

‘everything that’s solid melts into air,’ we in fact are driven by the predictability of long-term processes” (p. 95) that are molded by the “weight of the past,” which grows heavier as inherited wealth and newly accumulated capital make ever greater demands on our incomes and politics and culture.

Savage offers a valuable intervention in discussions of identity. He notes that intersectionality can offer insight into the bases of power and privilege as much as it illuminates dimensions of discrimination and disadvantage. His analysis offers a guide for how to conduct such studies. Rather than invoking race, class, and gender like a holy trinity, an approach that Savage traces back to 19th-century imperialist efforts to develop social categories that could be used to set boundaries between those who could be made part of a progressive program of social improvement and those who needed to be excluded and ruled, he says we instead need to analyze “a process of cumulative causality that comes together in household relations, not a single categorical position” (p. 223). Those categories, in Savage’s analysis, are artifacts of a few 20th-century decades when imperialism receded and strong, reformist nation-states were able to undertake somewhat egalitarian programs, albeit ones that still excluded much of the world.

The renewed triumph of inherited wealth, and of profit-generating economic and political monopolies, and the weakening of national states require new thinking about what sorts of political programs and strategies are viable. Savage offers an interesting array of suggestions at the conclusion of this book, ones that build on the reconceptualization of inequality that he undertakes.

*The Return of Inequality* is extremely well written, engaging, and learned. This is a book that would be an excellent centerpiece of contemporary social theory courses. It should be read carefully by social scientists who study inequality and all who want to understand how sociology and other social sciences arrived at their current understandings of social reality and the work of research and theorizing. I hope it wins a wider audience from nonspecialist and nonacademic readers as well.

*After the Gig: How Sharing the Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win It Back.* By Juliet B. Schor. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. Pp. xv+258. \$24.95 (paper).

Niels van Doorn  
*University of Amsterdam*

It started out with plenty of aspirational energy and a belief in genuine socio-economic transformation. Emerging alongside the Great Recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, the “sharing economy” concept embodied the hope that working people could rebuild the economy from the ground up and create fairer, more democratic ways of making a living. What’s more, they could do so without having to actually work, at least not for a boss.

Instead of the daily grind of “wage slavery,” one could access then-novel platform-mediated markets via smartphone applications (equally new) to actualize, in Adam Smith’s famous words, the human “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange.” The sharing economy was teeming with promise, and for many people it delivered. Yet at one point, the story goes, things went awry, and for an even larger number of people the (American) dream turned into a corporate nightmare.

Juliet Schor’s *After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win It Back* tells this story with much flair and nuance, based on her team’s groundbreaking and extensive research. From the get-go, the team was confronted with a wide variety of initiatives—some platform based, others less tech driven; some not for profit and dedicated to unremunerated transactions, others for profit and marketing rented goods or paid services—that are somewhat awkwardly bunched together under the capacious “sharing economy” umbrella. Schor’s book documents this (over)capaciousness, with case studies running the gamut from community-driven time banks and food swaps to corporate gig platforms such as Uber and TaskRabbit. The obvious benefit of such a wide scope is that it grants the book an unparalleled comprehensiveness, further amplified by the longitudinal nature of the study: Schor and her team started their research in 2011 and collected their final data in October 2017. Fortunately, Schor manages to effectively navigate—if not completely overcome—the challenges of a compromised analytical focus and an attendant pretense that what is being studied is more coherent than it really is, presenting the reader with a fascinating examination of the sharing economy’s heterogeneity, its uneven development, and its resultant equivocality.

Schor is quick to explicate her book’s primary wager. As she writes in the introduction: “Technological innovation and cultural change *have* put a person-to-person economy, with its solution to the problem of work, within reach” (p. 2, emphasis in original). Achieving the potential of platforms, however, requires particular conditions that have been gradually eroded by corporate “Big Sharing” companies, squandering the promise of a truly shared economy. Perhaps its biggest promise, as Schor sees it, is freedom, or “the chance to control one’s destiny” (p. 4). In her cautiously optimistic view, even algorithms and reputation systems may be repurposed to unleash the sharing economy’s democratic powers of freedom.

Schor provides an overview of the sharing economy’s economic and ideological roots and then takes the reader on a tour of the evolving world of work on for-profit platforms. We encounter a wide array of gig workers and home sharers whose experiences are woven together to illustrate these platforms’ “retreat from control,” resulting in a heterogeneous workforce with relatively more freedom and variegated earning patterns/strategies. Importantly, Schor and her team also found varying levels of dependency on platform earnings among their research participants, which did more to explain the gig work experience than platform-induced conditions. The more dependent one is on these earnings, the more precarious one’s situation is likely to be. Yet platform conditions do matter: Schor identifies a hierarchy in earnings and

satisfaction, with asset-rental platforms like Airbnb at the top and gig platforms like Uber at the bottom. Moving up the hierarchy, platform earners are increasingly white, more educated, and from a higher-class background, that is, more privileged and less dependent. Moreover, she also notes a downward trajectory in earnings and working conditions that especially affected low-income gig workers.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer ruminations on the team's empirical findings, concluding that the corporate sharing economy reproduces, rather than challenges, many of society's structural inequalities. As for-profit sharing scaled and became more commodified, platform companies did more to exacerbate (racialized, classed, and gendered) income and wealth gaps, environmental problems, and social alienation than to disrupt them. Thus, Schor ultimately returns to sharing's community-based, nonprofit roots to salvage the movement's revolutionary potential. Instead of a paean to grassroots sharing initiatives, however, we get a critical, measured, and highly intriguing account of the moral economies that structured various, often low-tech endeavors—many of which no longer exist. These turned out to be more homogeneous and exclusionary than for-profit platforms, because of how (racialized) class distinctions were upheld through forms of boundary policing that limited their accessibility and thus their value to (potential) participants. One prominent way of doing so was by signifying one's "distance from necessity," indicating that cultural capital is usually predicated on the availability of economic capital. Once again, Schor shows us how material privilege is a precondition for thriving in the sharing economy.

Accordingly, the final chapter starts out by summarizing the necessary conditions that would have to be satisfied to achieve a fairer, more egalitarian mode of sharing: "avoiding extreme earner dependence," "keeping inequality in check," and "regulation" (p. 148). Yet Schor also identifies a "deeper, structural innovation," in the form of platform cooperatives (Neils Van Doorn, "Platform Cooperativism and the Problem of the Outside, *Culture Digitally* [2017]). Here, I initially had trouble understanding how the latter could be deeper/more structural than the former: Isn't regulation essential if we aim to meet the first two conditions? I then realized, however, that the answer to this question hinges on one's conception of regulation and the role of the state. Ultimately, Schor sees regulation as ameliorative and deterring ("minimizing harm") rather than generative, creating new conditions of possibility and fostering alternatives. Real change starts with people who reclaim the tech-driven means of production to reorganize social relations and economic systems from the ground up. If the state is to play a role, she situates its future on the municipal level of "sharing cities" initiatives. Although I appreciate the progressive potential of this movement, I do not think local governments can or should lead the way here, given how many are already overburdened and underresourced. Neither do I believe that the sharing economy can be "rebooted" from the inside out by adopting commons-based peer production models. While I thoroughly enjoyed Schor's excellent book, which is poised to become a touchstone in the field, I ended up with a different conclusion: if

what comes after the gig is indeed a “collaborative revolution,” it will have to be cultivated from the outside in. Given the pervasiveness of corporate platform power, only (trans)national regulation and policy making could regenerate the public infrastructures that provide for life’s necessities, so that the people can truly share in freedom.

*Social Science for What?: Battles over Public Funding for the “Other Sciences” at the National Science Foundation.* By Mark Solovey. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2020. Pp. x+398. \$50.00 (paper).

Christopher R. Henke  
Colgate University

Mark Solovey’s detailed account of social scientists’ continued quest for money and legitimacy since the creation of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1950, *Social Science for What?: Battles over Public Funding for the “Other Sciences” at the National Science Foundation*, shows the decades-long struggle that has shaped the cultural and structural location of the social sciences relative to the physical, biological, computational, and health sciences. Excluded entirely in the NSF’s earliest years, the social sciences were not added to NSF programs until 1955 and still comprise the smallest slice of the budget allocated toward research funding. Solovey identifies *scientism* as the core and persistent ideology that restricted inclusion and equal status for the social sciences. Scientism, in Solovey’s definition, is an argument that the natural sciences are superior to and “harder” than the social sciences because they emphasize experimental and computational methods, seek and test natural laws, and are oriented toward basic (and apolitical) research goals. In this view, the social sciences were less mature and more prone to advance political agendas and would only be ready for equal status when they fully embraced the natural sciences as their role model.

Sound familiar? No doubt many social scientists have felt and continue to feel caught up in these same debates, and a major contribution of Solovey’s book is to historicize the role of scientism in the disciplinary evolution of the social sciences in the United States since World War II. Given the centrality of NSF programs and budgets in shaping U.S. scientists’ research priorities, Solovey’s analysis provides important insights about the players and institutions in sociology and other fields that sought to gain and secure a place at the NSF. Early on, the Social Science Research Council lobbied for inclusion in the NSF and sought to emphasize a scientific approach to social science research (p. 35). Social science disciplines also policed themselves and fought internally about whether to tack more closely to scientism or allow methods, approaches, and topics that could be disparaged as soft, politically motivated, or both. In some cases, these pressures spurred disciplines as a whole to move toward a more scientific approach. Solovey provides the most detail for this process via the case of political science, which was not