamental spheres of society, and the inherent limits of markets.

¹⁴ As Mishan (1986:283) says, anyone who believes in optimization understands that there can be too little or too much. It's up to us to seek the ever-changing balance between the three social spheres which is most appropriate for our own time and place.

Appendix A: Communities and social goods defined

Just as the characteristic political institution is governments, and the characteristic economic institution is markets,¹⁵ the characteristic *social* institution is *communities*, by which I mean *groups of people with which individuals self-identify, based on kinship, location, or belief*.¹⁶ Thus for example families and ethnic groups are communities based on kinship; while villages, neighborhoods, and cities are communities based on location; and religious or political groups are communities based on belief (or ideology).¹⁷

Neoclassical economics (especially development economics) recognizes communities as sources of social capital *as an input into the production of private or public goods*, but to understand communities themselves we must understand their *directly-social* reason for being (Wicks, 2005). Of course some economic production (e.g., food and shelter) and some political production (some level of social order) are necessary for survival. But communities also provide *directly* (not indirectly, via social capital) something even more emotionally and psychologically fundamental, which – analogously to private goods and public goods – I call *social goods*.¹⁸ Communities produce¹⁹ a sense of identity (used above, in fact, to *define* communities), and with it a sense of meaning and purpose; also feelings of kindness, companionship, and love; even the sense of affirmation, social recognition, and power that may accompany entrepreneurship or government. Social cohesion and stability are social goods. Needs for belonging, esteem, self-expression, and even

¹⁵ Firms (private enterprises), on the other hand, are essentially treated as single individuals in basic economic theory, i.e., as political (top-down) organizations, not as markets (nor as communities). Principal-agent theory attempts to open up this “black box” of the firm through the marketing of employer-employee contracts.

¹⁶ In his classic study *The Quest for Community*, sociologist Robert A. Nisbet (1953/70) wrote about “the primary associative areas of society” (p. 47), for example “the family, neighborhood, and church” (p. 49), “based on kinship, faith, [and] locality” (p. 54). More abstractly than Nisbet, Daniel A. Bell (1993:14, 118, 170) defines three types of “constitutive communities”: *psychological* (where we experience trust, cooperation, and altruism in face-to-face interactions, including Nisbet’s “kinship”); those of *place* (geography, Nisbet’s “locality”); and those of *memory* (strangers with whom one shares a “morally significant” history, like Nisbet’s “faith”). Besides families, *face-to-face* communities could include church groups, small towns, work units, long-lasting civic associations, etc. *Geographic* communities are the places where we were born and grew up, went to or go to school, live and work now, etc. Communities with a *morally significant history* are, for example, linguistic, national, and religious groups, as well as “interest groups” of any kind. Of course there is overlap in the definitions. And among other things, these “Tocquevillian intermediate structures” (p.174) help to restrain the centralized state, creating a bulwark against Hobbesian mass society, a point which Nisbet also emphasized. Etzioni and Etzioni (1999:241) describe communities as having two attributes: *bonding* (“a web of affect-laden relationships that encompasses a group of individuals – relationships that crisscross and reinforce one another, rather than simply a chain of one-on-one relationships); and *culture* (commitment to a set of shared values, mores, meanings, and a shared historical identity). These characteristics would seem to apply to all the other descriptions above as well.

¹⁷ Of course a single community could represent all three aspects, as for example a tribe or ethnic group living in a common area and professing a common religion. And in fact – since communities consist of individuals who *identify* themselves with that community – belief or ideology plays a role in all three types: We have to believe in the importance of our kinship, or recognize the importance of our common location, for those factors to be a basis for community. For example, if – or as – we come to see the human race as one, based on either kinship or common location (or both), then those beliefs or ideas may generate a “world community”. The mere fact of kinship and common location have heretofore not been enough.

¹⁸ See footnote 2 above.

¹⁹ Or *facilitate* the production of, in individuals.

for intellectual and esthetic satisfaction also seem to express preferences for social goods.²⁰

It's clear that these social goods have *not* been included in economic theory under public goods, because some social goods (for example love and friendship) are private (though non-marketable). In fact, a *distinguishing characteristic of social goods would seem to be their inherent non-marketability*, not because of non-excludability and resulting property-rights problems, but simply because they disappear – i.e., their character and value are changed unrecognizably – if one attempts to market them.²¹

Economic and *political* institutions may *also* be communities, insofar as people identify with them and they produce social goods. Firms and government agencies undoubtedly provide a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose for many of their employees, and can facilitate the production of kindness, companionship, and love among them, though these are not their primary reasons for being.

²⁰ If the preferences of entrepreneurs – who are also consumers – include such social goods, then it seems we must unpack the whole notion of “profit” and what motivates entrepreneurs in the first place. It seems unlikely that Bill Gates, for example, is motivated to earn more profits solely in order to purchase more in the market. Nisbet (1953/70) talked about “the small social and local groups within which the cravings for [the social goods of] psychological security and identification [can] be satisfied” (p. 53); “the kind of social groups which create a sense of belonging, which supply incentive, and which confer... a sense of status [all social goods]” (p. 71); “the small areas of association within which... values and purposes [social goods] can take on clear meaning in personal life and become the vital roots of the larger culture...” (p. 70). He considered “the primary types of identification [a social good]” to be affection, friendship, prestige, and recognition (p. 50), while “the principle incentives” learned through identification in “the small, primary, personal relationships of society” (p. 49) are work, love, prayer, and devotion to freedom and order (p. 50). According to Nisbet, “key words of community” (p. 23) are integration, status, membership, hierarchy, symbol, norm, identification, and group. Nisbet further explains (p. 50): “This is the area of association from which the individual commonly gains his [sic] concept of the outer world and his sense of position in it. His concrete feelings of status and role, of protection and freedom, his differentiation between good and bad, between order and disorder and guilt and innocence, arise and are shaped largely by his relations within this realm of primary association... What was once called... the social nature of man [i.e., social goods, as well as social capital] is but the product of this sphere...” In *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (1993), Daniel A. Bell associates the social sphere (pp. 7-8) with such social goods as community spirit, friendship, and traditional identity. Other references: sense of identity (Buchanan, 1978:366; Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Cowen, 2002:131,136); meaning and purpose (Iannaccone, 1998:1480-81); love and companionship (Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 2000; Lane, 2000); sense of affirmation, recognition, and power (Trigilia, 2002:43); social cohesion and stability (Seabright, 2004); need for belonging, esteem, self-expression, intellectual and esthetic satisfaction (Maslow, 1954; see also Wallach & Wallach, 1983:130-2, and Wilson, 1991:242).

²¹ This is not to deny that some social goods may exhibit non-excludability or non-rivalrousness. Some, but certainly not most, are even providable by government, and many more – e.g., the “mutual sympathy and consideration among citizens” that Dasgupta (1993:106) refers to – may have positive (or negative) externalities, and to that extent may be also considered public goods (or bads).

Appendix B: The three spheres in common usage and uncommon analysis

In both popular and technical literature, one can find the three-sphere taxonomy used here almost everywhere. In fact it can be quite a fun game, like “hit the mole”.²² Where and how will the three social spheres be represented in this or that text? And, given any set of three social attributes, can they be seen in some way as representing the three spheres?

Mackey (2002:384) refers to “economic, political, and social problems” (in Saddam’s Iraq); elsewhere (p. 181) to “the new political, social, and economic paradigm”; yet elsewhere (p. 49) she notes that something “meant more socially, politically, and economically”. The order doesn’t seem to matter, and one can easily find the other three permutations as well (e.g., Friedman 1999/2000:131; Giddens & Pierson, 1998:89; Sage, 2003).

The New York Times’ Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Thomas Friedman (1999/2000:202) uses the three-sphere social taxonomy analytically when he describes “corporate-led coalitions to create commercial value...; government-led coalitions to create geopolitical value...; [and] activist-led coalitions to create, or preserve, human values – such as worker rights, human rights, or environmental preservation.”

Friedland and Alford (1991) refer to three domains with different “logics of action”: In the marketplace, we are more likely to base our actions on individual utility and efficient means; in the polity, on democracy and justice; and in the family, on mutual support. Irene van Staveren (2001:24) asserts that “three values appear time and again in economic analysis: liberty, justice, and care. Markets tend to express freedom, states to express justice, and unpaid labor to express care among human beings.” She notes (p. 213) that C. E. Ayres (1961:170) asserted a similar set: “freedom, equality, and security as the core human values”. Waterman (1986:123) also asserts “three freedoms: economic, political, and religious (conscience)”. And Hobson (1938/1976:52) refers to “the democratic triad of liberty, equality, fraternity”. Van Staveren (p. 203) also notes the *form* that these values take: exchange, redistribution, and giving; the *locations* where they operate: market, state, and the care-economy; and the corresponding virtues: prudence, propriety, and benevolence. She further asserts that there are “distinct emotions and forms of deliberation as well”. Finally (p. 207) she asks about policy implications: “What value should development aid seek to further? [economic] self-reliance? [political] rights? or [caring, social] emergency aid?”

As these examples illustrate, a variety of words can be, and often are, used to refer to the three spheres, as when Mackey (2002:217) discusses “political, economic, and... cultural control”; Samuel Bowles (1998:105) refers to “states, communities, and markets...”; Wright (2000:211) refers to “governance, moral codes, and markets”; Marcel Mauss, in his classic *The Gift* (1925/67:52), refers to the “law, morality, and economy of the Latins” and to “the distinction between ritual, law, and economic interest”; and in the title of the book *Mexico: Catholicism, Capitalism, and the State* (cited by Bennett, 1985).

The three-sphere taxonomy has been used for at least a century. In his book of sermons titled *Is Christianity Practical?* (1885), economist Philip H. Wicksteed referred to “business, politics, and the pulpit” (referenced in Steedman, 1994:83). In

²² Analogy courtesy of Hertzberg (2004).

discussing Wicksteed's work, Steedman (p. 99) also refers to "potatoes, politics, and prayer". Similarly, J. A. Hobson (1938/1976:55) referred to "the purse, power, and prestige of the ruling classes in business, politics, and society". "Success" itself is often defined as "wealth, fame, and power" (noted by Boogle, 2004).

According to Trotsky (1957:255), communism would demonstrate that the human race had "ceased to crawl on all fours before God, kings, and capital" (quoted by Minowitz, 1993:240). Minowitz uses the same three-sphere taxonomy twice (in varying order) in his title: "Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion".

Father George Zabelka – who was the military chaplain for the crew that atom-bombed Hiroshima, to his later regret – noted how at the time "the whole structure of the secular, religious, and military society" made it seem right (cited by Myers, 2000:283).

One can interpret the three Buddhist "sins" – often referred to as greed, hate, and delusion – as related to the three spheres (or to their primary underlying principles). Greed can clearly relate to the profits of the market sphere, and hate (or anger) to the sphere of politics, war, and power. Delusion may be harder, but it is usually understood as "delusion of self", which clearly has something to do with identity, and thus relates to the social sphere.

The same taxonomy is also used in at least some non-English languages. For example, a Swedish call-for-papers (Nordisk konferens i idéhistoria och vetenskapshistoria, 2003) points out that "krig, mission och köpenskap hänger ofta nära samman" (war, evangelism, and trade often go together). And an advertisement for a book put out by Liber Ekonomi (Liber AB) says that one of its purposes is to show how basic concepts can be used for analyzing "sociala, politiska och ekonomiska problem". Knut Wicksell's (1909) book "Tronen, Altaret, Svärdet och Pänningpåsen" (The Throne, Altar, Sword, and Purse) included two aspects of the government sphere.

Another variation is expressed in the title of a paper presented by David F. Ruccio at a recent conference: "Socialism, Community, and Democracy: A postmodern Marxian vision of (post-)capitalism". Here democracy presumably refers to a mode of political organization, and socialism to a mode of economic organization. As Schumpeter (1943/76) notes, however, socialism's "motivation is at least equally 'non-economic', i.e., *social*, based on concern for community (human) values perceived as violated under capitalism." So Ruccio may have – perhaps intentionally – left markets out of his analysis.

A more market-friendly (but still critical) voice using the three-sphere taxonomy is Alan Greenspan (2000); the former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman (and thus an agent of the political sphere, government) said: "While recognizing the efficacy of capitalism to produce wealth, there remains considerable unease among some segments... about the effects of raw competition on society." It's not clear here *which* particular effects on society those "segments" might be concerned about – religion, culture, morality, or perhaps communities themselves – but it's clear that he's referring to this social sphere.

With all this evidence of the three-fold taxonomy of social spheres, it's not surprising that there are three basic academic social sciences, typically reflected in university departments of political science, economics, and sociology (Steuer, 2003).²³

This has been a small, rather arbitrary (almost random) sampling, but let's review what we've seen (Table 1), which can be symbolized by "Lady Liberty, Joan of Arc, and Mother Teresa" (van Staveren, 2001:208).

²³ Steuer actually also identifies psychology (or social-psychology) and anthropology as basic social sciences. But while individuals certainly only exist in a social context, psychology deals with them primarily *as individuals*, and social psychology deals with individuals as they're affected by the three *social* spheres. So for present purposes – since our concern is more broadly social – we can leave out psychology and social psychology. And according to Steuer, anthropology doesn't have an object of its own, but rather engages in the in-depth, personal, empathic study of distinct social groups, communities, or small cultures – including their political and economic aspects, of course. So, since we're looking into the social spheres themselves, we can leave out anthropology, which might be thought of as considering the details and relationships of those spheres across cultures. This is not to say that psychology and social psychology, or anthropology, have nothing to tell us even in this context, merely that their defining characteristics don't identify additional social spheres. Thus we're left with economics, political science, and sociology. As we are seeing, these three seem to represent quite well the way many scholars categorize – and theorize about – the social system. I haven't used the term "society" as the name of the third sphere and the object of sociology because, as noted above and as we'll discuss further below, economics and politics are of course also aspects of society, taken in a larger sense. Thus for example Emmett (1994:108) quotes Knight and Merriam (1947) referring to "business and politics and *other* social relations". But an alternative – in fact a long-discussed goal of some – could be for sociology to be considered the overarching social science, with economics and political science as particular specialties focussed on particular sub-spheres.

Table 1: Aspects of the three social spheres

spheres	politics, governance	economics	social, communities
sectors	government, war	business, commerce	morality, religion, culture
institutions	state, law	markets	unpaid labor, care-economy
“societies”	military	secular	religious
actors	governments	firms, corporations	activists
“movements”	nationalism	capitalism, socialism	Catholicism, Islamism, etc.
success	power	wealth	fame, prestige
logics of action	utility, efficiency	democracy, justice	mutual support
form	redistribution	exchange, trade	giving, aid, evangelism, ritual
values	geopolitical	commercial	human
values	justice, equality, rights	liberty, freedom	fraternity, care, security
freedoms	political	economic	religious (conscience)
virtues	propriety	prudence, self-reliance	benevolence
“sins”	hate, anger	greed	delusion
“oppressive powers”	kings, princes	capital, profits	God, priests
adjectives*	political	economic	social/sociological
<i>* modifying: problems, paradigms, reasons, conditions, reality</i>			
adverbs	politically	economically	socially
social sciences	political science	economics	sociology
symbols	throne, sword	purse, potatoes	pulpit, altar, prayer
symbols	Joan of Arc	Lady Liberty	Mother Teresa

It's obvious that we have some variation in the ideas expressed. For example, while the connection might not be immediately obvious, war is related to politics and statecraft in the famous expression of Clausewitz that “war is the continuation of diplomacy by other means”. Economics needn't only deal with capitalism and corporations, but could conceivably – at least in its “provisioning” aspect – deal with *potatoes* regardless of whether they're produced for markets or not. And together with “society” we've identified communities, activists, and various aspects of religion, so we might want to explore further what (if anything) unites them into a single “sphere”. (Appendix A defines communities and social goods and thus the *social sphere* as used in this paper).

Anthony Shadid (2001:38) adds some further richness to our picture of the social sphere of communities when he quotes Eid, his local trashman in Cairo, referring to “morals, principles, values, and traditions... the Egyptian way of life”. With some ambiguity, but mostly also clearly in the social sphere, Irene van Staveren (2001:76) describes the work of Margaret Reid at Chicago in the early 1900s on “home economics”, about “the care-economy of domestic labor, childcare, community work, and subsistence agriculture”. Further (p. 79), she notes that “unpaid production avoids transaction costs, is more personal (companionship, sympathy), and avoids insecurity.” From about the same period, she also discusses (pp. 84-6) “virtues learned in the home: love, sympathy, courtesy, truth, honesty, accuracy, courage, strength, wisdom, justice, humility, self-control, endurance, chastity, and honor” (quoted from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home*, 1903:164).

The three social spheres seem fundamental and exhaustive

Casual scanning of a variety of sources reveals further evidence of an apparently widespread belief that the three spheres just described are both fundamental and exhaustive. For example, Michael Novak refers to the “three mutually autonomous institutions: the state, economic institutions, and cultural, religious institutions” as “the doctrine of the trinity in democratic capitalism” (Abdul-Rauf 1986b:175; also Neuhaus 1986:517).

Michael Polanyi (1997:158) describes the Russian Revolution and the Soviets’ “projects for a new economic, political, and social system of mankind”.

Pope John Paul II also thought comprehensively, referring for example in his Opening Address to the Puebla Bishops Conference (cited by Gutierrez, 1983:133) to “the product of economic, social, and political situations and structures”.

Meyer et al. (1992:12) asserted that “individuals must acquire the means to participate effectively in the economic, social, and political life of the nation – this represents the standard modern desideratum.” In the same work, Suk-Ying Wong (1992:135) first refers to “business, political, and cultural interests...” and then (p. 141) makes it clear that these three spheres are considered exhaustive by referring (*italics added*) to “*all social domains..., economy..., polity..., and... cultural system*”. Wong (p. 142) also refers to “the larger society in which religious and associational participation over and above narrowly political and economic roles is a central desideratum”.

Similarly, Anthony Shadid (2001:3, *italics added*) makes the point that “political Islam, or Islamism...suggests an *all-embracing* approach to economics, politics, and social life.”

Partha Dasgupta (1993:104, *italics added*) provides a thorough analysis of “the agency view of government in contractual theories of the State” with

“one overarching idea, that of citizenship, with its three constituent spheres: the *civil*, the *political*, and the *socio-economic*. ...the civil element of citizenship consists of the rights essential for basic liberties. It consists of the right to justice. Civil society is the sphere of autonomous institutions [i.e., communities], protected by the rule of law... [B]y the political element we mean the right of a person to participate in the exercise of political power... [B]y the socio-economic element we mean a range that encompasses the right to a certain share of resources, the right to share to the full in the social heritage, and to live the life of a civilized being commensurate with the standards prevailing... ... The courts of justice; parliaments, and the councils of local government; and the educational system and the social services are, respectively, the protectors and promoters of these three sets of rights.”

Andrew M. Yuengert (1999:46) discusses “a mixed economy: free markets circumscribed within a tight legal framework, and operating within a humane culture”. Similarly, Michael Polanyi (1997:140, *italics added*), in discussing “cultural and economic life”, refers to “freedom under law *and custom*, as laid down and amended when necessary by the State *and public opinion*”.

Other logical underpinnings of the three spheres of society²⁴

The three spheres thus seem fundamental and exhaustive, but why? Kenneth Boulding (1978, 1985, 1990; also Boulding et al., 1980) described three organizing principles, the three means by which resources or products (including services, perhaps even time and energy in the form of human love and attention) can be transferred: gift due to love (or some sense of identification); seizure by force (or threat); or mutual exchange. Try it with your hand, while saying: “I can give to you; I can take from you; or we can trade.” There is a certain logic, which seems to cover the territory.

Economics typically deals with mutual exchange: You do this for me, and I’ll do that for you. This behavior is of course not confined to markets. Its analysis has often been used more generally, such as in the attempt to explain voting – i.e., in the political sphere (“public choice”) – but also, for example, in the attempt (*à la* Becker) to explain such basic social behavior as the choice to marry and have children.

However, mutual exchange does not exhaust the possibilities for transfer of resources. Even when economics tries to explain political decisions (e.g., to tax or to regulate) in terms of benefit/cost analysis by voters, the sphere of naked power must still be recognized (do this, *or else*; i.e., threat). It is this very possibility of compulsion that makes it possible for public-goods provision to escape the free-rider problem. Force and threat also seem to be reflected in some *internal* behavior in a firm: Do this or lose your job; or, do this or we’ll strike.

And beyond that there is the social sphere of communities of various kinds, in which we do for (or give to) others because we identify with them in some sense and to some degree. This is not necessarily a sphere of pure altruism – in which we value only the welfare of others – but rather we may do things for the good of “everybody”, for the community of which we see ourselves as a part. Then again, to the extent that behavior *is* “altruistic”, it may be quite selective, helping our family and friends, while hurting our foes.

In any given situation, more than one of Boulding’s organizing principles may play a role. Tax payments and compliance with regulations would probably fall off considerably without some threat – occasionally carried out – to back them up, but government also requires some degree of legitimacy based on identification of the ruled with their rulers (perhaps brought about through democratic processes). Markets also require social legitimacy in order to operate properly. But such analytical “confusion” need not disturb us. Purity or its lack is not our concern, merely to establish the existence and importance of the social sphere, alongside the more commonly-recognized political and economic spheres.

In the social sphere, the most fundamental of human communities – the family – would seem to be clearly based on the first of Boulding’s organizing principles, love or identity. That is, people do not get married and then have and raise children as a “firm” with primary focus on producing products for profit through exchange. Deirdre McCloskey (1998:302) comments: “I get utility because I love, not the other way around.”

Nor do the relationships involved seem to be primarily based on force or threat. When I provide food for my child, it’s because I love and identify with that child as

²⁴ Besides Fiske’s (1991) relational models discussed in the main body of the paper, and those implied in the foregoing.

though she or he were me. And if we choose to do fun things together – i.e., we make the work/leisure/family choice in favor of family – it is because we identify ourselves as such. This is not to deny that there may be some exchange-aspects to the activity, for example that I may hope that my children will take (good) care of me when I am old. But even granting this, the full phenomenon of families and the propagation of life in communities would seem to need more explanation. Any “bequest motive” recognizes this.

Similar to Boulding’s three organizing principles, Jane Jacobs (2000:27, italics added) notes that “time and again, human groups must have differentiated *trading* [the economic sphere] from both *sharing* [the social sphere] and *seizing* [the political sphere]”. She explains:

“Possibly the very oldest economic generality is the practice of sharing... Old English had a verb meaning ‘to give’ [and a phrase] meaning ‘to trade’, which meant, literally, ‘to give with worth’ – that is, to give for a price. Our word *sell* comes from... that phrase for trading”.²⁵

The communitarian sociologist Amitai Etzioni (founder of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics) similarly speaks (1996:122) of “three different conditions: paid, coerced, or convinced”, clearly referring to the economic, political, and social spheres.

Personalist economics (based at least loosely on Catholic theology) also recognizes three basic organizing principles of human life: competition, intervention, and cooperation (Jonish & Terry, 1999:465-6; O’Boyle, 1999:536-7).

Albert Hirschman (1986/92) referred to three different mechanisms: exit, voice, and loyalty. Though all three apply in varying ways to each sphere, *exit* refers primarily to the market sphere where, in a competitive situation, one has unlimited choice of buyers or sellers, so can “exit” from any one. *Voice* refers primarily to the political sphere, where one can attempt to influence results by persuasion. And loyalty of course refers primarily to the social sphere of communities.

Mary Douglas & Steven Ney (1998:100-02) offer another analytic way of understanding these categories, how they relate to each other, and why they can be considered exhaustive. The analysis is actually expressed in terms of *four* different types of “agents”, but it’s easy to see that *three* of the types also represent *aspects of society* in which we all participate.²⁶

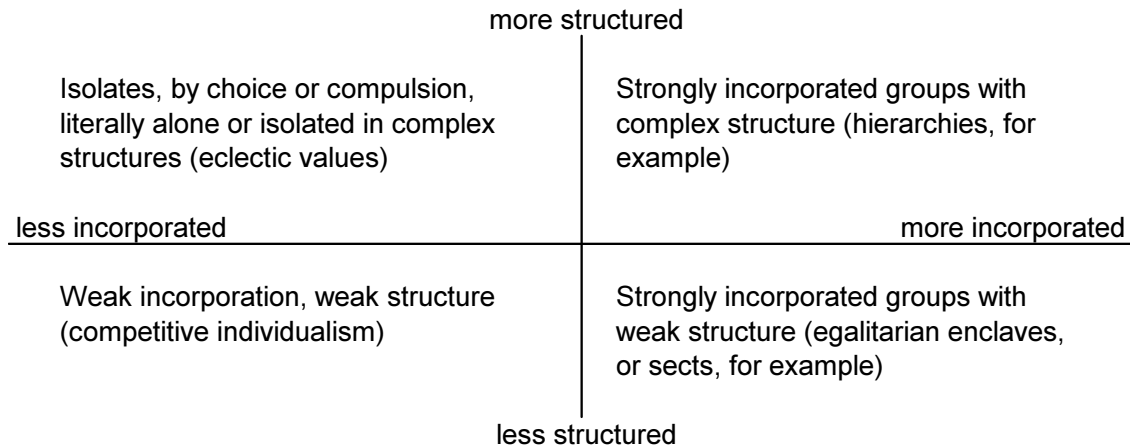
Douglas & Ney graph the degree of incorporation horizontally and the degree of structure vertically, resulting in the four categories shown in Figure 2. Douglas & Ney (p. 102) themselves characterize the lower-left quadrant as the home of pioneers showing individual initiative; the upper-right quadrant as a sphere of tradition and order, home of bureaucrats; and the lower-right quadrant as the religious sphere of holy men and protests. But we can easily recognize the type in the lower left-hand corner (competitive individualism) as corresponding to our market/economics sphere, while the upper right-hand corner (hierarchies) clearly corresponds to the political/military sphere. The lower right-hand corner (egalitarian enclaves, or sects) then corresponds to the social sphere of communities and religion. The fourth of Douglas & Ney’s types (the upper-left quadrant, isolates) by definition doesn’t

²⁵ The reference to Old English comes from Claiborne (1983:80).

²⁶ Douglas and Ney suggest that one could conceivably divide up society into an indefinite number of types, but that four is useful and often sufficient.

correspond to a *social* sphere, but rather to isolated individuals, probably at the mercy of those primarily engaged in one or another of the social spheres (although possibly also influencing one or another of those spheres, as artists do). Thus Douglas & Ney note (p. 104) that “inevitably, the culture of the isolates is crowded out of the forum, because by definition it is not organized.” They also note that “the adversary relationship of the other three is the essence of democracy.”

Figure 2: Douglas & Ney’s “cultural map”



Source: Adapted from Douglas & Ney (1998), p. 101.

Gudeman (1986:32) points out another very similar four-way classification when he refers to “Polanyi’s reciprocity, redistribution, and market-haggling – plus autarchy”.²⁷ Polanyi (1944/68:57,68) also refers to spheres of “market, authority, and gift-giving” (cited by van Staveren, 2001:62; see also Smelser & Swedberg, 1994:15, regarding exchange, redistribution, and a sense of reciprocal obligation).

There are also a variety of other logical or natural relationships among the three spheres. For example, A. B. Cramp (1994:189) notes that

“hermeneutical reading of the Bible yields [in economics] the idea of human stewardship or trusteeship of resources provided by God for purposes (ends) ordained by God. In political matters, justice. In matters of extended family and (small) social groups the norm of truth (loyalty). The norms of the different spheres fit together in the simultaneous realization of cultural mandates: People are workers but also citizens, and they belong to family and other social groupings.”

In summary then, the three spheres of governments, markets, and communities seem to be fundamental and exhaustive of social space and to have multiple logical underpinnings.

²⁷ Elsewhere I believe that Douglas also categorizes the three *social* spheres in terms of 1) exchange (markets); 2) vertical (hierarchy, political); and 3) inside/outside (i.e., identity, communities).

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