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Concepts of Capital in Pierre Bourdieu's Theory

Abstract

The hallmark of French thinker undoubtedly is worthy of critical attention. To make this task feasible, the paper focuses not on the secondary literature, but on Bourdieu's work itself. Thanks to what follows, one is able to establish whether the conception of various capitals stands up to analytical scrutiny. And an outcome of this examination has even broader relevance—Bourdieu is the most prolific exponent of an entire trend, much in vogue in social science recently. It would be difficult to indicate a field of inquiry in which this or that unorthodox, extra-economic concept of capital has not been deployed as a research tool.

The result of this critical analysis are not encouraging; Bourdieu's framework is plagued by economism or economic imperialism, and suffers from other limitations as well.

Key words:

Bourdieu, cultural capital, social capital, capital, economic imperialism

1. INTRODUCTION

The hallmark of French thinker undoubtedly is worthy of critical attention. To make this task feasible, the paper focuses not on the secondary literature, but on Bourdieu's work itself. Thanks to what follows, we should be able to establish

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whether the conception of various capitals stands up to analytical scrutiny. And an outcome of this examination has even broader relevance—Bourdieu is the most prolific exponent of an entire trend, much in vogue in social science recently. It would be difficult to indicate a field of inquiry in which this or that unorthodox, extra-economic concept of capital has not been employed as a research tool.

The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital [...]. Capital is accumulated labor (1986).

The passage cited above is in some way a strange animal; it looks like an orthodox exposition of historical materialism but not quite. One cannot object to the French theorist's historical approach but the thing is it is not adhered to. It is, namely, inconsistent with viewing capital as an explanatory link of that historicity. This is all the more odd that Bourdieu invokes the notion of private property which is an essential precondition of capital's existence. How then can be the presence of capital accounted for in the whole long span of human history without private property. On the other hand, it is not the case that the existence of private property relations is a sufficient condition of capital; and keep in mind that all the time we are talking about economic capital. Thus even this short passage is not free of contradictions. It may well be that the notion of other capital forms is a response to problems signaled above.

Be that as it may, Bourdieu's programmatic proposition is astonishing: "the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices" (1996).

This is an extreme form of reductionism and essentialism. Behind all appearances there lies a deep structure of the social world. Based on the above claim alone, the entire social life should be reducible to a variety of capitals, and because with all their diversity the particular capitals represent one and the same phenomenon, the social life is driven by the single logic of capital, or perhaps Capital. Ironically, given Bourdieu's left-wing convictions, this approach represents a praiseworthy nonpartisanship, or, if you will, perverseness.

Contradictory is also Bourdieu's definition of capital as "accumulated, human labour" which can potentially produce different forms of profits (1986, p. 241). The first part of the definition draws on the standard Marxian approach, and only the second part may give a hint of a different perspective in that it uses the phrase of "different forms of profit".

Bourdieu further develops his aforementioned theorem, stating that “It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory” (1996).

This claim may give the reader a clue what is forthcoming but what really calls attention is another simplification, this time around related to what Bourdieu refers to as “economic theory” which supposedly entertains one unified concept of capital. This, needless to say, is far from the truth.

Anyway, the presence of such a misunderstanding as an initial premise of the theory of various capitals does not bode well for the latter.

And indeed, further claims put forth by the French sociologist are just as contradictory and convoluted as the above-cited ones.

A case in point is another amazing definition, this time around equating capital with power. Of course, all hinges upon how the latter is understood, but even if Bourdieu implicitly adopts a broad notion of power, political power must figure prominently in any such definition, which means that, contrary to his aims, Bourdieu indulges in just another form of reductionism, or, looking at the matter from another angle, imperialism.

Of course, the culprit of all that mess would certainly reject such an accusation out of hand. Does not, after all, his conception of a variety of capitals respect their qualitative distinctiveness?

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 243).

The answer to the above, ostensibly rhetoric question is: no. In the last analysis there is only one real substance of social reality which is capital that can appear in a number of guises, which does not, however, disturb this ultimate underlying unity.

Bourdieu, to be sure, did not maintain that between economic and cultural capital there are no differences at all. However, in his view they boil down to the different modes of legitimation pertaining to the two respective dimensions of inequality.

Within cultural capital Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) focuses on “physical capital” as consisting in “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” that carry with them particular social and cultural meanings that set parameters for individual action and serve to reproduce and legitimize structures of inequality. When class inequality is conceptualized in this way, the differences that establish the broadly defined categories of upper, middle, and lower class are more than just differences in access to material, cultural, and social resources. Instead, they are differences that are actually embodied. In other words, class inequality can find expression in embodied ways, such as physical appearance, pronunciation, stride, style, posture, Body language, diet, handwriting, and so on. For Bourdieu, then, the body itself is a marker of social class, as particular embodied properties exist as a consequence of specific class practices. In Bourdieu’s view, for the body to be recognized as a “marker” of class, some bodily properties must have attached to them more (or less) symbolic value than others. These different “valuations” attached to the size, shape, and appearance of the body mean that individuals possessing particular valued bodily traits are more able to “exchange” these physical properties for other valued resources. In this way, Bourdieu views the corporeal as a form of currency that results in the unequal accumulation of material resources and, by extension, an important contributor to class inequality (Perks, 2012).

There are several problems with the conception laid out above. Firstly, it assumes a peculiar concept of the physical where both the body and mind are recognized at par as physical objects. This is all the more odd that Bourdieu points also to the symbolic nature of what he defines as cultural capital. To consider human consciousness as nothing more than as a set of energetic, at the end of the day material impulses of the brain is to indulge in a form of crude, naive materialism. This kind of vulgar materialism turns out to be infectious at that, as evidenced by the following statement by one of Bourdieu’s followers: “the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.)” (Gracey, 2007). Naturally, the fact that a painting, or a book appears in a material guise does by any means entail that the cultural objects in question are material, not ideal objects. For what matters in their case, the reason why a particular painting, or a poem are admired, is not their material form, but, conversely - ideal content. While indulging in this crude materialism or physicalism Bourdieu subscribes to the long tradition of French philosophy: consider, e.g., La Mettrie, this, needless to say constitute no justification for adopting this by no means just antiquarian doctrine- as it has been apparently galvanized by successes of neurology, and at an another plane, genetics in recent years. This assessment of the Bourdieusian notion, of course, calls into question its interpretation as one which “represents the social-structural

change from materialism to postmaterialism”² (Kim & Kim, 2007), which claim becomes less surprising given the same authors’ subsumption of even “environment into “the mental sphere rather than the physical one”. Besides, the definition referring to dispositions, etc. overlaps, to a degree that it becomes indistinguishable from, another Bourdieu’s notion of habitus³, after all, habitus is often defined as dispositions that are inculcated in the family but manifest themselves in different ways in each individual (Harker, 1990, p. 10; Webb, 2002, p. 37; Gorder, 1980, p. 226). Moreover, there is yet another term overlapping the above-mentioned one. What Bourdieu (1986) terms *embodied cultural capital* is tightly linked to the dispositions of the habitus, and Bourdieu describes it as a “corporeal hexis”, a “style of expression” (1988, p. 56), “a durable way of standing, speaking, walking” (1990b, p. 70).

Last but not least, the Bourdieusian conception is in fact a misconception in that, its terminology notwithstanding, it does not refer to any social classes whatsoever; the tripartite hierarchy it speaks of is typical of conceiving social differentiation in terms of stratification, which—although often uses class terms— is a theoretical framework alternative to that of social class.

Regarding specifically the central notion under consideration, it is our contention that a much better conceptualization of the above-mentioned problematics is provided by our general theory of society, i.e. socio-economic structuralism. Within the said framework society at large is conceived of as a system of four structures. One of these is the ideational structure whose products are to be sought amongst Bourdieu’s cultural goods.

To describe analytically given objects we do not need any “capital”; nay! - “culture”. The latter concept is commonly taken for granted, but its *raison d’être* in sociology is nothing but self-evident. Cultural anthropology and cultural studies is another matter, without it those disciplines would lose their subject but in sociology, and in other social science disciplines, the concept does more harm than good

² This claim, false as it is, suggest that an important reason for popularity of Bourdieu’s notion (which, as is argued in the book, is not supported by its analytical quality) may be—paradoxically, considering Bourdieu’s background—its appeal for anti-Marxists, who are always fishing for new arguments. The authors in question (Kim, Kim 2007) use the concept in question to seemingly refute what they consider the Marxist view on the relationship of base and superstructure: “cultural capital, a byproduct of superstructure to some extent, contributes to reproducing the production relation and also to determining or continuing the unequal structure in capitalist societies”.

³ The relevance of habitus as regards Bourdieu’s forms of capital is, at least according to some of his keen followers, is far broader inasmuch as financial, social, human and cultural capital “each are consistently related to, and clearly shaped by, each individual’s habitus” (Salisbury et al.).

owing to its inclusiveness and fuzziness⁴. Essentially, culture in an anthropological sense i.e. all human phenomena that are not purely results of human genetics, or the totality of patterns of human behavior and its products borders on the concept of society, its usefulness, or, rather, harmfulness is thus equal to that of “capital” understood in an inclusive, Bourdieusian sense. What is for the French scholar the prime example of cultural goods, e.e. tools and machines shall be regarded as such because they are indeed artifacts. In another context Bourdieu defines “cultural goods” as “paintings, monuments, machines, and any objects shaped by man” (Bourdieu 1996, p. 255).

What may be adequate for an anthropologist is, however, too general from the sociological point of view for which the former objects are to be considered as components of the economic structure of society, and lumping them together with the aforementioned monuments as being man-made is utterly useless from the standpoint of social theory.

The following Bourdieu’s account is of some interest as showing his eagerness to enter the contest with human capital theory that claims an explanatory power in the same regard: The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (Bourdieu 1996, p. 243).

This autobiographical confession is indeed useful in that it reveals the lengths to which will Bourdieu’s linguistic tricks go to justify his central idea; he first introduces the concept of profit with which, logically, the notion of capital as its underlying cause is associated. The trouble is, the premise of this reasoning is misplaced; why should educational attainment be dubbed “profit”? One could use other terms such as advantages or benefits as well in which case the connection with capital would be, however, not that apparent. But the whole proof of the alleged relationship is accomplished through verbal manipulation only, that is, ironically, through the use of linguistic symbols, those exemplary cultural objects.

The French theorist draws on the jargon of the stock exchange whose agents espouse the policy of asset diversification, risk minimization, and gain maximimi-

⁴ This is illustrated by the following contention: “A company that is valued above book is probably being valued for its culture, IBM was valued above book for many years; then the environment changed and the mainframe and the hierarchical company structure that produced it weren’t relevant any-more” (Thornburg 1994).

sation the effect of which is an array of false analogies: “the dominant fractions [...] tend to place ever greater emphasis on educational investment, within an overall strategy of asset diversification and of investments aimed at combining security with high yield” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 240).

As far as the aforementioned competition is concerned, Bourdieu is aware who his chief rival is, and launches an attack on human capital theory: their measurement of the yield from scholastic investment takes account only of monetary investments and profits, or those directly convertible into money, such as the costs of schooling and the cash equivalent of time devoted to study; they are unable to explain the different proportions of their resources which different agents or different social classes allocate to economic investment and cultural investment because they fail to take systematic account of the structure of the differential chances of profit which the various markets offer these agents or classes as a function of the volume and the composition of their assets. They [...] let slip the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital. Their studies of the relationship between academic ability and academic investment show that they are unaware that ability or talent is itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital. Not surprisingly, when endeavoring to evaluate the profits of scholastic investment, they can only consider the profitability of educational expenditure for society as a whole, the “social rate of return”, or the “social gain of education as measured by its effects on national productivity” (Becker, 1964b, p. 121, 155). This typically functionalist definition of the functions of education ignores the contribution which the educational system makes to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital. [...] a definition of human capital [...] does not move beyond economism and ignores, *inter alia*, the fact that the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 244).

As in many other cases, what is striking by its absence in the above argument is a reference to ownership; in particular, Bourdieu fails to perceive family as a unit based on common property from which definite consequences follow for his theory of different capitals.

The same considerations apply thus, *inter alia*, to his deliberations on social capital where commensalism is such a phenomenon crying for an interpretation in terms of common ownership; “Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the group. By the same token, it reaffirms the limits of the group, *i.e.*, the limits beyond which the constitutive

exchange – trade, commensality, or marriage – cannot take place” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 250).

As far as the above-mentioned critique of human capital theory is concerned, it is in point of fact not fair in that human capital theory is perfectly capable of capturing other than purely financial benefits of education. This does not alter the fact that the key criticism indicting the theory concerned with disregarding class relations is sound. The trouble is, this criticism by no means necessitates the use of such notions as cultural or social capital. Bourdieu takes this relationship for granted which reveals his arrogance, if not insolence. Eristic cannot substitute solid argument. In fact, it only adds to confusion in that it disallows the application of precise categories of property theory replacing them with void categories of capitals which obscure the former, inter alia, making the differentiation of the private and personal impossible. Certain objects considered by the French sociologist as part of cultural capital may function as private property, e.g. marketable works of art. Other ones, however, constitute personal property in that their sole function is the satisfaction of esthetic, intellectual needs of their possessor. Bourdieu's comments on the next form of his cultural capital betray the same ignorance of ownership theory.

Embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange. It follows that the use or exploitation of cultural capital presents particular problems for the holders of economic or political capital, whether they be private patrons or, at the other extreme, entrepreneurs employing executives endowed with a specific cultural competence (not to mention the new state patrons). How can this capital, so closely linked to the person, be bought without buying the person and so losing the very effect of legitimation which presupposes the dissimulation of dependence? (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 245).

Whilst for Bourdieu's framework the aforementioned question poses a difficult problem, from the standpoint of socio-economic structuralism it is rather easy to answer. Owners of real, as distinct from cultural, social, political or whatever capital can rent the labor power of given individuals without buying them in person which, by the way, is impossible in the civilized world. On the ground of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, though, this self-created puzzle must remain without solution. Bourdieu adds that “Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the

more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region" (1996, p. 245) which is true enough, the only awkward question remaining: why language should be termed capital? Given that the preponderant mass of social actions involves the use of language, it follows that, apart from the span whereby one learns his or her language, and obvious periods of sleep, etc. the whole social life is infused with capital. This is no small intellectual feat, but its benefits appear limited, not to say confusing.

Further Bourdieu's statements aggravate this confusion still more; linked in numerous ways to the person in his biological singularity and is subject to a hereditary transmission which is always heavily disguised, or even invisible, it defies the old, deep-rooted distinction the Greek jurists made between inherited properties (*ta patroa*) and acquired properties (*epikteta*), i.e., those which an individual adds to his heritage. It thus manages to combine the prestige of innate property with the merits of acquisition. Because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (miss)recognition, e.g., in the matrimonial market and in all the markets in which economic capital is not fully recognized, whether in matters of culture, with the great art collections or great cultural foundations, or in social welfare, with the economy of generosity and the gift. Furthermore, the specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital: any given cultural competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner. In other words, the share in profits which scarce cultural capital secures in class-divided societies is based, in the last analysis, on the fact that all agents do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children's education beyond the minimum necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power least valorized at a given moment (1996, p. 245).

Here Bourdieu claims innovation in the property theory whereas his own conceptualizations have in fact the opposite effect: obscuring rather than contributing new useful distinctions. The above-quoted passage adds insult to injury in that it reveals that the French scholar is perfectly aware and capable of using the concept of labor power whose relationship to ownership and capital, other terms in his repertoire, remains, though, obscure to him.

Going further, we are presented with the continuation of spurious analogies with economic relations: the capital, in the sense of the means of appropriating the product of accumulated labor in the objectified state which is held by a given

agent, depends for its real efficacy on the form of the distribution of the means of appropriating the accumulated and objectively available resources; and the relationship of appropriation between an agent and the resources objectively available, and hence the profits they produce, is mediated by the relationship of (objective and/or subjective) competition between himself and the other possessors of capital competing for the same goods, in which scarcity - and through it social value - is generated (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 246).

The use of such terms as “means of appropriation” is meant to legitimize the economic analogy (with the means of production) but in actual fact it has an exactly opposite effect – it highlights the divergence between the two. The reference to the notion of value in connection with cultural capital does not do the trick either; Bourdieu ignores the difference between reproducible goods to which both Ricardian and Marxian theory of value applies, and unique objects such as works of art whose price is determined by quite different mechanisms, and which cannot be couched in terms of accumulated labor.

Meanwhile, for Bourdieu, the economic theory of value applies in all other, in his terminology, fields, each being reigned by a different type of capital: “The universal equivalent, the measure of all equivalences, is nothing other than labor-time (in the widest sense); and the conservation of social energy through all its conversions is verified if, in each case, one takes into account both the labor-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labor-time needed to transform it from one type into another” (1996, p. 253).

The next pronouncement simply corroborates previous considerations: The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favorable to capital and its reproduction. But the most powerful principle of the symbolic efficacy of cultural capital no doubt lies in the logic of its transmission. On the one hand, the process of appropriating objectified cultural capital and the time necessary for it to take place mainly depend on the cultural capital embodied in the whole family (1996, p. 246).

Considering that in the Bourdieusian social theory the concept of structure as a building block of society is replaced by the notion of field, its cultural variety proves to be determined by what- translated into another language with which the French theorist is barely familiar- is property relations. The notion of non-economic property, however, should be applied to specific relations only⁵, which

⁵ In the current state of the theory, there are around twenty such relations, which are listed in Tittenbrun 2011a; 2011b.

are to be distinguished from economic (private or personal) property. By contrast, it is unknown what, if any, ownership implications pertain to “Manners (bearing, pronunciation, etc.) [which] may be included in social capital” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 255).

Contrary to what, it seems, appears to Bourdieu⁶, science is not magic in which putting a spell on an object can effect in its transubstantiation and corresponding renaming; in real social life property is property is property, and capital is capital is capital, to borrow, with a difference, Gertrude Stein’s famous saying. None of those guidelines is abode by Bourdieu.

The cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc., is transmissible in its materiality. A collection of paintings, for example, can be transmitted as well as economic capital (if not better, because the capital transfer is more disguised). But what is transmissible is legal ownership and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means of “consuming” a painting or using a machine, which, being nothing other than embodied capital, are subject to the same laws of transmission (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 247).

Again, the existence of “the same laws” governing the economic and cultural field, to use Bourdieu’s own terms, is his wishful thinking. The French writer in fact goes a long way towards blurring the distinction between the two, which only compounds confusion. A case of transfer of a work of art or other “cultural object”, or piece of “cultural capital “may mean very different things socio-economically. Selling a painting for profit is worlds apart from giving it as a gift to one’s niece, and still different from bequeathing it for the public museum. In Bourdieu’s night all cats are, however, grey, as the Polish saying goes. And treating machines on a par with paintings as ostensibly embodiments of cultural capital in both cases makes matters even worse. One may agree that industrial machinery is an example of efficacy of aesthetics as objectified in industrial design, but it does not alter the elementary fact that a piece of machinery constitutes first and foremost constant capital (if, of course, is used in the process of production), or the means of a specific type of quasi-work (when it is used in the household), in which case it is no capital at all. For Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital all these cases boil down to the same thing.

⁶ “But “glory” doesn’t mean “a nice knock-down argument”, Alice objected. In this sense the French thinker is not unlike Lewis Carroll’s legendary creation: ‘When I use a word’, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less’.

His tendency toward *Gleichschalten* is glaringly manifest in such pronouncements as the following one: it is possession of cultural capital that makes it possible to derive greater profit not only from labor-time, by securing a higher yield from the same time, but also from spare time, and so to increase both economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 240). Where all the distinctions between quasi-work (which term is to underline both common and distinct characteristics of activities bringing the means of livelihood, e.e. work, and those that, as domestic chores do not⁷) and work, between the respective parts of human personality, and between real capital and non-capital have been erased.

His cultural capital “exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, in the field of the social classes-struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore to the extent of their embodied capital” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 247).

So far, so consistent-in the sense of similar unfair tricks employed to substantiate the capital status of the construct under consideration. Unfortunately, contrary to the French sociologist’s opinion, it is not sufficient to use the concept in question in connection with such terms as “profit”, “appropriation”, “investment”, “production”, and so on, as each of those purported relationships must be separately validated, which has not been done. Anyway, it is precisely along similar lines that Bourdieu’s further argument goes: cultural goods can be appropriated both materially-which presupposes economic capital-and symbolically-which presupposes cultural capital. It follows that the owner of the means of production must find a way of appropriating either the embodied capital which is the precondition of specific appropriation or the services of the holders of this capital. To possess the machines, he only needs economic capital; to appropriate them and use them in accordance with their specific purpose (defined by the cultural capital, of scientific or technical type, incorporated in them), he must have access to embodied cultural capital, either in person or by proxy. This is no doubt the basis of the ambiguous status of cadres (executives and engineers). If it is emphasized that they are not the possessors (in the strictly economic sense) of the means of production which they use, and that they derive profit from their own cultural capital only by selling

⁷ A woman cooking for her family does not work in this sense, but when preparing even the same dishes at a privately owned restaurant where she is employed on a part-time basis, this action transforms into work.

the services and products which it makes possible, then they will be classified among the dominated groups; if it is emphasized that they draw their profits from the use of a particular form of capital, then they will be classified among the dominant groups. Everything suggests that as the cultural capital incorporated in the means of production increases (and with it the period of embodiment needed to acquire the means of appropriating it), so the collective strength of the holders of cultural capital would tend to increase - if the holders of the dominant type of capital (economic capital) we're not able to set the holders of cultural capital in competition with one another. (They are, moreover, inclined to competition by the very conditions in which they are selected and trained, in particular by the logic of scholastic and recruitment competitions)" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 246). "It exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, in the field of the social classes-struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore to the extent of their embodied capital. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 247).

There are a couple of problems with this argument. Firstly, it sounds very warlike – each field is beset with struggles, fights, or what have you. But, as is customary in the case of the thinker being discussed, the point is greatly overdone. It is put in such a way that one does not know what, if any, difference there is between those cultural or other, as the case may be, activities that are not conflict and such ones which can be considered in such terms. In a word, another case of "leaping" notion.

Secondly, Bourdieu touches the issue of class, but the outcome is very problematic. First, the logic of his argument would tend toward classifying managers, conceived of by him as holders of cultural capital, as capitalists themselves. The French sociologist withdraws at the last moment, leaving the matter in the state which is doubly unsatisfactory. If executives (which again is an inclusive notion encompassing not only corporate managers but also, e.g., government officials) "draw their profits from the use of a particular form of capital, then they will be classified among the dominant groups" which is contradicted by his another contention to the effect that if "they derive profit from their own cultural capital then they will be classified among the dominated groups". Apart from the adherence to the simplistic bipolar image of social differentiation, the above shows how difficult, if possible at all, is to determine the social location of groups connected with his newly invented cultural capital without the concept of ownership of the

means of production which at the end of the day is invoked to that end. Another missing concept is one of labor power which of course is implicitly referred to in the theorist's account of the dominated as those who "derive profit from their own cultural capital only by selling the services and products which it makes possible" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 247).

2. SOCIAL CAPITAL

Owing primarily to space limitations, our discussion of this form of capital will focus on its characteristics relevant to Bourdieu's broad theory of a range of capitals. Take, for example, the following claim: The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed. This work, which implies expenditure of time and energy and so, directly or indirectly, of economic capital, is not profitable or even conceivable unless one invests in it a specific competence (knowledge of genealogical relationships and of real connections and skill at using them, etc.) and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence, which are themselves integral parts of this capital (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 250).

The theorist who accuses others of economism describes as work (This is by any means an isolated formulation; in another place the reader is invited to consider "the profitability of this labor of accumulating and maintaining social capital" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 250) everyday conversations with friends and other similar activities on the basis that they require some expenditure of time and energy, and/or material resources. For one thing, this amounts to an equally grave sin of physicalism, otherwise elicited above. And it is not an accidental slippage at all, as evidenced by his other claims such as "In accordance with a principle which is the equivalent of the principle of the conservation of energy, profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in another" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 253), or "A general science of the economy of practices that does not artificially limit itself to those practices that are socially recognized as economic must endeavor to grasp capital, that 'energy of social physics'... in all of its different forms... I have shown that capital presents itself under three fundamental species (each with its own subtypes), namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital" (Bourdieu, in: Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 118–9).

Secondly, the aforementioned contention is bound, again, to dilute the concept of (economic) capital in that everyday banal activities turn out to be either capital investments or capital deployments. Payin for a bus ticket in order to meet with

a friend living in a distant quarter of the city, or dining with him at the restaurant has really nothing to do with capital or investment, and viewing them in such terms is economism writ large.

The capitalistic imperialism espoused by the French thinker goes still further in that even the following ingredients of human personality are transformed by him into components of capital – “a specific competence (knowledge of genealogical relationships and of real connections and skill at using them, etc.) and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence, which are themselves integral parts of this capital”.

And any such “proof” of the possibility of reducing a given social phenomenon to one or another form of capital is at the same time economism in that “economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital [...] produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 251).

Bourdieu, to be sure, would loudly protest arguing that “The real logic of the functioning of capital, the conversions from one type to another, and the law of conservation which governs them cannot be understood unless two opposing but equally partial views are superseded: on the one hand, economism, which, on the grounds that every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital, ignores what makes the specific efficacy of the other types of capital” (1996, p. 252), which however, is inconsistent with what he has to say even in the same sentence: “and on the other hand, semiologism (nowadays represented by structuralism, symbolic interactionism, or ethnomethodology), which reduces social exchanges to phenomena of communication and ignores the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics” (1996, p. 253).

Reading his ruminations on cultural capital, one may think it is the favorite child of its French parent, but certain claims regarding the blown out of proportions importance of social capital may shake this conviction – “social capital [...] is the basis of the existence of the group (a family or a nation, of course, but also an association or a party)” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 251).

This is an astounding claim given the restricted (to interpersonal relationships) connotation of social capital. It is precisely the said narrow focus that accounts for the use of the phrase of sociability in the above Bourdieusian deliberations on the form of “capital” in question, and the very definition of social capital: “The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). It is only from a common-sense

perspective that face-to-face relationships appear to be the most important, if not the sole form of social relations. In actual fact, each member of society, and in its globalized form-in an enhanced way-is entangled in a plethora of intermediate relations, most of which are, as opposed to the former, not registered by human consciousness, but which nevertheless can powerfully affect human behavior, health, etc.

Meanwhile, some justifications of the aforementioned importance of social capital given by its champion are perplexing: National liberation movements or nationalist ideologies cannot be accounted for solely by reference to strictly economic profits, i.e., anticipation of the profits which may be derived from redistribution of a proportion of wealth to the advantage of the nationals (nationalization) and the recovery of highly paid jobs. To these specifically economic anticipated profits, which would only explain the nationalism of the privileged classes, must be added the very real and very immediate profits derived from membership (social capital) which are proportionately greater for those who are lower down the social hierarchy (“poor whites”) or, more precisely, more threatened by economic and social decline (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 255).

It is not our purpose here to argue over the so-called economic interpretation of national liberation movements and nationalism in general, barring drawing attention to Bourdieu’s unfounded reduction of the said interpretation to a form of monocausalism.

Equally characteristic of Bourdieu who despite the frequent use of the term “property” does not hold any consistent and sound theory of one, is his failure to see the socio-economic significance of nationalization. If the move is skewed so that the overwhelming bulk of benefits therefrom are preempted by the privileged classes, then and only then his above-mentioned claim is correct; otherwise, however, the laboring masses stand to gain much from such a measure.

In terms of analysis of Bourdieu’s theory of capitals the most striking thing about the above-cited argument is purely notional role played by his term of social capital. Social factors relevant to membership of nationalistic movements are one thing, but their conceptualization in terms of social capital is quite another; the former by no means entails the latter.

The goal of establishing social capital as a potent social force is for sure not served particularly well by the contradictions present in this section of Bourdieu’s theory as well; on the one hand he criticizes, correctly enough, those who interpret generous or charitable conduct as ‘calculated acts of class appeasement’. This naively Machiavellian view forgets that the most sincerely disinterested acts may be those best corresponding to objective interest. [...] It would be thoroughly

erroneous to describe the choices of the habitus which lead an artist, writer, or researcher toward his natural place (a subject style, manner, etc.) in terms of rational strategy and cynical calculation (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 240).

The trouble is, Bourdieu is not able to stick to the dialectic position outlined above, and fully in line with the way of thinking he himself rejects above states that “The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies [...] aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248–249).

If the reader thinks the list of capitals utilized by the French theorist has been exhausted, she would be mistaken. Bourdieu holds that “the state is the culmination and product of a slow process of accumulation and concentration of different species of capital: a capital of physical force, in the form of the military and the police (which is evoked by Weber’s definition of the state as exercising the ‘monopoly of legitimate physical violence’); economic capital (which is necessary, among other things, to provide the funding for the physical force); cultural or informational capital, accumulated in the form of statistics, for example, and also in the form of instruments of knowledge endowed with universal validity within the limits of its competence, such as weights, measures, maps or land registers; and, lastly, symbolic capital. In this way, it is able to exert a determining influence on the way the economic field functions (and also, though to a lesser extent, on the other fields). This is the case chiefly because the unification of the market of economic goods (and also of symbolic goods, the marriage market being one dimension of this) accompanied the construction of the state and the concentration of different species of capital it brought about. This means that the economic field is, more than any other, inhabited by the state, which contributes at every moment to its existence and persistence, and also to the structure of the relations of force that characterize it (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 13).

It is difficult to imagine a text of similar length that would accumulate similar amount of errors. None of the factors attributed by Bourdieu to the state can be couched as a form of capital. Even financial resources held by the state cannot be characterized in those terms, because capital is intrinsically linked to private property that by definition is absent in the public sector. There is no reason for labelling by the stamp of capital physical force (whether in its state or other applications) either, and Bourdieu’s reference to Weber in this connection is based on an utter misunderstanding. The same applies to his subsequent remarks. To invoke Weber as a patron of viewing the economy as an extension of the state is a blunder; Weber, on the contrary, insisted on distinguishing the economy and politics whose differentia specific is the use of (legitimate) force or coercion, which, needless to

say, had in his view nothing to do with capital that constituted a key economic concept in his overall framework. This does not imply (as it did not implied for Weber as well) any downplaying of economic interventions undertaken by the state. It stands to reason, though, that in order to examine how X affects Y, it is essential to establish that they are distinct from each other; if they were the same thing, one would relapse to the level of Munchausen tales whose hero, and perhaps only him, could pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

It would be unfair to justify the above-mentioned errors as a form of petty ethnocentrism, indeed fairly commonly displayed by Bourdieu; yes, France has a long tradition of centralized, strong state, but this cannot justify Bourdieu's generalization of these properties elevating them to the level of General theory.

All in all, one can subscribe to the following summary, with a difference, the difference being the opposite sign – what for the commentator is the reason for praise, in our judgment is rather the reason for criticism: “Bourdieu's expanded concept of capital as a general framework for interdisciplinary research that seeks to dissolve what is largely an artificial distinction between economics and social science” (Svendsen, 2001, p. 2).

To be more specific, the overall objective outlined above is of course justified, what is objectionable is the set of means to achieve that end.

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