

spatial competition
and economic policies

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Theorizing Competition

**An interdisciplinary approach to the genesis of a
contested concept**

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Outline

- Motivation: Theorizing Competition from an Interdisciplinary Perspective
- Competitization as a trend of expansion of a “competitive logic”
- Different scopes of competition
- Conclusions: a wave dynamic of scope and reference of competition

Theorizing Competition

- Important trends in the relation of economy and society
 - ***Rise of the economics discipline*** and economic knowledge after WWII (Fourcade 2009, Christensen 2017)
“(economics/economic knowledge) has become more central to the nation [...] because the nation itself has become more economic” (Fourcade 2006, 162).
 - ***Economic imperialism***: expansion of economic theorizing/modeling into other social sciences (e.g. the work of Becker, Stigler, Buchanan)
 - ***Performativity of economics***: economic knowledge has a formative impact on real economic phenomena (Callon 1998, MacKenzie et al. 2017)
 - ***competitization*** and/or ***economization***: Expansion of an economic logic into society since the neoliberal era (e.g. Caliskan/Callon 2009; Jessop 2015)

Conceptualizing Competitization

- At least three different understandings of ***competitization*** from an interdisciplinary perspective
 - Increase in economic deregulation and expansion of neoliberal economic governmentality (Jessop 2015, Gane 2019, Davies 2017)
 - A spread of competitive formats (Tauschek 2012, Werron 2015)
 - Self-optimizing behavior in a competitive society (Bröckling 2016, Lavrence/Lozanski 2014)
- The concept of competition remains ambiguous
- Evaluation of competitization is closely related to specific concepts of competition

Three challenges and our contribution

- Three challenges for theorizing ***competition*** and ***competitization***:

- The generality of the concept and the multitude of reference systems and ***scope***
- Different perspectives on competition in social sciences (economics, sociology, cultural studies)
- Ideological bias and ***normative implications***

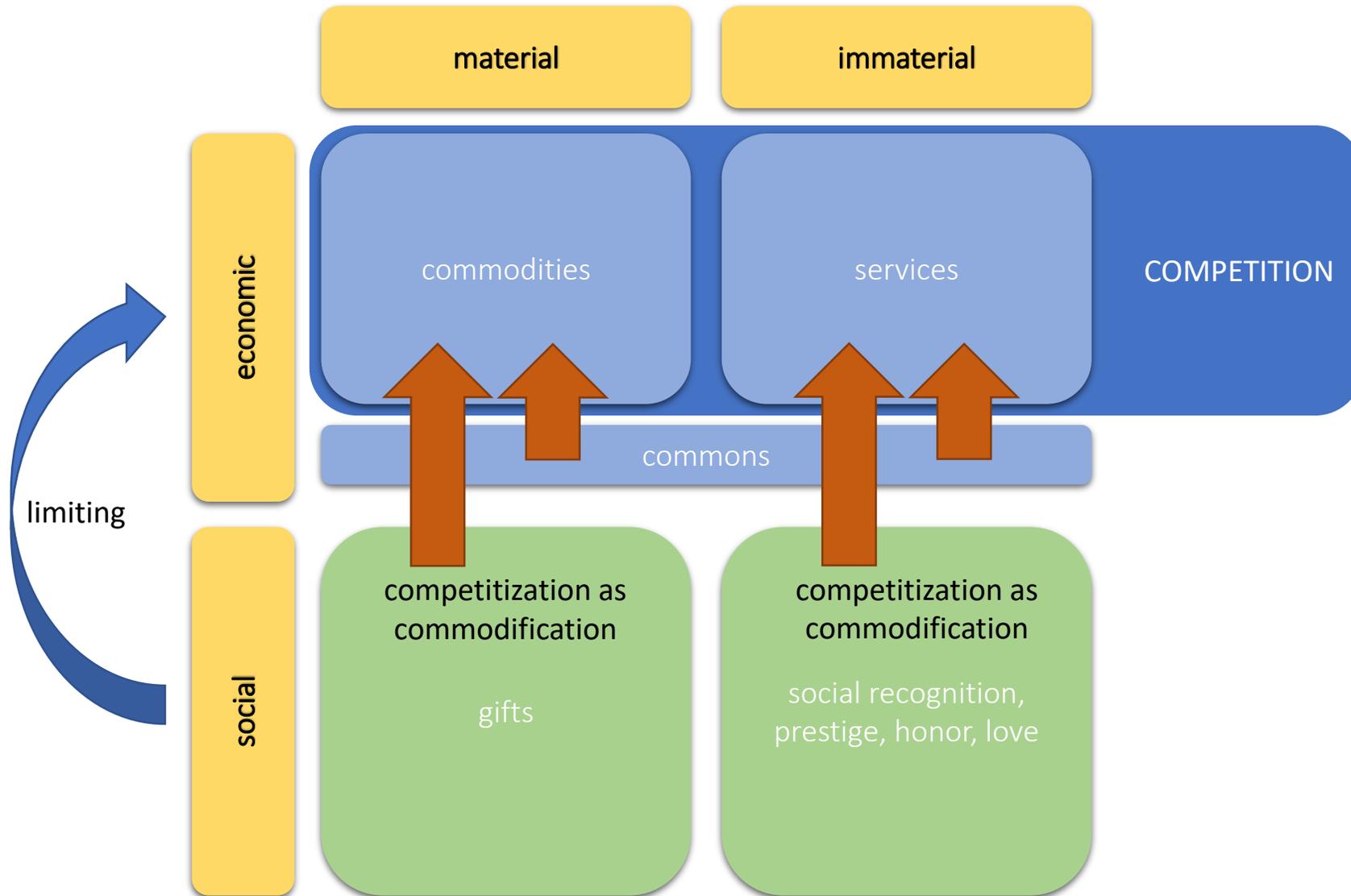
➔ We provide an interdisciplinary review of the intellectual history of prominent approaches to the concept of competition regarding its scope and normative implications

➔ We develop a differentiated understanding of the process and the implications of competitization

Scope of Competition

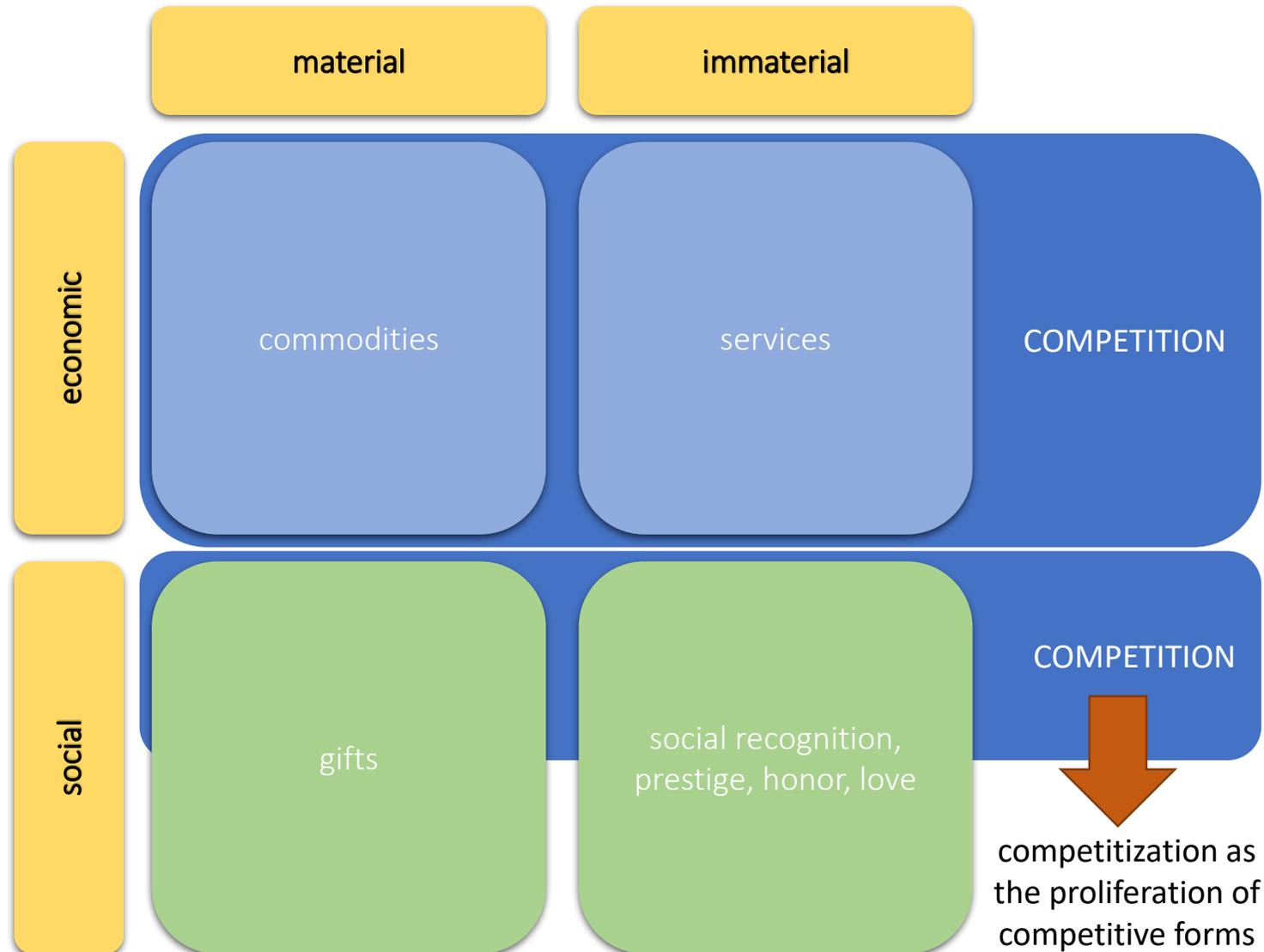
- Which part of human life is understood as competitive?
- Type of scope relevant for the understanding of competitization
- Three types of scope:
 1. Competition for commodities
 2. Competition for non-commodified goods
 3. Universal competition

Competition for commodities



- Two realms
- Social realm limiting the economic realm
- Competitization as commodification
- e.g. John Stuart Mill: sphere of production and sphere of distribution
- Linked to the analysis of markets

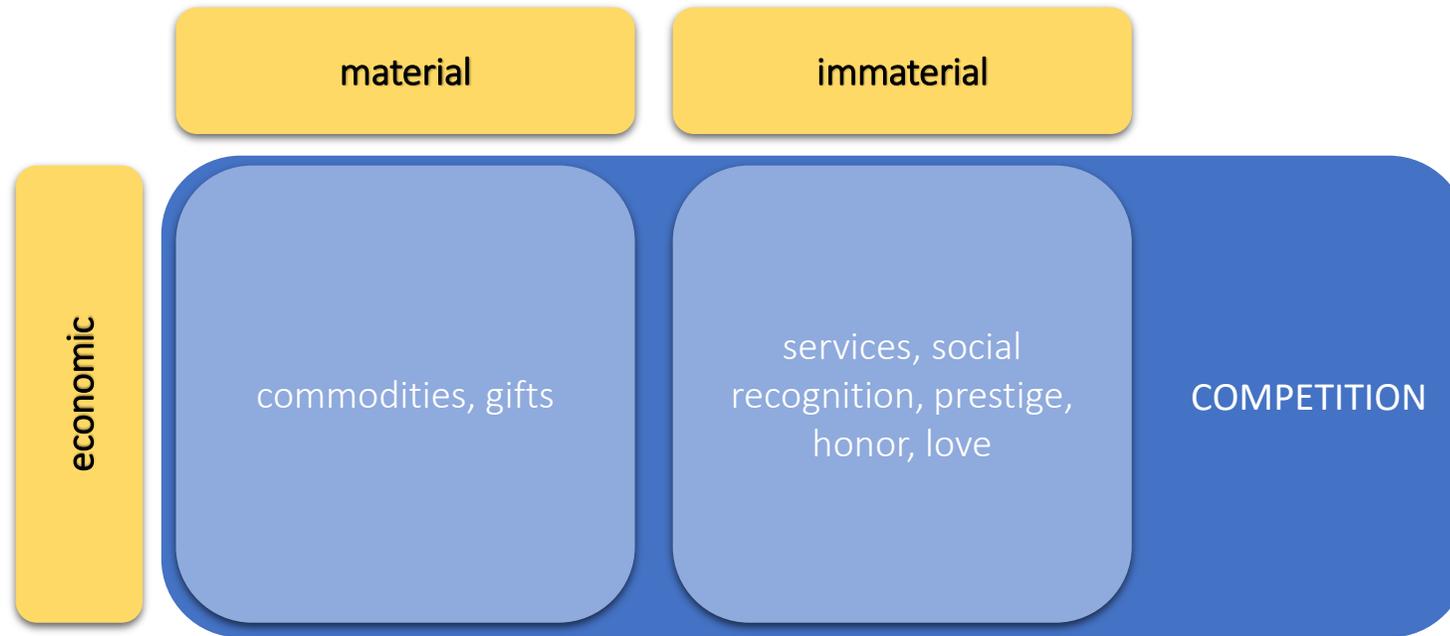
Competition for non-commodified goods



- Still two realms
- Competition takes place in both, although not every aspect of social life is competitive.
- Competitization as the proliferation of competitive forms
- e.g. Georg Simmel's sociology of competition
- Competition as a social form
- One of the core principles of social organization in the era of modernity
- Comprise trading, but also love relationships or sports

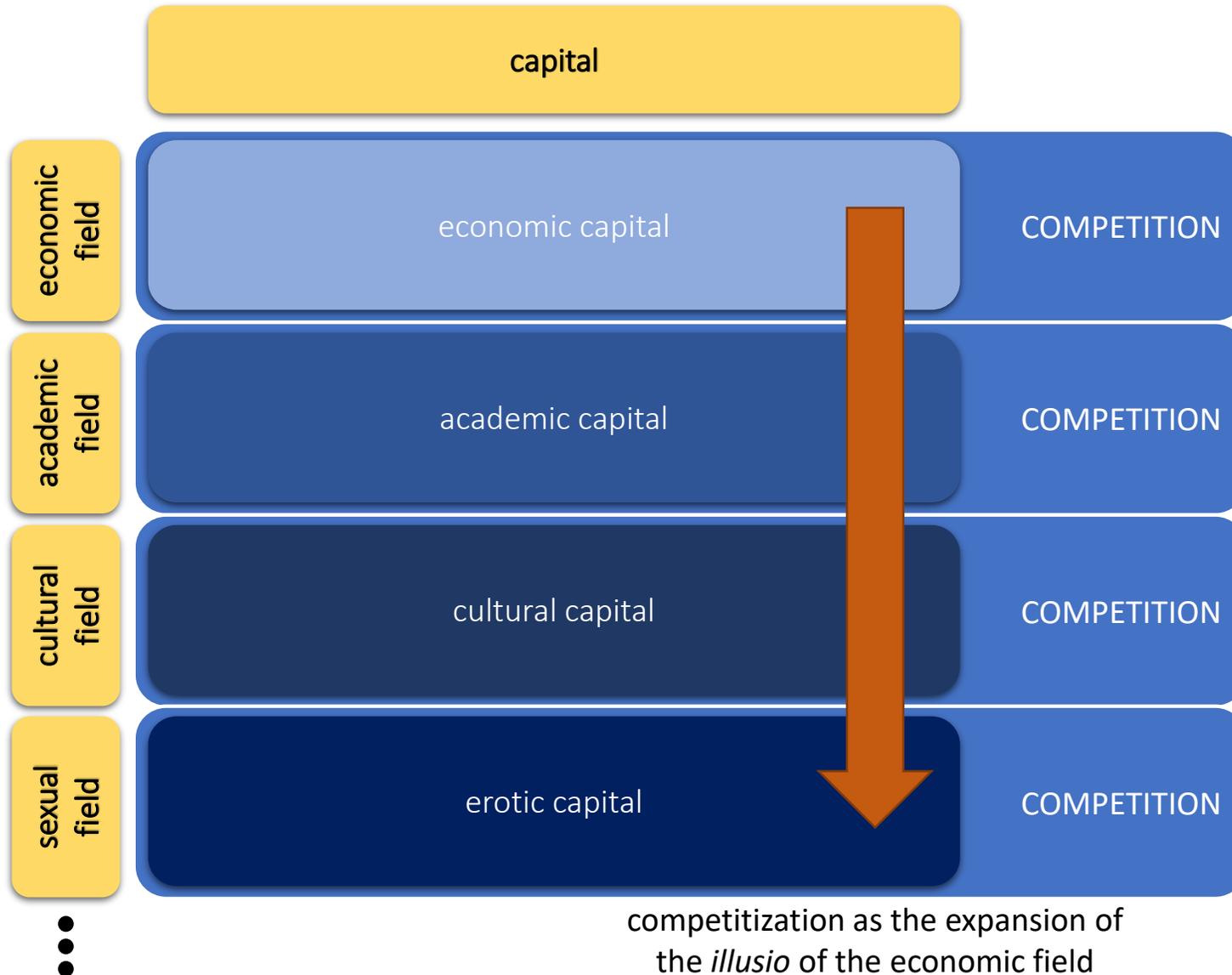
Universal competition

Universal competition in the vein of Gary Becker



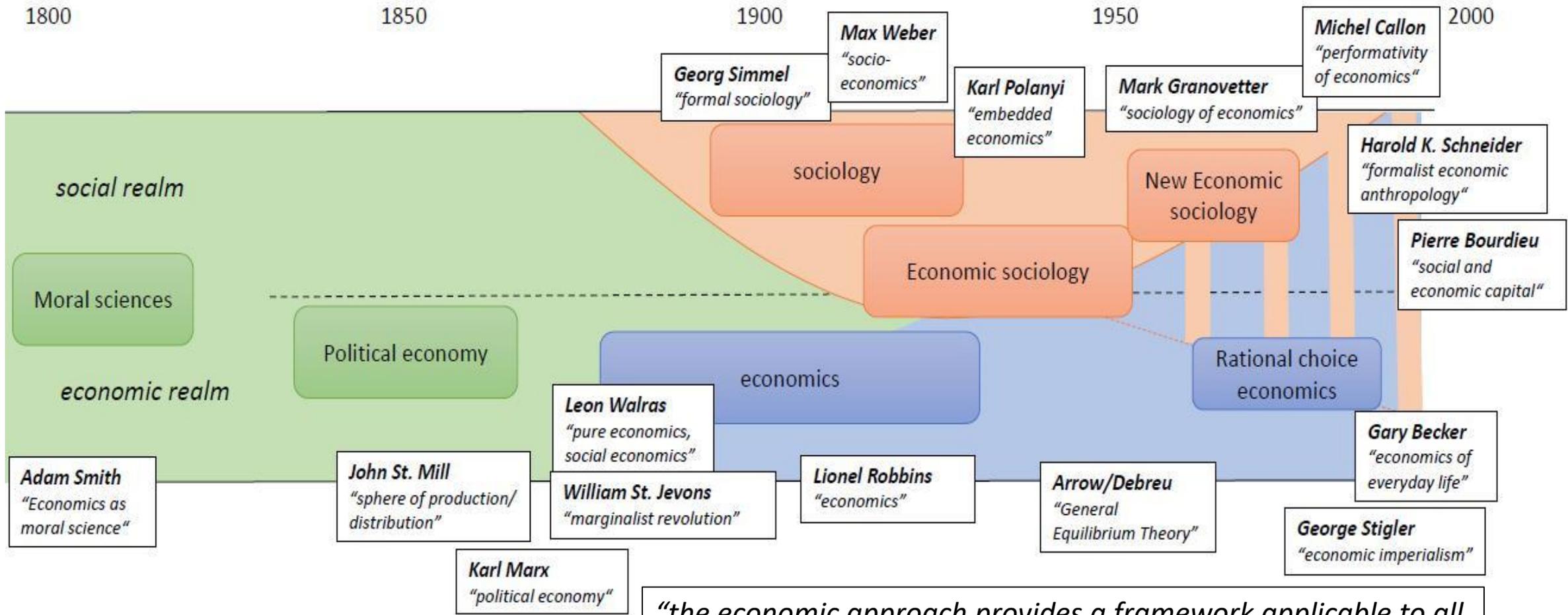
- There is only one, economic realm
- Competitization cannot be grasped since there is nothing outside of competition

Universal competition in the vein of Pierre Bourdieu



- The economic and social realms turn into different fields, which are all governed by a competitive logic but different scarce goods, i.e. capitals
- Competitization can be understood as the expansion of the *illusio* of the economic field to hitherto not affected fields

Conclusion: A wave dynamic of competition



"the economic approach provides a framework applicable to all human behavior—to all types of decisions and to persons from all walks of life" (Becker, 1981, ix)

Conclusion: A wave dynamic of competition

- Major trends in theorizing about competition are to be understood against the background of discourses on the relation and/or separation of the economic and the social realm
- Different conceptions of competition vary within and not only between social science disciplines
- Since the 1970s the boundaries of the economic and social realm blurred (re-embedding economics vs. Economic imperialism)
- Human behavior as such is seen as the consequence of economic principles (market logic, economic illusion)
- imperial mode of universal conceptualization of competition closely related to the discursive power of economic reasoning

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Thanks for your attention

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