HHS

Explanation, understanding and determinism in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology

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Abstract

This article locates Bourdieu's sociology within the lasting controversy concerning the nature of causal explanation and interpretative understanding in the social sciences, with a special focus on the classical problem surrounding the alleged (in)compatibility between these procedures. First, it is argued that Bourdieu's praxeological and relational perspective on the social universe leads him not only to join the 'compatibility field' of the debate, but to sustain, more radically, the *identity* between explanation and understanding. Second, the article defends the view that this methodological proposal is tied to a distinction often ignored among the commentators of Bourdieu's *oeuvre*, namely that between *objectivism*, a mode of knowledge of the social which he intends to integrate and overcome in his structural praxeology, and *determinism*, adopted by the author as a fundamental scientific principle and, at the same time, a potentially emancipatory ethico-political tool bequeathed by his reflexive sociology. While basically sympathetic to Bourdieu's perspective, the article concludes in a more critical vein, by defending the need to bridge the gap between the 'pessimism of the intellect' that marks his portrayal of the reflexive capabilities of the lay agent, on the one hand, and the 'optimism of the will' infused in the critical program of reflexive sociology, on the other.

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Introduction

The characterization of the methodological procedures of explanation by causes [*erklä-ren*] and understanding through meanings [*verstehen*] constitutes one of the main sources of controversy in the history of sociology, a controversy that can be traced back to its 'double foundation' (Vandenberghe, 1999: 34) by Comte's naturalistic positivism and the historicist tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften* led by Dilthey. The central theoretical problem that comes to the fore in this debate, intimately associated with the metatheoretical question concerning the epistemological status of the human sciences, refers to the alleged (in)compatibility between these ways of approaching human agency and social life. Starting with a brief historical presentation of some of the decisive moments in this debate, this article concentrates on how Bourdieu's structural praxeology tackles this old problematic. It argues that Bourdieu goes beyond the defense of the compatibility between explanation and understanding so as to sustain their ultimate *identity*.

   In the following section, the article connects the discussion on explanation and understanding to a more detailed examination of the often misunderstood status of the idea of *determinism* in Bourdieu's sociology. First, I attempt to recover a fundamental distinction that is frequently ignored in critical appreciations of the French sociologist's work, namely that between *objectivism* as a mode of knowledge of the social world, on the one hand, and *determinism* as a methodological guiding principle of (social-) scientific labor, on the other. My goal will be to demonstrate how Bourdieu tries to go beyond 'the objective limits of objectivism' (1977: 1) by means of a structural praxeology founded upon the dialectics between the objective and subjective dimensions of the social universe, while *embracing* determinism at the metatheoretical plane as a condition of possibility for doing science (and, thus, social science). In a refining of this reading, however, the last section defends the view that our author lends to the principle of determinism not only a methodological but also an *ethico-political* significance: according to Bourdieu, far from leading only to an impotent and resigned view of the determinant mechanisms of social conduct, a 'deterministic' sociology would empower the agents with intellectual-cum-practical tools to counteract these mechanisms and gain a margin of freedom from them.

Brief history of a long controversy

The ascriptions of epistemological identity to sociology were traditionally put forth against the backdrop of the logical and methodological properties of the natural sciences. Due to this circumstance, the discipline was born under the aegis of a 'double foundation', simultaneously national and epistemological, that ended up establishing the parameters of subsequent debates on its gnoseological status. On the one hand, Comte's positivism in France founded the division of paladins of epistemological monism or naturalism, according to which the social sciences must operate under the same methodological guidelines present in the natural sciences. On the other hand, Dilthey's hermeneutical historicism in Germany dug the foundations of an epistemically dualist or separatist position: in virtue of inescapable particularities of social life that stem from

its *meaningful* character, the type of knowledge proper to the understanding of human activity and its cultural products could be adequately portrayed as scientific, but of a kind of scientificity whose gnoseological status would be radically distinct from natural-scientific knowledge.

Due to the interpenetration between the epistemological and theoretical dimensions in the social sciences, the diverse metatheoretical perspectives on the scientificity (and scientificity type) of sociology were from the beginning tied to fundamental disagreements about the ontological description of the entities and processes that constitute the social universe, as well as about the most fruitful methodological orientations to the empirical research of that universe. Among these ontological and methodological problems, the one that interests us the most in this article concerns the role of intentions, beliefs and practical skills that actors subjectively mobilize in the production of their conduct and, through these, in the reproduction and transformation of the more ample social contexts in which they are embedded.

Even if no social scientist could come to the point of denying that, unlike the phenomena studied by the natural sciences, the human agents that form the object of sociology are moved by intentionality and possess (inter)subjective representations of their own behavior and multiple action environments, there has always been a marked disagreement about the *implications* of this diagnosis to the sociological intelligence of collective structures and processes. The idea that the human sciences acquire a radical epistemological singularity in virtue of dealing with 'self-interpreting animals' (Taylor, 1995: 45) can be traced back at least to Vico in the 18th century. In his *Scienza Nuova*, the wise man from Naples inaugurated a brand of epistemological humanism that contrasted the insurmountable exteriority of the natural sciences' *modus cognoscendi* to the need of accessing the inner life of conscious actors in the study of human practices and products (Vico, 2000; Berlin, 1976).

This theme came forcefully to the fore in the famous controversy about the *Geisteswissenschaften* that shook German academia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Outhwaite, 1975). Dilthey gained pre-eminence in this debate as the advocate of a radicalized methodological dualism that was based precisely on a distinction between the procedures of explanation, proper to the natural sciences, and understanding, a mode of intelligibility exclusive to the cultural sciences. He also entered the history of sociology as a theorist of *empathy*, the psychical transposition to other minds, as the proper path to illuminate the actions in diverse social-historical scenarios, conceived, under the influence of Hegel, as exteriorizations of the human *Geist* that would become intelligible thanks to the psychological reactivation of the subjective meanings that they historically coagulate (Ricoeur, 1981: 209).

Max Weber espoused a singular kind of *via media* in that methodological dispute, delineating a perspective that moved away from both a positivistic naturalism that was blind to the unavoidable methodological implications of the meaningful character of the social world and the radical epistemological dualism of luminaries of German historicism such as Rickert and Dilthey. While recognizing the singularity of the social-scientific enterprise, Weber did not infer from this that sociological research would make use of methodological procedures that were radically distinct from those present in the natural sciences – for instance, replacing empirically verified causal explanation with

some form of empathic intuitionism. In fact, the main maneuver of his *verstehende Sociologie* was to take the understanding of social action, i.e. the capture of the subjective meaning of the agent's conduct, as inherent to the explanation of 'its course and consequences' (Weber, 1978: 4). Furthermore, though he recognized the potential utility of empathic transposition into other mental lives in the effort to understand the conducts of the subjects/objects of sociological analysis, Weber did not maintain that understanding was contingent upon this device, since the social-scientific imputation of meaning would be most of the time the result of an inferential work, based on the historical-sociological inventory of information regarding the situational context and the consequences of a certain course of action. Therefore, with respect to the theme of the (in)compatibility between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, Weber is with those who conceive of them not as mutually exclusive and radically discrepant modes of scientific inquiry, but as complementary operations of sociological analysis. Among Weber's most influential interpreters, both Alfred Schutz (1962) and Talcott Parsons (1937) remained faithful, albeit each in his own distinctive way, to an intermediate position that acknowledged the need to account for the agent's subjective point of view as the *differentia specifica* between the natural and the social sciences, but also defended that this account was compatible with the general methodological demands implied in the very idea of science, natural or social.

With a special emphasis on the theme of empathy, the plea for the compatibility between explanation and understanding in the social sciences also gained prominence in the writings of logical-empiricist philosophers imbued with the defense of a unified conception of science, such as Hempel (1942) and Nagel (1961: 484). The leitmotiv of their arguments consisted in the effort to demonstrate that the meaningful attributes proper to human action, although unparalleled in the domain of nature, did not constitute insurmountable obstacles to a monist position in epistemology as long as the explanations anchored in an interpretation of such attributes obeyed the logical and methodological demands intrinsic to the idea of science. In his reflection on the imaginative reliving of subjective states by historians and social scientists, Hempel (1942: 44) states that this procedure cannot by itself be taken as explanatory, but, at best, as a heuristic device capable of suggesting adequate explanatory hypotheses to be submitted to empirical control. This meant that the validity of these hypotheses could not be simply asserted by the psychological identification between the researcher and the researched, but would have to be empirically founded upon the gathering of factual data on the context and results of actions. Thanks to this empirical support, one could also accomplish understanding in circumstances where empathy would not be possible: 'one need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar', to quote Weber again (1978: 5). In the last instance, the position of pre-eminent figures of logical empiricism on empathic understanding ('useful, but not indispensable') was wittily captured by Otto Neurath, who claimed that it had the same importance as a cup of coffee consumed by the scientist during investigations[1] (Neurath, 1973: 357).

The case against the combination of causal explanation and interpretative understanding does not necessarily depend, however, on a view of understanding as 'psychic reproduction' (Dilthey) or 'intentional transposition into the other' (Husserl). Indeed, the subsequent decades saw not a cooling of the debate, but new attacks from the anti-compatibility front. These attacks no longer resorted to empathetic understanding, however, but to accounts of the human being as a linguistic animal. Some motifs of Dilthey's

historicism were reformulated in a Heideggerian fashion by Gadamer (2004: 483), who rebuked Dilthey's notion of understanding as the psychic re-enactment of others' experiences by focusing on language as the true medium of intersubjectivity. Meanwhile, Winch (1990) used Wittgenstein's language pragmatics in order to introduce again a watershed between natural science and social knowledge, by defending the radicality of the distinction between a causal-explanatory account and the elucidation of the meaning of an action as it is engendered according to the rules of the actor's culture, 'language game', or 'form of life'.

Agency, structure and 'the new theoretical movement'

During the 1970s and the 1980s, the problems of causal explanation and interpretative understanding came to be conceived in their intimate relation to the attempts to connect agency and structure that marked what Jeffrey Alexander has famously called 'the new theoretical movement' (1988). Without advocating a return to the erstwhile 'orthodox consensus' (Giddens, 1979: 235) that Parsons' structural functionalism had managed to achieve by the middle of the 20th century, authors such as Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas and Bourdieu himself strove to overcome the sense of theoretical fragmentation that resulted from the multiple critical reactions to Parsons' systems theory. These reactions may be ideal-typically divided into two main flanks: (1) the micro-sociological approaches, such as phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and neo-Wittgensteinian philosophies of action, which showed that the situated agent was not a 'cultural dope' (Garfinkel, 1967: 68), but a knowledgeable and skillful actor upon whose contribution the very reproduction of social order was contingent; (2) the macro-sociological approaches of neo-Marxian and/or neo-Weberian 'conflict theory', which actually shared an objectivistic slant with Parsons, but fiercely criticized his over-integrated image of society and the correlative neglect of its 'ugly face' (Dahrendorf), that is, the phenomena of systemic contradictions, social conflicts, power asymmetries, class domination and so on.

In face of this polarized landscape, the heroes of the 'new theoretical movement' were all engaged in the task of offering social-ontological accounts and methodological guidelines that would avoid the objectivist characterization of the social world in terms of autonomous or self-propelling mechanisms (making any reference to individual agency superfluous). On the other hand, they also wanted to remedy the subjectivists' inattentiveness to the fact that the very cognitive and practical capabilities which agents continually invest in the practices that produce and reproduce the social world carry the undeniable marks of their socialization within the structures of this same world. Although they all intended to bring explanation and understanding under one roof, the main differences between Habermas and Giddens, on one side, and Bourdieu, on the other, stem from the fact that the latter tried to *fuse* what the former two preferred to *combine* – a point that applies, by the way, not only for the procedures of explanation and understanding, but also for moral and political *critique*.

In *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1988), certainly one of his most impressive 'historical reconstructions with systematic intent', Habermas defended the articulation of explanatory, interpretive and critical moments within social science through a progressive integration and overcoming (Hegel's *Aufhebung*) of, *inter alia*, Parsons'

structural-functionalism, Schutz's phenomenology of intersubjectivity, Wittgenstein's theory of language-games, Gadamer's hermeneutics of dialogue between different collective horizons of meaning and, finally, the model of emancipatory self-reflection that could be extracted from Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian ideology critique. To put it roughly, and obviously avoiding very complex details, his ulterior sociological theory of modernity in terms of the duality between System and Lifeworld (Habermas, 1984a, 1984b) could also be read as an attempt to overcome the objectivism/subjectivism dichotomy through the analytical specification of the societal domains in which objectivist explanation and participant understanding were methodologically adequate – *casu quo*, System and Lifeworld respectively.

As for Giddens, he and Bourdieu share not only the project of overcoming dichotomous theories of agency and structure, but also the identification of *social practices* as the proper ontological domain in which subjectively propelled individual action, on the one hand, and objective social constraints and enablements, on the other, historically meet (Parker, 2000). Nevertheless, as it is commonly the case with 'short blanket' problems (when one tries to cover one's head better, one's feet get exposed, and vice versa[2]), Giddens' and Bourdieu's versions of a praxeology that supposedly transcends the 'imperialisms' of either the subject or the object have been attacked as sophisticated versions of neo-subjectivism (e.g. Thompson, 1989) and neo-objectivism (e.g. Alexander, 1995: 136) respectively. Although we cannot analyse the first critique in detail here, what is certainly true is that, while Bourdieu confers theoretical precedence to the 'objectivist moment' over the 'subjectivist moment' (see below), Giddens' structuration theory postulates a hermeneutical starting point (1993: 163–70) according to which the elucidation of a social form of life depends upon the capacity to participate in it (at least in principle). By embracing Winch's thesis on the necessity of establishing a 'logical tie' between the technical terminology of social science and the performative repertoire of ordinary language categories, Giddens (1982: 15) puts himself miles away from Bourdieu's (1977: 21) Bachelardian and Durkheimian insistence on the need for an epistemological break with common-sense notions and representations. At the same time, however, Giddens also criticizes any attempt to reduce social-scientific inquiry to its interpretative dimension (that is, to an account of how lay agents represent their collective contexts), and underlines that social conduct is both causally conditioned by unacknowledged systemic factors and a chronic source of unintentional effects upon its social environments (Giddens, 1984: 27; 1993: 37). Therefore, Giddens' position delineates a 'third way' (*sic*) between, on the one hand, a hermeneutical and pragmatic sensitivity to the importance of starting with a 'naïve' access to intersubjective beliefs and linguistic categories that actors invest in the constitution of their practices and, on the other hand, a 'structural' sensitivity to unacknowledged conditions and unintentional effects of action, thanks to which social theory could also claim for itself the task of critical analysis of common-sense beliefs in terms both of their epistemological and their ethico-political validity (Giddens, 1984: xxxv, 334–43).[3]

Enfin Bourdieu vint: Epistemological preliminaries

As do Weber, Hempel, Habermas and Giddens, but in a more radical way, Bourdieu situates himself in the pro-compatibility tradition when it comes to the possibility of conjoining

explanation by causes and understanding of meanings in sociological analysis. Based on a model that articulates an 'objectivist moment', devoted to the analytical reconstruction of the objective social structures within which agents are socialized and act, to a 'subjectivist moment', occupied with the diagnosis of how the dispositions subjectively cultivated in such social spaces contribute to reproduce them, Bourdieu ends up stating that 'understanding and explaining are one' (Bourdieu, 1999b: 613).

It is no mystery that Bourdieu formulated his theoretical framework striving to overcome some of the most tenacious dichotomies of social science (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 73). The very program of surpassing the antinomy between explanation and understanding is founded upon the epistemic proposal of the transcending of what he saw as the false opposition between the radical alternatives of naturalistic positivism and interpretative dualism. On the one hand, by recognizing that actors' subjective intentions, beliefs and practical orientations are *constitutively* involved in the historical reproduction of the social world, Bourdieu is miles away from approaches that unite naturalism and holism and claim that social systems, as part of nature, are submitted to necessary laws that operate independently of subjective interests and dispositions (deemed, then, as explanatorily irrelevant).

On the other hand, Bourdieu affirms that the critics of positivism tend to share with their opponents an unawareness 'of the exact epistemology of the exact sciences' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991: 6). This false representation would lend credence to the thesis that the particularities of social life pose insurmountable barriers to a sociological method conceived as nothing else but a particular instantiation of the logical and methodological principles on which any science is based. Thus, without neglecting the hermeneutical dimension of the object of sociology, but underlining the unity of the principles of scientific method beyond the divisions between natural and human sciences, Bourdieu follows the *via media* of a 'qualified, phenomenologically informed and hermeneutically sensitive nonpositivist naturalism' (Vandenberghe, 1999: 36). This perspective provides the epistemic foundation for his view on the problematic of explanation and understanding.

The praxeological transcendence of the antinomy between objectivism and subjectivism

The 'epistemological break' (Bachelard) with commonsensical representations of the social world and the use of a relational perspective that conceives the latter as an objectively structured space of relations between differentially positioned agents constitute valuable acquisitions of an *objectivist* mode of social knowledge – manifest, for instance, in Durkheim's structural functionalism or Levi-Strauss' symbolical structuralism. In Bourdieu's perspective, however, both methodological procedures are necessary but insufficient steps towards the sociological objectivation of the mechanisms of production and reproduction of social life. The portrayal of social formations as structures of objective relations must be complemented, according to him, with the investigation of the processes through which such structures are historically reproduced by the practices of the agents that inhabit and vivify them. Without the analytical recovery of the practical dispositions thanks to which individual actions contribute to the historical continuity of

systems of social relations, the objectivist perspectives are led to adopt a reified view of social structures, taken either as formal ahistorical patterns or as autonomous entities able to act in the manner of historical concrete agents (Bourdieu, 1990b: 123–4).

Bourdieu's 'subjectivist moment' is introduced precisely to prevent the slip towards this spuriously naturalized view of the social universe. However, if Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 73) gets close to subjectivist perspectives when he depicts social structures in terms of their continuous (re)constitution – i.e. of the modes through which they are historically reproduced or transformed by the practices of interest-driven and knowledgeable agents –, he departs from them by pursuing the socio-genetic sources of the interests and abilities that propel and enable actors (Bourdieu, 2001: 147). These interests and abilities are united in this 'socialized subjectivity' which is the *habitus* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126).

Therefore, in Bourdieu's theoretical edifice, the repertoire of the most useful conceptual and explanatory instruments bequeathed by the objectivist and subjectivist modes of social knowledge is deployed in a new framework. This theoretical framework takes both forms of investigation as 'moments' in a research method woven to capture the dialectical relation between the action paths of individual agents and the reproduction/transformation of collective structures, as this relation is manifested in *social practices*. His praxeological perspective is based, in principle, on the objectivist distance that breaks with the agent's spontaneous representations in order to apprehend the structural constellation in which the agent is immersed, occupying a position that shapes that agent's actions and experiences. The objectivist procedure is then complemented by an attempt to overcome this very distance in a subjectivist moment that recovers the practical intentions and skills that animate agents' minds and bodies. In this moment, the analytical profitability of the objectivist stage is not abandoned but 'sublated' (to use the Hegelian term), that is, conserved and overcome in an analytical framework crafted to account for the 'double truth' of the social world. Such 'double truth' would demand a double intellectual lens able to capture the 'immanent necessity' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 302) of the social universe without falling into the hypostasis of social formations typical of objectivist approaches, which are blind to the fact that the historical developments of such formations are ontologically founded upon practices propeled by specific interests and capacities. These interests and capabilities are, in turn, acquired as parts of a *habitus* that is structured and restructured in the course of a socially situated biography. *Summa summarum*: we have a chronic circular process in which agents are constituted by society and society is constituted by agents.

The identity between explanation and understanding

In broad brushstrokes, these are the contours of Bourdieu's project of going beyond objectivism and subjectivism. Although underlining the causal inter-determination between individual conduct moved by the dispositions of the *habitus*, on the one hand, and the fields of objective relations that provide the agents' structural context of socialization, action and experience, on the other, Bourdieu preaches an ordered and hierarchical use of the resources proper to the objectivist and subjectivist moments, conferring precedence on the former over the latter. In this sense, unlike pro-compatibility

approaches that, without reducing social science to its interpretative dimension, postulate for these a necessarily hermeneutic starting point (Giddens, 1993: 169–71), Bourdieu claims that the empathic or hermeneutic understanding of the subjective meaning of a certain conduct could never consist in the primary heuristic path to its causal explanation. On the contrary, only the reconstruction of the field of objective relations within which a certain agent occupies a position and undertakes a trajectory could allow a proper access to her subjective experience and to the internal motors of her actions. One should always, so to speak, begin the investigation with the forest in order to understand the trees, not vice versa.

The genetic priority of society over agents, whose structuring dispositions are first structured dispositions, leads Bourdieu to defend a compatibilism based not on a thesis of complementarity but of *identity* between explanatory and comprehensive procedures. This identity is seen as the condition a social scientist must fulfill in order to be able to be situate herself, in thought, in the researched individuals' 'shoes':

> Attempting to situate oneself in the place the interviewees occupy in the social space in order to understand them *as necessarily they are*, by questioning them from that point on, and to some degree to take their part ... is not to effect the phenomenologists' 'projection of oneself into the other'. Rather, it is to give oneself a *generic and genetic comprehension* of who those individuals are, based on a ... grasp of the social conditions of which they are the product ... a grasp of the circumstances of life and the social mechanisms that affect the entire category to which any individual belongs (high school students, skilled workers, magistrates, whatever) and grasp of the conditions, inseparably psychological and social, associated with a given position and trajectory in social space. Against the old distinction made by ... Dilthey, we must posit that *understanding and explaining are one*. (Bourdieu, 1999b: 613)

The mention of the 'generic' character of the explanation–understanding of an agent's behavior refers to the necessity of situating any individual actors in 'the entire category' to which they belong. Such categories are defined based on the sharing of social conditions of existence associated to the occupation of an identical or similar position in the structure of distribution of material and symbolic resources (forms of capital) operating in the social space.[4] These conditions, in their turn, lead to the generation of homologous practical dispositions among the individuals pertaining to such groups, even if such 'belonging' is not explicitly recognized.

On the other hand, the reference to the 'necessitating' quality of the elucidation of the agent's practices testifies to the fact that Bourdieu's approach is not *antideterminist*, if by determinism we understand the thesis, taken as a methodological premise and/or an ontological postulate, that there are no 'un-caused' facts in any sphere of the phenomenal world, including the domains of social life and individual psyche. This perspective is made explicit by the author in a passage with clear Durkheimian overtones:

> Like every science, sociology accepts the principle of determinism, understood as a form of the principle of sufficient reason. The science which must give reasons for that which is ... postulates ... that nothing exists without a reason for being. The sociologist adds: 'social

reason' – nothing is without a specifically social reason for being. ... The degree to which the social world *seems* to us to be determined depends on the knowledge we have of it. On the other hand, the degree to which the world is *really* determined is not a question of opinion; as a sociologist, it's not for me to be "for determinism" or "for freedom", but to discover necessity, if it exists, in the places where it is. Because all progress in the knowledge of the laws of the social world increases the degree of perceived necessity, it is natural that social science is increasingly accused of "determinism" the further it advances. But, contrary to appearances, it's by raising the degree of perceived necessity and giving a better knowledge of the laws of the social world that social science gives more freedom. All progress in knowledge of necessity is a progress in *possible* freedom ... A law that is unknown is a nature, a destiny ... a law that is known appears as a possibility of freedom.' (Bourdieu, 1993a: 24–5)

We will have more to say on the distinction between *objectivism* as a mode of knowledge of the social world and *determinism* as a methodological guiding principle of social-scientific work (or any science for that matter), a distinction frequently ignored in the critical reception of Bourdieu's *oeuvre*. We will also deal in more detail with the thesis that the sociological objectivation of the determinant mechanisms of social processes may offer the actors embedded in them not only a helpless and resigned perception of such mechanisms, but the possibility of reaching a margin of freedom from them.

The defense of a non-objectivist determinism

In Bourdieu's thought, the articulation between agency and structure does not constitute a sociological version of the old philosophical quarrel between partisans of free will and determinism in accounting for human conduct. The dialectical interplay between the subjective and objective dimensions of the social world does not refer, in Bourdieu's theory of practice, to the confrontation between the agent's freedom (at least if understood as the absence of determined attributes) and the necessities imposed by an external social universe. It refers rather to the logical role of subjectively propelled agency in the explanation of social phenomena. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between *objectivism* and *determinism* in Bourdieu's glossary. Broadly defined, objectivism is embodied in all sociological approaches that consider the reference to collective structural conditions and tendencies as data not only necessary but *sufficient* to the explanation of social processes. The actors' subjective intentions and representations could be, thus, summarily dispensed of the inventory of variables that compose the *explanans* of any social-historical facts, while the individuals could be residually deemed as epiphenomena, conductors, or supports (Bourdieu often quotes the Weberian term *Träger*) of causal forces over which they would have neither control nor consciousness. The classical example of such a line of reasoning is Durkheim's explanatory procedure in *Suicide* (2002).

While critical of objectivism, Bourdieu does not abandon the precept that the causes of social processes are irreducible to the subjective intentions and representations of the individuals that are immersed in them and at the same time contribute to constitute them collectively. This precept of explanatory irreducibility implies the rebuttal of the 'illusion of transparency' characteristic of the 'spontaneous sociologies' of common sense,

also leading to his subscription to what he calls, in *The Craft of Sociology*, 'the principle of non-consciousness' (2000: 109). Although Bourdieu subsequently qualified the crypto-objectivistic inclinations of this book, he had already stated there that those methodological injunctions, contrary to what many authors have thought since Durkheim, did not have as a corollary the reduction of 'sociological explanation to the scale of an objectivism' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991: 19) that would consider individual actions and subjective motivations as explanatorily irrelevant. As a commentator underlined, agents 'are not mere bearers of the social structures in which they are positioned – they add something specific, they make a difference in the "chain" of events and structural causations that leads to social practices' (Hage, 1994: 430). The overcoming of the subjectivism/objectivism divide refers, in Bourdieu's thinking, to the irrevocable necessity of constructing explanatory models of the historical course of social processes that make reference to the specific causal contributions of: (1) structured environments in which agents intervene; (2) the subjective interests and resources that actors mobilize to produce their actions; (3) the dynamic effects provoked by the interaction between the aforementioned factors.

Bourdieu's theoretical project aims for a line of inquiry able to capture not only the reproduction and transformation of social formations through individual agents' practices, but also the complementary facet of such processes, namely the social constitution of the durable personality dispositions of such actors. In this way, he is unsympathetic (Bourdieu, 1990a: 53) to those approaches of critics of objectivism, such as Gluckman and Leach, who sought to overcome the epiphenomenalist reduction of agency to structure by posing a deterministically immaculate terrain of volitionally free action. This would be achieved through the axiom that social structures may be thought of as entities exclusively exterior to individuals, who would be capable of choosing freely between diverse paths of conduct within the limits specified by those structures. According to Bourdieu, this thesis would fictitiously and asociologically rehabilitate a picture of the agent as a pure and uprooted subject whose personality would be capable of confronting an exterior social world while remaining impermeable to it.

The result of such a perspective tends to be a portrait of society as exclusively *constraining*, i.e. as a source of external restrictions to the courses of action open to actors, while Bourdieu's insistence on the social shaping of individual subjectivity implies taking it as simultaneously restrictive and *enabling*, to the extent it offers those actors a plethora of cognitive, practical and expressive resources with which they become able to contribute to the reproduction or transformation of the social formations in which they are embedded. In this sense, it would be only if we thought of the references to an agent's freedom as designating not an alleged impermeability of her subjective operations to causal processes (*à la* Sartre), but simply the specific causal contribution exerted by her choices, decisions, intentions and skills to the flow of social life, that we could affirm that Bourdieu subscribes to the thesis of the existence and indispensability of freedom in sociological explanation. He would only add, however, that this 'freedom' is not an asocial residue, but, on the contrary, flourishes from the social formation of the agent:

> . . . the *habitus* offers the only durable form of freedom, that given by the mastery of an art, whatever the art. . . . this freedom made nature, which is acquired, paradoxically, by the

obligated or elective submission to the conditionings of training and exercise (themselves made possible by a minimal distance from necessity), is indeed, as is the freedom in regard to language and the body which is called *ease*, a *property*. (Bourdieu, 1999a: 340)

In any case, Bourdieu's passionate claim to scientificity has as its corollary, in his view, sociology's submission to the methodological premise of determinism, a premise that 'no science can reject without disowning itself as science' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991: 16). This postulate does not imply denying the fact that human beings act according to choices and orientations (be these more or less opaque to their consciousness), but attempts to equip the social-scientific analysis of human conduct with the possibility of investigating the determinant circumstances of such choices and orientations, not only under the form of instantaneous conditions of a given action, but also of those past factors that mould a personality and are continuously reactivated in the production of agency thanks to the mediation of a subjectivity socialized by them (Bourdieu, 2001: 151).

Sociological reflexivity, anthropological understanding and participant objectivation

It was after his formal academic training as a philosopher that Bourdieu turned to the social sciences, ending up in sociology shortly after his ethnological investigations of Algerian society. The uniqueness of his intellectual trajectory had as an auspicious consequence a social-scientific modus operandi that includes 'the ethnological imagination' (Kurasawa, 2002) as a constitutive element of sociology itself. In other words, Bourdieu made use of insights on human agency and social life obtained in the study of social-symbolical contexts of which he was not a native in order to interrogate his own socio-cultural environment(s) in a more reflexive, critical and creative fashion (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988).

The discipline of anthropology was particularly important to the reflection on the methodological challenges of interpretation of human actors' subjective states and behavioral manifestations, by posing to its practitioners a task similar to the one faced by the historians that inspired Dilthey's epistemological cogitations, namely the penetration of *Weltanschauungen* that present themselves initially as strange and apparently unintelligible. Malinowski's moving reflections at the end of his *magnum opus* evidence a methodological stance akin to Dilthey's view, a stance reflected in his ultimate commitment to the capture of 'the inner meaning and the psychological reality of all that is outwardly strange, at first incomprehensible, in a different culture' (2005: 405). This interpretative procedure would be based on the diligent collection of data propitiated by ethnographic immersion, but also dependent upon a certain state of mind on the part of the ethnographer.

In Geertz's contemporary reading, Malinowski's emphasis on the qualities of sensibility required for the anthropological understanding of the native's point of view has strongly contributed to the creation of 'the myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism' (1993: 56). Irony of history: the posthumous and non-authorized

publication of *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Malinowski, 1989), in which the Polish ethnographer gave free way to the vivid expression of all sorts of intensely experienced dissatisfactions with the natives with whom he lived, served as one more demonstration of the profound implausibility of the myth that the knowledge of the native form of thinking and feeling the world stems, in the last analysis, from 'some sort of extraordinary sensibility', as Geertz puts it. The same author goes on to ask: 'What happens with *verstehen* when *einfühlen* disappears?' (1993: 56). Replacing a psychologistic conception of cultural products as expressions of ineffable mental intentions and qualities with a textualist perspective (Reckwitz, 2002: 248) that conceives them in their public character, as incarnate in events, symbols and human conduct, Geertz explores a hermeneutic response that conceives anthropological understanding in terms of intercultural dialogue and translation directed to the ideal of 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 2004: 305) between the researcher and the researched.

Although sharing Geertz's skepticism towards empathic devices, Bourdieu rejects not only his hermeneutic proposal, but also, and more caustically, the radicalized and postmodernizing versions of interpretativism that resulted in a particular type of 'reflexive' anthropology[5] (Marcus and Clifford, 1986). Rebuking *en bloc* empathic subjectivism, hermeneutic dialogism, structuralist objectivism and, finally, the appeal to the 'narcissistic reflexivity of postmodern anthropology' (ibid.: 281), Bourdieu advocates a 'participant objectivation' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 253; Bourdieu, 2003). This would be based on a scientific diagnosis of the inseparably social and epistemic conditions of theorization and research on a foreign socio-cultural context. As a methodological path, participant objectivation represents the specific application, within ethnological investigation, of the particular twist Bourdieu confers on epistemic reflexivity within the social sciences, able to apply to the apprehension of themselves the very instruments of objectivation that they coin to interrogate and elucidate other empirical realities (Bourdieu, 1993b: 274).

Pursuing the objectivation both of the subjective relation an anthropologist has with her objects and of the social conditions of possibility of such a relation, the modality of reflexive ethnography defended by Bourdieu would not lead to 'a more-or-less antiscientific relativist subjectivism' that culminates in Derrida's thesis that 'everything is … nothing but … text'. On the contrary, Bourdieu's version of reflexive self-objectivation in ethnography is a methodological strategy to conquer 'genuine scientific objectivity' (Bourdieu, 2003: 282). The reflexive return of the objectivating subject to her own socially-founded categories of judgment, as well as to the specific profits that motivate her work of objectivation, would allow her to control the distorting influences of such presuppositions and interests on the account of the social universe she intends to construct.[6]

To offer an example, let us see Bourdieu's investigations of matrimonial strategies in Kabyle society (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a). Predictably, he vehemently denounces the fictitious abolition of the social and epistemic distance between researcher and researched through the mere resort to participant observation, as if only an act of goodwill was needed in order to access the native's thought and experience. The French master affirms that what is truly needed for one really to 'get closer' to the native is the reflexive objectivation of the tacit presuppositions inscribed in the very situation of exterior and distant

objectivation. This procedure reveals particularly the gap that separates the ethnographer – who attempts intellectually to decode acts, events and symbols by means of explicit theoretical understanding – from the native – a 'being-in-the-world' continuously engaged in answers to its urgent practical demands and making use of a tacit (simultaneously immediate and infraconscious) understanding of the universe in which she or he is embedded. Standing outside the theater as a spectator, the foreign researcher is prone to lose sight of the analytical limitations entailed by this distance, which can only be overcome by a reflexive effort of returning to one's own experience as a situated actor within a social world. Only then would one discover the 'native' within oneself and insert in one's theory of practice a theory of the difference between a theoretical and a practical relationship with the social universe. The unreflective neglect of that difference leads the anthropologist to project her or his own cognitive and 'detached' relation to the ethnographed world in the native's mind itself. The consequences, according to Bourdieu, are various forms of the 'scholastic fallacy' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 123), such as the intellectualist accounts of the motivations of individual conduct that assume either the guise of rational choice theory or the form of the artificial 'legalism' of approaches that presuppose that the actors establish a conscious conformity with explicitly stated norms (Bourdieu, 1990b: 11, 17).

Therefore, the 'familiarization with the exotic' necessary to the apprehension of the native's point of view should be pursued, according to Bourdieu, not by means of empathic immersion in the indigenous society or even through the establishing of a dialogical-hermeneutic 'fusion of horizons',[7] but through a participant objectivation able to overcome both the 'mystified immersion' and the objectivism of the 'absolute gaze' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 68). Furthermore, the double procedure of simultaneous objectivation of the object and of one's social and epistemic relation with the object demands not only a new trail to the *familiarization of the exotic* in the investigation of cultural contexts which are foreign to the social scientist. It also implies a process of *methodologically constructed 'exoticization' or estrangement of the familiar* in the situations in which researchers study the very universes where they are immersed.[8] In the case of familiarization as in that of exoticization of the object, what is at stake is the attempt to explain and make explicit the motivational and recursive dimensions of the production and organization of social practices, dimensions that are externally, but also internally, invisible to the agents in the guise of conscious cognition. The dissolution of the antinomy between objectivism and subjectivism results, thus, in an approach that combines both forms through which sociology has traditionally tried to illuminate common-sense knowledge: (1) the objectivation of structural circumstances that influence the actors *a tergo*, 'behind their backs'; (2) the phenomenological and discursive explication of dimensions of motivation, cognition and action which the actors activate at an implicit or tacit level.

On a more general plane, thus, Bourdieu acknowledged the radically positioned character of the social scientist's initial point of view on the social world, but did not abdicate from the ideal of scientific objectivity. He also came to combine the open diagnosis of the intensely 'interested' and competitive motivations that animate 'the market of scientific goods' (Bourdieu, 1975) with a neo-Mandevillean explanation of how the immanent social-historical laws of science forced individual scientists to pursue their private

interests on the accumulation of symbolic capital only by making public, impersonal contributions to a collective enterprise. By this token, Bourdieu maintained his portrayal of the fiercely self-interested struggles for scientific capital, in contrast to any naïve images of scientists' disinterestedness, without, however, denying the universal, objective validity of the intellectual products that resulted from such historical struggles ('private vices, public virtues'). His 'rationalist historicism' (Bourdieu, 2001: 106), which both explained and justified science as 'a *Realpolitik* of reason' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 190), could therefore escape any asociological transcendentalism while also avoiding, say, Foucault's epistemological agnosticism or the 'nihilistic subjectivism' of Latour and Woolgar's ethnographies of science (Bourdieu, 1998: 94; Bourdieu, 2004: 26–31).

Dick Pels noted that many 'efforts at self-clarification may ... degenerate into subtle blackmail ... insofar as the self-exposure of the observer comes with a political prerogative to expose the self-contradictions of the observed' (Pels, 2003: 158). The passage basically describes how Bourdieu's reflexive sociology came to be seen in many quarters: thanks to the sociological objectivation of its own perspectival limitations, Bourdivine sociology could claim for itself the capacity to reach 'the famous God's eye view from nowhere' (Latour, 2005: 139) that it skeptically denied to everyone else. Having already proven in *Homo academicus* (1988) that he was smarter than all his academic peers, Bourdieu would then offer his self-analyses to prove that he was also smarter than himself. One could go on and on with the ironies ... [9]

Amid the various intellectual currents that came to the fore as challenges to Bourdieu's critical sociology in contemporary France, Boltanski's sociology of critique and Latour's critique of sociology are among the most influential (see Vandenberghe, 2006: 179–224). Latour's ethnographic studies of science (e.g. Latour and Woolgar, 1986) were commonly denounced for the 'nihilistic subjectivism' implied by the proposal of explaining the production of consensus within the scientific community solely by reference to internal social factors, as if Nature 'out there' (if my postmodern friends allow me this naïveté) did not have any 'participation' in the process. In a sense, turning the tables on all the realist sociologists who had chastised his subjectivism, Latour later presented his actor-network theory (2005) precisely as an undertaking that fully recognized the agency of material objects in the historical assemblage and reassemblage of the social world and, thus, indicted sociology's traditional tendency to conceive of social relations exclusively in terms of intersubjectivity. To the participant objectivation of the BEEs [*Bourdieusians Entrenched in Ethnography*], the ANTs [*Actor-Network Theorists*] oppose an 'infra-reflexive', narrative ethnography that follows human and non-human 'actants' as they engage in social-technical networking.

Meanwhile, in *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* ([*Love and Justice as Competences*] 1990: 55–7), Luc Boltanski was so determined to break with the critical orientation of his former brother in sociological arms that he defended a purely interpretative inquiry, fully content with only describing and making explicit the ways in which lay actors represent and think about their social environments. Boltanski also chose to express his methodological defense of interpretation and critique of the '*rupture épistémologique*' in a language of moral denunciation: the project of sociologically criticizing ordinary representations was seen as an 'arrogant' claim for epistemic 'asymmetry', the reduction

of sociology to an 'account of accounts' was presented as 'respect' for the agents, etc. (for a critique, see Lahire, 2002: ch. 1). Fortunately, as shown by the lectures gathered in *De la critique* ([On Critique] 2009), Boltanski's position has recently evolved to a more balanced and synthetic account of the strengths and weaknesses of both critical sociology and the pragmatic sociology of critique – an account that, *mutatis mutandis*, reminds one of Giddens' view. While still alert to the dangers of turning lay actors into cultural or structural dopes, or explaining away commonsensical critiques of sociology as mere symptoms of resistance (in the psychoanalytic sense), Boltanski also came to defend sociologists' ability to question the perceived naturalness of social conditions, as well as to offer comparatively more 'totalizing' instruments of intellectual apprehension in a plural and fragmented social landscape.

The questions alluded to in these brief forays into post-Bourdieusian sociology necessitate both an analysis of Bourdieu's views on the critical or ethico-political implications of his openly 'deterministic' sociology and a consideration of some of the main criticisms that have been directed to his views on explanation and understanding. Let us tackle these themes one at a time.

Reflexive sociology; or determinism as a liberating weapon

Even if Bourdieu underlines that the *habitus* is the fundamental and most frequent of the subjective motors of human practices, he does not deny the existence of causally effective actions motivated by reflexive deliberations, noting only that such form of behavior depends on specific social and historical conditions of possibility. Besides the contexts of disjunction between subjective dispositions and objective conditions that configure what he calls the '*hysteresis* effect' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 108), the passage from the tacit activation of ingrained propensities of conduct to the consciously pondered choice of action alternatives, from *praxis* to *logos*, could also be backed by sociology, if conceived as an instrument of self-analysis (ibid.: 116).

The enterprise of a reflexive sociology is founded precisely upon the possibility that the infraconscious dispositions that condition one's thoughts, emotions and actions may be rationally mastered if they reach the domain of consciousness. As Frangie has noted in a recent text (2009), although Bourdieu has highlighted the importance of reflexivity mainly as a fundamental resource of social-scientific methodology, he also came to endow it with the potential ethico-political role of making agents conscious of the social determinisms that externally and internally constrain and shape their conduct, opening up 'the possibility of an emancipation founded upon the awareness and knowledge of the conditionings undergone'. This awareness could even subsequently support the reflexive cultivation of new forms of *habitus*, that is, 'new conditionings designed durably to counter . . . [the] effects' of a previous socialization (Bourdieu, 1999a: 40).

The transposition of the notion of reflexivity as socio-self-analysis from the domain of scientific methodology to the ethico-political terrain may be understood as a conjoining of the Kantian and Marxist conceptions of the 'critical' in Bourdieu's critical theory of symbolic power. In the tracks of Durkheim's 'sociological/Kantianism' (Lévi-Strauss), which points to the socially shaped character of the agents' 'categories of understanding', this critical reflexivity systematically excavates the most ingrained presuppositions of (lay

or academic) thought and action. But, according to Bourdieu, the structures of perception and orientation of conduct that ensure the intelligibility of the social world to the agents are the same that lead these agents to experience the lasting resource inequalities and power asymmetries that pervade this same world as natural and evident. Therefore, the Kantian–Durkheimian diagnosis of the 'ontological complicity' between social and symbolic structures goes through a Marxian twist, associated with the effort of uncovering ideologically masked forms of domination and exploration.

As I have argued elsewhere (Peters, 2011: 78-79), the sociological objectivation of patterns of domination and symbolic violence, by pointing to their profound cognitive, moral, emotional and bodily effects upon individual subjectivities, has consequences that are inseparably political and existential. Since the 'personal is social' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 202) and therefore political, the ethics of the good life becomes inseparable from the politics of the Just City, while the questioning of and struggle against exterior and interiorized domination becomes both an ethical act of reflexive self-fashioning and a political move of resistance to domination.

In spite of the difference in theses and methods, the implicit reference to psychoanalysis in the notion of socio-analysis betrays their common source in the Socratic project of self-consciousness as an emancipatory path, that is, in the intention of expanding the domain of human self-awareness to determinant dimensions of our conduct which, if left untouched by this scientifically informed reflexive operation, remain hidden, repressed, unconscious, dissimulated. Being, as was Freud, an ethical rationalist tremendously sensitive to every sort of obstacle that need to be faced in order for autonomous reason to emerge, Bourdieu pursues a different unconscious: the socially acquired mental and practical propensities that configure our mode of being in the world. If 'it is history that is the true unconscious' (Durkheim), the self-analyst informed by Bourdieu's thought conceives the theory of the *habitus* under the aegis of Marx's endeared principle '*De te fabula narratur*' and therefore knows herself or himself as a 'history made body'.

The disenchanting vein of this line of inquiry is undeniable, since it depicts human beings not as irreducible to the world, but worldly, all too worldly, molded in their personalities' most intimate territories by social-historical determinations which are not of their choosing, as Marx would say, but end up objectivated in their very subjectivities. Sociologically armed self-analysis leads thus to the uncomfortable and even painful discoveries of objectivity within the very heart of subjectivity, of externality within internality, of banality within what until then had sustained a self-representation of rarity.

Nevertheless, this same disenchanting sociological-reflexive effort of '*anamnesis*' (to use Plato's expression) constitutes a liberating way for a self-reappropriation. Since, in this reality domain, we are not dealing with trans-historical laws of nature, to recognize the forces that act upon ourselves and particularly 'inside', 'within', or 'through' ourselves, means acquiring a tool in order to act upon these very forces. As in psychoanalytical therapy, in which the onslaught on psychic scourges depends on the uncomfortable and painful phase of the recognition of the unconscious sources of one's symptoms, the risky and unsettling rise of self-consciousness constitutes precisely the first *locus* of the possibility of freedom. Indeed, in an exploration of the metaphor of the puppet theater in his deceptively non-ambitious *Invitation to Sociology*, Peter Berger had

already claimed a 'Delphic' (from the inscription at the Delphi Temple: 'Know thyself') or 'clinical' (Bourdieu) mission for the field of the social sciences, seeing in this potentially liberating self-reflection the very justification for the existence of our discipline (Berger, 1970).

Animated by the same spirit, Bourdieu affirms that sociology 'frees us *by freeing us* from the illusion of freedom' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 28; emphases added). This sentence is not (or not only, if you will) another instance of the unbearable repetitiveness of Bourdieu's prose. By adding the highlighted expression, he intended to underline that the possibility of freedom offered by the objectivation of social conditionings of thought and conduct goes beyond a Spinozian or Hegelian 'recognition of necessity'. To the extent that the 'necessities' operating in the social world are historically constituted and reproduced through human agents' actions and representations, the recognition of such necessities may consist in the preamble for questioning, fighting and even destroying them. Therefore, in a singular combination between a 'pessimism of the intellect' and an 'optimism of the will', Bourdieu could even say that the determinism of his theoretical approach is precisely what turned it into a potentially liberating instrument.

Critical questions: Neo-objectivism and lay reflexivity

We have seen that a scientific account of human action in society must refer to agents' freedom in a metaphysically weak sense, i.e. to point to the causal contribution that an individual's motivations, abilities and practical interventions offer to the reproduction or transformation of the social world in which that individual is embedded. At the same time, the idea of a science of human freedom, if the latter is conceived in the metaphysically strong sense of an ontological *locus* in individual subjectivity which is completely immune to causal influences of any kind (social or non-social), is, if not ontologically implausible, at least methodologically impossible in principle. The distinction between the metaphysically weak and the metaphysically strong senses of freedom also implies that it would be possible for a sociologist to return to the process of sociologically enabled self-liberation that we alluded to above, and analyse it 'deterministically', taking the very reflexive use of sociology itself as a link in a causal chain. In any case, the fact that we should let Bourdieu off the hook when it comes to the accusation of 'determinism' does not mean that the same is true concerning the often connected charges of neo-objectivism and a deficient account of the lay actor's reflexivity.

The concept of *habitus* designates a 'socialized subjectivity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126) which, in turn, contributes to constitute and reconstitute the objective social world in which it is embedded when drawn upon to manufacture individuals' practices. The emphasis on this circularity of the *habitus* pervades the whole of Bourdieu's *oeuvre*, where the category depicts the generating (though socially generated) principle behind practices and representations; or still, to quote one of his most infamous (but amusing) cases of stylistic acrobatics, a 'structured structure' predisposed to function as a 'structuring structure' of the same structures that structured it (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). Besides pointing to the socially constituted *and* socially constitutive character of human agency, the main heuristic function of the theory of *habitus* is to highlight the prevalently tacit, pre-reflexive and non-discursive operation of the subjective movers

of individual conduct. In his vigorous onslaughts on the multiform intellectualistic depictions of human actions and motivations that result from 'the scholastic fallacy' that widely infested philosophy and social theory, Bourdieu was theoretically subscribing to the primacy of practice already emphasized in Husserl's phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt*, Heidegger's existential analytics of *Dasein*, Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian (but also anti-behaviorist) description of habits, and Wittgenstein's language pragmatics.

In any case, the genetic principle behind social practices that inextricably articulate 'objective relations' (Marx) and 'subjective meaning' (Weber) is the dialectics between *habitus* and field, but Bourdieu obstinately asserts that this dialectics always begins chronologically and causally with the field. To the extent that agents act 'pre-reflexively' based on a stock of practical dispositions that consist of interiorized injunctions from their objective spaces of socialization, they can be seen only as 'the apparent subjects of actions which have the structure as subject' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 49). This postulate would not be affected by the emphasis on the dialectical encounter between *habitus* and field as the genetic principle of social practices, since the properties of any *habitus*, as subjective internalizations of objectivities, could be reduced to its social conditions of production – while that *habitus* could produce 'thoughts, perceptions and actions' adjusted to those social-historical circumstances and '*only those*' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 55; emphases added). In this sense, the aforementioned encounter could be perceived not so much as a relation between an agent and the social structure in which that agent is embedded, but between the injunctions of two objective structures: the one in which the agent was socialized and which is sedimented in the matrix of structured dispositions of the agent's body and mind, on the one hand, and the one in which the agent is acting, on the other. Action would be reduced, thus, to a dialectic between objective structures past and present, even though this dialectics is made possible only through the mediation of the *habitus* as the instance that actualizes or 'presentifies' the agent's structural context of formation within her or his structural context of current action.

The theoretical bias towards objective structures is the reason why Bourdieu's démarche, despite its alleged intention of transcending the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, has been frequently depicted by critics as a sophisticated version of neo-objectivism, instead of a satisfactory synthetic theory of the agency/structure relation. Correlatively, many of these critics assert that, in Bourdieu's theory, 'the difference between understanding and explanation ... is dissolved ... toward the side of explanation' (Kögler, 1996: 222). But the previous considerations should show that the neo-objectivist slant of Bourdieu's theory of practice is fundamentally connected to the fact that his otherwise valuable emphasis on the tacit functioning of the *habitus* led him to neglect the causally significant extension of agents' reflexive and conscious knowledge of, and control over, their own behavior.

The comparison with Giddens' structurationist perspective (1979, 1984) might be useful to identify the deficit of reflexivity present in Bourdieu's account of the lay actor. Without neglecting the fundamental importance of tacit knowledge or *savoir-faire*, structuration theory explicitly recognizes that reflexive or 'discursive consciousness' must be seen, together with the social-ontological domains of the *habitus* (or 'practical consciousness') and objective social conditions, as a relatively autonomous and causally influential dimension of sociological explanation. Indeed, even if we set aside an independent causal role for human

reflexivity and subscribe to the thesis that the emergence and/or effectiveness of the agent's reflexive consciousness always depends on the social-historical rupture of the ontological complicity between subjective and objective structures, we would have to add, *pace* Bourdieu, that such situations are 'radically more frequent' (Elder-Vass, 2007: 341) in the social world than he allows. Ergo, the occurrence of ordinary 'micro-hysteresis' – that is, of inadequacies between practical dispositions and experiential contexts – and, thus, the need to mobilize reflexive deliberations in conjunction with (or sometimes against) the propensities of one's *habitus* are not only found in circumstances of radical crisis (e.g. May '68 in France [Bourdieu, 1988]), but constitute part and parcel of the daily social existence of any agent – especially in contexts of frequent radical change, such as modern ones (on the relation between *habitus* and reflexivity, see, among others, Kögler, 1997; Aboulafia, 1999; Crossley, 2001; Sweetman, 2003; Sayer, 2005; Adams, 2006; Archer, 2007, 2010; Fleetwood, 2008; Mouzelis, 2008: 131–41).

In any case, more recent theoreticians who agree on the need to combine habitual dispositions and reflexive deliberations (or 'internal conversations' [Archer, 2003]) within the theory of action continue to diverge on the possibility of embracing lay reflexivity within a framework that calls itself 'determinist' – Margaret Archer (2003, 2007, 2010), for instance, denies it, while Bourdieu's critical disciple Bernard Lahire (who strives to be for Bourdieu the kind of immanent critic that Bourdieu was for Lévi-Strauss) is all for it (Lahire, 2001, 2002). With Lahire, but against Archer, it seems plausible to me that causal determinism goes all the way. With Archer, but against Lahire, it also seems clear that there are irreducibly pre- and non-social dispositions that condition our very responses to socializational influences. As many perspectives have shown, from Chomsky's demolition of Skinner's theory of linguistic learning (1959) to the 'constructivist' psychologies of Piaget and Vygotsky, the very study of socialization evidences an active and even creative agency on the part of the individual being socialized (as both Bourdieu [1977: 88] and Giddens [1979: 128] have seen), as well as the fact that the acquisition of capacities obviously depends upon capacities of acquisition – even though, as the process unfolds, any precise boundary between the innate and the acquired ends up being exploded by the cumulative and emergent effects of the complex interaction between one's constitutional potentialities and one's environmental influences. I suppose the main difference between my perspective and Archer's on this matter is that, at least within the realm of science, the only option that I think we have when we bump into facts that seem not to be socially explainable is to look elsewhere for causes – as Peter Berger, good scientist and good Christian, has noted (1970: 142). At any rate, one obviously does not need to suppose that a phenomenon (for instance, a reflexively pondered decision) is ontologically 'uncaused' to be able to take it as a given in order to explain another phenomenon (such as an overt piece of behavior). The more we can turn an *explanans* once taken as given itself into an *explanandum*, the better, but this *ars longa* will continue to be infinitely vaster than our *vita brevis*.

Conclusion

We have tried to locate Bourdieu's social theory within the debates on the nature of causal explanation and interpretative understanding, as well as on the alleged (in)compatibility

between those procedures in the social sciences. The proposal of a praxeological transcendence of the subjectivism/objectivism divide was presented in its connection with Bourdieu's idea that, in the last analysis, explanation and understanding of social practices are not distinct and incompatible modes of intelligibility but should be conceived as one and the same methodological procedure. Since the goal of this procedure is the objectivation of the 'inseparably psychological and social' dispositions that actors incorporate in virtue of occupying 'a given position' and taking up a given 'trajectory in the social space' (Bourdieu, 1999b: 613), Bourdieu's approach is openly *determinist*, committed to the scientific identification of the causes of particular courses of human agency and social processes.

However, the 'subjectivist moment' of the theory of practice, dedicated to the diagnosis of how the objective structural properties of the social universe are historically reproduced and/or transformed through practices propelled by socially acquired interests and competences, renders clear that the commitment to determinism as a guiding principle of (social-) scientific work does not reduce 'sociological explanation to the scale of an objectivism'. Finally, we saw how, in Bourdieu's perspective, this same 'deterministic' sociology, by bringing to light the complex mechanisms that engender social practices, could empower and sustain an emancipatory work of reflexive liberation from them. If any a priori depiction of agents in the social world as free subjects of their own destiny is empirically unrealistic and politically dangerous, the sociological analysis that registers the determinants of human action progresses not only towards the accurate diagnosis of what actually happens in the social universe, but also towards the ethico-political contribution to expanding the effective reach of human liberty.

Of course, things are never that simple (as Bourdieu himself, the good Bachelardian, was prone to emphasize). There seems to be a significant gap between the pessimism of the intellect that marks his portrayal of the lay agent, often close to being fully identified with the practical and infra-conscious dispositions of that agent's *habitus*, and the optimism of the will infused in the ethico-political program of reflexive sociology. The only way Bourdieu's project of a sociological enlightenment of lay agents' perceptions of their historical-biographical predicaments could escape contradiction and self-defeatism would be by postulating that these agents *already have*, in principle, the capability for a (relative and variable, but not negligible) reflexive distantiation both from their *habitus* and their habitats – the very capability that would make 'sociological self-enlightenment' possible in the first place.

The advance of a reflexive sociology which mobilizes the tools of science to provide the lay actors themselves with a more precise grasp of the connections between their biographical predicaments and their structural locations in a macro-social history is not diluted, but *strengthened* by the realization that they are endowed with greater powers of reflexivity than Bourdieu had allowed in his theoretical scheme. The reintroduction of lay reflexivity in the theory of practice and the emancipatory program of reflexive sociology can, thus, be deemed as complementary parts of the exercise through which we strive to shape and reshape 'sociology, society and, ultimately, our selves' (Wacquant, 1992: 59).

Notes

1. Needless to say, many social scientists would be willing to defend, against Neurath, the absolute indispensability of one or more cups of coffee.

2. Without leaving the bedroom, readers who believe that the metaphor of the 'short blanket' is too bland can resort to the undoubtedly more sinister story of the bed of Procrustes to express the same idea.

3. Despite having made clear (Giddens, 1995: 244–5) that the possibility of evaluating the empirical validity of common-sense notions depends upon a realist epistemology and a conception of truth as correspondence, Giddens did not bother to offer detailed philosophical defenses of any of these views (Bryant and Jary, 1991: 27). In a similar fashion, he evidenced that he does not share Habermas' obsession with foundations when he considered that any attempt at formulating a normative framework to ground moral and political judgments about social reality was a 'futile' enterprise (Bleicher and Featherstone, 1982: 72; for a critique of Giddens' somewhat lazy notion of critique, see Bernstein, 1991).

4. On Bourdieu's lexicon, forms of capital are unequally distributed and fiercely disputed means to the legitimate exercise of power in the social world. The concept derives, of course, from a fundamentally agonistic view of the human condition and the social universe. For a detailed discussion, see Peters (2011).

5. Animated by 'falsely sophisticated considerations on "the hermeneutic process of cultural interpretation" and the construction of reality through ethnography', these currents led to 'an explosion of narcissism' in response to the 'positivist repression' (Bourdieu, 2003: 282) that once prevented the narrative expression of ethnography as the particular experience of a partial and situated subjectivity.

6. Michael Löwy (2012) has critically compared the idea that social-scientific objectivity could be achieved by a mere act of intellectual goodwill to the fantastic feature in which the Baron Munchausen escaped from a swamp by pulling himself up by his own hair. Since the self-objectivation defended by Bourdieu does not resort to mere introspection but to a sociological explanation–understanding of oneself, he could say that the instruments of objectivation accumulated throughout the history of social science are like tree branches the social scientist can grab in order to get out of the swamp of socio-cognitive prejudices.

7. Margaret Archer, usually a brilliantly subtle and careful interpreter, erroneously attributes this Gadamerian perspective to Bourdieu's sociology of science (Archer, 2010: 291).

8. Particularly, of course, the terrain of the *homo academicus*, the title of a study (1988) that constitutes, in this sense, both a substantive sociological analysis of the French university system and an experimental exercise in method.

9. In any case, albeit I do not subscribe to the thesis that Bourdieu's appeals to reflexivity were a scientistic affectation or a Machiavellian device in the construction of his own intellectual authority, it does seem to me that his strenuous effort to distance his concept of reflexivity from the 'narcissistic' variant lends itself to some unnecessary exaggerations, such as his choice of the sentence 'This is not an autobiography' as epigraph of his *Sketch for a Self-analysis*, a book that would certainly merit the designation 'autobiography' without having to

compromise its scientific status. Filled with genuinely moving autobiographical moments, such as the narration of his trials as an adolescent going through the harsh world of boarding school (2008: 90–100), this work might be seen, thanks to its epigraph, as a rare case of non-authorized autobiography.

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