The two strands of current debate dealt with in this chapter – Social Capital and Trust – are conjoined here because they represent a conservative, political and theoretical reaction to the overarching post 60s issue of social cohesion. Additionally, they present themselves in limited terms: terms concerned mainly with aspects of micro sociality. In contrast the Chapter 3 deals with Third Way and Communitarian advocates, who, while fundamentally conservative in orientation, also present a far wider project which, in both instances, seeks a fundamentally new type of ethical and political space.

Of course there is some overlap between all four strands in terms of their ideas, targets and motivation. Indeed, in passing it should be noted that all four strands are underpinned, in one way or another, by a narrative of loss which though it takes differing formulations, uses the past as a yardstick to indict the present for some perceived failure or deficiency.

Social Capital

In its many guises Social Capital has become a key concept for government policymakers and academics over the last ten years (Barron et al., 2000). As we shall see this is in part because the term itself represents a simple re-packaging of themes historically familiar within American sociology.

The term itself, as one of its main proponents Robert Putnam records, has a myriad of authors (Putnam 2000, p. 19), indeed one of its proclaimed strengths – at least for advocates – is precisely this positioning within the ‘cycle of ideas’ (ibid, p. 19). Others have attributed the honour to Coleman (1988), while some commentators claim the term...
originated as a means of identifying aspects of local community central to the functioning of city neighbourhoods during the late Fifties, a claim which of course locates the work as a direct off spring of Parsonian Functionalism (Tempest, Mackinley, Starkey 2004).

Regardless of origin, what is clear is that there are multiple strands within a general overarching category. Some of the ‘founders’, like Coleman for instance, concentrate upon educational performance, others, and here Robert Putnam is the leading light, focus upon civic tradition. Presently the notion of Social Capital is widely used in a variety of fields including sustainable development, management literature (Kogut and Zender 1992; Galvic and Eishadt 2000), as well as work designed to address issues of continuity in the transmission and accumulation of social inequality (Hogan and Owen, 2000) and to analyse career paths in the television and financial industries (Tempest et al. 2004).

Others, Cohen and Prusak (2001) for instance, emphasise the importance of language and particularly shared narratives of mutual effort as a key factor in developing and sustaining aspects of Social Capital. Others (e.g. Hughes, Bellemey, Black 2000) use such concepts in education. Additionally, much of the work connected with Trust, and the revival of civil society utilises Social Capital concepts. Mention should also be made of the work of Richard Sennet (1998) who, though not commonly associated with Social Capital, has a clear interest in trust (p. 10, 24) as well as the corrosion of social networks (ibid, p. 122), a persistent social capital theme. Francis Fukuyana (1995) is also closely associated with the Social Capital agenda as are Uslander (1999, 2002) and Etzioni, whose work clearly builds on Social Capital as well as Communitarian ideas.

Recent British work has also utilised Social Capital conceptualisations in work concerning community (Morgan 1996), gender and intergenerational divisions within family life (Edwards Rosalind 2004) as well as the place of gender in the understanding of both Social Capital and the family.

Finally, reference should be made to the work of Pierre Bourdieu the French sociologist whose work on Social Capital originated independently of the American stream and who deals much more directly with the interdependence of cultural and social aspects within capital accumulation.

In general then, Social Capital can be seen as an umbrella term for the study of the diverse range of resources and linkages existing and provided by the web of social relations (Adler and Kwon 2002, p. 17).