

mobilizing a bold new stream of research that combined new forms of large-scale quantitative data analysis with qualitative theoretical insight, and yoked to a moral concern with the injustice of inequality, social scientists could seize on a big-picture story that had pretty much entirely evaded the attention of big data evangelists. The new social science of inequality trumpeted a bold, big, and commanding vision. By contrast, proponents of big data failed to deliver on the knowledge revolution that they promised, because their technically skilled findings were trivial, often defaulting to startling visual displays but with no defining narrative.¹¹

This new big-picture social science provoked by inequality researchers met a huge public demand from large audiences trying to make sense of the rapidly changing world they were living in. Inequality provided the kind of overarching narrative that could string together economic boom and bust, globalization, political logjam and dysfunction, and wider feelings of malaise. The result has been a remarkable upturn of popular interest in social science. In the United Kingdom, the most prominent example is Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's *The Spirit Level* (2010), which was a runaway best seller and prompted huge academic and policy debate through its message that unequal societies produced more social problems. Even though this book generated critical responses from some social scientists who saw it as too simplistic, this did not detract from its power to show that inequality mattered.

The same point became even more clear in 2013 with the publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. A dense data-driven tome laying out long-term trends of income and wealth inequality in numerous nations was not an obvious candidate to sell two million hardbacks. Nonetheless, this book captured the public imagination to a remarkable extent and catapulted Thomas Piketty to superstar status. This was not the kind of attention that social scientists had normally enjoyed, and it easily exceeded the attention that any big data exponents were attracting.

These two books reveal the breakdown of the fractal divide that had imprisoned the social sciences since their inception. These were works of sophisticated data assemblage that demanded considerable technical skill. But they also had a clear moral tone and drew on wide-ranging theoretical, historical, and interpretative reference points. They are simultaneously quantitative, qualitative, historical, comparative, theoretical, political, and moral. They mark a profound reordering of social scientific expertise and a new