Pierre Bourdieu, the centrality of the social, and the possibility of politics

Conference Item

Pierre Bourdieu, the Centrality of the Social, and the Possibility of Politics

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In the last years of his life, Pierre Bourdieu became an increasingly prominent public figure. His political writings of the 1990s brought him a wide readership in and beyond the universities, but also met with a vicious collective backlash from French journalists and even derision from some academics. Bourdieu's fame grew internationally too, as he challenged neoliberal globalization. If this won new admirers, it also offended some, especially American academics who didn't like being associated with his critique of "the American model". As his theory predicted, the media made him all the more a celebrity when he attacked the celebrity-making machine itself in his book, *On Television*, which addressed how the media undercut public discourse by reducing it to "cultural fast-food."[2] Some critics charged that he was participating in this trend rather than resisting it, writing short essays rather than long and difficult books. Indeed, many claimed that his new public writings marked a reversal of what he had stood for. And to some extent the public excitement over Bourdieu the public intellectual eclipsed engagement with Bourdieu's scientific work.

Bourdieu was already famous, of course. In June 1968, students had actually carried copies of his book, *The Inheritors*, onto the barricades.[3] But Bourdieu had stayed more or less apart from that struggle, turning his attention to scientific—albeit critical--research. Some of this research produced *Homo Academicus*, a book partly about the relationship between the university microcosm and the larger field of power in 1968, but the book appeared over fifteen years later.[4] One reason Bourdieu was not a vocal public activist in 1968 was that he did not think the crucial issues of power and inequality were well-joined in the struggles of that year. Neither their romanticism nor the predominant versions of Marxism appealed to him, and he resisted especially leftist tendencies to collapse the scientific and political fields. Moreover, he worried that naïve overoptimism encouraged actions that would set back rather than advance the cause of liberation. Not least of all, there was a superabundance of symbolically prominent intellectuals in 1968. By the early 1990s this was no longer so. Sartre and Foucault were both dead, and a number of others had abandoned the public forum or simply appeared small within it.

The death of Foucault may have been especially important. While Foucault lived, Bourdieu was in a sense protected from the most intense demands of media and popular activists for a dominant public intellectual of the left. After Foucault was gone, there was a sort of vacuum in French public life which Bourdieu was increasingly drawn to fill. Bourdieu seized the occasion to fight for undocumented and unemployed workers,

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[2] Bourdieu, *On Television*. New York: New Press, 1998; orig. 1996.

[3] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1973; orig. 1963.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988; orig. 1984.

against the tyranny of neoliberal ideology, and to create a new "International" of public-spirited intellectuals. He defended the homeless and anti-racist activists. There was nonetheless an irony, for early in his career Bourdieu had railed against French model of the "total intellectual" with its presumption of omnicompetence and its displacement of more specialized scientific knowledge. The sociologist who had criticized Sartre seemed to be taking on a Sartrean mantle.

As Bourdieu's theory suggested, however, public fame is a product of the field not just the individual and he could not escape it. A wave of strikes in 1995 was pivotal, not only pitting the government and capitalists against workers but splitting the Left over whether reformist accommodation to globalization was the best strategy or resistance made sense. Bourdieu had previously written important reports on education for the socialist government and participated quietly in the politics at or beyond the left wing of the socialist party. After making what was then a rare appearance at a demonstration at the Gare de Lyon in 1995, however, Bourdieu took on an increasingly public role. It was in many ways a transformation of the intellectual and political fields that brought about the transformation in at least an aspect of Bourdieu's habitus.

In the present paper, I will attempt to situate Bourdieu's work in its context(s) and demonstrate something of its unity, particularly noting its roots in his studies of Algeria and French educational and cultural institutions. These roots have been somewhat obscured in American reception of Bourdieu. My main aim, though, is to challenge one specific claim from the years of academic counterattacks against Bourdieu's public interventions. This is the suggestion that his public arguments do not follow from or fit well with his work in social science. On the contrary, I shall suggest that they follow closely and fit well with both his theory and his empirical analyses--and indeed that developing this fit is itself intellectually useful. Bourdieu's political actions are fully consistent with and understandably in terms of his scientific sociology, though they were not dictated by it.

Bourdieu's challenge to threatened collapse between scientific and economic (and for that matter, political and economic) fields in the 1990s and early 2000s is of a piece with his rejection of a collapse between academic and political fields in 1968 and both are informed by his theory of quasi-autonomous social fields. Further, I shall argue that Bourdieu's work should be read in specific relationship to "poststructuralism"; that though Derrida and Foucault are more conventional exemplars, on purely intellectual grounds the label "poststructuralist" fits Bourdieu at least as well; and that he represents a version of poststructuralism more serious about science and social organization than other lines of work usually grouped under that label. Indeed, the popular poststructuralism that began to flourish after 1968 as "French theory" spread to America was, he feared, specifically disempowering to the struggles against neoliberalism. Just as 1960s-era attacks on the university made it harder to defend the academy from new right-wing assaults, the poststructuralism (and "postmodernism") that followed encouraged denigrations of science and social order and substitutions of identity politics for more material struggles that weakened those who might resist neoliberalism.

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To begin with, let us recall the extraordinary scope and distinctive commitments of Bourdieu's work. The most influential and original French sociologist since Durkheim, Bourdieu was at once a leading theorist and an empirical researcher of broad interests and distinctive style. While no one would describe Bourdieu's writings as "easily accessible," few social scientists in our era have had a stronger and broader impact in the academic world as well as on modern culture and society. Bourdieu not only helped redefine the fields of sociology and anthropology; he made signal contributions also to education, history, literary studies, aesthetics, and a range of other fields. He analyzed labor markets in Algeria, symbolism in the calendar and the house of Kabyle peasants, marriage patterns in his native Béarn region of France, photography as an art form and hobby, museum goers and patterns of taste, modern universities, the rise of literature as a distinct field of endeavor, and the experience of misery and poverty amid the wealth of modern societies.

A former rugby player and a reader of the later Wittgenstein, Bourdieu was drawn to the metaphor of games to convey his sense of social life. But by "game" he didn't mean mere diversions or entertainments. Rather, he meant a serious athlete's understanding of a game. He meant the experience of being passionately involved in play, engaged in a struggle with others and with our own limits, over stakes to which we are (at least for the moment) deeply committed. He meant intense competition. He meant for us to recall losing ourselves in the play of a game, caught in its flow in such a way that no matter how individualistically we struggle we are also constantly aware of being only part of something larger—not just a team, but the game itself. Rugby is one of the world's most physically intense games. When Bourdieu spoke of playing, he spoke of putting oneself on the line.

Social life is like this, Bourdieu suggested, except that the stakes are bigger. Not just is it always a struggle; it requires constant improvisation. The idea is directly related to Wittgenstein's account of language games.[5] These are not diversions from some more basic reality but a central part of the activity by which forms of life are constituted and transformed. Learning a language is a constant training in how to improvise 'play' in social interaction and cultural participation more generally. No game can be understood simply by grasping the rules that define it. It requires not just following rules, but having a "sense" of the game, a sense of how to play.[6] This is a social sense, for it requires a constant awareness of and responsiveness to the play of one's opponent (and in some cases one's teammates). A good rugby (or soccer or basketball) player is constantly aware of the field as a whole, and anticipates the actions of teammates, knowing when to pass, when to try to break free.

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[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. London: 1967; orig. 1953.

[6] See Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule..." on Bourdieu's account of the limits of rule-following as an explication of action and its relationship to Wittgenstein; pp. 45-60 in C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, and M. Postone, eds.: *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)..

In this regard we can, I think, see that Bourdieu's entry into contestation over globalization was well timed, and the result of both conscious decision and an experienced strategist's sense of how to play the game in a shifting context. There are different possible approaches to each contest, and to each moment in a contest. What makes for a good strategy is determined by the rules of the game, of course, but also by assessing one's opponent's strengths and weaknesses—and one's own. A central strength of global capitalism is its ability to control the terms of discourse, and most especially, to present the specific emerging forms of globalization as driven by the force of necessity. Consider the force of this message in the rhetoric of the European Union and the advocates of a common currency. Globalization appears as a determinant force, an inevitable necessity to which Europeans must adapt; capitalism appears as its essential character; the American model is commonly presented as the 'normal' if not the only model. To assert that the specific pattern of international relations—like relations within nations—is the result of political choices and the exercise of power is to open up the game, to remove the illusion of necessity. This is a basic act of critical theory.

Bourdieu came by his critical intellectual orientation naturally, if you will, or at least biographically. Born in 1930, he was the grandson of an itinerant sharecropper and son of a farmer who later turned postman in the remote village of Lasseube in the Pyrénées Atlantiques. From this humble background, he rose through the public school system. He was at the top of his class at the Lycée de Pau, at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand à Paris, and at the École Normale Supérieure at the rue d'Ulm, the preeminent institution for consecration of French intellectuals. But he was never allowed the unselfconscious belonging of those born to wealth, cultural pedigree and elite accents. At the same time, he also never confused his success with simple proof of meritocracy (even if it did demonstrate some degree of grudging openness to the system). Instead, he developed from it an extraordinary capacity for critical social analysis and epistemic reflexivity.

Bourdieu's sense of bodily insertion into the competitive and insular universe of French academe was an inspiration for his revitalization of the Aristotelian-Thomist notion of *habitus*, the system of socially constituted dispositions that guides agents in their perception and action. His awareness of what his classmates and teachers did *not* see--because it felt natural to them--informed his accounts of the centrality of *doxa*–the preconscious taken-for-granted sense of reality that is more basic than any orthodoxy--and of misrecognition in producing and enabling social domination. Though educated in philosophy, Bourdieu embraced sociology precisely in order to make empirical research a tool for breaking through ordinary consciousness to achieve truer knowledge about a social world usually considered too mundane for philosophical attention. And his critical distance from the institutions within which he excelled propelled his telling analyses of French academic life, and indeed of inequality, the state and capitalism generally.

Bourdieu's contemporaries and comrades at the École Normale, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, shared this sense of distance from the dominant culture of the institution. Though the specifics varied, a certain horror at the social environment of the École informed each in a struggle to see what conventional consciousness obscured. Indeed, as Bourdieu sometimes reminded listeners, Foucault attempted suicide as a

student there. Bourdieu's intellectual response differed crucially from Derrida's and Foucault's: he embraced science, and in opposition to the aristocratic elitism of his initial field, philosophy, took up the plebian discipline of sociology. Rejecting the "caste profits" of the philosopher and accepting the challenges of empirical research offered, he thought, the best means for breaking with the enchantments of established ideas and self-evident social relations.

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In 1955, Bourdieu was sent to do military service in Algeria during that French colony's struggle for independence—and Republican France's horrific repression of it. The bloody battle of Algiers was a formative experience for a generation of French intellectuals who saw their state betray what it had always claimed was a mission of liberation and civilization, revealing the sheer power that lay behind colonialism, despite its legitimation in terms of progress. Bourdieu addressed this both with direct opposition and with research into the nature of domination itself, including in France, and into the nature of misrecognition and the struggle over classification.

Confrontation with the Algerian war, and with the transformations wrought by French colonialism and capitalism, left a searing personal mark on Bourdieu, solidifying his commitment to the principle that research must matter for the lives of others. Scarred but also toughened, he stayed on to teach at the University of Algiers and became a self-taught ethnographer. He proved himself an extraordinarily keen observer of the interpenetration of large-scale social change and the struggles and solidarities of daily life. Among other reasons, his native familiarity with the peasant society of Béarn gave him an affinity with the traditional agrarian society of Kabylia that was being destroyed by French colonialism. With Abdelmalek Sayad, he studied peasant life and participation in a new cash economy that threatened and changed it.[7] Conducting research in Kabyle villages and with Berber-speaking labor migrants to the fast-growing cities of the Algeria's coastal regions, he addressed themes from the introduction of money into marriage negotiations to cosmology and the agricultural calendar, and the economic crisis facing those who are forced into market relations for which they are not prepared. He studied the difficult situation of those who chose to work in the modern economy and found themselves transformed into its "underclass", not even able to gain the full status of proletarians because of the ethno-national biases of the French colonialists.[8]

These studies helped forge Bourdieu's theory of practice and informed his entire intellectual trajectory, including both academic endeavors and his later political critique of neoliberalism. Near the end of his life, he wrote:

> As I was able to observe in Algeria, the unification of the economic field tends, especially through monetary unification and the generalization of monetary

[7] Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le Déracinement, la crise de l'agriculture en Algerie.* Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964. An exceptional scholar in his own right, Sayad remained a close friend and interlocutor of Bourdieu's until his own death in 1998.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians* 1962; orig. 1958; Bourdieu, Pierre, Alain Darbel, J-P. Rivet and C. Seibel (1963/1995) *Travail et travailleurs en Algerie.* Paris and the Hague: Mouton.

> exchanges that follow, to hurl all social agents into an economic game for which they are not equally prepared and equipped, culturally and economically. It tends by the same token to submit them to standards objectively imposed by competition from more efficient productive forces and modes of production, as can readily be seen with small rural producers who are more and more completely torn away from self-sufficiency. In short, *unification benefits the dominant.*"[9]

Unification, of course, could be a project not only of the colonial state but also of national states, the European community, and the World Trade Organization.

It was also in Algeria that Bourdieu learned to fuse ethnography and statistics, ambitious theory and painstaking observation, and crafted a distinctive approach to social inquiry aimed at informing progressive politics through scientific production. In some ways, it may have helped to be self-taught because it encouraged Bourdieu to ignore some of the artificial oppositions structuring the social sciences—e.g., between quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Working with Alain Darbel and Abdelmalek Sayad helped to inaugurate a pattern of intellectual partnership that characterized Bourdieu's entire career. Sociology and anthropology have been slow to institutionalize collaboration (compared, for example, to the biomedical sciences). The French intellectual field remains dominated by the charismatic image of the heroic individual genius. But Bourdieu developed long-term relationships and a support system for shared intellectual labor. His ethnographic exploration of social suffering in contemporary society, *The Weight of the World*, was completed with 22 collaborators (I refrain from listing all Bourdieu's co-authors here).

Not least, Bourdieu's fieldwork in Kabylia—the practical experience as well as the data--supplied the foundation for his theoretical innovations in the theory of practice or "social praxeology".[10] One of the most basic difficulties in ethnographic research, Bourdieu came to realize, is the extent to which it puts a premium on natives' discursive explanations of their actions. Because the anthropologist is an outsider and starts out ignorant, natives must explain things to him. But it would be a mistake to accept such explanations as simple truths, not because they are lies but because they are precisely the limited form of knowledge that can be offered to one who has not mastered the practical skills of living fully inside the culture. Unless he is careful, the researcher is led to focus his attention not on the actual social life around him but on the statements about it which his informants offer. "The anthropologist's particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place (except by choice or by way of a game) in the system observed and has no need to make a place for himself there, inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations".[11] Such an approach would treat social life as much more a matter of explicit cognitive rules than it is, and miss the ways in which practical activity is really generated

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[9] "Unifying to Better Dominate," *Items and Issues*, winter 2001; orig. 2000.
[10] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; orig. 1972; and *The Logic of Practice.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990; orig. 1980.
[11] *Outline*, p. 1.

beyond the determination of the explicit rules. Bourdieu's project was to grasp the practical strategies people employed, their relationship to the explanations they gave (to themselves as well as to others), and the ways in which people's pursuit of their own ends nonetheless tended to reproduce objective patterns which they did not choose and of which they might even be unaware.

The resulting studies, culminating in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice* are among the most influential efforts to overcome the reified oppositions between subjective and objective, agency and structure. Though Bourdieu introduced the phrase "structuration" later made famous by Anthony Giddens, his work was different in two important ways. First, it was always rooted in a reflexive inquiry into the conditions of possibility of both objective and subjective views, never simply a new theory of a third way. Moreover, Bourdieu never sought to tackle these issues purely in the abstract but instead always in struggle to understand concrete empirical cases. Bourdieu's studies join with Foucault's work of the same period in moving beyond structuralism's avoidance of embodied subjectivity and with Derrida's effort to recover epistemology by breaking with the notion that it must be grounded in the Cartesian perspective of the individual knowing subject. In an important sense, the imprecise term "poststructuralist" fits Bourdieu as well it does Foucault or Derrida.

Bourdieu built on structuralism and benefited especially from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who among other things had helped rehabilitate the Durkheimian project of a science of the relations between culture and social organization and thus sociology as well as anthropology. Indeed it is actually hard to remember, from this side of Atlantic and given the way in which the history of social science is typically taught, that the work of Durkheim had fallen precipitously from prominence after his death and that of Marcel Mauss. Bourdieu saw himself as in important ways resuming that legacy, even while also improving on it, and the book series he edited made a variety of works by Durkheim and his students available that considerably broadened understanding of their project. In studies like his analysis of the Kabyle house, Bourdieu produced some of the classic works of structuralism.[12] He broke with conventional structuralism, however, as he sought a way to move beyond the dualisms of structure and action, objective and subjective, social physics and social semiotics and especially to inject a stronger account of temporality (and temporal contingency) into social analysis. For this he drew on the materialist side of Durkheim and Marx; on the phenomenologies of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty and later on ethnomethodology (not least the work of his friend Aaron Cicourel); on Wittgenstein, Austin and post-Saussurian linguistic analysis; on Ernst Cassirer's neo-Kantianism (especially *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*) and Erwin Panofsky's studies of the history of art and perception; and on the "historical rationalism" of his own teachers Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Jules

[12] Originally written in 1963-4, this was first published as "La maison kabyle ou le monde renversé," in J. Pouillon and P. Maranda, eds., *Échanges et communications : Mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss à l'occasion de son 60ème anniversaire* (Paris: Mouton, 1970, pp. 739-58), and republished as part of the French edition of the *Outline*, which was entitled *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle*. In the same sense, many of Michel Foucault's works of the mid-1960s are arguably classics of structuralism and not yet in any strong sense "poststructuralist"—e.g., *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon, 1970; orig. 1966).

Vuillemin.[13] Bourdieu's effort was not merely to forge a theoretical synthesis, but to develop the capacity to overcome some of the opposition between theoretical knowledge based on objectification of social life and phenomenological efforts to grasp its embodied experience and (re)production in action. Human social action is at once "structured" and "structuring," Bourdieu argued, indeed structuring *because* it is structured, with the socialized body as "analogical operator of practice."

Bourdieu railed against false antinomies and the kinds of scholastic oppositions that serve less to advance scientific knowledge than the careers of those who write endless theses arguing one side or the other, or proposing artificial syntheses designed essentially to create a new academic profit niche. The point was not simply to choose Weber over Marx, or Lévi-Strauss over Sartre, but to escape from false dualities and imposed categories. "Objective analysis," he wrote in *Homo Academicus,* "obliges us to realize that the two approaches, structuralist and constructivist ... are two complementary stages of the same procedure."

Likewise, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* he analyzed the opposition of mechanism to finalism, so prominent in the debates over structuralism, as "a false dilemma". It is, by the way, a false dilemma that has refused to die. Once familiar to English-language anthropologists through the debate between Rodney Needham (taking the structuralist position) and George Homans and David Schneider attacking it on methodologically individualist grounds, the false dilemma has recurred in recent metatheoretical arguments occasioned by rational choice theory and so-called "critical realism". Mechanisms are all the rage, advocated by Jon Elster and Charles Tilly, backed up by philosophers of science like Mario Bunge.[14] They promote various ideas of "mechanism" (usually without considering that their work might be read as 'mechanistic') in response to the common interpretative style of ethnographic or phenomenological work that treats agents' self-understandings or intentions as analytically sufficient. Bourdieu would not be altogether unsympathetic, as he pointed out that methodological objectivism is a necessary moment in all research. But most of the protagonists in the theoretical debates seek ways to advance causal analysis without

[13] Bourdieu's book series "*Le sens commun*" (published by Éditions d'Minuit) revealed some of the intellectual resources on which he drew and which he made available in France: The works of Ernst Cassirer, Gregory Bateson, Erwin Panofsky, Joseph Schumpeter, Mikhail Baktin, Jack Goody, and Erving Goffman, among many others, are known in France mainly because of Bourdieu's efforts. It was the same series that also helped revive and disseminate knowledge of the works of Durkheim and his heirs Marcel Mauss and Maurice Halbwachs, whose writings had been virtually effaced from French intellectual discourse.

[14] Rodney Needham, *Structure and Sentiment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); George C. Homans and David M. Schneider, *Kinship, Authority and Final Causes* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955); Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Charles Tilly, "Mechanisms in Political Processes," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2001, 4, pp. 21-41; Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*; Mario Bunge: *The Sociology/Philosophy Connection* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999); Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg, eds., *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). A key question is whether the emphasis on mechanisms is simply a restatement of Robert K. Merton's advice to stick to "middle-range theories" between pure description and grand theoretical systems (*Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York: Free Press, 1968; orig. 1957) or is itself part of a more dogmatic metatheory.

having to pass through the complexities of a theory of practice, usually by treating either actors' decisions or structural conditions as in themselves causally efficacious.

When Bourdieu wrote *Outline,* it was Sartrean existentialism that posited "each action as a sort of unprecedented confrontation between the subject and the world."[15] For today's advocates of explanation by "mechanisms" the fear of a loss of objectivity is aroused by poststructuralist cultural studies, in which the subject acting in the world may be less central but the subjective perspective of the observer dramatized. But the objectifying response—whether in the form of rational choice theory or a more structural theory—remains problematic if it is conceived as sufficient for science rather than a moment in a larger process of producing social knowledge. As Bourdieu wrote in *Outline*:

> In order to escape the realism of the structure, which hypostatizes systems of objective relations by converting them into totalities already constituted outside of individual history and group history, it is necessary to pass from the *opus operatum* to the *modus operandi*, from statistical regularity or algebraic structure to the principle of the production of this observed order, and to construct the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices, which is the precondition for establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification.[16]

There exists, thus, no simple 'solution' to the riddle of structure and agency (though early on Bourdieu introduced the term 'structuration' later made famous by Anthony Giddens). Rather, their mutual constitution and subsequent interaction must be worked out in analysis of concrete empirical cases, by reconstituting, first, the social genesis and makeup of objective social worlds (fields) within which agents develop and operate, second, the socially constituted dispositions (habitus) which fashion the manner of thinking, feeling, and acting of these agents. This "double historicization" calls for field and habitus to be related in analysis of specific temporal processes and trajectories. Moreover, it must be complemented by the historicization of the analytic categories and problematics of the inquiring scholar. Only in this way can social scientists do the necessary, if hard, labor of "conquering and constructing social facts"—that is, of distinguishing the hidden forms and mechanisms of social reality from the received understandings of previous academic knowledge, folk knowledge and the everyday preconceptions of "culture" more generally. On this basis, empirically-based reflexive analysis can also establish the social and epistemological conditions for both the objective and subjective perspectives themselves, and for avoiding the pitfalls of what Bourdieu later termed "the scholastic bias" – the tendency of social analysts to project their own (hermeneutic) relation to the social world into the minds of the people they observe.[17] Bourdieu's analyses thus lay the basis for an empirical science that would

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[15] *Outline*, p. 73.
[16] *Outline*, p. 72.
[17] This is discussed in several places; for a general treatment see chapter 6, "The Scholastic Point of View," in *Practical Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

address the practices of knowledge at the same time as it produced knowledge of social practice. The issue remained central in his challenge to neoliberalism:

> The implicit philosophy of the economy, and of the rapport between economy and politics, is a political vision that leads to the establishment of an unbreachable frontier between the economic, regulated by the fluid and efficient mechanisms of the market, and the social, home to the unpredictable arbitrariness of tradition, power, and passions.[18]

The production of knowledge structured by such presupposed categories undergirds the failure to take seriously the social costs of neoliberalism, the social conditions on which such an economy depends, and the possibilities of developing less damaging alternatives.

Pursuit of such a reflexive grounding for social science was one of the central motivations for Bourdieu's sociology of the scientific and university fields.[19] One cannot understand the stances intellectuals took during the pivotal period of May 1968, for instance, without understanding both the positions they held within their microcosm or the place of that intellectual field in the web of symbolic and material exchanges involving holders of different kinds of power and resources which Bourdieu christened "the field of power." This bears not just on political position-taking but on intellectual work itself. It is necessary to use the methods of social science—not merely introspection or memory—to understand the production of social science knowledge. Bourdieu was often accused of determinism, as though he were simply expressing a belief in agents' lack of free will. Much more basically, though, he argued that agency itself was only possible on the basis of the complex and ubiquitous pressures of social life, and that this as well as simple exercise of material coercion helped to explain the inertia of power relations and academic ideas alike. In the context of '68, for example, despite his own critiques of the educational system, Bourdieu was wary of romantic radicalism that imagined leaping beyond it or beyond inequality at a power at a single jump. This neglected the way in which institutions actually worked; it posed the risk of making matters worse by destroying rather than expanding the opportunities offered by the university system. He worried later that misappropriations of his own analysis of social reproduction encouraged abandonment of educational standards more than real struggle to transform education and society to the benefit of the marginalized.

More generally, Bourdieu called for an objective analysis of the conditions of creativity, and the pressures that resisted it, rather than an idealization of it as a purely subjective phenomenon. He demanded that social scientists pay scrupulous attention to the conditions and hence limitations of their own gaze and work—starting with the very unequal social distribution of leisure to devote to intellectual projects—and continually objectify their own efforts to produce objective knowledge of the social world. As Bourdieu made clear, he could not exempt himself from epistemic reflexivity, though like any other would need to be placed in an intellectual field not analyzed in purely individual terms. Bourdieu challenged, in other words, the common tendency to

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[18] "L'imposition du modèle américain et ses effets," *Contre-feux 2*, pp. 25-31; p. 29-30.

[19] See especially, Bourdieu's germinal article "The Scientific Field" (1975) and the books *Homo Academicus* (1984, tr. 1988) and *The State Nobility* (1989, tr. 1993).

propound objective explanations of the lives of others while claiming the right of subjective interpretation for one's own.

Bourdieu's views of the educational system reflected the disappointed idealism of one who had invested himself deeply in it, and owed much of his own rise from provincial obscurity to Parisian prominence to success in school. As he wrote in *Homo Academicus*, he was like someone who believed in a religious vocation then found the church to be corrupt. "The special place held in my work by a somewhat singular sociology of the university institution is no doubt explained by the peculiar force with which I felt the need to gain rational control over the disappointment felt by an 'oblate' faced with the annihilation of the truths and values to which he was destined and dedicated, rather than take refuge in feelings of self-destructive resentment".[20] The disappointment could not be undone, but it could be turned to understanding and potentially, through that understanding, to positive change.

Educational institutions were central to Bourdieu's concern, but both his sense of disappointment and his critical analyses both reached widely. All the institutions of modernity, including the capitalist market and the state itself, share in a tendency to promise far more than they deliver. They present themselves as working for the common good, but in fact reproduce social inequalities. They present themselves as agents of freedom, but in fact are organizations of power. They inspire devotion from those who want richer, freer lives, and they disappoint them with the limits they impose and the violence they deploy. Simply to attack modernity, however, is to engage in the "self-destructive resentment" Bourdieu sought to avoid. Rather, the best way forward lies through the struggle to understand, to win deeper truths, and to remove legitimacy from the practices by which power mystifies itself. In this way, one can challenge the myths and deceptions of modernity, enlightenment, and civilization without becoming the enemy of the hopes they offer. Central to this is renewed appreciation of both the autonomy and distinctive character of the scientific field and of the contributions it can make to public discourse:

> It is necessary today to reconnect with the 19th century tradition of a scientific field that, refusing to leave the world to the blind forces of the economy, wished to extend to the whole social world the values of the (undoubtedly idealized) scientific world.[21]

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Bourdieu was part of the poststructuralist movement in the general sense of incorporating a structuralist starting point but moving beyond it, as well as simply by generational identity. He shared with other progenitors of poststructuralism a suspicion of purely actor-centered (e.g., Sartrean) accounts of social life and an emphasis on the centrality of power. His project of a theory of practice was distinct, however, in its claim to scientific status rather than philosophical-literary critique; in its retention of both phenomenological and materialist moments largely rejected by the followers of Derrida,

[20] *Homo Academicus,* xxvi.
[21] *Contre-feux 2*, p. 8.

Foucault and Lacan; and in its reflexivity. Bourdieu rejected the widespread reliance on the metaphor of textuality as an approach to social life, and though he shared an emphasis on physical embodiment with Foucault, he rejected the tendency to import ideas of an underlying life-force along with other aspects of Heidegger and Nietzsche. Dwelling on the more familiar faces of poststructuralism is useful, however, in situating Bourdieu's theory and seeing its relationship to his politics. The connections are particularly obscure to those reading in English, because the pattern of translation and reception made Bourdieu appear not as a contemporary of Foucault and Derrida, but somehow as the coming after them.

Poststructuralism is almost by definition incoherent. It labels, mainly at a distance, a congeries of predominantly French efforts to move beyond the temporary certainties of structuralism. Structuralism itself was more a bundle of linked theoretical positions than a single theory. It joined Lévi-Strauss to Althusser, Lacan to Piaget. To some extent, though, it was a kind of intellectual movement. It reached an apogee in the 1960s and gave birth to poststructuralism in that moment of its triumph. This was also the moment in which American reception began in earnest. In anthropology, the importance of Lévi-Strauss brought a significant engagement with structuralism before engagement with Foucault or Derrida (and in fact, some of Bourdieu's early work was rightly read as exemplifying this structuralism). Althusser influenced Marxists, but not the core of any academic discipline. To a considerable extent, though, structuralism and poststructuralism made the Atlantic crossing together. This was perhaps especially true in literary studies, which were pivotal for the very idea of poststructuralism, and where the way had been prepared to some extent by the teachings of Paul DeMann. Moreover, in many fields, "poststructuralist" writings were vastly better known and more influential than structuralism itself had been—and failure by later generations of students to grasp the structuralism in poststructuralism produced many misunderstandings. In a sense, in the American reception, what poststructuralism was "post" to and in tension with varied among academic disciplines and not surprisingly shaped its appropriation.

Derrida and Foucault were the most influential standard-bearers of what came to be called poststructuralism, reaching out initially from within the structuralist movement to embrace other philosophical resources and ideals, such as the work of Nietzsche; to challenge rationalist certainties with reinstatements of both doubt and irony; and to suggest that rejecting the philosophy of individual consciousness did not entail rejecting epistemological inquiry. Their commonalities, like their place at the head of a putative poststructuralist movement, were less claimed by them than ascribed by appropriators on the other side of the Atlantic (and the link of poststructuralism to postmodernism can be similarly confusing). The unity of poststructualism was always dubious, and seldom important to those acclaimed the central poststructuralist theorists. There were a variety of paths beyond (as well as within) structuralism.

Most of those labeled poststructuralists, however, shared three refusals. First, they shared a rejection of positive politics, most especially the "modern" attempt to build new political systems or defend political arrangements rather than only to resist power or

expose inconsistencies, abuses, and aporias.[22] Second, they shared a repudiation of—or at least a disinterest in—the social.[23] In a sense, both of these refusals reflected the Nietschean heritage of poststructuralism; they reflected Nietzsche's rejection of a world of ordinary values and compromises, of the masses and mere existence, and of a morality of good and evil as the underpinning for a politics of liberation. Third, they rejected science, viewing it mainly as part of a system of repressive power and not as a potential source of liberation (a concept usually abandoned with ideas of positive politics). Bourdieu suggested, in fact, that this was partially a reflection of the very training of the "core" poststructuralists as philosophy students at the École Normale, and also their appreciation of the "caste profits" that accrued to those who chose higher status disciplines (even though both Derrida and Foucault were in marginalized by academic philosophy, the former gaining influence mainly in literary studies and the latter gaining position as a historian).

Bourdieu had little patience for the rejection of science recently fashionable among self-declared critical thinkers. He thought that the "French theory" that claimed indebtedness to Foucault and Derrida had "much to answer for" on both the scientific and the political fronts and considered "postmodernism" a "global intellectual swindle" made possible by the uncontrolled "international circulation of ideas" that gained prestige from their exotic provenance even while this undermined what should have been the corrective mechanisms in different intellectual fields. Much of French poststructuralism and postmodernism derived, thus, from a German *Lebensphilosophie* opposed to the historicist rationalism at root of the French social science lineage. While he shared the view that simple empiricism was liable to reproduce ideologically conventional views, he argued that the necessary response was not to throw out the baby of science with the bathwater of positivism and abandon empirical research, but to wield continual collective vigilance over the classifications and relations through which scientific knowledge was produced and disseminated—including by state bureaucracies whose categories pigeon-hole human beings for their own purposes while providing social scientists with apparently neutral data.

The problematic tendencies inherent in French poststructuralism were magnified in its American appropriation. As in the importation of *lebensphilosophie* into France, the export of poststructuralism to America involved both an artificial accretion of prestige an intellectual decontextualization. The American appropriation was marked by a further reduction in attention to social relations, partly perhaps because it was led by professors of literature whose disciplinary formation encouraged focusing on the abstracted text, but also because of a tendency to underappreciate (Jameson notwithstanding) the marxist

[22] This is not to say that they were politically inactive; Foucault, for example, campaigned importantly on prisons. The point is the reluctance to embrace a positive political project as distinct from resistance. Perhaps equally indicative is Foucault's early support for the Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeni, which praised precisely its resistance to modernity.

[23] It should be granted, though, that if poststructuralism, along with much of the "cultural studies" movement in English language scholarship, suffered an inattention to the social, a symmetrical lack, or even repudiation, characterized much of social and political theory and sociology. Those on the other side from poststructuralism and kindred cultural inquiry often insisted on thin notions of culture and especially failed to pay much attention to creativity.

theory in the background and underpinnings of many poststructuralist theorists. Poststructuralist theories were conjoined with politics, but seldom with positive rather than negative political projects (and too often with the illusion of politics that intra-academic insurgency offers). And American poststructuralism eagerly embraced the critique of science.

All these are crucial reasons why what has come most visibly after poststructuralism—in both France and the US--is on the one hand a resurgent right wing populism and on the other variants of liberalism—whether neoKantian or Hayekian—and a Left both weak and theoretically impoverished.[24] Poststructuralism offers scant tools to contest either the resurgence of a racism transformed into a kind of ethnicism or the neoliberalism of global capitalist interests. The new right wing politics has attracted few poststructuralists, and indeed few theorists. It is rooted partly in a populist *ressentiment,* but it also builds on some openings poststructuralism helped to create and critical responses are weakened by some poststructuralist assumptions.

Much academic poststructuralism and postmodernism produced illusions of radicalism without fact contesting either power structures or the production of suffering. It involved, in Bourdieu's terms, "transgression without risk." As Bourdieu wrote of Philippe Sollers, the famous founder of *Tel Quel* and ostensible cultural radical, "The man who presents and sees himself as an incarnation of freedom has always floated at the whim of the forces of the field."[25] The phrase could describe not only the particular individual, but the paradigmatic individual of individualism, unable to recognize the social conditions of actual freedom, confusing ephemeral novelties with changes in the underlying field of power. And what Bourdieu suggests is that for all the will to radicalism in fashionable poststructuralist thought, it more commonly achieves cynicism and a kind of cultural play that fails to engage deeper social issues. If this is willfully self-serving in Sollers' case and a genuine intellectual misrecognition in others', so much more reason to seek out a theoretical basis for a more critical intellectual position.

Poststructuralists were the most important enemies of the universalist critique of hierarchy—sometimes to be sure still resisting hierarchy itself, but abandoning this foundational position for the resistance. They were also strong celebrants of "difference". In the hands of many in the European new right (and some homologues in America and elsewhere) this combination has issued in a right-wing nationalism and ethnic politics. However repugnant this is to most poststructuralists and others, it shares a claim to a non-

[24] A variety of liberalisms are involved, including both more "left" and more "conservative" neoKantian positions in France and there especially the variety of academic positions trading on rejections of the thought of '68 (cf. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaud, French Philosophy of the Sixties, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); consider also Lyotard. In America, somewhat similarly, feminists who had argued largely from poststructuralist positions were often thrown back on liberalism in their efforts to defend gains against resurgent right wing challengers. This fit with feminism's close association with defense of multicultural freedoms, but it often sacrificed the kind of more general and positive social and political theory earlier linked to socialist-feminism (though see efforts to reclaim the latter project, e.g., by Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interreuptus.* New York: Routledge, 1996).

[25] Sollers, Bourdieu said, made "cynicism one of the Fine Arts". *Acts of Resistance* (New York: New Press, 1998), 12.

hierarchical construction of difference as the basis for both celebrations of self-identity and politics of exclusion. As Taguieff has argued, this new "differentialist racism" has produced confusion in the anti-racist camp, because it has reduced the purchase of traditional anti-racist arguments while introducing a new racism that can appropriate the terms of the poststructuralist discourse of difference and resistance to universalism.[26] There is clearly an irony in seeing celebration of difference turn into a racist reaction to it.

Equally ironically, and even more centrally perhaps, the poststructuralist politics of resistance has turned into an outright liberalism for some, and undercut resistance to dominant liberalism for others. This is ironic, because most versions of liberalism depend, for example, on presumptions of individual subjects strikingly at odds with poststructuralism's deconstructions and analyses of the production of subjects by disciplinary power. Similarly, poststructuralists often affirmed a polymorphous creativity at odds with the role of neoliberalism in support of the disciplining labor for global consumption. There is perhaps a closer and less ironic link between the celebration of consumer culture by many postmodernists (in ways not really inherently poststructuralist) and the neoliberal argument that consumer choices are a good measure of freedom. In any case, many whose primarily political instincts were simply to resist authority have found themselves unable to resist the seductions of an ideology that sees free movement—free play!—of capital as a prime instance of resistance to authority.[27] It is now hard to find a way out of oppositions between a racism and nationalism dressed up in new differentialist colors, and a neoliberalism in which the liberties of capital dominate over any positive conception of human freedom. Whatever its contributions, most versions of poststructuralism offer little help in the search for an escape from this frustrating forced choice.

For many who have been influenced by poststructuralism, simply shoring up liberalism appears as the best choice—protecting civil liberties, for example, as a way of protecting differences among subjects. To some extent this reflects simply the extent to which the left was thrown on the defensive, hoping to preserve various freedoms during the rise of the new right. But there was also an elective affinity between poststructuralism and the abandonment of projects more directly engaging state power or seeking structural change in social relations. At the same time, many followers of poststructuralism, in America at least, tended to substitute academic politics for ties to social movements

[26] See Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and its Doubles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[27] One of the many ironies of U.S. politics in the 1980s was that many who saw themselves as radical critics of the established order identified with poststructuralism and with an academic politics in which more old-fashioned leftists (including marxists, especially of an older generation) were the would-be authorities to be resisted as often as extra-academic authorities of the right. To speak of the social, or of basic structures of capital, was in many circles seen as a retrograde attempt to enforce old views that stood condemned as repressive and—perhaps worse—boring. What this meant was that opportunities for a fruitful melding of marxist and poststructuralist insights were often lost, or at least deferred. Indeed, the image of poststructuralism in the U.S. tended often to present French poststructuralists as more clearly opposed to marxism (and structuralism) than was in fact the case. The structuralism and (often structuralist) marxism incorporated into many of the classics of poststructuralism was underestimated—making works like Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994) more surprising than they should have been.

beyond the universities. Feminism, for example, was once a remarkable demonstration of how academic intellectual work and broad social movement could be joined, but the link was largely severed in the era of poststructuralist predominance. To some extent, this was not the fault of poststructuralism but of larger movement and political dynamics. The dominant forms of poststructuralism, though, were particularly prone to what Bourdieu called the "scholastic fallacy," to attributing the problems of theoretical understanding to people not engaged in theory as such, and thus to imagining that academic contestation over cultural issues was the same as practical politics rather than a potentially useful complement to it. Poststructuralist theory did offer useful complements—including its emphasis on difference and the problems with universalism—but not a viable alternative. Fights between marxists and poststructuralists, moreover, tended to crowd out other traditions of critical social analysis—including for example the approaches offered in France by Mauss and Merleau-Ponty, both part of a tradition Bourdieu sought to revitalize.

Not all features of liberalism are problematic, of course, but liberalism without a strong theory of social relations and social practice is in a remarkably weak position to contest the "neoliberalism" that makes the abstracted individual the ground of all analysis and the economic the primary measure of this individual's well-being. This neoliberalism is the dominant ideology of the day. Mounting an effective challenge to it, and moving beyond the idea that it is the only available alternative to the new racism and nationalism, depends on revitalizing the idea of the social and overcoming debilitating oppositions between the social and the economic, the social and the individual, and the social and the cultural. Not least of the importance of Bourdieu's work, then, is suggesting a truly sociological way to incorporate the gains of poststructuralism, but transcend its weaknesses.[28] Most versions of liberalism, by contrast, represent a continued retreat from the social.

In order to contest neoliberal orthodoxy and the paradoxical collapse of much poststructuralism into it, we need to inquire into the very construction of "the social"—that is, of human life understood relationally. Bourdieu's theory is not the last word on this, but is a crucial starting point for investigating how the social is built and rebuilt in everyday practice, and how the basic categories of knowledge are embedded in this. Bourdieu's work at its most basic is a challenge to false oppositions: the interested and disinterested, the individual and the collective, and the socio-cultural and the economic.[29] "A presupposition which is the basis of all the presuppositions of economics" is that "a radical separation is made between the economic and the social, which is left to one side, abandoned to sociologists, as a kind of reject."[30] This in turn undergirds "a political vision that leads to the establishment of an unbreachable frontier between the economic,

[28] On this point, and also the relationship of both Bourdieu and other poststructuralist arguments to critical theory, see Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

[29] Bourdieu's emphasis has been especially on the separation of the economic from both the social and the cultural, but the opposition of the latter two can be equally pernicious, as in specious ideas of division of labor between sociology and anthropology in the US, or the construction of "sociology of culture" within American sociology—rather than, say the "cultural sociology" of central Europe.

[30] *Acts of Resistance,* p. 31.

regulated by the fluid and efficient mechanisms of the market, and the social, home to the unpredictable arbitrariness of tradition, power, and passions.[31] Economics is able to claim a falsely asocial (and acultural) individual subject, and the social (including culture) is posited as the non-economic realm (the realm at once the economically unimportant and of the pure aesthetic--never a true commodity but claimable only after the fact as an economic good). When the production of knowledge is structured by such presupposed categories failure to take seriously the social costs of neoliberalism, the social conditions on which such an economy depends, and the possibilities of developing less damaging alternatives is almost inevitable.

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Bourdieu's engagement with "the social" was not simply a theoretical position but the product of an acute interest in social inequality and the ways in which it is masked and perpetuated. At once personal and political as well as scientific, this concern was appropriately evident in his studies of intellectual production and its hidden determinations. More generally, it underpins his account of the forging, conversion and communication of "cultural capital" and the operation of "symbolic power"—a central theme of his career. Already prominent in his work on Algeria, this concern became even more prominent when he turned his attention to France, notably in studies of matrimonial strategies and gender relations in his native Béarn during the early 1960s.[32]

In 1964, Bourdieu published *The Inheritors*, the first of several ground-breaking studies of schools, cultural distinction and class division, soon followed by *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society* (both collaborations with Jean-Claude Passeron). The latter outlines a theory of pedagogical work as an exemplar of "symbolic violence". This concept reflects Bourdieu's structuralist/poststructuralist heritage, referring to the imposition of a "cultural arbitrary" that is made to appear neutral or universal.[33] Both books examined the ways in which seemingly meritocratic educational institutions reproduced and legitimated social inequalities, for example by transforming differences in family background or familiarity with bourgeois language into differences in performance on academic tests. Read in English narrowly as texts in the sociology or anthropology of education, they were also more general challenges to the French state, which embraced education more centrally than its counterparts in the English-language countries. The national education system stood as perhaps the supreme exemplar of the pretended seamless unity and neutrality of the state in simultaneous roles as representative of the nation and embodiment of reason and progress. Bourdieu showed not merely that it was biased (a fact potentially corrigible) but that it was in principle biased. This was read by some as a blanket condemnation, and indeed Bourdieu himself

[31] "L'imposition du modèle américain et ses effets," *Contre-feux 2*, pp. 25-31; p. 29-30.

[32] Bourdieu published several articles on these themes, and left a more extended, book-length treatment, *Le Bal des célibataires,* in press at his death.

[33] *The Inheritors,* with Jean-Claude Passeron. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; orig. 1964; *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society*, with Jean-Claude Passeron. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977; orig. 1970.

worried later that this loose reading of his work encouraged teachers simply to adopt lax standards in order not to be seen (or see themselves) as the agents of symbolic violence.

The heavy emphasis of the early works on demonstrating the tendency of the educational system to reproduce its own internal hierarchy and the external material and symbolic hierarchies of the larger social order encouraged readers to the distorting simplification of seeing the studies as merely arguments that "education is a process of reproduction". In fact, Bourdieu did not deny the progressive possibilities of education—albeit in need of reform—and he certainly saw science as potentially liberating.[34] The issue was more that a particular system of categories, contents, and outcomes was presented as necessary and neutral (and one senses Bourdieu's outrage at professors who can't see the system reflexively and critically even while he explains their complacency and incapacity). Forming the taxonomic order of both the way academics thought and the way the system was organized, it was impressively protected against internal critique and therefore successful reform and improvement. As he wrote later,

> The homology between the structures of the educational system (hierarchy of disciplines, of sections, etc.) and the mental structures of the agents (professorial taxonomies) is the sources of the functioning of the consecration of the social order which the education system performs behind its mask of neutrality.[35]

In short, the education system is a field. It has a substantial autonomy, which it must protect, and a distinctive form of capital which depends on that autonomy for its efficacy. It is internally organized as a set of transposable dispositions and practical taxonomies that enable participants to understand their world and to take effective actions, but which also produce and reproduce specific inequalities among them and make these appear natural. These can be challenged—as indeed Bourdieu challenged them by analyzing them—but it should not be thought that they could be easily changed by a simple act of will. And it is externally productive, providing the larger field of power with one of its most powerful legitimations through the process of the conversion of educational capital into more directly economic, political, or other forms.

Here we see again the dialectic of incorporation and objectification to which Bourdieu referred in the passage quoted above from *Outline*. The education system depends on the inculcation of its categories as the mental structures of agents and on the simultaneous manifestation of these as material structures of organization. This enables the production of objective effects that do not cease to be objective and materially powerful simply by pointing to the subjective moments in their creation. It is true that there is "symbolic aggression observable in all examination situations" (and Bourdieu goes to great lengths to document and analyze such things as the terms teachers use in commenting on examination papers) but not that this is explicable simply as the psychological attitude of individual agents. Rather, it is a disposition inculcated by agents' own trajectories through the educational field (as students as well as teachers) and

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[34] For decades he quietly supported students from Kabylia in the pursuit of higher education, a fact that speaks not only to his private generosity and sense of obligation, but to his faith that, for all their complicity in social reproduction, education and science remain our best hope for loosening the yoke of domination.

[35] "The Categories of Professorial Understanding," p. 204; originally published in 1978, this is reprinted as a postscript to *Homo Academicus*, 1988; orig. 1984.

both reproduced and rendered apparently neutral by its match to the categories of organization and value in the field as a whole.[36]

More generally, the social order is effectively consecrated through the educational system because it is able to appear as neutral and necessary. In one of Bourdieu's favorite metaphors for describing his own work, the Maoist notion of "twisting the stick the other way", he turned the structuralist analysis of taxonomies in another way by mobilizing it through an account of practice in the context of fields. And the analysis of how the culturally arbitrary (and often materially unequal) comes to appear as natural and fair directly informed his later critique of the imposition of neoliberal economic regimes and the American model of dismantling or reducing state institutions, including those like education that do provide opportunities for ordinary people even while in their existing form they reproduce distinctions like that of ordinary from extraordinary.

Just as Marx argued that capitalism produced wealth that it could not effectively distribute to all its participants, Bourdieu argued that science and education do in fact produce and reproduce knowledge but do so inseparably from inequalities in capacity and opportunity to appropriate that knowledge.

> Economic power lies not in wealth but in the relationship between wealth and a field of economic relations, the constitution of which is inseparable from the development of a *body of specialized agents*, with specific interests; it is in this relationship that wealth is constituted, in the form of capital, that is, as the instrument for appropriating the institutional equipment and the mechanisms indispensable to the functioning of the field, and thereby also appropriating the profits from it.[37]

It would make no sense to start socialism—or any more egalitarian society—by willfully abolishing all the material wealth accumulated under capitalism and previous economic systems. But it would be necessary to transform the system of relations that rendered such wealth capital. Likewise, knowledge as a kind of resource deployed by those with power in relation to specific fields—legal, medical, academic--constitutes a specific form of capital. But knowledge need not be organized this way.

Bourdieu's exploration of the operation of different forms of power blossomed into a full-fledged model of the relations between economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital in the deployment of strategies of class reproduction. This perhaps reached its

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[36] "The Categories of Professorial Judgment" ends with an illustration of the workings of fields that is also a comment on the aristocratic side of the fashionable Heideggerianism of the poststructuralist era:

> These generic dispositions are in fact made specific by the position held by each reader in the university field. We see, for instance, what the most common reading of the classical texts (O Epicurean garden!) may owe to the virtues of provincial gardeners, and what ordinary and extraordinary interpretations of Heidegger may owe to that aristocratic asceticism which, on forest path or mountain pass, flees the flabby, vulgar crowds or their concrete *analagon*, the continually renewed (bad) pupils who have to be endlessly saved from the temptations of society in order to inculcate in them the recognition of true value. (p. 225)

See also Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991; orig. 1988, where field analysis is used to understand Heidegger himself.

[37] *Outline*, pp. 184-5.

fullest development in his study of the *grands écoles* and the political and economic power structure of the elite professions, *The State Nobility.*[38] The studies of education were part of a broader approach to culture and power that drew also on a series of influential empirical studies of art and artistic institutions starting in the 1960s.[39] In addition to the book-length works on education and art, Bourdieu published extensive shorter studies of the religious, scientific, philosophical, and juridical fields. In these and other investigations, he laid the basis for a general theory of "fields" as differentiated social microcosms operating as spaces of objectives forces and arenas of struggle over value which refract and transmute external determinations and interests. His deepest and most sustained work on fields, as well as his most historical research, focused on literature and was capped by *The Rules of Art*, an investigation of the symbolic revolution wrought in literature by Flaubert, Baudelaire and others.[40] Bourdieu's greatest unfinished work is probably its companion study, a sociogenetic dissection of Manet and the transformation of the field of painting in which he played a pivotal role.

This line of work is most widely known, however, through *Distinction*, almost certainly Bourdieu's most prominent book in English.[41] *Distinction* is an analysis of how culture figures in social inequality and how the pursuit of distinction or differential recognition shapes all realms of social practice. It is also an effort to "move beyond the opposition between objectivist theories which identify the social classes (but also the age or sex classes) with discrete groups, simple countable populations separated by boundaries objectively drawn in reality, and subjectivist (or marginalist) theories which reduce the 'social order' to a sort of collective classification obtained by aggregating the individual classifications or, more precisely, the individual strategies, classified and classifying, through which agents class themselves and others."[42] Bourdieu develops, thus, an argument that struggles over classification itself are an important and largely ignored aspect of class struggle (suggesting in the process that class struggle has hardly become obsolete). That classification is materially efficacious may be a familiar idea from the structuralist heritage; that it is an exercise of political power and potentially challengeable by a political—and also cultural—struggle is more in keeping with "poststructuralist" arguments (though Bourdieu's notion of power always had more to do with agents wielding and benefiting from it than, say, Foucault's).

Distinction, however, is also crucially a response to Kant's Third Critique (and to subsequent philosophical disquisitions on judgment). Much as Durkheim had sought to challenge individualistic explanation of social facts in *Suicide*, so Bourdieu sought in *Distinction* to uncover the social roots and organization of all forms of judgment. Kant's argument had sought an approximation in practical reason to the universality available

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[38] Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; orig. 1989.

[39] See *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (with Luc Boltanski, Robert Castel, Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Dominique Schnapper). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990; orig. 1965; *The Love of Art* (Alain Darbel and Dominique Schnapper). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990; orig. 1966

[40] *The Rules of Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; orig. 1992.

[41] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984; orig. 1979.

[42] *Distinction*, p. 483.

more readily to pure reason. He had seen this as crucial equally to artistic taste and political opinion. But he had imagined a standpoint of disinterested judgment from which practical reason (and critique) might proceed. Bourdieu clearly accepted the analogy between art and politics, but not this idea of disinterest or of a place outside social struggles from which neutral knowledge might issue. If he shared this critique of ostensible neutrality with Foucault and other more conventional poststructuralists, he differed importantly in arguing that knowledge not only buttresses the hierarchies of the social world but also can be an effective part of the struggle to change that world, even if it is never produced from a standpoint outside it. The world-as-it-is-perceived issues out of and bolsters the world-as-it-is, a struggle over classification may actually change the world, and—this was crucial for Bourdieu—that struggle need not be simply a matter of power but can be through science a matter of knowledge which transcends mere power even if it does not escape struggles over power and recognition altogether. In short, we needn't go down the Nietzschean path towards a choice between simple embrace of the will to power or a futile resistance to it.

We can refuse relativism even though we cannot escape social relations. And if many of the poststructuralists failed to avoid relativism, they also failed to recognize the system of social relations in which they remained embedded, including the quasi-aristocratic system of the university (and especially in the French case, the philosophy-centered production of this aristocratic system).

> Failing to be, at the same time, social breaks which truly renounce the gratifications associated with membership, the most audacious intellectual breaks of pure reading still help to preserve the stock of consecrated texts from becoming dead letters, mere archive material, fit at best for the history of ideas or the sociology of knowledge, and to perpetuate its existence and its specifically philosophical powers by using it as an emblem or a matrix for discourses which, whatever their stated intention, are always, also, symbolic strategies deriving their power essentially from the consecrated texts. Like the religious nihilism of some mystic heresies, philosophical nihilism too can find an ultimate path of salvation in the rituals of liberatory transgression. Just as, by a miraculous dialectical renewal, the countless acts of derision and desacralization which modern art has perpetrated against art have always turned, insofar as these are still artistic acts, to the glory of art and the artist, so the philosophical 'deconstruction' of philosophy is indeed, when the very hope of radical reconstruction has evaporated, the only philosophical answer to the deconstruction of philosophy.[43]

Philosophy is like art in claiming a certain disinterested distance from the economy but in fact contributing the reproduction of the social order. Both also specifically deny the centrality of the social, not only in terms of the institutions in which they flourish but in the necessary distinction between merely intellectual and truly social breaks with the established order.

If philosophy and art operate with a denial of interest, economics and less academic discourses about economic matters clearly embrace interest. But they operate with a presumption of neutrality and objectivity that renders them vulnerable to a closely

[43] *Distinction,* p. 496.

related critique. For if the cultural world is the economic world reversed, as Bourdieu famously put it,[44] it is also true that liberal economics turns precisely on the denial of cultural significance, the positing of "interests" as objective, and the perception of economic systems as matters of necessity rather than products of choice and power (and therefore potentially to be improved by struggle). There is no disinterested account of interests, no neutral and objective standpoint from which to evaluate policy, not even academic economics. But this doesn't remove economic matters from science, it simply extends the demand for a truly reflexive social science, and for an overcoming of the oppositions between structure and action, objective and subjective to economics and economic analysis. The economy has no more existence separate from or prior to the rest of society than do art or philosophy. It is not 'necessity' to which we may only adapt any more than artistic creativity is simply 'freedom' with no social base.

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Bourdieu's approach was to rethink major philosophical themes and issues by means of empirical observation and analyses rooted in "a practical sense of theoretical things" rather than through theoretical disquisition.[45] Science—including sociology and anthropology—was for him a practical enterprise, an active, ongoing practice of research and analysis (*modus operandi*), not simply a body of scholastic principles (*opus operatum*). It was no accident that he titled his book of epistemological and methodological preliminaries *The Craft of Sociology*.[46] The craft worker is always a lover of knowledge; the craft itself is precisely a store of knowledge, yet it is never fully discursive and available for explicit transmission as such. Masters teach their skills by example and coaching, knowing that know-how cannot be reduced to instructions, and never escapes its situated and embodied character. Like *habitus*, "the rules of art" is a phrase that signifies practical knowledge, learning-by-doing, tacit understanding, like the knowledge of cooking embodied in a grandmother's demonstrations and guidance rather than a cookbook. Art can never be reduced to following set rules and yet to say it is without coherence, strategy or intention or not based on social organized and shared knowledge would be to misunderstand it utterly. Neither is science simply the value-free expression of "truth." It is a project, but one organized, ideally, in a social field that rewards the production of verifiable and forever revisable truths—including new truths and new approaches to understanding--and not merely performance according to explicit

[44] "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," pp. 29-73 in *The Field of Cultural Production.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; orig., 1983.

[45] Only relatively late, in *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997; orig. 1995), did Bourdieu offer a systematic explication of his conception of social knowledge, being, and truth. In this book, he started once again with the premise that the knowledge produced by social analysts must be related to the conditions of intellectual work and to the peculiar dispositions fostered by the scholastic universe. He laid out his philosophical anthropology, in which human action is guided not by "interests" but by the eternal thirst for recognition, whose form will be determined by particular locations in collective and individual histories. He clarified his agonistic view of the social world, anchored not by the notion of "reproduction" but by that of struggle (itself internally linked to recognition). And he showed why epistemic--as distinguished from narcissistic—reflexivity mandates a commitment to "historical rationalism," and not relativism.

[46] *The Craft of Sociology* (with Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron). Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991; orig. 1968.

rules and standards. It is a project that depends crucially on reason as an institutionally embedded capacity, and therefore refuses equally the rationalistic reduction of reason to rules, simple determinism's unreasoned acceptance of the status quo, and the expressive appeal to insight supposedly transcending history and not corrigible by reason.

Indeed, it was as a scientist that Bourdieu in the last years of his life turned to analyze the impacts of neoliberal globalization on culture, politics, and society. Though he was accused of simply adopting the mediatic throne Sartre and Foucault had occupied before—and certainly he never fully escaped from that mediatic version of politics--he offered a different definition of what a "public intellectual" might be. Citing the American term, he writes of "one who relies in political struggle on his competence and specific authority, and the values associated with the exercise of his profession, like the values of truth or disinterest, or, in other terms, someone who goes onto the terrain of politics without abandoning the requirements and competences of the researcher".[47] Even in the tradition of Zola, it was important to recognize the difference between becoming a politician and speaking in public as an intellectual.

Basic to Bourdieu's interventions as a public intellectual, in this sense, was the importance of creating the possibility of collective choice where the dominant discourse described only the impositions of necessity. In the context of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, for example, Bourdieu challenged the idea that the choices of European citizens were limited to passivity before the horrors of ethnic cleansing or support for the American-led NATO policy of high-altitude bombing. More prominently, he challenged the neoliberal idea that imposition of the "American model" was a necessary response to globalization (itself conceived as a quasi-natural force). This American model he identified with five features of American culture and society which were widely proposed as necessary to successful globalization in other contexts: (1) a weak state, (2) an extreme development of the spirit of capitalism, and (3) the cult of individualism, (4) exaltation of dynamism for its own sake, and (5) neo-Darwinism with its notion of self-help.[48]

Bourdieu was concerned above all that the social institutions that supported reason—by providing scholars, scientists, artists, and writers, with a measure of autonomy--were under unprecedented attack. Reduction to the market threatened to undermine science; reduction to the audience-ratings logic of television entertainment threatened to undermine public discourse. The problem was not internationalization as such. Bourdieu himself called forcefully for a new internationalism, saw science as an international endeavor, and founded *Liber*, a European review of books published in six languages. The problem was the presentation of a particular modality of "globalization" as a force of necessity to which there was no alternative but adaptation and acceptance. Calling this the American model annoyed Americans who wished to distance themselves from government and corporate policies but capturing with this label a worldwide trend toward commodification, state deregulation, and competitive individualism exemplified

[47] "Pour un savoir engagé," pp. 33-41 in *Contre-feux 2: Pour un mouvement social européen.* Paris : Raisons d'agir, 2001: 33.
[48] "L'imposition du modèle américain et ses effets," *Contre-feux 2*, pp. 25-31.

and aggressively promoted by the dominant class of the United States at the end of the 20th century.

Whatever the label, Bourdieu meant the view that institutions developed out of a long century of social struggles should be scrapped if they could not meet the test of market viability. Many of these, including schools and universities, are state institutions. As he had demonstrated in much of his work, they were far from perfect. Nonetheless, collective struggles had grudgingly and gradually opened them to a degree to the dominated, workers, women, ethnic minorities, and others. These institutions and this openness are fragile social achievements that open up the possibility of more equality and justice, and to sacrifice them is to step backwards, whether this step is masked by a deterministic analysis of the "market" or a naked assertion of self-interest by the wealthy and powerful. This does not mean that defense must be blind, but it does mean that resistance to neoliberal globalization, even when couched in the apparently backward-looking rhetoric of nationalism, can be a protection of genuine gains and indeed, a protection of the public space for further progressive struggles.

In his own life, Bourdieu recognized, it was not merely talent and effort that propelled his extraordinary ascent from rural Béarn to the Collège de France, but also state scholarships, social rights, and educational access to the closed world of "culture." This recognition did not stop him from critical analysis. He showed how the classificatory systems operating in these institutions of state, culture, and education all served to exercise symbolic violence as well as and perhaps more than to open opportunities. But he also recognized the deep social investment in such institutions necessarily inculcated in people whose life trajectories depended them: "what individuals and groups invest in the particularly meaning they give to common classificatory systems by the use they make of them is infinitely more than their 'interest' in the usual sense of the term; it is their whole social being, everything which defines their own idea of themselves..."[49]

Neoliberal reforms, thus, not only threaten some people with material economic harms, they threaten social institutions that enable people to make sense of their lives. That these institutions are flawed is a reason to transform them (and the classificatory schemes central to their operation and reproduction). It is not a basis for imagining that people can live without them, especially in the absence of some suitable replacements. Moreover, the dismantling of such institutions is specifically disempowering, not only economically depriving. That is, it not only takes away material goods in which people have an "interest", it undercuts their ability to make sense of their social situation and create solidarities with others.

Especially from the early 1990s, Bourdieu worked to protect the achievements of the social struggles of the twentieth century -- pensions, job security, open access to higher education and other provisions of the social state -- against budget cuts and other attacks in the name of free markets and international competition. In the process, he

[49] *Distinction*, p. 478.

became one of the world's most famous critics of neoliberal globalization.[50] Indeed, Bourdieu became remarkably famous, not least after Pierre Carles' documentary movie on his political work, *Sociology Is a Martial Art*, was a surprise commercial success in 2000-2001. Theater groups staged performances based on his ethnographic exploration of social suffering, *La misère du monde*.[51] It was this fame that brought forth the criticism and resentment of many of his colleagues and a variety of cultural commentators.

It is easy to see how celebrity can fuel jealousy among intellectuals. To this we must add the special complexities of the French intellectual field and Bourdieu's place within it. His chair at the Collège de France gave him a symbolically preeminent but materially marginal position. He could not effectively place all his protégés. Moreover, though he resisted (and sometimes fiercely denied) becoming one of the "mandarins" of the French system, its structural constraints insistently asserted themselves: to achieve personal autonomy, several of Bourdieu's early students and collaborators felt it necessary to go through painful rebellions. A few could not restrain themselves from publicly expressing their quasi-Oedipal struggles in newspaper commentary after Bourdieu's death. And yet, perhaps the greatest source of resentment against Bourdieu was his refusal to turn his own success – in the intellectual world, on the political scene, and in the media -- into an endorsement of the system and thus of all those honored by it. On the contrary, Bourdieu was relentlessly critical of the consecration function performed by educational institutions. By implication, many felt deconsecrated.[52]

Bourdieu's public interventions were, however, firmly rooted in his sociological analyses. Indeed, it was his theory of social fields—honed in studies of the religious field, the legal field, and the field of cultural production--that informed his defense of the autonomy (always only relative) of the scientific field from market pressure. His theory of the multiple forms of capital—cultural and social as well as economic—suggested that these were indirectly convertible but if they were reduced to simple equivalence cultural and social capital lost their specificity and efficacy. And his early studies in Algeria showed the corrosive impact of unbridled extension of market forces.

Bourdieu knew the political importance of science, but also that this importance would be vitiated by reducing science to politics. In *Pantagruel*, Rabelais famously said, "Science without conscience is nothing but the ruin of the soul." It is a better line in French, where 'conscience' also means consciousness.[53] It is not the sort of line Bourdieu

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[50] The theme was central to two short books *Acts of Resistance.* New York: New Press, 1999; orig. 1998; *Firing Back.* New York: New Press, 2002; orig. 2001; for Bourdieu's earlier political writings, see *Interventions, 1961-1991,* in preparation. Bourdieu's essays were only a part of his struggle "against the tyranny of the market". He gave speeches and interviews, appeared on the radio and at public demonstrations, launched a non-party network of progressive social scientists called *Raisons d'agir* (Reasons to act), and helped to forge links among intellectuals, cultural producers and trade-union activists.

[51] Bourdieu, et al, *The Weight of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[52] Knowing the antagonism this would arouse, Bourdieu had called the first chapter in *Homo Academicus* "A 'Book for Burning'?"

[53] Pour la traduction, la phrase "It is a better line..." n'est pas necessaire; ici la ligne de Rabelais: En *Pantagruel*, Rabelais a dit, « Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme. » ... Mais Bourdieu a démontré que 'conscience' n'est pas seulement à l'intérieur de l'individu. Conscience—en sa double sens—est un acquis collectif. Il est un produit du travail social.

would quote, though, because public appeals to conscience are too commonly justifications for a jargon of authenticity rather than the application of reason. But Bourdieu demonstrated that *conscience*—in both its senses--is not simply an interior state of individuals. It is a social achievement. As such, it is always at risk. Bourdieu was a scholar and researcher of great rigor and also a man and a citizen with a conscience attuned to inequality and domination. Would there were more.