

# The Social as Heaven and Hell: Pierre Bourdieu's Philosophical Anthropology

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GABRIEL PETERS

## INTRODUCTION: BOURDIEU BETWEEN THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN AND THE STUDY OF HUMANS

It is . . . because man is a God unto man that man is a wolf unto man (Bourdieu, 1990a: 196)

As Bourdieu himself recognized in the almost testamentary *Pascalian Meditations* (2000a), his sociological thought contains a philosophical anthropology to the extent that it is possible to extract from his theoretical framework and empirical research results a more general picture of the fundamental predicates of the human condition, a picture whose core is the thesis of a “universal dependence on the judgment of others” (Bourdieu, 2000b: 100). The attempt to discern an overarching view of the *conditio humana* in the oeuvre of this most empirical of social theorists does not imply, of course, the defense of an innocent return to “philosophical anthropology” as it was practiced when philosophy, though not exclusively endowed with the prerogative of reflection on universal attributes of the human being, didn't have to struggle for this space of inquiry with a plethora of disciplines imbued with relative epistemic autonomy, such as sociology and social or cultural anthropology.

Such an attempt does presuppose, however, that the idea of a philosophical anthropology, partially indebted to more than 20 centuries of invaluable interrogations about the human animal, but also sensitive to the necessity of a methodological reformulation of its analytical procedures in face of the contributions of social-scientific thinking, still makes sense. In tune with social scientists who situate themselves in the interface between these two intellectual universes (Honneth and Joas, 1988; Vandenberghe, 2009), I believe this enterprise is heuristically and ethico-politically indispensable to human sciences like sociology and anthropology, if conceived as the systematic examination of the assumptions on “what human beings are like” (Taylor, 1988: VII) that these disciplines activate, in an explicit or tacit manner, in their endeavors of theoretical reflection and empirical

research. In that sense, the project of a philosophical anthropology adapted to our times of intellectual hyper-specialization is not reducible to what philosophers have to say about the human being, but includes also, and necessarily, the reflexive efforts through which social scientists try to excavate or, more boldly, refine and elaborate the conceptions of “human nature” that inform their writings on specific types of action/experience and social organization.

Montaigne has expressed the dilemma that haunts philosophical anthropology in an epigrammatic formulation: “if our faces were not alike, we could not distinguish man from beast; if they were not unlike, we could not distinguish one man from the other” (1952: 519). If we interpret the allusion to the physiognomy of faces as a metaphorical reference to the whole array of human properties, we can understand this passage as an affirmation that the tension between generality and particularity in the study of the *anthropos* cannot be simply resolved by unilaterally privileging one of these poles over the other. According to this interpretation, to defend the relevance of philosophical anthropology *does not* entail turning a blind eye to the impressive socio-cultural plasticity which marks human beings and is largely documented by disciplines such as history and anthropology, which can always be used to counter the unsatisfactory forms of “essentialism” (usually ethnocentrically biased) infused in certain philosophical definitions of the humanity of humanity, i.e. of what makes humans human. The rationale behind the intensification of a productive dialogue between philosophical anthropology and the social sciences responds, on the contrary, to the need of understanding human beings in terms of both unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Concentrating on the former, a philosophical-anthropological enterprise would search for what Honneth and Joas aptly call “the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness” (1988: 7).

It is easy to demonstrate that Bourdieu was acutely aware of the presence of an “idea of ‘the human being’ ” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 8) of a more general and presuppositional kind in his theoretical and empirical (or theoretical-cum-empirical) works. Nevertheless, with important exceptions (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1993; Pinto, 2000: 125–141; Wacquant, 2004a: 11), the exegeses of the master’s oeuvre have been relatively negligent to the fact that, in the late phase of his career, this sociologist originally trained as a philosopher became not only more openly political, but also more openly philosophical, striving, especially in his *Pascalian Meditations*, to outline his own conception of the universal traces of the human condition, a view which was in part presupposed in his historical-sociological investigations and in part an emanation from them.

Indeed, Bourdieu seemed to think that, if “only history can rid us from history” (1990a: 178), a philosophical anthropology founded upon the sociological study of multiple modalities of social-historical existence would be less prone to mistake particular existential properties for universal characteristics of the human condition, walking more safely (or less precariously) towards the universal. According to this reasoning, the French sociologist did not attempt to annihilate, but to explore

in a heuristically fruitful way the tense dialectic between the uncovering of the “universal structures of human being”, on the one hand, and the historical-sociological investigation of the “contingent practices that sustain, perpetuate and modify these structures”, on the other (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1993: 35).

This article reconstructs Bourdieu’s philosophical anthropology as an account of the *existence humaine* in which collective recognition (“symbolic capital”) appears as both the fundamental existential goal through which individuals strive to confer *meaning* to their lives and the source of the endless symbolic competition which keeps society moving. Bourdieu’s image of the human condition depicts a “quest for meaning” (Frankl) which is also, and necessarily, a “quest for power” (Adler), precisely the unequally distributed and fiercely disputed power to endow one’s life with a collectively avowed justification, a social verdict on “the *legitimacy* of an existence” which is inseparably tied to any individual’s personal feelings of being “justified in existing as he or she exists” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 237).

The agonistic picture of the social universe that nourishes his genetic sociology of symbolic power returns in his philosophical anthropology in the form of a synthesis between Durkheim’s idea that “society is God”—i.e. the worldly instance where individuals pursue an existential *justification* of their ephemeral lives, which can only come through the collective recognition that they are endowed with a social function/mission—and Sartre’s thesis that “hell is other people”—i.e. that social recognition can only be obtained in a differential and distinctive way, as both the mechanism and the result of a competition which condemns many individuals to a particular kind of social-symbolic misery stemming from invisibility and/or stigmatization. Bourdieu’s philosophical anthropology is thus contained *in nuce* in his statement that “it is . . . because man is a God unto man that man is a wolf unto man” (1990a: 196)—a sentence which is only one amidst the many oblique references to Western philosophical tradition (*casu quo*, to Hobbes and Spinoza) sprinkled throughout his work. In what follows, I will present this perspective on what it is like to be human, stressing the connection not only between Bourdieu’s sociological framework and his philosophical anthropology, but also between the critical impulses which animate the former, amounting to a stern refusal of any form of “sociodicy” (Aron), and the quite melancholic “philosophy of misery” that ensues from the latter.

#### THE SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (1): A GENERAL ECONOMY OF PRACTICES

As is well known, a vision of the history of human societies as a process of causal interdetermination between agency and structure is at the heart of Bourdieu’s social-theoretical framework. From the point of view of the explanation of social phenomena, this process renders impossible to reduce “structures to interactions” or, on the contrary, “to deduce actions and interactions from structure” (1990a: 129). Bourdieu’s theoretical originality, however, is not located in this thesis on the

reciprocal conditionality between subjectively propelled individual conducts, on the one hand, and the structural, institutional and cultural formations in which the agents are immersed, on the other, but in the more specific fact that he conceives of this relationship as a dialectic between habitus and field.

The notion of habitus refers to agents' practical propensities of conduct, which are subjectively internalized through their socially situated experiences and recursively mobilized in the production of the practices whereby the social world is reproduced or transformed. The concept of field, on the other hand, constitutes the fundamental analytical tool used by Bourdieu to operationalize the transposition of a *relational* mode of thinking to the human sciences, by developing a topological approach to social formations which depicts them as structured spaces of positions. These positions are determined by the unequal distribution of properties which operate as *capital* in those spaces, in the sense of material, cultural and symbolic possessions able to confer force or power to their holders.

The agonistic philosophical-anthropological supposition that runs throughout all of Bourdieu's sociology is that to act in the social world means necessarily to engage in certain *arenas of competition* for determinate specimens of material and/or symbolic profits. Such an engagement requires the strategic use of socially legitimate means of struggle, i.e. forms of capital, particularly varied in modern society due to the diversity of fields or "games" which emerge from its heightened process of social and institutional differentiation. It is this meta-scientific presupposition, according to which to exist socially is to compete, that leads him to define his research program as a *general economy of practices* capable of overcoming a restricted economism that could only recognize as genuinely economic interests those that orient actions towards monetary profit in contemporary capitalist formations. Bourdieu's "general economism", on the other hand, is founded upon the socially and historically plural character of *symbolic* profits and interests pursued by agents in diverse collective configurations (1977: 177–178). In this way, he intends to show that even the "enchanted" settings of conducts generally portrayed as disinterested, such as the religious, scientific or artistic fields, are also structured around actions propelled by determinate interests on non-monetary forms of profit, in particular those associated with the acquisition of *symbolic capital*, which assumes the form of collective reputation or prestige ("glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame" [2000a: 166]) and intersubjectively authorizes the legitimate exercise of symbolic authority in that sphere.

Bourdieu underlines the importance of resorting to economic lexicon as a way of preventing the sociology of cultural fields from being restricted to a description or celebration of the faithful experience of the sacred—that is, of the sacred (religious, aesthetic, scientific, etc.) as a socio-cultural territory untainted by instrumental interest -, while also pursuing the social-historical conditions of production of such an experience. At the same time, however, the increasing use of notions such as *illusio*, investment (in an inseparably psychoanalytical and economic sense) and libido (1998a: 78) in order to communicate the idea of interest which he

upholds bears testimony to the fact that, far from advocating a vulgar materialism, his notion of interest intends to convey the agents' intense existential commitments to the goods at stake in a certain game, as well as to the game itself (Bourdieu, 1990b: 290). As the "libidinal" dimension of a habitus, the particular interests of an agent are shaped by the sensitizing influences proper to a certain social constellation in a lasting process of "sentimental education". The fact that different socialization scenarios bring about distinct interests and "guide" the agents to different fields, each one with a type of *illusio* irreducible to any other, explains why the typical investments in a field appear nonsensical or absurd to those situated in a different social universe and subjectively predisposed to recognize other goals and values as truly worthwhile.

Since every field constitutes an arena of competition between asymmetrically positioned agents for the maximization of a unique form of capital, the efficient operation of any species of capital as a legitimate weapon of struggle depends on its collective recognition as *symbolic capital*, manifest in *distinctive properties* that express a "monopolistic possession (exclusivity)" through the "exhibition, intentional or not, of this capital and of the difference attached to its possession" (Bourdieu, 1999a: 337). *Summa summarum*: symbolic capital is "the supreme form of capital and of validation of every species of capital" (Pinto, 2000: 159).

#### THE SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (2): SYMBOLIC POWER

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital must be understood within his effort to overcome the antinomy between two approaches to symbolic forms such as language, art, religion, myth and science: a) the perspectives that privilege the internalist or "tautegorical" (Schelling) interpretation of the meanings inscribed in such symbolic systems, perceived as endowed with immanent autonomy and intelligibility; b) analytical strands, exemplarily represented by Marxism and the "genealogical" (Nietzsche/Foucault) mode of historical investigation, that stress the effects of external determinisms on the production and practical mobilization of social-symbolic webs, pointing, for example, to their ideological functions in legitimating the interests of dominant classes or other types of groups.

Bourdieu's synthesis of these traditions is anchored in the reformulation of a seminal thesis advanced by Durkheim and Mauss (1963), namely the assertion that, in so-called "primitive societies", the categorical structures governing the interpretation of the natural world reproduced, at the cognitive level, the real divisions inscribed in the very social structure of the group or collectivity: the social principles of group division were transmuted into cognitive principles of vision—or worldview (Wacquant, 1992: 12; Bourdieu, 2002a: 8–9). His most important reformulation of the two venerable sociologists' insight on the connection between mental and social structures does not consist, however, in its transposition to research on "advanced" societies, but in the postulate that symbolic systems are simultaneously instruments of knowledge, communication and domination (1990a: 24).

Accordingly, the notion of symbolic power/capital presents itself as a conceptual tool to empirically grasp processes whereby relations of *force* are actualized in and through relations of *meaning, cognition, recognition* and *communication*. The intersection between modes of knowledge/communication and modes of domination in social life is at the basis of *symbolical violence*, defined as the “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167). That assent should be explained by the fact that the subjective schemes of perception internalized in the habitus of dominant and dominated agents are themselves products of the objective structure of relations within which these agents were socialized. Thanks to this relationship of circular reinforcement or “ontological complicity” (1990a: 194) between objective and subjective structures, or, in other terms, to the fact the actors perceive their social relations through symbolic-interpretive resources engendered by these same relations, a social environment infused with an unequal distribution of economic, cultural and symbolic resources is nevertheless *naturalized* and *essentialized*, so as to make the exercise of domination not to be recognized as arbitrary, but, on the contrary, experienced (or “misrecognized”) as the natural and evident order of things in the eyes of both the dominant and the dominated.

#### THE SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (3): THE GENETIC SOCIOLOGY OF SYMBOLIC POWER AS CRITICAL THEORY

The moral and political intentions and implications of the social-scientific project of genetic analysis of symbolic power are obvious and overtly acknowledged by Bourdieu. We can therefore classify his sociology as a variant of “critical theory” in the ample sense of the expression, beyond its reduction to the epistemic and ethical-philosophical tenets associated with the Frankfurt School (Calhoun, 1993: 63). The notion of *critique* implied by Bourdieu’s version of critical theory seems to unify a sociologically reformulated version of its Kantian sense to one more akin to Marxism (Wacquant, 2004b: 97). The Kantian moment of critique involves an analysis of the presuppositions and limits of human cognition and thought, although these presuppositions and limits are historicized and sociologized by Bourdieu, i.e. conceived not as properties inherent to the sensibility and understanding of a transcendental subject, but as capabilities resulting from the actors’ socializational immersion in determinate social-historical formations.

Besides demonstrating, in the wake of Durkheim’s “sociological kantianism” (Lévi-Strauss), the socially constituted character of the agents’ sensibility and understanding, Bourdieu’s procedure of critique unites the Kantian meaning of systematic excavation of presuppositions of thought and action to a neo-Marxist sense, associated to the effort of uncovering ideologically masked modalities of domination. The entanglement between these two kinds of critique (empirically worked out in detail, to single out only his *magnum opus*, in the “social critique of

the judgment of taste” that constitutes the bulk of his “ethnography of France” [1984:XII]) derives from his contention that the categories of perception and orientation that ensure the intelligibility and practical reliability of the social world to the actors are the same which lead them to naturalize and essentialize the tenacious power asymmetries that permeate it.

Conceiving social structures essentially as historically reproduced mechanisms of asymmetrical distribution of power between individual and collective agents, Bourdieu devoted himself, during his whole career, to identify it in the spaces, beliefs and practices in which its exercise was collectively dissimulated or “euphemized” (1991:170) in the eyes of both the dominant and the dominated—that is, tacitly *recognized as legitimate* and (which amounts to the same in his perspective) *unrecognized as arbitrary*, hence the expressions “misrecognition” and “misrecognized”<sup>1</sup>.

#### TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY (1): PRACTICE AS THE ESSENTIAL MODALITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

A philosophical anthropology constitutes a set of explicitly or tacitly formulated answers to the questions “What is a human being?” and “What is the place of the human being in the world?” The answers to these doubts have always involved some confrontation with our existential status of *homo duplex*, i.e. the need to think simultaneously about our fundamental biological properties, on the one hand, and our distinctly cultural and spiritual activities, on the other (Vandenbergh, 2009: 298). Whatever the specific avatar this problems takes—the *anthropos* as the “citizens of two worlds” (sensible and intelligible) in the Platonic perspective, Man suspended between finite and infinite in Christian anthropology, or the various conceptions of the mind/body relation in modern philosophy since Descartes -, the analysis of our existential ambiguity (“half angel, half beast”), of the fact that we have one foot in matter/nature and the other in spirit/culture, pervades more than twenty centuries of anthropological reflection.

We do not find in Bourdieu, however, long digressions on the biological constitution of the human being, although many passages (e.g., 1990a: 196; 2000a: 134; 227) indicate that his perspectives on our modalities of action (how we intervene in the world) and experience (how we are affected by it) were founded upon presuppositions, usually implicit, about our physiological and neurological properties—from theses on the different levels of cognitive plasticity we exhibit on the sequential stages of our life or on the relative inertia of our bodily memory to the recognition, in itself trivial but filled with momentous implications, that we feel and know that we are finite (to modify Spinoza’s classic *dictum*)<sup>2</sup>. At any rate, even though he resorted to analytical distinctions which may evoke the foregoing accounts of our “duplicity”, the main thrust of Bourdieu’s philosophical anthropology, in tune with his long career as a self-proclaimed dualism terminator, is a

crusade against interpretations of the human condition according to any strong polarizations such as material/ideal, mind/body and subject/world.

Throughout his trajectory, Bourdieu turned a significant part of his heavy artillery against a variety of accounts of human subjectivity that conceive it as essentially “disengaged” (Taylor, 1992: 143), that is, as maintaining an intellectualistic and contemplative relation to the world. In Bourdieu, the “pure” subjectivity is replaced by a perception of the human agent in its radical “facticity” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), as a subjectivity systematically exposed to the injunctions and conditionings of the social universe and cognitively, practically, emotionally and carnally involved in the processes through which its environments are reproduced or transformed (2000a: 138–142).

The rejection of intellectualistic and contemplationist accounts of the agent/world relation also carries a critique of dualistic views of the relationship between mind and body that conceive the latter solely as an *object* of the agents’ representations. Against this perspective, Bourdieu, as Merleau-Ponty before him, fiercely defends that the agent’s body (or better, that the agent as an inescapably embodied agent) is the very operational *locus* of the practical intentionalities and competencies based on which she intervenes in the societal universe: “What is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has . . . but something that one is” (1990b: 73). Although the intensity of his critique of the forgetting of the body in certain dominant traditions in philosophy and social theory lead him sometimes to outline quasi-“physicalist” theses on the nature of human conduct (e.g., 1990b: 66–79), his frequent references to the “mental structures” infused in the habitus seem to be a clear indication that the fundamental element of his model of the actor is not a systematic reduction of agency to bodily movements and operations, but the idea that body and mind must be thought along one and the same *continuum*, namely the flow of practical activity<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the notion of practice is conceived throughout the *Bourdieuiana* as the most characteristic mode of human existence and, *ipso facto*, the ontological instance which relates and unifies the phenomenical dimensions traditionally designated by the classical dichotomies of social theory and philosophical anthropology, such as individual/society, action/structure, material/ideal, mind/body and subject/object (Parker, 2000: 42).

#### TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY (2): THE ECONOMY OF SYMBOLIC GOODS AS A STRUGGLE FOR THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE

Elsewhere we can find many detailed analyses of the conception of practice in Bourdieu’s theoretical framework. In this article, I intend to focus on the theme which is at the center of his anthropological-philosophical *méditations*, i.e. the “question of justification” (2000a: 237). Max Weber, also in semi-testamentary meditations (1998: 139)—weaved under the aegis not of Pascal, but of another agonistic Christian: Tolstói -, had already recognized that to study the meanings

human beings give to their actions means also investigating how they respond to ultimate questions and project an existential justification for their lives, pleasures, sufferings and mortality. The echo of Weber's existentialism *avant la lettre* (Aron, 1998: 253) indicates that, amongst the most universal historical conditions of the *anthropos*, we find the endless effort of the human being to experience its life as something endowed with meaning, even (or perhaps especially) in what it contains of cruelty, brutality, suffering and horror.

Sharing much of Weber's agnostic (and agonistic) sensibility, Bourdieu's philosophical anthropology is also based upon the notion that human beings crave for meaning, but it encounters social *recognition* (another name for "symbolic capital") as life's main source of innerworldly justification:

*'No one can really proclaim, either to others or, above all, to himself, that "he dispenses with all justification". And if God is dead, who can be asked to provide this justification? It has to be sought in the judgment of others'* (2000a: 237).

It was based on that phenomenon that the French author undertook, by the end of his life, to overcome another dichotomy: nothing less than the clash between *heaven* and *hell* as antagonistic metaphors for picturing human existence in society, metaphors paradigmatically represented by the Durkheimian postulate that "society is God" (Bourdieu, 2000a: 245; Durkheim, 2001: XX) and the classic Sartrean saying that "*l'enfer, c'est les autres*" (Sartre, 1989: 45). Rather than portraying God as a human, all-too-human creation, as is customary, Bourdieu proposes a kind of sociological mundanization of heaven and hell, conceived as allegories for the (inseparably related) existential condition and subjective experience of the contented sense of *dignitas* stemming from collective consecration, on the one hand, and of the suffering experientially infused in the situation of social stigmatization or invisibility, on the other<sup>4</sup>. Regarding the latter, his shrewd discussion of how the unemployed are not only materially deprived by the loss of their wage but also symbolically "mutilated" by the "loss of the *raison d'être* associated with work" (2000a: 202–221–223), as well as the voluminous book he published, with a handful of collaborators, on manifold instances of semi-invisible "social suffering" (1999), signal that Bourdieu's "philosophy of misery"—a sort of existentialism of the poor or Nietzscheanism with a very non-Nietzschean sympathy for the weak and the oppressed—is not vulgarly materialist, but, on the contrary, particularly attentive to psychic wounds provoked by *social-symbolic deprivations of value and meaning*.

An "existential utilitarianism" founded upon an amplified conception of utilitarian interest as *illusio* constitutes the approach through which Bourdieu explains the motivational sources of the agents' practical investments on social games. It is in the relation between the game established in a field and the habitus as a "feel for the game" (*sens du jeu*) that are engendered goals and values which, even though they don't exist outside of it, appear within that relation with unquestioned

necessity and evidence, generating an original form of fetishism which is the motivational principle of every action: “The sacred only exists for those who have a sense of the sacred, who nonetheless . . . still experience it as fully transcendent”; and ‘the same is true of every kind of value’ (1990a: 195). Therefore, the *illusio* can only be perceived as *illusion* by the observer who grasps the game from outside and has not invested anything in its objectives. Bourdieu asserts, nevertheless, that this detached point of view tends to overlook the fact that such investments are, as Durkheim said about religions, “well-founded illusions”, since the accumulation of a certain amount of symbolic capital means abandoning anonymity and being recognized by others and by oneself as an agent endowed with a social function or mission, a central foundation of the actor’s self-identity and, therefore, of the conquest of a collectively recognized significance for her existence<sup>5</sup>. Of course, this process must not be intellectually understood as a discursively mediated attempt of justification “of human existence in its universality”, but as a practical effort and lived-in-the-flesh experience of seeking, in the businesses of daily life, a justification for one’s “particular, singular existence” (2000a: 237). The certificates of social identity, which operate as certificates of ontological “necessity” dragging the agents out of the lonely encounter with their own contingency, become manifest in the whole specter of ordinary interactions in which they feel socially solicited with occupations, projects, obligations and commitments which reinforce the sentiment of “counting to others, being important for them, and therefore in oneself, and finding in the permanent plebiscite of testimonies of interest—requests, expectations, invitations—a kind of continuous justification for existing” (2000a: 240).

The thesis that humans long for experiencing their lives as something endowed with meaning, tied to the idea that this meaning not only constitutes an inner-worldly invention, but also depends on the collective recognition that the biological individual is a *social agent*, justified as such (and solely as such) in her right to existence, appears as the means through which Bourdieu tackles the question of the *psychic* level of the construction and maintenance of social identity (Hall, 1996: 6), that is, the problem of knowing why individuals libidinally invest in the social identities, roles or “subject-positions” that are offered or ascribed to them in a certain context. Since the functioning of a field depends on the readiness with which the agents take its immanent demands seriously, the acts of social branding and enacting whereby individuals incarnate the meanings objectified in institutions and are (re)instituted as socially classified actors ascribe to the owners of (and owned by) these classificatory titles a body of obligations and/or privileges, benefits and/or handicaps that are continuously confirmed and strengthened by a whole universe of routine social verdicts and (mal)treatments. These operate as reinforcements which performatively contribute (in the manner of Merton’s “self-fulfilling prophecy” [1968: 479]) to transmute other people’s judgment into self-judgment, transforming socially instituted difference in a set of properties durably inscribed in the agents’ bodies and minds, in such a way they end up working

practically as “second nature” (Cicero/Pascal), while being pre-reflexively perceived as “natural”.

Many of the tenets of Bourdieu’s conception of human being-in-the-world can be read as critical appropriations and sociological reformulations of Heideggerian and Sartrean themes. Like Heidegger and Sartre, but also Weber, he states that the world as well as human life, in themselves devoid of significance, have only the meaning(s) we humans ascribe to them. On the other hand, he strongly underlines, against the intellectualism of philosophers who project their own experiences into lay agents’ minds (e.g., Sartre interpreting the *café* waiter’s behavior), that these subjective acts of meaning endowment are predominantly and fundamentally *tacit*, “not necessarily implying consciousness and representation” (2000a: 241). Even more importantly, rebuking Sartre’s theses (Sartre, 1996: 496) that causality is absent from psychic life and that past experiences are ultimately unable to affect the subject’s present behavior (who would have to always create and recreate herself *ex nihilo*), Bourdieu suggests that meaning attributions are by no means radically free acts. If the agent endows her mundane condition with significance, it is precisely because she is subjectively inhabited, so to speak, by historically objectivated meanings which have become her own (or, more strongly, herself) through socialization:

*‘The café waiter is not playing of being a waiter. When he puts on his black trousers and white jacket . . . and performs the ceremonial of eagerness and attention, . . . he is not making himself a thing (or a “in-itself”). His body, which contains a history, spouses his job, . . . a history, a tradition, which he has never seen except incarnated in bodies, . . . in the uniforms inhabited by a certain habitus that are called waiters.’ (2000a: 153–54).*

The critique of Sartre’s intellectualism and subjectivism is finally tied to an attack on his individualism. Even when Bourdieu resorts “somewhat inadequately” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 191) to the vocabulary of “bad faith” and self-lying<sup>6</sup> (1990a: 188) in order to describe the *illusio* as ultimately an illusion, he is at pains to emphasize that individual self-deception is strongly sustained by a whole ensemble of collective symbolic and institutional mechanisms of self-deception ceaselessly working to assure individuals that their “social functions”, undertook and lived as terribly important, do not be exposed as what they really are in the last instance: “social fictions” (*Op.cit.*: 195). This is “the institutionally organized and guaranteed misrecognition” (1990b: 112) thanks to which the very meanings and values which humans project into the world are fetishistically experienced as objective realities infused in the world itself.

In Bourdieu, the participation in the games of social life is motivationally fuelled by an attempted flight from the “anthropological datum” of contingency which is also, and necessarily, a flight from the confrontation with our own finitude. He localizes already in Pascal an idea that will become famous with Heidegger, namely that “we do everything we can to forget” our finitude, “flinging . . . into diversion or fleeing into ‘society’”, even though we know that “the

only certain thing in life” is the fact that “we shall die alone” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 239). Endorsing the view, taught by Schopenhauer and Tolstoi, that the meaning of life only becomes a truly poignant problem for the *anthropos* the moment it becomes aware of its inescapable and inescapably solitary mortality, Bourdieu underlines, like Heidegger, that the ongoing enacting of social roles in the ordinary games of social life fulfills an existential function of shielding us from openly contemplating our finitude. The plunging in “diversion” (Pascal’s *divertissement*) or “everydayness” (Heidegger, 1962)—in other words, the practices and rituals of social existence—constitutes thus a device through which individuals continuously strive to suppress or at least endure the awareness of their mortal condition:

*‘one can establish a necessary link between three indisputable . . . facts: man is and knows he is mortal, the thought that he is going to die is unbearable or impossible for him, and, condemned to death, an end (in the sense of termination) which cannot be taken as an end (in the sense of a goal) . . . , he is a being without a reason for being, haunted by the need for justification, legitimation, recognition (. . . ) And, as Pascal suggests, in this quest for justifications for existing, what he calls the “world”, or “society”, is the only other recourse other than God’* (Bourdieu, 2000a: 239).

What gives this process of social production of justified existences an agonistic or even tragic character is the fact that, since ideal or symbolic goods only derive their value from their relative scarcity, social recognition can only be obtained “in a differential, distinctive way”, in such a manner that “every form of sacred has its profane complement, every distinction generates its own vulgarity and the competition for a social life that will be known and recognized, which will free you from insignificance, is a struggle to the death for symbolic life and death” (1990a: 196). The self-identity and self-esteem obtained as consequences of social recognition depend on their counterpart, the symbolic destitution of the socially invisible or stigmatized *outsider*, the “misery of man without mission or social consecration” carrying the cruel burden of a negative symbolic capital, like “the Jew in Kafka’s time or, now, the black in the ghetto or the Arab and the Turk in the working-class suburbs of European cities” (2000a: 241). If “the judgment of others is the last judgment”, this grim predicament is “the concrete form of hell and damnation” (1990a: 196).

#### AGONISM AS THE REFUSAL OF SOCIODICY; OR THE PLIGHT OF THE LOSERS

A panoramic glance at the critical literature on Bourdieu is sufficient for one to register the frequency of the accusation that his hyper-agonistic theory of social life is exaggerated and unilateral. Even those authors who admit that human beings universally attempt to experience their lives as meaningful and that social recognition is a (or the) fundamental condition of possibility of such an experience would still take issue with Bourdieu’s view that such processes can only occur within the fiercely competitive and zero-sum games that take place in social fields<sup>8</sup>.

However, the theoretical and empirical diagnoses that stroke some critics as the excesses of an “agonistic and reductive metaphysics” (Parker, 2000: 51) were certainly interpreted by Bourdieu as results of a tireless effort to achieve a realistic, even if necessarily disenchanting and uncheerful, picture of the social world—especially concerning its “ugly face” (Dahrendorf), often camouflaged under the smooth veil of symbolic violence<sup>9</sup>. Bourdieu’s commitment “to avoid sentimentality” (Alexander, 1995: 152), even to the point of bending the stick too much in the agonistic direction (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1994: 276), may also be attributed to one of the deeply ingrained personal dispositions which appear in a sublimated form in his sociology: a rejection of *sociodicy* (to use the term coined by Raymond Aron), understood in his case as the process whereby structural domination and symbolic violence are “justified” not so much through the conscious and explicit resort to ideological discourse as through the daily “doxic” compliance that comes from experiencing societal environments as they are as natural and evident.

In this sense, even though I disagree with readers (*inter alios*, Alexander, 1995: 129) who depict Bourdieu as a Marxist in the last instance (*sic*), his continuous effort to expose the appearance of necessity and naturalness acquired by contingent social-historical conditions as both false and ideologically functional does put him in the company of Western Marxist critiques of reification *à la* Lukács and the Frankfurt School. Bourdieu is definitely closer to “cold” than to “hot” currents of Marxism (to use Bloch’s terms), since he consistently concentrates on the analysis of the structures of domination at the expense of disclosing possibilities of emancipation (but see below). One must also keep in mind that, as his references to the fetishism behind any human ascriptions of value and significance to the social world and the agents who inhabit it make clear, his philosophical anthropology partially and ambivalently “redeems” social order to the extent it points not only to the tripartite function of knowledge, communication and domination fulfilled by social-symbolic systems, but also to their *existential* role as worldly resources through which human beings (inter)subjectively endow with meaning and justification a condition which would be otherwise stripped of sense and thrown back into its dreadful contingency.

Nonetheless, if every determination implies negation (as Spinoza taught us), the human quest for meaning is a quest for the power to be socially recognized as meaningful, in such a way that one’s salvation condemns others to damnation, in its concrete forms of collective invisibility or stigmatization. The “refusal to compromise with institutions” (1990a: 4) which Bourdieu affirms “has never left” him involves, therefore, the systematic uncovering of how these institutions produce cohorts of defeated players, and “there is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity” (2000a: 241). With some liberty, and pushing the comparison with Western Marxism further, one could even say that, in spite of the discrepancies in style and content between Benjamin’s revolutionary-messianic philosophy of history and

Bourdieu's critical sociology of symbolic power (no utopian messianism in the latter, not even a "weak" one), there is a loose affinity of ethical impulse uniting them, namely the tendency to side morally with the losers and to urge the historical or sociological reconstruction of the human adventure not to forget the plights of all of those who are literally or metaphorically "sprawled underfoot" the "triumphal procession" of the dominants (to use Benjamin's terms)<sup>10</sup>. In tune with his critical theory of the subtle and soft operations of symbolic violence, one could say that the philosophy of misery tied to Bourdieu's philosophical anthropology endeavors to recover not so much "the cry of anguished humanity" (Rosenzweig) as its painful silence. The fact that Bourdieu's main discussion (2000a: 237–245) about the "losers" on the struggles for the meaning of existence in the social world is illustratively supported by nothing less than the tragic and terrifying story of Joseph K. in Kafka's *The Process* clearly signals that his *Weltanschauung* remained, until the end, profoundly agonistic. In a cruelly competitive world, Bourdieu's agonism may be explained as fidelity to one of the ethico-political imperatives of any critical theory worthy its name: the earnest and uncompromising effort to bring the suffering of the defeated to the fore.

BUT THE PAINFUL SILENCE IS NOT SO SILENT AFTER ALL: AN EXCURSUS ON  
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOMINATED FROM *DISTINCTION* TO *THE WEIGHT  
OF THE WORLD*

The systematic, instead of chronological, presentation of Bourdieu's philosophical anthropology that I have attempted was written from the point of view he advanced in his later work. Indeed, while the reference to a "philosophy of poverty" was already present in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1981 (1990a: 196), the detailed account of the objective and subjective circumstances of the miseries of (non-)recognition appears mainly in two of his last books, theoretically in *Meditations* and empirically in *The weight of the world*. This invites the question of whether there have been any significant transformations on his viewpoint concerning social-symbolic domination, struggles for recognition and so on.

Although I cannot develop this point at length, I do think that is the case. In his by now classic study of class life styles in France, the game of symbolic distinction only ensues and grows in importance as distance from economic constraint and necessity increases. The struggle for social recognition does not seem to reach the economically constrained working-class, whose life style and tastes are explained not in terms of the unconsciously strategic pursuit of distinction but of the practical and tacit adaptation of subjective expectations to objective chances (Bourdieu, 1984: chapter 7). The common "charge" of neo-Marxism or even vulgar materialism which was often directed to Bourdieu was strongly related to this idea that cultural practices of symbolic distinction were contingent upon the satisfaction of primary material needs (Swartz, 1997: 167–176). But this is certainly *not*

the position advocated in *Pascalian Meditations* and *The Weight of the World*. One does not need to read Bourdieu with Honneth's lenses (Honneth, 2003: 118–119) to perceive that in these later works the order of recognition—which the French sociologist perceives, unlike the German social philosopher, as coextensive with the order of competitive social-symbolic distinction<sup>11</sup>—pervades every social relation, while the material hardships endured in virtue of economic difficulties are inseparably tied to subjective feelings of being unjustly denied social-symbolic value.

Nevertheless, this very insight on the misery of recognition as “social suffering” brings to the fore another inconsistency in the French master's oeuvre. The whole theory of symbolic violence is predicated upon the process of a structurally induced experiential naturalization of inequality and domination. It is not solely through the symbolic-cognitive process of “misrecognition” that the circular relation between social and subjective structures leads to a practical compliance of dominant and dominated alike with the inequality of life conditions between individuals and groups. The reproduction of domination is tremendously reinforced, at a motivational level, by the fact that positionally distinct “life chances” (Weber) are translated through socialization into durable orientations of conduct that pre-adjust agents' aspirations to a practical, “intuitive” anticipation of their “realistic” opportunities in life.

As Sayer brilliantly noted (2005: 31), this theoretical notion of the *amor fati* of the dominated, forcefully illustrated in *Distinction*, simply renders unintelligible the discursive expressions of dissatisfaction and suffering so well and movingly documented in *The Weight of the World*. By definition, psychological pain and frustration from being denied social recognition can only occur if there is a *gap* between one's subjective desires and/or expectations and one's actual experiences in the social realm.

Bourdieu's account of the predicament of the subordinated working-class in *Distinction* has been frequently criticized for overlooking and/or rendering unexplainable many occasional or even daily practices of opposition and resistance among the dominated (Swartz, 1997: 174; Lovell, 2007: 85). But what a book as *The Weight of the World* abundantly shows is also that, even in situations where there is, at least for all significant practical purposes, no resistance to structural domination and asymmetric distribution of resources, the habitual complicity of the subordinated which is observable in the domain of social practice may *coexist* with (and perhaps even intensify in some cases) a reflexive, very conscious and many times discursively articulated experience of acute criticism and painful rejection of one's social environment and conditions of existence<sup>12</sup> (Sayer, 2005: 35). One needs only to recall that Nietzsche used the Latin expression to designate a happy state of mind to suspect that it is necessary to distinguish between *amor fati* as practical compliance and *amor fati* as subjective assent<sup>13</sup>. At the level of his social theoretical framework, however, Bourdieu could only account for such phenomenon if he had mitigated his strong emphasis on the tacit or infra-conscious

character of the subjective movers of human conduct and conceded a more significant space to the reflexivity of the lay actor in face of both her external social environments and her internalized subjective dispositions (on the relation between habitual dispositions and reflexive deliberations or “internal conversations” [Archer, 2003], see Kögler, 1997; Aboulafia, 1999; Crossley, 2001; Sweetman, 2003; Sayer, 2005; Adams, 2006; Archer, 2007; 2010; Elder-Vass, 2007; Fleetwood, 2008; Mouzelis, 2008).

THE EMANCIPATORY ASPECT OF BOURDIEU’S PHILOSOPHY OF MISERY: *THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD*, CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY AND REFLEXIVE POLITICS

The fact that Bourdieu has advanced a critical theory of structural asymmetry and symbolic domination without clearly establishing normative philosophical criteria or alternative sociopolitical project(s) to ground and justify his critical stance towards the social world has brought forth accusations of cryptonormativity (Vandenbergh, 1999: 62; Sayer, 2005: 16). As it often happens with Foucault (e.g. Merquior, 1985), the combination between the absence of explicitly advanced counterfactual normative ideals and the uncompromising picture of how far and deep power and domination can go may even lead from the charge of cryptonormativity to the more serious one of cynicism and (crypto)nihilism (Alexander, 1995: 129, 211).

Countering this interpretive current, Frangie (2009) has recently proposed a very interesting reading of Bourdieu’s work which may be seen as both an ethico-political rationale behind books such as *The weight of the world* and a possible way to give a less pessimistic and more emancipatory twist to his critical theory and “philosophy of misery”. It is possible to locate in his oeuvre a strand in which the notion of reflexivity as socio-self-analysis is transposed from the domain of scientific methodology to the ethico-political terrain of self-cultivation and the conduct of life (see, for instance, Bourdieu, 2008: 113). The sociological diagnosis of forms of domination and symbolic violence, by pointing to their profound cognitive, moral, emotional and bodily effects upon individual subjectivities, has implications that are inseparably political and existential. Since the “personal is social” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 202) and therefore (feminists unite!) political, the ethics of the good life becomes inseparable from the politics of the Just City, while the questioning and struggle against exterior and interiorized domination becomes both an ethical act of reflexive self-fashioning and a political move of resistance to domination. This would be tantamount to a “clinical sociology” or “reflexive politics” (Frangie, 2009: 213).

Bourdieu’s well-known project of a reflexive sociology is grounded precisely on the possibility that infra-conscious behavioral dispositions may be rationally controlled if brought into consciousness (1999a: 340). The implicit reference to psychoanalysis in the notion of socio-analysis indicates a common root in the

Socratic project of self-consciousness as the first *locus* of freedom, in the purpose of expanding human awareness to hidden determinants of our conduct. Being, as Freud, an ethical rationalist tremendously sensitive to unperceived obstacles that persistently appear in the path to rational self-determination, Bourdieu seeks to shine a light on an unconscious which is distinct from the one conceived by the father of psychoanalysis: the socially internalized matrix which generates the actions that configure our mode of being-in-the-world. If, as Durkheim taught, history is the true unconscious, the sociologically-armed self-analyst knows herself as “history made body”, a socially constituted personality, a being at first possessed by (more than in possession of) a habitus.

Although the disenchanting vein of this mode of analysis is undeniable, this same reflexive effort of “anamnesis” (Plato) might constitute the first step in an existential work of self-reappropriation that may precede or accompany a political work of resistance to domination. By claiming a “clinical” or “delphical” task to sociology, Bourdieu proposes that the latter “frees us by freeing us from the illusion of freedom” (1990a: 15). “By freeing us” is everything but an unnecessary part of this sentence, since it means that the possibility of freedom offered by the objectivation of social conditionings of thought and conduct goes beyond a simple and helpless “recognition of necessity”. Given that the “necessities” operating in the social world are constituted and reproduced through the actions and representations of human agents, their sociological identification could serve as a springboard to questioning, combating or even destroying them<sup>14</sup>. Seen through this interpretive grid, therefore, Bourdieu and his collaborators’ book may be read as an exercise in morally motivated reflexive sociology which mobilizes the tools of science to provide for the lay actors themselves a more precise grasp of the connections between their biographical predicaments and their structural locations in a macro-social history (Lovell, 2007: 74).

#### CONCLUSION: THE TWO-WAY STREET BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The main point of this article has been to offer a coherent reconstruction of the anthropological-philosophical underpinnings of Bourdieu’s sociology. It will therefore have attained its primary goal to the extent it has contributed to enrich our global understanding of his oeuvre. As a particular instantiation of a more general line of inquiry focusing on how theoretical frameworks and empirical analyses in sociology both presuppose and engender broader conceptions of what it means to be human, I also hope this paper may encourage similar efforts of investigation of the anthropological-philosophical assumptions of other prominent figures in our sociological landscape. To my knowledge, the search for overarching views on the human condition in our discipline is much more frequent in the interpretation of the classic canon of sociological theory than in the

terrain of contemporary theorizing. Marx advanced a morally colored philosophical anthropology centered upon the notion of alienation in his youthful *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1986), and, no matter how many twists and turns it may have undergone as he aged, there is a distinctly Marxian view of “Man” that goes all the way into his later sociological diagnoses and political critiques of capitalism. Lukes (1973: 433) and Giddens (1971: 228) have demonstrated how the depiction of a *homo duplex*, internally divided between egoistic impulses and inculcated moral imperatives, undergirds Durkheim’s sociology. And even when it comes to Weber, more ambivalent and detached towards philosophy than the other members of sociology’s Holy Trinity, Aron has correctly remarked that some of his ideas approach “a philosophy which at the time was not yet known as existential or existentialist but which in fact was so” (1998: 220).

Similar exercises of anthropological-philosophical excavation could be attempted in the sphere of contemporary social theory. To give just one example, this is the path Parker is hinting at when he talks about the “existential foundation” of Giddens’ theory of structuration (Parker, 2000: 54), which could be described as a set of anthropological-philosophical intuitions concerning mainly how human agents deal cognitively, experientially and practically with uncertainties and risks inherent to their condition as beings in the world. These intuitions inspire Giddens’ use of Erikson’s concept of ontological security in his social theory and the notions of ‘trust’ and ‘risk’ in his subsequent sociological account of late modernity. In fact, the exploration of the interface between philosophical anthropologies and substantive sociologies may lead to tracking a whole set of family resemblances between theories which portray social order as providing an existential shelter to secure us against hyper-anxiety or, in a more dramatic vein, the terrors of our condition (Giddens, 1979: 122–123, 218–219; 1984: 375; 1991a; 1991b; Schutz [1962: 228]; Berger [1963: 147–148]).

The fact that these ideas of the human being are situated not only at the level of presuppositions but also of the *consequences* of theoretical and substantive sociological work should be sufficient to evince that I am not advocating any kind of upwards collapse of sociological theory and research into philosophical anthropology. There is probably no one better than Bourdieu to serve as an example of this point. If he allowed himself to propose a more abstract discourse on the fundamental predicates of the human condition, it was not because he had abandoned the empirical orientation that had marked all his oeuvre on behalf of the “scholastic” type of theorizing he always criticized. On the contrary, it was *precisely* because his “idea of the human being” had the non-scholastic heuristic advantage of having been constructed and refined by means of a long confrontation with empirical research problems. To the extent his philosophical anthropology is tied to the theoretical framework he formulated and amended through the investigation of a plurality of concrete social scenarios, it should never be conceived as a definitive discourse, but as part of an analytical toolkit to be indefinitely put to use in *new* empirical investigations. As dispositions of a (social)

scientific habitus gradually engendered and polished through the constant traffic between theorization and experience, the most abstract anthropological-philosophical presuppositions of Bourdieu's sociology found their methodological translations in the most mundane operations of his empirical works, while the latter have served, on their turn, to specify and elaborate those presuppositions.

But Bourdieu's debate with philosophy goes deeper. Applying to the study of human beings the thesis that the search for substantive knowledge of the real must be accompanied by *critique* "in the Kantian sense" (2000a: 1), the French author defends that the most radical and effective form of this procedure is not philosophical introspection, but the sociological "objectivation of the subject of objectivation" (2004: 93), either sociologist or philosopher. This is why the presentation of his philosophical anthropology is preceded, in *Pascalian Meditations*, by a sociological critique of the scholastic illusions of philosophy, the cognitive distortions stemming from the influence of infra-conscious presuppositions that philosophers owe to the very particular social and institutional conditions of production and circulation of their discourses. All in all, both the empirical anchoring and the sociological objectivation of unthought presuppositions that govern philosophical views of social life and human agency demonstrate that the *leitmotif* of Bourdieu's engagement with philosophy is not so much a rejection of its objectives as the belief that sociology (or better, his sociology) is in possession of intellectual instruments more apt to the attainment of these, including the production of a universally valid "idea of the human being".

*Gabriel Peters*  
 IESP/UERJ  
 Rua da Matriz  
 CEP 22260-100  
 Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Brazil  
 gabrielpeters@hotmail.com

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The thesis which states that every power is in the last instance illegitimate has, in the perspective of some of Bourdieu's critics, (e.g., Alexander, 1995: 211), nihilistic (or cryptonihilistic) consequences from an ethico-political point of view. Although this critique effectively points to a significant problem concerning the normative pretensions of Bourdieu's sociology, a more benevolent reading could underline that his references to science

as “the least illegitimate of symbolic powers” (1990a: 198) presuppose at least the possibility to distinguish between more and less illegitimate modalities of power and to direct political action towards the implementation of the latter. This point seems to be reinforced by his late public interventions in favor of causes such as the maintenance of the autonomy of the artistic and scientific fields against market constraints or the defense of the social protective institutions of the Welfare State against neoliberal dismantling (Bourdieu, 2002b).

<sup>2</sup> One could also reformulate Keynes’ famous reminder that the humanity *in toto* is a “being-unto-death” (Heidegger) and remark that, in the short run (incredibly short, almost insignificant from a geological point of view), we are all dead.

<sup>3</sup> The very characterization of the habitus as “practical sense” (*sens pratique*) reflects Bourdieu’s defense of a non-dualist understanding of the mind/body relation, since the notion of sense refers concomitantly to the sensory apparatus through which our bodies (or we as bodies) experience our immersion in social reality (“sensory sense”) and to the symbolic-interpretive instruments thanks to which we endow this experience with meaning (“significant sense”).

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu’s conception of the struggle for symbolic capital as a constitutive dimension of human social existence seems rather distant from Honneth’s Hegelian-Meadian theory of recognition, but the French sociologist would undoubtedly agree with Honneth’s thesis that “the integrity of human subjects, vulnerable as they are to injury through insult and disrespect, depends on their approval and respect from others” (1992: 188; 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu seems to go as far as to assert that the craving for recognition from the other is not only a product of socialization, but an emotional condition of possibility of its efficacy. Even if the quest for recognition within given public fields must be based on a more basic disposition to libidinally invest in social games, a disposition which must have been previously cultivated in the familial sphere, this very work of cultivation is motivationally supported by the infant’s need to be recognized: “to inculcate the durable disposition to invest in the social game which is one of the prerequisites of all learning, pedagogic work in its elementary form relies on one of the motors which will be at the origin of all subsequent investments: the search for recognition” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 166). Since the child can only conceive of herself as a subject by learning how others perceive her as an “object”, the infancy is the first setting of the defining human experience of being “condemned to be defined as . . . (one) . . . ‘really’ is by the perception of others” (idem). Following Bourdieu’s common procedure of taking philosophical *sententiae* out of context in order to turn them into sociological (or anthropological-philosophical) statements, one must conclude that the human being is a being for whom “to be is to be perceived” (Berkeley).

<sup>6</sup> “Sociology unmasks self-deception, that collectively entertained and encouraged form of lying to oneself which, in every society, is in the basis of the most sacred values and, thereby, of all social existence.” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 188).

<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding his agreement with Heidegger when it comes to the phenomenological description of that social-psychological mechanism, Bourdieu does not endorse either the typically scholastic denunciation of the “inauthenticity” of those who “fall” into the familiar demands and “idle chatter” that mark the public world of *das Man* or the correlative “existential exaltation of ‘*Sein-zum-Tode*’” (Bourdieu, 2000a: 239). Both are a result, in his view, of a sociologically unconscious condition of someone with the privileged “leisure to think” [*casu quo*, to engage in *meditatio mortis*] and “dispense with the economy of thought that ‘inauthentic’ conduct allows” (Bourdieu, 1990b: 291).

<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, Bourdieu *did* come to admit the possibility of escaping the endless strategic and competitive spell of human relationships in his surprising “*Post-scriptum* on love and domination” at the end of *Masculine Domination* (2002a: 109–112). There, our sociologist “talks openly . . . about the limits of his system, *casu quo* the miraculous cease-fire, the end of war and fights, the end of strategic exchange, . . . nonviolence, mutual

recognition, full reciprocity, disinterest, trust, wonder, happiness or ‘peace’” (Vandenberghe, 1999: 50). It is symptomatic of Bourdieu’s agonistic perspective that he depicts these moments as “miraculous”, but it is also worth mentioning that he explicitly admits believing in the existence of such miracles.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu could easily say, with good old somber Weber, that he practiced science to know how much truth he could bear.

<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu’s diagnoses of the social determinants of the conditions of personal suffering presented in *The Weight of the World*—in other words, the sociological unmasking of such circumstances of “biography” as the result of positioned trajectories within a macro-social “history” (to use Mills’ celebrated language [2000])—is motivated by a *moral* and *political* sympathy towards those “from below”. However, as his sociological remoulding of the theory of ideology in terms of symbolic violence already makes clear, this normative impulse does not translate into any kind of standpoint epistemology according to which “social disadvantage creates epistemic advantage” (Harding, 1996: 146). For Bourdieu, the only source of epistemic advantage in knowledge of the social world is the scientific method itself.

<sup>11</sup> Any systematic comparison with Honneth’s take on social recognition is beyond the scope of this text. Suffice it to say that, in terms of the latter’s typology of patterns of recognition (Honneth, 1996: 92–130), Bourdieu’s perspective could be roughly described as one in which the sphere where individuals attain self-esteem as a result of their particular, differential status in a collectivity practically colonizes and overdetermines both the domain of love and friendship and the realm of juridical and political recognition of personhood.

<sup>12</sup> An experiential condition that indeed may grow into active political resistance, as in the case of the movement of the unemployed in France, which Bourdieu came to describe, again using a religious metaphor that betrays a confession of the limits of his theoretical framework, as a “social miracle” (1999b: 88).

<sup>13</sup> “We can get used to living in crowded conditions but still want space of our own; we can get used to doing without holidays but still want one”, etc. (Sayer, 2005: 35). When it comes to facing the hiatus between desires and opportunities, it is also useful to realize that the theorem of adaptation of expectations to chances only tells half the story: “. . . [the] tension between expectations and possibilities need not always result in resignation, compliance and the refusal of what is refused. It can also result in *longing for what is denied* to the actor” (idem, italics by the author). A complex model of subjectivity as involving both habitual dispositions and reflexive deliberations can make room for situations in which behavioral complicity may coexist with a reflexive inflation (and even compensatory fantasized satisfaction) of one’s desires for extremely difficult or practically unattainable goods and goals.

<sup>14</sup> Combining a “pessimism of the intellect” with an “optimism of the will”, Bourdieu could even say that it was precisely the “determinism” of his sociological approach that made it a liberating force.

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