

From Communal Norms to Networks*

(从社群规范到社会网络)

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Conscious concern with trust and trustworthiness seems to be a late development in civilization. It appears to come in with the move from organizing society in small communities to organizing it in larger units, such as cities. In small communities, cooperative behavior is substantially regulated by communal norms. In larger communities, especially when these are economically differentiated through extensive division of labor, individuals increasingly rely on networks of people for specific realms of activity and for specific purposes. Networks are particularly important when we need to exchange or otherwise deal with very different kinds of people for different purposes. Such networks are less relevant in very small communities, because in such communities everyone is connected to everyone else.

When we move from communal organization to network organization of cooperation, we essentially switch from group-generalized exchange relations to specialized dyadic exchange relations. Our dyads can be chain connected into networks. Some recent commentaries on differences in social organization, as in Francis Fukuyama's (1995) comparisons of China, Japan, and the United States, treat many differences in economic organization as enduring cultural differences. The extraordinary rapidity of progress and change in China and in several other nations in recent decades belies any such view. Some of the supposedly culturally determined forms of economic organization may be much less a matter of such culture than of simple differences that derive from differing levels of development of network relationships. The latter are a function of the level of economic development. Patterns of interaction — from communal to network — may therefore be more nearly the result than the cause of economic development. To read a poor future for China from its close familial patterns of organization implies that European nations should never have turned the corner on economic development. It is advancing economic development with its increasingly refined division of labor that drives us apart in our daily lives. At the same time it connects us to far more people than we would typically ever have met at earlier stages of economic development when the economy is predominately communal, even autarkic and closed to the external world.

It is likely true, of course, that later developing societies may follow different paths of moving from communal to network organization just because their economic development is expedited in many ways, so that they leap-frog over various intermediate stages of development that earlier developing societies went through. Hence, they may have strong lingering elements of communal organization that is regulated by norms and generalized exchange (Yamagishi and Cook 1993) rather than by dyadic or network exchange. Residual norms may not be evidence of enduring cultural differences but only of jumbled patterns of adaptation to new conditions. They are genuinely residues. It is nevertheless possible that the path to development matters in the longer run because there may be path dependence. If we initially organize enterprises along family lines and these enterprises grow well beyond the bounds of family and community, we may then find that organizing them along more nearly open lines requires relatively radical changes.

Communal Norms

Norms can be exclusionary or universalistic (Hardin 1995, chapters 4 and 5).¹ Norms of exclusion are specific to a group or community or culture. In addition to defining a relevant behavior, they often define who is in and who is out of the group or community. Hence, if we violate our community's norms, our community might exclude us from active participation. If we value membership and participation in that community, we may see this exclusion as a severe sanction. Hence, we will have strong interest in abiding by our community's norms in order to avoid exclusion. This interest might be trumped by other interests, such as the prospect of obtaining a very good job that our community would frown on, especially if it is a job outside the community.

Universalistic norms typically are thought to apply to everyone or to everyone in a particular kind of role. Some universalistic norms cover dyadic or very small group interactions and others cover essentially collective interactions. For example, a more or less dyadic norm against lying typically covers interactions between two or very few people — although Presidents Nixon and Clinton apparently achieved the remarkable feat of lying to the entire American people and of being officially chastised by a few hundred of them. A collective norm against littering or polluting the air is typically not one that merely concerns our immediate associates but people throughout the larger society, including many whom we do not and will not ever know.

A striking fact about these classes of norms is that some of them are far more likely to be congruent with interests than are others. It is *prima facie* in our interest to abide by our community's norms of exclusion.² But we would typically also find it against our interest to violate the norm against lying because such a violation is likely to make those to whom we lie reluctant to rely on us in the future, to both our disadvantage and theirs. Again, this interest might occasionally be trumped by other interests that would give us incentive to lie. We would not, however, so immediately see it as in our interest not to litter. Indeed, what makes it against our interest to litter is primarily and maybe only the possibility of being sanctioned in some way for doing so. We might personally prefer not to litter for our own moral or fastidious reasons, but it might often not narrowly be in our interest to avoid littering. In general, universalistic collective norms are less likely to be backed by interests independent of sanctions than are

¹ This discussion is taken from Cook and Hardin (2001), where there is a much fuller presentation of the arguments.

² Fukuyama (1995, 33) says “culture is totally arational.” This is an absurd claim. Culture has to motivate people if it is of significance, and much of the motivation must be rational, as in the account here of sanctions for those who violate the cultural norms.

universalistic dyadic norms.

An extreme case of small community effects is to give misfits no place to feel at home in their own communities. Katherine Newman et al. (2004) attribute the mass killings over the past few years in high schools in Columbine (Colorado), Westside (Arkansas), and Heath (Kentucky), to the chilling uniformity and predictable stability that such communities effectively impose on their members. In such towns, networks overlap. Your current neighbors went to school with you, your child's teacher is in your church, and you coach the little league team for which your child's school mate plays. Any child who gets into trouble in one of these contexts will soon have a reputation in all of them.

In such a close community, there is no escaping very nearly complete knowledge of all your and your children's foibles. Any misfit is apt to feel trapped in their own well known personal misery. Most members of such communities might be quite happy with the communal norms and might readily join in enforcing them on others who do not fit the behavior required by those norms. In these American towns, the misfits were nerdy or were otherwise not a part of the sports culture that dominates the lives of boys growing up there. In the past such misfits might have killed only themselves; today, with guns readily accessible, they often take many others with them.

When the Amish, a fundamentalist religious community, of the upper Midwest in the United States have to decide whether to permit the use of a new technology, their bishops ask, "Does it bring us together, or draw us apart?" (Rheingold 1999). When a group of Scott's Malaysian peasants refuses to work at a low wage and the cultivator refuses a raise, no other group of villagers will take their place (Scott 1985, 259). There is an imposed mutuality of class solidarity through shunning, not helping, not informing of opportunities, etc. (261). The group acts from so-called moral economy. Moral economy includes a norm of exclusion among the peasants, who use shunning against their peers to enforce their collective stance against the landowner. It also includes a universalistic norm of fairness on the part of the landowner, who, on certain occasions, is expected to give gifts to the peasants who work their paddies.

Such moral economy is a special case of communal norms, well defined by self-interest. As E. P. Thompson (1971) chronicled for the rural English a few centuries past, a poor population might suppose that it is morally right that the price of bread remain constant through various changes in the supply of grain. Workers might also suppose that employment relations should remain fixed even in the face of changing technology. Despite a couple of decades of work on this topic, much of it by James Scott (1976, 1985, 1999) in his studies of mostly Asian societies, it is still unclear where we should stand on the judgment of Thompson's and Scott's peasants and others that they are being treated wrongly. In many cases they face merely swings in the production of wheat or other food crops that might be beyond anyone's responsibility because they are the result of variations in climate or blight. But sometimes they follow from massive economic transitions that supersede old ways of doing things and that relieve the next generations of the grim life of relative poverty. As Scott's peasants in Malaysia say of harvesting machines, "the machine eats work" (Scott 1985, 154). The poor blame the individual

well-to-do for their losses, for breaking norms of obligation to each other (168-9); they see their distress as primarily a result of human agency, therefore personal (181), because the landowners *choose* to use machines. The choice might be highly constrained, however, because an owner who does not adopt the machinery might soon be priced out of the market.

Economic transitions commonly require dramatic improvements if they are to overcome opposition. In particular, “at the margin of accustomed practices and routines, the prospective benefits to increased division of labor constitute a rather weak force” (Leijonhufvud 1995, 63). The introduction of the innovations that Scott discusses has lifted well over eighty percent of the populations of many nations out of the destitute poverty of subsistence farming, and still those innovations are commonly opposed, especially by the transitional generation of those who will lose immediately and perhaps for the rest of their lives from the changes.

The claim of moral economy is essentially that what has been is what should be, independently of economic forces or opportunities. With some variation this is also the core of the claim for communitarianism and for ethnic group preservation — independently of demographic and economic changes. Contrary to David Hume’s dictum that we cannot derive an ought from an is, those committed to moral economy and to communitarianism derive an ought from a was. Scott’s Malaysian peasants come to see annual gift-giving (*zakat*) from the landowner as not a gift but a right (Scott 1985, 193). In this commonplace move of seeing “what is” as morally right, regular gift-giving ceases to seem an act of free-will generosity when it is regularly expected. When expectations have stabilized at the level of the annual gift, not making the gift seems like a punishment or denial of rights. The move is not entirely wrong because one might suppose the gift-giving is a reward not merely for time in the paddies but for the quality of the work and for the loyalty of the workforce (306).

One account of the moral psychology of moral economy is that shame circumscribes behavior within the moral boundaries created by shared values (Scott 1985, 17). Still, it is hard to see exactly how peasants and millers, or peasants and landowners share relevant values for making the shaming of moral economy work against the more economically powerful party. Peasants react against the farmer on whose land they work or against the local miller who grinds wheat for their bread. The landowner and the miller need their respective peasants, but they seem clearly to have greater power.

In Richard Emerson and Karen Cook’s (Emerson 1962, 1964, 1972; Cook and Emerson 1978; Hardin 2002, 100-102; Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005, chapter 3) account of power, the peasants are individually more readily replaceable than the landowner or the miller and therefore they have less power. They are power dependent. Indeed, the landowner can do about as well if a few peasants are excluded from working for them.

Note that moral economy very likely requires close relationships. The moral economy is about interpersonal relationships in a community, not about general principles of justice for a whole society. Moral economy is a set of group-based norms,

some of which might be invented as “needed.” The poor in Scott’s account of rural Malaysia complain that part of the profit of a harvest now goes outside the village, even to Japan (for tractors) and, in an inventive move, they claim that this is immoral (Scott 1985, 183). But the profit is now much larger, even in their reckoning (55).

Networks of Exchange

The members of any particular network in an urban area are likely to be involved in many other networks that have relatively little overlap with each other. In a closer community, people in one network are less likely to give one entrée to other networks because there are few or no other networks that connect with the first. For example, in New York, meeting someone new often means entering one or more networks of which one previously was not a member. In Stanford, the networks are typically more nearly overlapping. Life in a very small, close community could be fully characterized without even mentioning networks, because all are connected to all on very nearly all issues that go beyond family.

In the language of comparative politics from the 1950s, the networks are cross-cutting. In close communities, the networks are typically more nearly overlapping or congruent even to the point of being identically one. Congruent cleavages make for group or community separatism and even hostility to out-groups. Cross-cutting networks are apt to lead to openness to others. The close community tends to be monoglot; the cross-cutting urban community tends to be pluralist. A community such as Stanford is somewhere between these two extremes.

How do the differences between close and open communities affect trust relations? The more intense involvements of the close community give one reputational information about virtually everyone in the community, information that covers many aspects of interaction. In an urban society, the lesser involvements in any given network yield reputational information only about a limited range of kinds of interaction and primarily within the network, not to people outside the network. That is apt to be sufficient for organizing interactions and cooperation because members of a loose network will likely interact only in limited ways and therefore will need or seek cooperation only over limited projects. In the urban context, an individual can trust others within a network to exhibit cooperativeness in the limited kinds of interactions they have but might not trust them outside that range of projects.

The Network Society

Much of the macro-sociological work on trust by numerous scholars, including Ulrich Beck (1992), Anthony Giddens (1990), Niklas Luhmann (1980), Adam Seligman (1997), and Pyotr Sztompka (1999, 39), has associated the rise of concern with trust in modern societies with a supposed increase in the importance and intrusiveness of risk in our lives. Because these scholars do not give us anything like measures of risk in earlier times and today, it is very hard to judge what they mean and whether they are right. They merely cite such modern risks as the environmental disasters that we might bring on

ourselves. The thesis of increasing risk in our lives, even if we count only those risks that others (and not nature) impose on us, is implausible on its face. In much of history, local communities were subject to the completely unannounced arrival of military hordes who descended upon them and summarily raped and murdered them and pillaged their lands. They were also subject to devastating diseases brought to them by visitors from other places. And they sometimes destroyed their own environments and thereby their civilization (Diamond 2005). In part for these reasons, their lives were much shorter and radically poorer than are the lives of people in the advanced industrial states that are supposed to fit the thesis of trust as a response to harsh risk. The supposition that things are much harder today is a variant of a golden age fallacy. It is an especially odd one in that it requires that things have got worse despite the apparent facts that we are doing remarkably better today and that our expectations are that we will continue to thrive.

The macro-sociological arguments are relatively crude in that they offer little sense of how our relationships with others have changed. They are merely loose speculative claims. What we need are analyses of how social relations (on which trust depends) have changed. Manuel Castells (1996, 469) argues persuasively that the historical trend of our time is that dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around networks. These networks “constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the discussion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture.” Our relationships with others are increasingly network relationships.

Among the things that technology and science have brought us are individual connections to vastly more people than anyone in earlier centuries could ever have had relations with. These vastly many people cannot be well known to us as the villagers of, say, medieval times knew the several dozen people in their village, who, for many of those villagers, would have been almost the only people they would ever have met or dealt with (Leijonhufvud 1995; Hardin 1999). This change means that we must constantly size new people up as a normal part of our dealings. Sizing them up means judging their likely trustworthiness in dealings with us. Of course there are risks in these dealings, but those risks are commonly small. The smaller they are, the less we need to worry about the trustworthiness of others. When the risks are very large, we want the backing of others and, especially, of institutions to enforce the cooperation we want. In an earlier time, we might have relied very heavily on our communal norms and their enforcement by all of us against any miscreant who behaved uncooperatively in certain contexts. But our lives have long since gone beyond such community.

Social Capital

One way to characterize much of the developmental analysis from communal norms to networks is as changes in the nature or structure of social capital. James Coleman defines social capital by its function: “It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors — whether persons or corporate actors — within the structure. Like other forms of capital and human capital, social

capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (Coleman 1988: S98; also see Coleman 1991: 302-304; for various other views, see Ostrom and Ahn 2003)

The earlier organization of society in small communities was a form of social capital that was useful and that can be replaced in its functions only by a somewhat costly transition from the one form of organization to another. Such a transition is costly because of the conservatism about change, as in the moral-economy view. The current generation, who are well adapted to roles defined by the society as it exists, often lose, as in many of the former Soviet states and in the transition toward capitalism in China. Social capital in this case can inhibit change as much as it can facilitate change, because its function is to facilitate cooperation, including cooperation that can be opposed to change (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005, chapter 5). Both the old and the potentially new form of organization facilitate cooperation, merely in different and perhaps largely conflicting ways. In the short term, sticking with an older, more developed form of social capital is beneficial, but in the long term it might retard or even block beneficial changes in economic organization, as for example through the claims of moral economy.

Contrary to many implicit claims for it, social capital has no valence, as Coleman rightly notes in the quote above. It enables us, and it can enable us to wreck our lives or those of others as well as it can enable us to prosper and to help others prosper. What once was a beneficial form of social capital in small, close communities can be a hindering and even harmful form under later conditions in urban societies. If future generations of Chinese, Malaysians, Indians, and many others are to prosper, they will have to escape the bonds of communal norms that elevate stasis to a normative principle. Those norms are suitable for an agricultural economy that is very nearly a subsistence economy, but not to a highly productive modern economy. These peoples will prosper from organizing their lives within vast numbers of diverse networks that enable them to tap into needed resources. In these changes, they will drastically remake the form of their social capital from static and often constraining communal norms to enriching networks.

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