

## THE TEN SPHERES OF SOCIAL LIFE

This paper argues that human social life unfolds in ten different 'spheres', each of which comprises a set of interlocking social relationships, institutions and cultures. These three elements are co-constitutive. No single element is more fundamental or more important than the others. A sphere of life is not a specific social institution but an aspect of life that can be present in a number of different social institutions. The paper will first present the background to the idea of spheres of life by examining the work of various writers and then present a summary of each of the ten spheres of life.

The idea of spheres of life was first proposed by Weber. He identified various 'life spheres' such as the economic, social, political, erotic, religious, intellectual and aesthetic. Others propose similar typologies. Alexander (2006) for example, identifies various spheres of life including the civil, economic, political, family, community and religious. Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) likewise identify six 'worlds of justification' or 'polities', namely, the industrial, market, civic, fame, domestic and inspired. Albert et al (1986) identify four different spheres of society, namely, the political, economic, kinship and community spheres. Friedland and Alford (1991) similarly identify five 'institutional logics' within modern society, namely, the bureaucratic state, capitalist market, democracy, nuclear family and religion. Macfarlane (2002) argues that human social life comprises four different spheres, namely, the polity, economy, kinship and community. Walzer (1983) identifies eleven different spheres of life, namely, political power, office, money and commodities, recognition, kinship, education, welfare, membership, divine grace, hard work and free time. Various writers then identify a number of different spheres of life such as the political, economic, religious, familial, religious and social.

This paper builds on the work of these writers. It identifies ten spheres of life, namely, predation, government, commerce, civil society, honour, paternalism, community, equality, spirituality and materiality. These spheres cross cut social institutions although some are more associated with certain institutions than with others. For example, government, commerce, paternalism and spirituality tend to be associated with the polity, economy, family and religion respectively.

In constructing this typology I have drawn upon the ideas of five writers in particular, namely, Mary Douglas, Alan Fiske, Max Weber, Pitirim Sorokin and Jonathan Haidt. From Douglas I have borrowed the idea that social life comprises two key dimensions which when overlaid crosswise yield a two by two table of 'ways of life'. These comprise a mixture of social relationships, organization and culture. Douglas drew on the work of Durkheim to argue that social regulation ('grid') and social integration ('group') comprise the two key dimensions of social life. These two dimensions give rise to four ways of life, namely, fatalism, individualism, hierarchy and egalitarianism. I have retained the idea that social integration or 'solidarity' is a key dimension of social life but instead of social regulation I propose that power or the extent of inequality/equality in social relationships is the second key dimension of social life. Kemper and Collins (1990) likewise argue that power and 'status' (which is the same as what I call solidarity) are the two key dimensions of social life. Many social psychologists have argued likewise (see Haidt 2006). The intersection of these two dimensions gives rise to four types of social relationship or 'social domains' which I have labelled coercion, contract, authority and fellowship (see diagram 1). These roughly equate to Douglas's fatalism, individualism, hierarchy and egalitarianism.

I have also drawn upon the ideas of Alan Fiske (1991). Fiske argues that we can identify four universal types of social relationship or 'relational models'. These are market pricing, authority ranking, communal sharing and equality matching. Fiske's typology resembles that of Douglas. Market pricing roughly corresponds to individualism, authority ranking to hierarchy and equality matching to egalitarianism. Fiske's market pricing corresponds to what I call 'commerce', authority ranking to both 'honour' and 'paternalism', communal sharing to 'community' and equality matching to 'equality'. I have also drawn upon Weber's typology of authority and idea of life spheres and upon the work of Sorokin. Sorokin argued that human social relationships could be classified into three types: compulsory, contractual and familistic. These correspond to what I call the domains of coercion, contract and authority/fellowship. He also contrasted ideational and sensate cultures. These correspond to what I call the spiritual and material spheres.

Finally I have drawn upon the ideas of Jonathan Haidt. He argues that human social life comprises three dimensions: power, solidarity and divinity. The last of these arises from the emotion of disgust and leads humans to distinguish a world of purity, spirituality and sanctity from a world of impurity, carnality and profanity. I argue that the dimension of divinity gives rise to the contrast between two social domains, the spiritual and the material. Haidt (2012) draws on the work of Fiske and Shweder to identify six 'moral foundations' namely, liberty, authority, care, loyalty, fairness and divinity. Table 1 indicates how the ideas of these various thinkers can be allocated within the six social domains and ten spheres of life that I have identified.

**Figure 1: Six domains of social life**

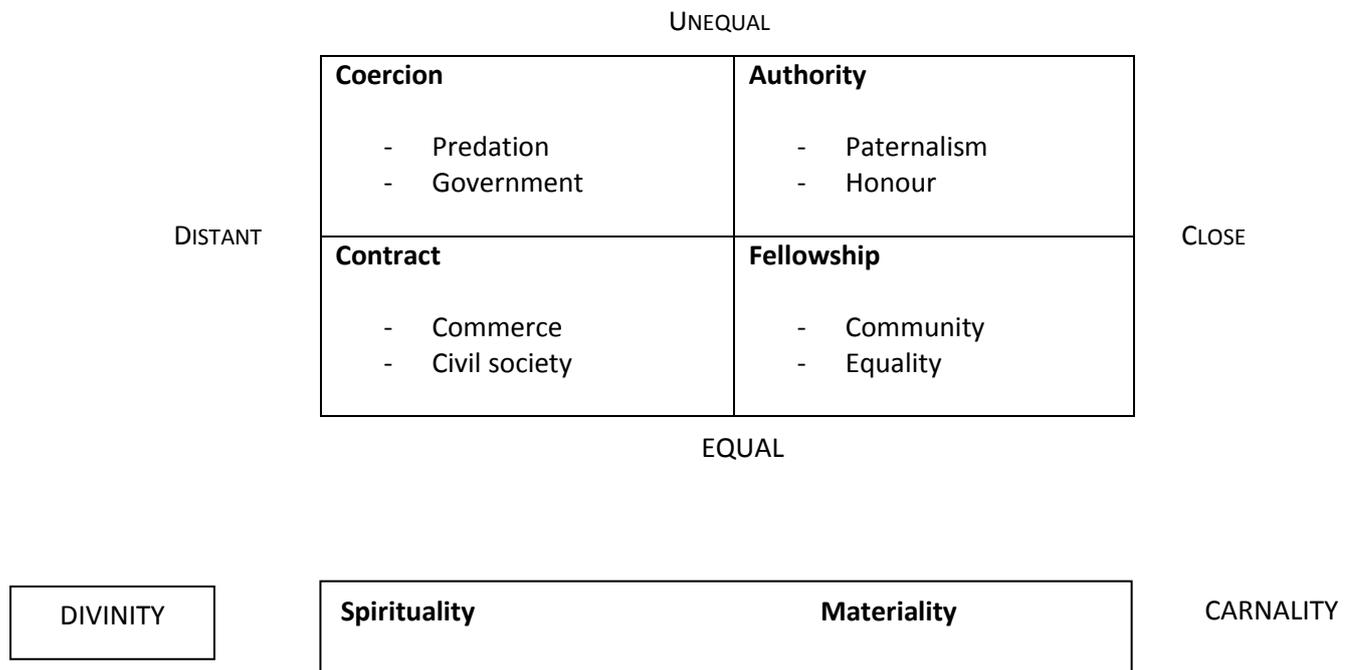


Figure 1 depicts six social domains that are generated by the three dimension of social life. The intersection of the dimensions of power and solidarity gives rise to four social domains while the dimension of divinity gives rise to only two. Divinity does not intersect with the other two domains

since it is not a mode of interpersonal relationship but a form of social cognition or moral appraisal that can be applied to social relationships.

There are three dimensions of social life depicted in figure 1: power, solidarity and divinity. 'Power' is the extent of asymmetry in social relationships while 'solidarity' is the extent to which people feel either close to or distant from others. This yields four categories of social relationships: equal-distant, equal-close, unequal-distant and unequal-close. The idea that social relationships may be located on the two dimensions of power and solidarity was advanced by Brown and Gilman (1960). Triandis (1995) similarly argues that social relationships can be classified on the basis of two dimensions: collectivist-individualist and vertical-horizontal. I call the collectivist-individualist dimension 'solidarity' and the vertical-horizontal dimension 'power'. Triandis distinguished four types of cultures/social relations on the basis of these two dimensions: Vertical individualism, Horizontal individualism, Vertical collectivism and Horizontal collectivism. These correspond to what I call coercion, contract, authority and fellowship.

Tonnies distinguished between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* relationships. These roughly correspond to individualism and collectivism. He argued that social relationships could also be divided into what he called an 'authoritative' and a 'fellowship' type. The former involve social inequality whereas the latter involve social equality. This argument closely parallels the ideas of those authors who see power and solidarity as the twin dimensions of social life.

Within each of the four social domains of coercion, contract, authority and fellowship, I identify two spheres of life. The domains of spirituality and materiality may also comprise particular spheres. For example, the spiritual sphere could comprise religious and aesthetic spheres. Similarly the material sphere could comprise a carnal sphere that is centred on bodily pleasures and a technological or utilitarian sphere. I will now provide a summary outline of each of the ten spheres of life.

The first sphere is that of 'predation'. It arises where high inequalities of power combine with low social solidarity so that power holders prey upon power subjects. The Latin saying '*homo homini lupus est*' or 'man is a wolf to man' conveys the essence of the predatory sphere. This sphere comprises relationships of coercion, violence, oppression, exploitation, conflict and fighting. When one person seeks to prey upon another the intended victim may either surrender or fight back. In the latter instance the relationship of predation becomes one of fighting or situations in which people seek to overcome opposition from others by using force. Fights may occur between individuals or groups. In the latter instance we may encounter organized violence or war. Predation also encompasses on going situations of oppression or exploitation such as tyranny and slavery.

The second sphere is that of 'government'. This sphere comprises relationships of regulation, oversight, discipline, coercion, legal authority and training. Like the sphere of predation such relationships involve a combination of high inequality and low solidarity. Government differs from predation in that it does not necessarily involve the exploitation of power subjects. Rather, power here is exercised on behalf of impersonal ends. An example would be a bureaucratic office holder. I use the term 'government' here to refer not just to rule by states but also to all types of impersonal rule including bureaucratic administration within non-government and private sector organizations. The sphere of government roughly corresponds to what Weber called rational-legal authority. It comprises institutions such as government, armies, courts, prisons and corporations and practices such as management, administration, policing, regulation, planning and taxation.

The third sphere is that of 'commerce'. This sphere comprises relationships of market exchange, contract, bargaining, competition and calculation. Within this sphere people enter into transactions voluntarily rather than as a result of compulsion. In entering into these transactions people are motivated by self-interest rather than altruism. The commercial sphere is primarily manifested in the market economy. Exchange relationships involving the trading of favours can be found in other social institutions. For example, we find vote buying in politics, a 'sexual market' in the field of sexual relationships and religious markets where denominations compete for adherents. The sphere of commerce comprises institutions such as markets, exchange, bargaining, prices, banking, profit, barter, finance, accounting, marketing, private enterprise, money, competition and private property.

The fourth sphere is that of 'civil society'. This sphere comprises relationships of voluntary association, dialogue, conciliation, civility, dissent, consent and persuasion. It differs from the spheres of predation and government in that it does not involve the use of coercion. Individuals within the civil sphere seek to persuade or negotiate with others rather than to coerce them. The civil sphere comprises such institutions as civil society, liberal democracy and the rule of law, the public sphere, pluralism, citizenship, the non-profit sector, politics and diplomacy. It differs from the commercial sphere in that people here are not seeking to exchange goods and services but to pursue broader interests such as engaging in a pastime, voicing their opinion or reaching agreement.

The fifth sphere is that of 'honour'. This sphere comprises relationships of deference, performance, status, hierarchy and charismatic authority. To use Goffman's terminology, it is the sphere of deference and demeanour. Within this sphere people seek to obtain status or recognition from others. They do so by engaging in 'performances' or presentations of self. I have located this sphere within the domain of authority since it combines social inequality and social solidarity. The sphere of honour is embodied in such institutions as aristocracy, honours, honour cultures, status groups, honorifics, status hierarchies, reputation, celebrity, charisma, precedence and hero-cults.

The sixth sphere is that of 'paternalism'. It arises where high social inequality combines with high social solidarity. This sphere comprises relationships of traditional authority, leadership, tutelage, nurturance and attachment. It differs markedly from the sphere of predation since power holders here seek to benefit power subjects rather than to exploit them. The sphere of paternalism originates in the parental role of caring for infants. It is manifested in such institutions and practices as parenting, adoption, clientelism, the family, teaching, patrimonialism, nepotism, feudalism, patriarchalism, tradition, charity, care, leadership and traditional authority.

The seventh sphere is that of 'community'. Here high social solidarity combines with low social inequality. This sphere comprises relationships of communality, solidarity, trust, conformity and consensus. It is embodied in such institutions as primary groups, minority groups, in-groups and out-groups, discrimination, racism, communal sharing, social closure, kinship, ethnic groups, separatism, segregation, gangs, tribalism and sectarianism. People in this sphere differentiate between in-groups and out-groups and emphasise in-group loyalty and conformity as virtues. It corresponds to Fiske's communal sharing, Douglas's 'enclavist' culture and Haidt's 'loyalty' moral foundation.

The eighth sphere is that of 'equality'. This comprises relationships of reciprocity, cooperation, equality, justice and rebellion. It partly corresponds to Fiske's 'equality matching'. In terms of Haidt's moral foundations theory, the sphere of equality has two moral foundations. The first is that of 'fairness'. This morality is based on the norm of reciprocity. The second is that of 'liberty' or

resistance to oppression. The sphere of equality consequently comprises both relationships of reciprocity and rebellion against injustice. It is manifested in such institutions and practices as gift exchange, cooperation, feuding or eye for eye retaliation, friendship, egalitarianism, justice, rebellion, social movements, peer groups, teams, alliances, democracy, republicanism and fraternity.

The ninth sphere is that of spirituality. It comprises the cultural domains of the sacred, charisma, magic, myth, ritual, asceticism and morality. The spiritual domain corresponds to Haidt's 'divinity' moral foundation. People here seek to lead nobler, purer and less carnal lives. Sorokin argues that within ideational cultures people regard ultimate reality as being super-sensory. The spiritual sphere comprises such institutions and cultural domains as religion, the sacred, ritual, myth, magic, gods, sacrifice, charisma, taboo, worship, gods, asceticism, mysticism and prophecy.

The tenth sphere is that of materiality. The material sphere comprises the mundane, worldly and carnal and includes the cultural domains of bodily pleasure, self-interest, the profane, reason and utility. It comprises such institutions and cultural domains as technology, secularism, hedonism, markets, materialism, work, science, the everyday, iconoclasm and profanity. For Sorokin what defines a sensate culture is the belief that ultimate reality is revealed by the senses.

Underlying the idea of spheres of life is that beneath the surface diversity of cultures we can detect a set of universal social, cultural and institutional 'modes' or 'logics'. It strikes a mid-point between cultural pluralism on the one hand, where each culture is seen as being unique and explicable only in its own terms, and cultural monism, where diverse cultures are seen as being the embodiment of a single universal logic such as that of rational choice.

The theory proposed here is a typology rather than an explanatory theory. It could however be allied to an explanatory theory. The salience of the different spheres has clearly varied over time. In the earliest human societies the spheres of government, commerce and civil society were absent or undeveloped. The material sphere has increased in importance relative to the spiritual sphere within Western societies in the last 500 years. To explain such changes we would need to examine the role of political, cultural, technological, economic and ecological factors. The theory needs to be elaborated in greater detail to show how the various spheres are manifested in different institutions, social practices and cultural values and beliefs however limitations of space prevent me from being able to provide more than a summary outline of the ten spheres within this paper.

Table 1: The ideas of various thinkers located within the six social domains and ten spheres of life

Social domains <i>Spheres of life</i>	Coercion		Contract		Authority		Fellowship		Spirituality	Materiality
	<i>Predation</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Commerce</i>	<i>Civil society</i>	<i>Honour</i>	<i>Paternalism</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Equality</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>	<i>Materiality</i>
Ferdinand Tönnies	Gesellschaft-Authoritative		Gesellschaft-Fellowship		Gemeinschaft-Authoritative		Gesellschaft-Fellowship			
Mary Douglas	Fatalism		Individualism		Hierarchy		Egalitarianism			
F.G. Bailey	Tyranny		Rivalry		Authority		Trust			
Harry Triandis	Vertical individualism		Horizontal individualism		Vertical collectivism		Horizontal collectivism			
Hamilton & Sanders	Authority/Contract		Equal/Contract		Authority/Status		Equal/Status			
Alan Fiske			Market pricing		Authority ranking		Communal sharing	Equality matching		
Jonathan Haidt				Liberty	Authority, Care		Loyalty	Fairness	Divinity	
Pitirim Sorokin	Compulsory		Contractual		Familistic (unequal)		Familistic (equal)		Ideational	Sensate
R.J. Rummel	Coercion		Exchange		Authority		Love			
L.T. Hobhouse	Authority (naked force)			Citizenship	Authority (sanctity)		Kinship			
Max Weber	Sphere of Power	Legal-rational	Economic sphere		Sphere of Honour	Traditional			Charisma	Routinization
Jeffrey Alexander	Instrumental power	Political, State	Economic	Civil		Family	Community		Religion	
Michael Walzer		Political power, Office	Money		Recognition	Kinship, Education	Membership		Divine Grace	Work, Free time
Boltanski & Thevenot		Industrial	Market	Civic	Fame	Domestic			Inspired	
Friedland & Alford		Bureaucratic state	Capitalist market	Democracy		Nuclear family			Christian religion	
Jürgen Kocka	Struggle & War	Rule & Obedience	Exchange & Market	Civil society						
Karl Polanyi		Redistribution	Exchange			Householding		Reciprocity		
János Kornai		Bureaucratic	Market	Associative		Family		Ethical		
Stanley H. Udy		Political	Contractual	Voluntary		Familial		Reciprocal		
Max Boisot		Bureaucracy	Market			Fief	Clan			
William Ouchi		Bureaucracy	Markets				Clans			
Walter W. Powell		Hierarchies	Markets					Networks		
Charles Lindblom		Authority	Markets	Polyarchy		Preceptor system				
Albert & Hahnel		Political	Economic			Kinship	Community		Community	
Alan Macfarlane		Polity	Economy			Kinship			Religion	
Talcott Parsons		Polity	Economy			Fiduciary system	Societal community		Societal community	
Robert Nisbet					Status	Authority	Community		Sacred	
Pierre Bourdieu			Economic capital		Symbolic capital	Cultural capital	Social capital			
Michael Mann	Military power	Political power	Economic power			Ideological power				
Ernest Gellner		Communist society		Civil society			Segmentary society		Islamic society	

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