

Pierre Bourdieu and the Crisis of Modernity

I.

Pierre Bourdieu is a problem. He continues to be a problem even though since January 23, 2002, he is no longer alive. He is a problem because he has great prestige and he gives some bad advice. ATTAC, an organization he co-founded, continues to be a forum where his views carry great weight. The publisher of the Chilean edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, a periodical to which he frequently contributed, has reprinted a collection of his writings on political and social issues that includes: "The Essence of Neoliberalism," "For Committed Science," "Give Social Meaning to the European Union," "The Architect of the Euro Confesses," "A New Planetary Vulgate," and "Masculine Domination." I will be commenting mainly on these.

My case offered as proof that Pierre Bourdieu is a source of bad advice has a qualification, two steps, and three levels.

The qualification is that some of his advice is very good, excellent.

The first of the two steps, which I aim to take here in this writing, is to offer an alternative. The second step, which is beyond the scope of this particular writing but is not a task I have neglected, is to explain in detail why the alternative is true ("true" in the sense of being a more adequate account of the way things are, *adequatio intellectus ad rei*) The logic of my procedure is this: If my views (roughly summarized as a philosophy of cultural action) are true (as I and others show elsewhere), and if they are an alternative to Bourdieu's (as I show here) then the alternative will be a preferable source of advice.

Some would complain against the preceding paragraph that it invokes a narrow epistemology that classifies statements as either true or false, while a better (sometimes also called more feminine) epistemology would replace "either/or" with "both/and." I do not disagree. If my readers understand why I believe that following Bourdieu's advice would be unwise, then I will be happy, regardless of whether they count my theses as "true". In the end I just want whatever will lead toward what I believe Pierre Bourdieu also wanted: green, nonviolent, multicultural, deeply democratic socialism. ("Socialism" in the sense of inclusive and equitable institutions that work for the benefit of everybody, and are constantly revised by democratic processes with the aim of making them work better – not in the sense of no private business and no private property, and not in the sense of a one size fits all pattern that is supposed to be best for all people at all times and places)

The three levels are politics, social science, and philosophy. At first, I will mainly explain why I think Bourdieu's misinterprets neoliberalism and offers poor advice for combating it. I will offer an alternative interpretation. I will also trace some connections between his (in my view) bad political advice and his approach to doing social science. Both of these are part of the first step (what I will do here in this writing) and both require incursions into the marshy territory of the methodology of the social sciences. ("Methodology" not in the limited sense Bourdieu employs when he criticizes social science "methodologists" for ignoring

epistemology, but in the broad sense Bourdieu himself puts into practice, in which the territory of methodology is not separate from the territory of the philosophy of science.) In this marshy territory, one is called upon to give good reasons for choosing to use some words and procedures and not others. In these marshes I turn for guidance to certain aspects of the early works of Martin Heidegger and certain aspects of the late works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, partly because I agree with a statement Heidegger made that Wittgenstein demonstrated -- that doing philosophy can be conceived as laboring to keep simple words alive. I have already expressed my allegiance to the mid twentieth century resurrection of being-in-the-world and ordinary language by using the word "bad" starting in my third sentence, and the word "true" starting in my ninth. I will connect my philosophical sympathies with favoring social scientists like Emile Durkheim who have tended to explain human conduct by reference to conventional norms or rules, and with favoring an approach to politics that is less confrontational and more constructive, but not less radical.

I will begin by analyzing Bourdieu's critique of neoliberal discourse as exemplified in certain statements made by Hans Tietmeyer, the president of the Central Bank of Germany in "The Architect of the Euro Confesses". Tietmeyer said: "The challenge today is to create conditions favorable for sustainable growth and to gain the confidence of investors. For this reason, it is necessary to control the budgets of the states." [i.e. of the governments of the member states of the European Union.] (Bourdieu, 2002, p 33) Tietmeyer's scarcely disguised message is, in part, that funds for social programs must be cut to please investors. Investors want more profit and therefore less tax. Bourdieu further quotes Tietmeyer: "It is necessary to control public spending, to adjust the levels of interest rates and taxes until they are at a level that is sustainable in the long term, to reform the social safety net, and to dismantle the rigidities of the labor market..." ... "a new period of growth will not be achieved unless we make an effort to achieve more flexibility in the labor market." (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 34-35)

Bourdieu locates Tietmeyer's statements inside the vocabulary of a neoliberal lingua franca familiar to every newspaper reader: sustainable growth, investor confidence, public spending, social safety net, rigidity, labor market, globalization, flexibilization, tax cuts, competitiveness, productivity, governability, employability, new economy, individual responsibility etc. (I should mention that although Bourdieu and I use the term "neoliberal" in the same way, there are many, Joseph Stiglitz for example, who give the term a more restricted meaning, counting only the most extreme of the people we call neoliberals as real neoliberals.)

The structure of Bourdieu's critique of Tietmeyer's neoliberalism quickly appears. ("structure" in the sense of the relationship of the whole to the parts) ("appears" in Heidegger's sense of showing itself)

After quoting Tietmeyer's words, Bourdieu describes them as euphemisms. The euphemism "dismantle rigidities in the labor market" sugarcoats the reality of having to work late at night, working weekends, irregular schedules, higher pressure, less job security, more stress... etc. The euphemistic first person plural of "we make an effort" masks the fact that it is the workers, not the owners or the financiers, who will be compelled to make sacrifices in order to gain the confidence

of investors. Bourdieu describes the use of the first person plural here ironically as “a splendid piece of rhetorical work”. (Bourdieu 2002, p. 35)

The structure of Bourdieu’s critique is what Peter Gay in his study of Edward Gibbons’ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* called “split level”. At the deeper level, at the level of reality, there is a struggle for power. Discourse at a conventional second level, here the level of euphemisms, is part and parcel of the struggle for power it masks. Throughout the *Decline and Fall* Gibbon writes in a split-level style. Gibbons’ readers learn simultaneously the rhetoric and the reality.

So do Bourdieu’s readers. (Above I meant to imply not just that the structure of Bourdieu’s critique of Tietmeyer appears, but also that the structure of Bourdieu’s critique of neoliberalism appears. I also believe that the structures of his critiques of education, art, fashion, television, academic politics, and sexism appear. Bourdieu’s critique of Tietmeyer’s language as euphemistic is not a blind alley leading nowhere, but the general appearance of an important aspect of Bourdieu’s way of thinking.)

Bourdieu’s social science is a study of fields of struggle. The concept of “capital” is generalized to say that in each field social agents (classes, groups, institutions) struggle to get more of it, more economic capital, more social capital, and more cultural capital. In each field, there are dominant and subordinate positions. Those holding dominant positions are the beneficiaries of a fourth kind of capital, symbolic capital. Symbolic capital inflicts symbolic violence on the subordinates by camouflaging the arbitrary character of the skewed distribution of the other three kinds of capital, thus making the contingent historical construction of domination appear as natural. Sociology, Bourdieu writes, “...discovers the arbitrary and the contingent where one wanted to see necessity and nature, and discovers necessity and social coercion where one wanted to see choice and free will”. (Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Flachsland 2003, p.42)

The alternative I will offer to this attractive and influential general approach to social science will fit together with an alternative reading of Hans Tietmeyer’s words.

When Tietmeyer says, “The challenge today is to create conditions favorable for sustainable growth and to gain the confidence of investors,” I read him less as masking the facts and more as stating the facts. He is saying what the rules are. More precisely, what he is saying is true because of the rules. It is a fact that there will not be sustainable growth (or any growth) unless investors are confident that their investments will be profitable. This “fact” is what John Searle calls an “institutional fact”. It is true because the rules of capitalism frame and constitute a way of organizing production in which the expectation of profit is the standard dynamic. Karl Marx depicted the dynamic of capitalism in a diagram he employed in the second volume of *Capital*:

M --- CP..... C' ---- M'

To read this simplified diagram as showing an accumulation process one must imagine that all or part of the surplus ($M' - M$) is reinvested cycle after cycle. Thus

read, Marx employed the ideas illustrated in the diagram to argue that capitalism will necessarily come to an end. The cycle of accumulation that piles up more and more wealth in a small part of the population will at some point become unsustainable.

The same diagram and the same ideas can be used to argue that capitalism will never come to an end. Because capitalist culture is the particular way that homo sapiens sapiens adjusts to its ecological niche today, the way it mobilizes resources to meet needs has to be kept going. As the French regulationist school puts it, there must be some “regime of accumulation” or other. There must be some combination of political and social institutions that guarantees that the capitalist process of producing goods and services for the purpose of getting more money out at the end than was put in at the beginning will continue to function. Because capitalism is indispensable, when leftist movements try to dispense with it, there are voter revolts, or military coups, or fascist uprisings, or whatever it takes to restore capitalist normality, i.e. to restore the logic of accumulation. . (Property owning interests of course often claim that measures favoring them are indispensable even when, strictly speaking, it is not so much the logic of accumulation as their political power that makes favoring their interests indispensable. Quite apart from the standard tendency to slow production when profitability declines, organized capitalist classes sometimes threaten economic collapse and deliberately create collapse for the sake of promoting their interests.) But what I am saying is not quite true. It is not quite true to say that all the citizens are at the mercy of what capital accumulation requires, or pretends to require. To the extent that other ways to mobilize resource to meet needs are sufficiently widespread and operational, capitalism can be dispensed with. Saying that capitalism can in favorable circumstances be dispensed with is to say that it can be modified or replaced when it is not functional. This is not the same thing as laying down a moral principle that it is intrinsically wrong and should be eliminated root and branch. When capitalism is sailing along generating good jobs, creating the green technologies of the future, and contributing to community welfare the maxim if it is not broken don't fix it applies. But more commonly, its dynamics lead to one disaster after another.

But, more importantly, there is another level to this conversation. There is a level distinct from the level at which societies seek a reasonable consensus regarding the best mix of institutions. At this other, deeper level, the present reign of the logic of accumulation is an ongoing disaster because people depend on it so much that trying to implement the conclusions of democratic deliberation and trying to make ethical choices is often futile. It matters little what John Rawls' theory or any other theory says a just society would be; it matters little what mix of public, private, and third sector institutions would best serve the common good; because whatever else happens there must be some regime of accumulation that assures that there will be production by assuring that there will be sufficient profits. The regime of accumulation must be kept going whatever ethics and voting may prescribe, because the alternative is either real or imagined economic downturn.

Most places most of the time alternatives to the logic of accumulation are not sufficiently operational to make it possible to replace capitalism in whole or in part

–or, what amounts to the same thing, to restrict it to operating within the limits that democratic processes suitably informed by ethical deliberation prescribe.

To put the same point differently, the transition from capitalism to socialism is necessarily a transition from the logic of accumulation to other logics. A mixture of capitalism and socialism is necessarily a mixture of the logic of accumulation with other logics. The “other logics” are the “solidarities” and “collectives” that --as Bourdieu points out-- neoliberalism is methodically destroying.

By describing capitalism this way –as cultural structures set in an ecological context— I meant to discourage the notion that capitalism can be overthrown by struggles consisting mostly of protests and strikes. I thought of myself as not having to discourage the idea that capitalism does not need to be overthrown at all, but can just be checked by the countervailing power of labor unions and welfare states as in the good old days of post World War II Europe. That discouragement, I thought, was already accomplished by showing that the demise of social democracy and the rise of neoliberalism were mostly due to the normal operation of the constitutive rules of capitalism – from which it followed that those basic rules must be modified. I meant to encourage a sort of synthesis of anarchism, socialism, and religion. From the anarchists I take the ideas of mutual aid and building the new society in the shell of the old. From the socialists I take the idea that sooner or later, in principle peacefully, gradually, and democratically, the basic rules of capitalism must be replaced by other basic rules. Humanity and the biosphere must be liberated from property and contract laws that make decisions to produce or not produce depend on investors’ expectations concerning whether or not investments will be profitable. From the world’s religions I take the ideals of service to others and inclusion. (“inclusion” is a meaning of “agape”) I encourage these ideals from these sources not just because I happen to like the sources, but for scientific and pragmatic reasons. They adjust culture to physical function. (“Anarchism” should probably be renamed “communitarianism” to avoid being misunderstood as endorsing violence.)

Reading over what I have just written I find that it is more positive than negative. It is positive in that it gives quite a few brief hints about how I think social science should be done in order to serve social movements that are building green, multicultural, nonviolent, deeply democratic socialism. (“socialism” in the sense of inclusive and equitable institutions that work for the benefit of everybody, and are constantly revised by democratic processes with the aim of making them work better – not in the sense of no private business and no private property, and not in the sense of a one size fits all pattern that is supposed to be best for all people at all times and places) It is not very negative because it adds very little to what I said above (in I.) about why I am disappointed by Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, it does not show why Bourdieu’s sociology, which was carefully crafted to give due weight and dignity both to folk knowledge and to objective material realities known to scientists, nevertheless lends itself to a contemporary split-level style. It is time to take a closer look at Bourdieu’s way of doing social science, in order to make more explicit why I think his approach makes it hard to reverse neoliberalism.

Pierre Bourdieu’s works provide good examples of Michel Foucault’s idea that scientific discourses construct their own objects. Sociology as a science is subdivided according to the fields of struggle to be studied. The objects to be

studied are fields of struggle. Bourdieu's methodological discourse also guides research by constructing another object to be studied, the habitus. Bourdieu offers the idea of habitus as a resolution to a number of oppositions that divide social science. Among them, "...the most fundamental and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism." (Bourdieu 1990, p. 25)

Subjectivism is exemplified in philosophy by Jean-Paul Sartre and in sociology by Alfred Schutz, both of whom fell early in life under the influence of Edmund Husserl. Schutz developed sociology as the systematic study of Husserl's life-world (which I have mentioned above and associated with other projects for recovering for science the phenomena of everyday life). Objectivism is exemplified by Karl Marx, for whom the logic of accumulation imposes objective laws on society which people must obey whether they want to obey them or not, and whether they are aware of their existence or not. And by the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, for whom kinship systems and phonemic systems, to cite two major objects of anthropological research "...are built up by the mind on the level of unconscious thought." (Bourdieu 1990, p. 38)

By aiming to reconcile this fundamental and ruinous opposition by means of the concept of habitus, Bourdieu aims also to reconcile the antinomies of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and unconscious, and individual and society.

Above I suggested a somewhat similar reconciliation, Swanger's and my reconciliation of Winch (subjectivism) with critical realism (objectivism) through the idea of rule. Hence, one way to ask about habitus is to ask, "Why (and when) should one choose to talk about habitus instead of talking about rules?" and "Why (and when) should one choose to talk about rules instead of talking about habitus?" Perhaps one should add, "Why (and when) should one employ both ways of talking simultaneously in the same context?"

One might go about trying to answer these questions by relating them to a task which, I take it, is basic to any social science, although perhaps so basic that it is more often presupposed than stated, namely the task of explaining why people do what they do. It has not been unusual for social scientists to approach this task with the aid of two similar concepts "norm" and "rule" and others allied with these two, somewhat as follows: People do what they do because they follow, more or less, the customary norms that prescribe what people are supposed to do, according to the culture (or subculture) of some given time and place. Culture channels and governs the instinctual tendencies, more or less. But since some people are less socialized than others, and everybody feels an urge to get wild from time to time, and some hyper-socialized people have their own ethical standards they conceive as superior to the general norm, some people most of the time, and almost all people some of the time, do what they do because they have an emotion or a reason that moves them to deviate from the culture's (or subculture's) norms.

A line I do not want to draw: This brief schematic explanation of human conduct, admittedly bordering on tautology, is meant to be unremarkable. It illustrates, however, ways of accounting for human conduct sometimes thought to useful mainly for pre modern societies and for those aspects of modern life still today not governed by economic calculations. Predominantly capitalist societies,

Max Weber says, arose only in Europe and North America, and only in the nineteenth century, from whence they spread to the rest of the world. Their general presupposition is something that is not immediately recognizable as a set of conventional norms, and something not prevalent in traditional societies, namely rational capital accounting; its logic is instrumental rather than customary. Thus, the logic of accumulation might be said to govern a different type of society, in which categorically different patterns of explanation are required. I am not persuaded. "...the premises by which economists explain international trade are, in the end, descriptions of how certain basic cultural norms work out in practice on a global scale." (Richards, 2000) I want to downplay Weberian and other accounts which tend to draw a sharp conceptual line separating human behavior under capitalism (and in modern bureaucracies) from human behavior elsewhere. Instead I follow Emile Durkheim in holding that the acquisitive individualism of homo economicus navigating in a world structured by private property, bureaucracies, and markets is itself a construction of the conscience collective of a certain type of society with certain norms.

A line I do want to draw: Bourdieu's idea of habitus suggests a different sort of story about humans, about their practices, their motives and their reasons. It deliberately does not make rule-talk central to explanation. Let us read Bourdieu on habitus to see how he departs from norm-centered methodologies..

Bourdieu uses the term habitus frequently in ways that round out its meaning and illustrate its use. At one point, he gives a definition of "habitus" as follows:

"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor." (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53)

(In the original French: « Les conditionnements associés a une classe particulière de conditions d'existence produisent des habitus, systèmes de dispositions durables et transposables, structures structurées prédisposées a fonctionner comme structures structurantes, c'est a die en tant que principes générateurs et organisateurs de pratiques et de représentations qui peuvent être objectivement adaptées a leur but sans supposer la visée consciente de fins et la maîtrise expresse des opérations nécessaires pour les atteindre, objectivement « réglées » et « régulières » sans être en rien le produit de l'obéissance a des règles, et, étant tout cela, collectivement orchestrées sans être le produit de l'action organisatrice d'un chef d'orchestre »).

The key words are "conditionings" and "dispositions." Conditionings produce habitus. Habitus are dispositions. They are dispositions that produce not just a single behavior, but a whole series of organized possibilities of behavior ; for this reason Bourdieu sometimes calls them "generative schemes."

Some things habitus are not:

They are not conscious aims. They are not the deliberate acts of Aristotle's Ethics, nor the human acts of any of the theories of action that have followed Aristotle, nor of any of the more recent theories of human action inspired by the late Wittgenstein, such as that of Stuart Hampshire.

They are not rules or norms.

They are not habits formed by following rules or norms.

They are not any kind of obedience to authority.

As stated above, Bourdieu offers habitus as a tool for dealing with several difficulties sociology faces as a science. But others have dealt with these same difficulties without doing something Bourdieu does, that is, without constructing an explanatory category that studiously and explicitly avoids saying that people do what they do because they are following (or not following) rules.

A habitus is a bodily disposition that organizes action without the actor thinking about rules. Bourdieu reviews much of his field research with Algerian peasants showing how the concept of habitus applies in anthropological practice to make sense of behavior that is only made muddle when one tries to describe it as rule-following. For example, a boxer aiming blows and anticipating the opponent's blows does not organize the blows by reference to rules. It only makes a muddle to try to explain the boxer's behavior in terms of a science of boxing composed of laws that prescribe how to anticipate and to counter one's opponent's blows. So it is in general with human behavior. It follows a logic of practice, not reducible to rules. The logic of practice is not the logic of the logicians.

One can agree with everything Bourdieu has to say about habitus, without agreeing that it is complete, and without refraining from saying that a different and complementary focus would be advisable. To demonstrate that rules do not explain everything is not to demonstrate that they explain nothing. It is not to demonstrate that rules play no important part in explaining, for example, why it is the case that if a tenant does not pay rent long enough, and if the landlord goes to court and gets an eviction decree, then the sheriff's deputy will come and physically eject the tenant from the premises. The decisions by the courts enforcing property rights are conscious deliberate acts that follow rules and obey authority, namely, the authority of the civil code.

As H.L.A. Hart plausibly shows, the law can be thought of as a union of primary and secondary rules (primary rules dealing with behavior, and secondary rules dealing with what counts as a primary rule). A rule, Hart says, is (1) a description of what people usually do, but it is more than that. It is also a (2) norm licensing other people to complain if the rule is violated. One can also criticize oneself and feel guilty. Thirdly, (3) a rule has an internal aspect. The internal aspect is that people look to the rule in order to guide their own conduct. (Bourdieu sometimes but not always prefers the term "rule" for behavior satisfying the first of Hart's three criteria, and reserves the term "norm" for cases where the second two are also satisfied, making the rule prescriptive. But for present purposes nothing turns on this distinction.)

But even if Bourdieu grants that while habitus provides a good account of some kinds of human behavior, rules or norms must be invoked to explain other

kinds, Bourdieu has another string to his bow. Bourdieu cites Wittgenstein's discussion of the question how one knows whether one is following a rule or not, which ends saying, "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'" (Wittgenstein quoted by Bourdieu at Bourdieu 1990, p. 25) Reading Wittgenstein as a behaviorist, these lines can be interpreted as saying that rule-following is, in the last analysis, a set of dispositions, a form of habitus. Thus, talk of habitus can say all that needs to be said, because habitus is a general category of which rules and norms are either a subset, or two slightly different subsets.

In this marshy territory, one is called upon to give good reasons for choosing to use some words and procedures and not others. One reason for saying a rule is not just a disposition is that it is awkward to unpack all the social practices of criticism, self-criticism, and self-guidance, organized on the scale of institutions that persist in time and outlive the people presently playing roles in them, in terms of some very long and complex series of statements about behavioral dispositions. One would want some estimate of the costs and benefits of this awkward move before deciding to make it.

In some ways, one of the beneficiaries when habitus wins over rules is the Algerian peasant. His or her humble logic of practice is vindicated as against the logical logic of the pretentious anthropologist who tried to read into peasant conduct orderly self-conscious rule-following that was not there. But this is not to say that in the conflict between subjectivism and objectivism subjectivism wins. On the contrary: that part of subjective experience that consists of orderly self-conscious rule-following, such as the internal aspect of the conduct of the judge deciding to issue an eviction order, tends to go out of focus. On the whole, Bourdieu's reconciliation of subjectivism and objectivism tends to favor the latter, Marx as against Sartre. "...subjectivism ... is quite incapable of giving an account of the necessity of the social world." (Bourdieu 1990, p.52) Bourdieu's methodology from his first work in Algeria to his last work reflects a passion for honor and respect, and a passion against reducing people to the status of specimens for scientific study. Nonetheless, the conventional transactions of everyday life, honored at one level, do not end up à la Aristotle as deliberate human acts with causal powers. In this latter respect, the lived-world loses.

The interpretation imposes itself that Bourdieu does not want rules to be explanations. Offered a choice, he goes out of his way to avoid using rules as explanations. My hypothesis is that he does not want to use a human tendency to be obedient as an explanation. He desires to disassociate himself with the tradition of the Logos, in which human acts (praxis as distinct from mere behavior) are thought of as commands of reason either made by the self to the self or made by some higher authority. Although Socrates, and therefore critical inquiry, is a part of that tradition dear to him, it is also the tradition of ontotheology, which so many writers have identified with so many forms of oppression. Bourdieu is on the side of the oppressed. The last thing he wants is a research methodology that implies that if human conduct is to be understood at all, it must be understood as the conduct of creatures naturally inclined to be obedient to authority.

As further evidence I cite this passage: "It is because the habitus exploits the body's readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social that the king, the banker, or the priest are able to be the Monarchy, financial capitalism, or the Church made flesh." (Bourdieu 1990, p. 57) Surely there are any number of words and phrases available in ordinary language to explain the respect conventionally due to kings, bankers, and priests. That Bourdieu constructed a technical language in which "the performative magic of the social," the "habitus," and the "body's readiness," jointly explain how these social roles function suggests that he was not satisfied with ordinary language. Everything suggests that the commonsense tendency of rule-talk to favor obedience is at least part of what led Bourdieu to invent neologisms.

Almost any psychology, Freud's for example, takes large notice of the roles played in the genesis of a social human personality by personal relationships with figures exercising authority –a dimension of sociability that Bourdieu studiously ignores. He explicitly rejects it when he praises his own intellectual construct, habitus, precisely because it enables us to think of patterns of conduct as, "... objectivement « réglées » et « régulières » sans être en rien le produit de l'obéissance a des règles, et, étant tout cela, collectivement orchestrées sans être le produit de l'action organisatrice d'un chef d'orchestre »

Connections between obedience to rules and ordinary language can be seen in the works of Jacques Lacan. Like most students of child development, Lacan finds that participating in language, submitting to social constraint, and being a person with a self are all three inextricably mixed. Lacan uses a play on words "le nom du père" (the name of the father) using the French word "nom" (name) which is pronounced the same as "non" (no). This play on words illustrates the idea that having parents, coming into language, and learning the meaning of "no" are indissolubly joined in the genesis of a human personality. In the light of such considerations, whether or not one agrees with Lacan's particular account of them, it is no wonder that ordinary language invokes ghosts of authority figures.

It may seem that I am reading into Bourdieu, based on a rather arcane discussion of technical issues, a greater and more pervasive anti-conservative bias than he really had. But I think Bourdieu's book on Martin Heidegger shows that I am not exaggerating his anti-conservatism.

If Heidegger was, as T.W. Adorno said, "fascist to his very cells", then Bourdieu was "democratic to his very cells". Bourdieu's level of political sympathy with Heidegger was zero. The theme of Bourdieu's case against Heidegger is that all of his philosophy was deliberately designed to promote conservative values. In Heidegger's work being-in-the-world is part and parcel of a philosophy that while it contrives to appear to be above politics is in fact "...political from beginning to end." (Bourdieu 1991, p. 96) Heidegger uses being-in-the-world to naturalize oppression.

True. But the sorts of social research that take off from Husserl's lived world, Heidegger's being-in-the-world, and Wittgenstein's games played in ordinary language have other uses. One of them is Paulo Freire's method of "codification of the symbolic universe", in which the lived world of a group is systematically catalogued as a starting point for consciousness-raising adult education. Cesar Chavez, a farm labor organizer for whom I worked as a volunteer lawyer, practiced

the construction of collective protection against economic forces that Bourdieu advocated. The subjective worlds of farm workers were worlds Cesar made systematic, conscious efforts to understand. Before beginning an organizing campaign, Cesar would go door to door listening to people to find out what was on their minds and what issues they understood, much as Paulo Freire would recommend. His efforts were perhaps not of a sort that would count as sociological research using a phenomenological methodology, but they were of a sort which could well count as a beginning to be later extended and augmented by social scientists using such a methodology

For Bourdieu a payoff of banning subjectivity from sociology (counting on habitus to do all the work people used to think they needed subjective sociology for) was the deconstruction of mainstream economics. (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 46-47, 63-64)) Economic theory is absurd because it begins with the illusory subjective experience of the economic actor (say a buyer or a seller) making a subjective choice; it begins with preference schedules, and builds on that bogus foundation towering mathematical nonsense. Sociology performs the work of producing studies of the same phenomena grounded in material reality, showing the real logics active in practice. Bourdieu offers a sophisticated, not exaggerated, version of James Duesenberry's insightful exaggeration, "Economics is all about how people make choices. Sociology is all about how they don't have any choices to make." (Duesenberry 1960, p. 233)

But a general ban on the systematic study of subjectivity was not necessary to undo, at a conceptual level, the damage done by mainstream economics. The same healing can be accomplished seeing economic actors as playing language games, like buying and selling, governed by the rules of property law and contract law. The actors' subjective perceptions of their own actions can be both preserved (i.e. counted as really existing, resurrected from the death imposed on them by reductionist science) and incorporated into a critical social science serving social change movements. When I see a homeless man begging on the street I might read what I see through the lenses of a materialist sociology as a member of a subordinate class who is kept down by the dominant class by means of symbolic violence. But I might also see him through a complementary lens. I can take a more legal view. The homeless person owns no property. He has no legal right to sleep anywhere. He is excluded from the market because he has nothing to sell that anybody wants to buy. This legalistic interpretation, in addition to having the merit of being compatible with the systematic study of subjectivity, also has the merit that it directly implies that to build a society of solidarity it is necessary to democratize access to property. It also supports what Jose Luis Coraggio calls "resignifying markets" and strengthening non-market relationships since it immediately displays exclusion from markets as a source of the homeless person's misery.

This rule-friendly approach suggests seeing today's neoliberal plague (always understanding "neoliberal" in Bourdieu's broad sense, since in some narrow senses of the term the plague is already abating) as a crisis of the legal framework of a market economy, that is to say, as a crisis of modernity. ("modernity" in Karl Polanyi's sense of market relations disembedded from, and tending to dominate, social relations). Seeing the problem in this way opens the door to searching

western traditions older than capitalism (and non-western traditions) for cultural resources capable of modifying the systemic imperatives that condemn today's lonely crowds to inhabit dysfunctional institutions. The reason why a rule-friendly approach to social science facilitates opening the door to considering the merits of other cultures is that if the problem is conceived in terms of dysfunctional norms, then the solution to the problem must be found somewhere in the wide category of "other norms."

Bourdieu's dominance/subordination approach to understanding neoliberalism, in contrast, is of a piece with his wishful thinking about the prospects for restoring collective bargaining and the welfare state, as if such results could be accomplished at this point in history without bringing into focus, analyzing, and modifying the constitutive rules of capitalism. Bourdieu does not see neoliberalism as a crisis of modernity, where modernity is conceived as market society. Far from it. It is just another version of the general pattern of fields of struggle in which some dominate others by symbolic violence. Bourdieu writes, "One of the effects of the neoliberal philosophy, which is nothing more than the mask of an old conservative philosophy, is to lead to a regression of the state to the minimal state, conforming in everything to the ideal of the dominators. That is to say, the state reduced to the forces of repression, as is shown in the increase of spending on the police." (Bourdieu 2002, p. 39) An implication, it seems to me, of calling neoliberalism the mask of an old conservative philosophy, read in the context of what Bourdieu says in general, is that the allied anti-conservatives of Europe, the labor unions, the left parties, and the social movements, supported by a social science that deconstructs the ideologies that naturalize subordination, might succeed against this new form of conservatism, employing the same forms of struggle with which they succeeded sometimes in the past against other forms of conservatism. They might. But only if they are able to create operational alternatives to the logic of accumulation.

By Howard Richards

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Strict Standards: Non-static method mosCache::getCache() should not be called statically in /home/howardri/public_html/peace/includes/frontend.php on line 91