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## Concepts of capital in Pierre Bourdieu's theory

According to Bourdieu, there are various forms of capital. It is with this contribution that he is most commonly identified. Yet, the aim of this paper is to show that the Bourdieusian framework brought about (or created) more harm than actual good. Paradoxically, whilst Bourdieu is commonly regarded as a culturalist, his approach is grounded in economism or economic imperialism<sup>2</sup>. This squeezing of the extra-economic phenomena into an economic straightjacket, leads necessarily to the latter, i.e. the concept of capital being over-stretched. In turn, the notion of cultural capital suffers from crude physicalism and under-specification.

**Key words:** Bourdieu, cultural capital, habitus, field, power, ownership, economism

### Introduction

The hallmark of French theory is undoubtedly worthy of critical attention. To make this task feasible, the paper focuses not on the secondary literature, but on Bourdieu's work itself. Thus, the purpose is an analysis of the original source material, rather than to review the commentaries advanced by other scholars. What follows, is an examination of how the various conceptions of 'capital' stand up to analytical scrutiny. Furthermore, the outcome of this examination has even broader relevance as it demonstrates how Bourdieu is the most prolific exponent of an entire trend, much of which is currently in vogue in social science. 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Still, the present author is not alone in seeing that aspect to Bourdieu's approach; Sulkunen (1982: 108) describes as "«naive economism» applying a concept of capital (understood as a formal model of capitalist economy) by analogy to any area of social interaction".

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 and with it, accumulation and all its effects. Capital is accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its «incorporated», embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour, 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 (Bourdieu 1986).

The passage cited above is in some way a strange animal, since it appears to be an orthodox exposition of historical materialism, yet on closer inspection, not quite. One cannot object to the French theorist's historical approach but, the most telling thing here is, that he does not follow through with it. It is namely inconsistent with viewing capital as an explanatory link that historicity. It 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 the presence of capital be accounted for in the whole span of human history without private property? On the other hand, the existence of private property relations is not a sufficient condition of capital, especially when we keep in mind we are talking about economic capital. Thus, even this short passage is not free of contradictions, a historicity that contrasts with the author's declarations, being but one example. The same criticism is also made by Shapiro (2009) who writes of Bourdieu that "his entire analytic corpus is a transhistorical one that is applied as equally to non-, pre-, or weakly capitalist societies as to capitalist ones. By refusing to consider how the modernity of capitalist appropriation and reconfiguration of extramural formations fundamentally alter these preexisting spheres, Bourdieu grants himself the liberty for an evidentiary transitivity that moves from an anthropological study of the relatively «premodern» Kabyle of colonial Algeria to commentary on twentieth-century French society, shaped by its membership within the core of capitalist nation-states, as if the introduction of (imperialist) capitalism is irrelevant for customs of social stratification, lineage, and incorporation within adulthood".

We might give the French thinker the benefit of the doubt, and examine whether the other forms of capital suggest a solution to these problems.

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 any 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" (Bourdieu 1996).

This is an extreme form of reductionism and essentialism. Behind all appearances, there lies a deeper structure of the social world. If we were to base this on the above claim alone, the entire social order of life would be reducible to a variety

of capitals, and because of their diversity this particular series of capitals represent one and the same phenomenon, and so the social order of 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.

It is also contradictory that Bourdieu's definition of capital is "accumulated, human labour" which can potentially produce different forms of profits (1986: 241). The first part of this particular definition draws upon the standard Marxian approach, and it is only in the second part of the definition that may subtly propose (or put forward) 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" (Bourdieu 1996).

This claim may present the reader with a clue that is forthcoming, but what really catches (or cements – this is more definite) their attention is another simplification, and this time it is 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.

The misunderstanding of such an initial premise of the theory of various capitals does not bode well for the latter. Indeed, further claims put forth by the French sociologist are just as contradictory and convoluted as those already cited.

Economic theory has allowed itself to be foisted upon a definition of the economy of practices, which is the historical invention of capitalism, and thus, by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) self-interested, it has implicitly defined other forms of exchange as noneconomic, and therefore as a result it has become disinterested.

In particular, it defines as disinterested those forms of exchange which ensure the transubstantiation in which the most material types of capital, such as those which are economic in the restricted sense, can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa (...).

In other words, the constitution of a science of mercantile relationships which, inasmuch as it takes for granted the very foundations of the order it claims to analyse – private property, profit, wage labour, etc. – is not even a science of the field of economic production, prevented the constitution of general science of the economy of practices, which would treat mercantile exchange as a particular case of exchange in all its forms (Bourdieu, Darbel 1966).

Having thus introduced two key capital terms, Bourdieu goes on to attack economics for, symptomatically, its economism:

It is remarkable that the practices and assets thus salvaged from the ‘icy water of egotistical calculation’ (and from science) are the virtual monopoly of the dominant class – as if economism had been able to reduce everything to economics only because the reduction on which that discipline is based protects from sacrilegious reduction everything which needs to be protected. If economics deals only with practices that have narrowly economic interest as their principle and only with goods that are directly and immediately convertible into money (which makes them quantifiable), then the universe of bourgeois production and exchange becomes an exception and can see itself and present itself as a realm of disinterestedness. As everyone knows, priceless things have their price, and the extreme difficulty of converting certain practices and certain objects into money is only due to the fact that this conversion is refused in the very intention that produces them, which is nothing other than the denial (*Verneinung*) of the economy. A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognised as economic, and which can be performed only at the cost of a whole labour of dissimulation or, more precisely, euphemization, must endeavor to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another.

(Bourdieu, Darbel 1966)

## Field of economics

Bourdieu was even more of an anthropologist than a sociologist, which makes one wonder how he could overlook a well-known concept from his fellow anthropologist, and as expanded upon by many others, i.e. Karl Polanyi, who distinguished between substantive and formal understanding of economics. According to this distinction, only economics in the second sense restricts itself to the logical and historical bounds of the market economy, whereas the same discipline in its substantive guise goes beyond the logic of profit and monetary exchange<sup>3</sup>. This is not the only instance in which Bourdieu makes his task easier by constructing a straw man with whom, the fight becomes far simpler than with a real opponent. It follows that the real boundary between the economic and non-economic lies elsewhere than one as delineated by the French scholar, and, by extension, his charge of economism may or may be not true depending on which economics he is referring to<sup>4</sup>. Paradoxically, the aforementioned charge applies, however, to his own

<sup>3</sup> This gap is the more incomprehensible that in another context Bourdieu implicitly and partially at least refers to the above-mentioned distinction; he distinguishes between “archaic” economies, whose function is to limit and hide the callous brutality of economic interests, versus a capitalist economy, which allows room for “the clear, economic (i.e. economical) concepts of the undisguised self-interest economy” (Bourdieu 1977: 172).

<sup>4</sup> How important is this kind of specification is evidenced by, inter alia, the following claim by one of his numerous enthusiasts who contends that “it is possible to convert one form of capital into another. This entails a conceptual break with the economism of Marx and the classical economists”

project, “a general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognised as economic” (Bourdieu, Darbel 1966). His initial move along this route is ostensibly a laughable stratagem, whereby he conveniently glosses over the fact that the economism he ostensibly rejects is made possible only by his own shameful practice of castrating the alternative, or considered by him as such, provides a convenient starting point for his own concept, whose justification, however, smacks of the very reductionism of which he is so fond of accusing his rivals. His analysis would not restrict itself to actions which can be capitalised in what Marx terms “callous cash payment” (Bourdieu 1977: 177), but must encompass also those actions as marked by an apparent disinterestedness, behind which people seek to camouflage the economic drives which lie behind their efforts to acquire capital. As noted above, for Bourdieu, all forms of capital can always be converted into economic capital, which is made possible by “a conceptual break with” the economics’ practice of “artificially isolating an economical economy from a cultural economy” (Bourdieu 1990b: 113, Lash 1993).

Before tracking (analysing?) the above-mentioned “reappropriation”, let us then draw the reader’s attention to other contradictions and ambiguities present in the above-cited statement. Bourdieu states that economic theory “defines as disinterested those forms of exchange which ensure the transubstantiation whereby the most material types of capital – those which are economic in the restricted sense – can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa. Interest, in the restricted sense it is given in economic theory, cannot be produced without producing its negative counterpart, disinterestedness. The class of practices whose explicit purpose is to maximize monetary profit cannot be defined as such without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products; the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art’s sake and pure theory” (Bourdieu 1996).

### The Bourdesian understanding of the notion of ownership

Bourdieu is not the only theoretical “capitalist” to have used a flawed notion of property. It is remarkable that the theorist who wrote about private property can oppose it to the “gratuitous” reigning culture and pure science. In actual fact, what is treated by Bourdieu as non-economic and non-property, constitutes the very substance of economic ownership. The benefits inherent in the ownership

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(Svendson). The aforementioned follower of his French idol explains that Bourdieu’s alternative is to depart from such a substantialism and materialism by localising the economic forces behind all human actions, without necessarily seeing these as derived from naked self-interest, as the economists would have it (Bourdieu 1977: 17–8, Snook 1990: 169).

of the factors of economic activity are always, somewhat, to a lesser or larger extent, gratuitous<sup>5</sup>.

One can see that having established the presence of such an erroneous discrepancy therefore pushes the theorist to the aforementioned reclaiming of the non-economic sphere of the social order of life (perhaps I am wrong to correct social life, if so please ignore it) by his own theory which, as he announced, would use economic concepts and yet would in itself not be economic or economic “in the restricted sense”.

There are identifying signature clues as to how this economic, and yet somehow at the same time, not economic theory, can be gauged from another startling definition by Bourdieu, only this time he equates capital with power. Of course, all hinges upon how the latter is understood, but even if Bourdieu implicitly adopts a broad notion of power, the political kind must figure prominently in any such definition, which means that, contrary to his aims, Bourdieu indulges in yet another form of reductionism, or, looking at this from another angle, imperialism.

Of course, the culprit of what is clearly a convoluted mess, would certainly reject such an accusation almost 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 institutionalised in the forms of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised 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 institutionalised in the forms of a title of nobility (Bourdieu 1996: 243).

The answer to the above, an ostensibly rhetoric question is, no. Take into account the analysis so far, that there is only one real substance of social reality, which is capital that can appear in a number of guises, and 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 different modes of legitimation pertaining to the two respective dimensions of inequality. In the case of cultural capital, despite the fact that cultural capital is acquired in the home and the school via exposure to a given set of cultural practices, and therefore has a social origin, it is liable to be perceived as inborn “talent”, and its holder “gifted”, as a result of the fact that it is embodied in particular individu-

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<sup>5</sup> As convincingly argued by the “rent theory of ownership” (Tittenbrun 2011; 2012), where the distinction between the concept of rent as conceived under socio-economic structuralism, as the author’s theoretical framework has been dubbed, and the notion of economic rent known from conventional economic theory is also elucidated.

als. Moreover, because the school system transforms “inherited” cultural capital into “scholastic” cultural capital, the latter is predisposed to appear as an individual “achievement”. For example, researchers have demonstrated that what they conventionally classify as middle-class parents typically talk more to infants and young children than do working-class or poor parents. As a result, middle-class children often have larger vocabularies when they enter school, and subsequently score more highly on standardized tests measuring verbal skills (Hart, Risley 1999; Lareau 2003). “Nevertheless, teachers, parents, and students themselves are likely to interpret the differences in test scores as a matter of natural talent or individual effort” (Lareau, Weininger 2003).

Pertinent as those observations are, they do not capture the unique features of the cultural, as distinct from the economic inequalities. As previously shown, one powerful set of class ideologies and rationalisations are at work to disguise the real socio-economic source of the disparities concerned, and among those, incidentally, the individualistic myths of self-made men are, and have long been salient in capitalism's economic life, notably in its stockholder, of the Anglo-Saxon variety.

An important source of all this confusion, and at the same time being a further misnomer which indubitably hides behind the construct under consideration, is revealed in the following statement: “Cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu, Passeron 1977) includes culture-based factors and indicators of symbolic wealth that help define a person's class” (Wells 2008). What we have in mind is the term “symbolic wealth”. Symbolic or not, wealth is closely related to property, as is, on its side, also the following statement “cultural «habits and dispositions» comprise a resource capable of generating «profits»; they are potentially subject to monopolization by individuals and groups; and, under appropriate conditions, they can be transmitted from one generation to the next” (Lareau, Weininger 2003).

And there lies the rub. It is arguable that social differentiation in the non-economic realm is grounded in non-economic property relations<sup>6</sup>. This suggests that the inclusion of class in the above-mentioned particular context, is ill-conceived, since although according to our approach, classes may be involved in certain non-economic property relations, it is economic ownership that determines their location in the structure of societal differentiation.

### Cultural capital – a critical evaluation

The second point as suggested by the above-cited statement is that, in a sense, but quite different from the one conceived of by Bourdieu, is his pointing to the economic origin of his multiple concepts being correct, and namely, that his “capitals” refer to the various forms of property, only including non-economic property connections (as, inter alia, Weber's notion of social estate-commonly mistrans-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. (Tittenbrun 2011; 2012).



lated as “status group” – suggests). Educational qualifications are of course part and parcel of the ownership of labour power, and in connection with economic capital, Bourdieu himself mentions the concept of property rights. In addition, the terms such as “institutionalisation”, “title”, “rights” are suggestive of the legal view of property, which is untenable to the extent that there exists a yawning chasm between jurisprudence and dogmatic (as Weber referred to such formal disciplines) sciences in general, and and empirical sciences, including social science, on the other.

Even at this present stage of analysis we are in position to pin down the essential property of Bourdieu’s theory of capitals, which is that his capital concepts do not bring anything new in the way of information on the social world, they merely replicate the content of other pre-existing concepts. The same applies to the Bourdesian extension of the cultural capital concept.

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realisation of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalised state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu 1996: 243).

In developing the notion under consideration, Bourdieu’s starting point was his inquiry into the causes of the discrepancies in educational attainment shown by different social classes in France in the 1960s. For Bourdieu, the gap in access to economic capital had not been able to account for, adequately speaking, the educational disparities present there. Instead, the French sociologist proposed that, above and beyond economic factors, two other forms of capital – cultural capital and social capital – should be held responsible for the reproduction of class privilege.

### Cultural capital embodied

Within cultural capital Bourdieu (1986: 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 recognised 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 2002). 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 galvanised 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"<sup>7</sup> (Kim, Kim 2008), 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 habitus<sup>8</sup>; after all, habitus is often defined as dispositions that are inculcated in the family but manifest themselves in different ways in

<sup>7</sup> 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 2008) 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".

<sup>8</sup> The relevance of habitus as regards Bourdieu's forms of capital is, at least according to some of his keen followers, 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.*).

each individual (Snook 1990: 10). 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” (1986: 56), “a durable way of standing, speaking, walking” (1990b: 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, and the tripartite hierarchy it speaks of is typical of conceiving social differentiation in terms of stratification, which, although it often uses class terms, is a theoretical framework alternative to that of social class.

### Cultural capital and socio-economic structuralism

Regarding specifically the central notion under consideration, it is our contention that a much better conceptualisation 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”; any – “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 another matter, and without it those disciplines would lose their subject, but in sociology, and in other social science disciplines, the concept does more harm than good, owing to its inclusiveness and fuzziness. 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 behaviour 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, Bourdesian 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: 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 account is of some interest as it shows 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: 243)

This autobiographical confession is indeed useful in that it reveals the lengths to which Bourdieu will use linguistic tricks 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. The 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 minimisation and gaining maximisation, 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: 240).

As far as the aforementioned competition is concerned, Bourdieu is aware of whom he considers his chief rival, and launches an attack on human capital theory.

### Scholastic investment as monetary investment

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 (see esp. Becker 1964).

Furthermore, because they neglect to relate scholastic investment strategies to the whole set of educational strategies and to the system of reproduction strategies, they inevitably, by a necessary paradox, 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 (Becker 1964: 63–66). 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 1964: 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. From the very beginning, a definition of human capital, despite its humanistic connotations, 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. Moreover, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up (Bourdieu 1996: 244).

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

The same considerations apply thus, *inter alia*, to his deliberations on social capital where commensalism is such a phenomenon which is crying out 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: 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 something other than the 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 that this criticism by no means necessitates the use of such notions as cultural or social capital. Bourdieu takes this relationship for granted, and in doing so reveals his arrogance, if not his insolence. An eristic approach cannot substitute solid argument, and in fact, it only adds to the confusion in that it disallows the application of precise categories of property theory, thus 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. Others, however, constitute personal property in that the sole function is the satisfaction of the esthetic, and 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, prop-

erty 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: 245)?

Whilst for Bourdieu 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 form of capital can rent the labour power of given to individuals without buying them in person, which, by the way, is impossible in the civilised world. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, though, this self-created puzzle, must remain without a 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) which is true enough, the only awkward question remaining: why language should be termed capital? Given 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" (Bourdieu 1996: 245).

Furthermore, Bourdieu's statements tend to aggravate this confusion, s 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. And since 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 unrecognised as capital, and recognised as legitimate competence, as an authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition, e.g., in the matrimonial market and in all the markets in which economic capital is not fully recognised, 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 labour-power least valorized at a given moment (Bourdieu 1996: 245).

Here Bourdieu claims innovation in the property theory, whereas his own conceptualisations 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 labour power whose relationship to ownership and capital, unlike other terms in his repertoire, remains conveniently 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 labour 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: 246).

The use of such terms as “means of appropriation” is meant to legitimise the economic analogy (with the means of production), but in actual fact it has the exact opposite effect since 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 labour.

Meanwhile, for Bourdieu, the economic theory of value applies, in that as in all others, such as his terminology, and within his field, each is being reigned in by a different type of capital: “The universal equivalent, the measure of all equivalences, is nothing other than labour-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 labour-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labour-time needed to transform it from one type into another” (Bourdieu 1996: 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 favourable 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.

(Bourdieu 1996: 246)

## Structures versus fields

Considering that within 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 is translated into another language, with which the French theorist is barely familiar, i.e. property relations. The notion of non-economic property, however, should be applied to specific relations only<sup>9</sup>, which 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: 255).

Contrary to what it seems, it appears to Bourdieu that<sup>10</sup> science is not magic in which putting a spell on an object can effect in its transsubstantiation and corresponding renaming, because in the real social order of life property is property is property, and capital is capital is capital, to borrow, with something of difference, Gertrude Stein's famous saying.

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: 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 to public museum/use. In Bourdieu's night all cats are, however, grey, as the Polish saying goes. And treating machines on

<sup>9</sup> In the current state of the theory, there are around twenty such relations, which are listed in (Tittenbrun 2011; 2012).

<sup>10</sup> “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”.



a par with paintings as ostensible embodiments of cultural capital in both cases makes matters even worse. One may agree that industrial machinery is an example of the 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, it 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 represents no capital at all. For Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, all of these cases boil down to the same thing.

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 labour-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: 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<sup>11</sup> not) 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: 247).

So far, so consistent, in the sense of similar unfair trickery being 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 these purported relationships must be separately validated, which has not been done. It is precisely along similar lines that Bourdieu's argument goes further: 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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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 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) were 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: 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: 247)

There are a couple of problems with this argument. Firstly, it sounds warlike, each field beset with struggles, fighting, 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 those which can be considered in such terms. In a word, another case of the notion of “leaping”. Secondly, Bourdieu touches upon the issue of class, but the outcome proves to be problematic. First, the logic of his argument would tend toward classifying managers, conceived of by as holders of cultural capital, as capitalists themselves. The French sociologist withdraws at the last moment, and leaves the matter in a 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 labour 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: 247).

## 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 re-affirmed. 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: 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 labour of accumulating and maintaining social capital” (Bourdieu 1996: 250)] everyday conversations with friends and other such 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 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: 253), or “a general science of the economy of practices that does not artificially limit itself to those practices that are socially recognised as economic must endeavour 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 sub-types), namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital” (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992: 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. Paying for a bus ticket in order to meet with a friend living in a distant quarter of the city, or dining out, has really nothing to do with capital or investment, and viewing them in such terms is economism writ large.

The capitalistic imperialism as 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 genea-

logical 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: 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: 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 the phenomena of communication and ignores the brutal fact of **universal reducibility to economics**” (1996: 253; emphasis: J.T.).

After reading his ruminations on cultural capital, one may think it is the child whom he favours most, but certain claims regarding the blown-out of proportions of the 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: 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 Bourdesian 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 1986: 248). It is only from a commonsense 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 globalised 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 the human consciousness, but which nevertheless can powerfully affect human behaviour, 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: 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 nationalisation. 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 labouring masses stand to gain much from such a measure.

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

The goal of establishing social capital as a potent social force, is certainly not served particularly well by the contradictions present in this section of Bourdieu’s theory. On the one hand he criticises, 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: 240).

The trouble is, Bourdieu is not able to maintain the dialectic position outlined above, and fully in line with the way of thinking he himself rejects above, he 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: 248–249).

If the reader thinks the list of capitals utilised by the French theorist has been exhausted, they 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 characterise it (Bourdieu 2005: 13).

It is difficult to imagine a text of similar length that would accumulate such a similar amount of mistakes/misconceptions. 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 characterised 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, such as by the of capital physical force (whether in its state or other applications) either, and Bourdieu's reference to Weber in this connection is based on a complete misinterpretation. 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 specifica* 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 imply it 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, and if they were of the same thing, one would view them to as something akin to Munchausen tales whose hero, and perhaps only him, could successfully pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

It would be unfair to justify the above as a form of petty ethnocentrism, as commonly displayed by Bourdieu, because, yes, France has had a long tradition of a centralised and strong state, but this cannot justify Bourdieu's generalisation of these properties and of elevating them to the level of General theory.

### In spite of conclusions

All in all, one can subscribe to the following summary, with a difference, and that the difference being the opposite, that where the commentator sees praise, in our judgment it is rather more a 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: 2). To be more specific, the overall objective outlined above is of course justified, what is objectionable is the set of means by which to achieve that end.

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