

Redistributing Habitus? Bourdieu, Practical Sense and Democratic Deliberation

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The deliberative turn in democratic theory has allowed political theorists to articulate a normative account of effective participation in democratic practices to improved democratic decision-making. Yet, advocates of deliberative approaches have had to grapple with objections raised by critical theorists, radical democrats, and other critics who have demonstrated that deliberative approaches often rely on an overly narrow conception of legitimate forms of expression, underestimate the extent to which social authority (based on race, class, gender, and so on) displaces rational justifications in deliberation, and fails to attend to the importance of confrontation rather than consensus in democratic practice.

This paper intervenes in these debates by taking up one of Pierre Bourdieu's critiques of liberal democratic theory. Specifically, Bourdieu argued that liberalism conflates moral equality with practical equality and is therefore unable to develop sufficiently power-sensitive democratic models. The paper has two main tasks. In the first I briefly describe Bourdieu's accumulative model of selfhood (habitus) as a site of unequal distributions of 'cultural capital' and the social contexts, or fields in which this plays out. Following Bourdieu I argue that the uneven distribution of practical know-how in terms of the ability to formulate, consider, and articulate political perspectives presents important challenges to deliberative models. Second, I move beyond Bourdieu by examining the specific challenges of applying egalitarian and redistributive principles to a social scene where the resources requiring equalization are embodied the embodied dispositions and practical sense of the habitus, using his sociology of science as a model.

No one can any longer believe that history is guided by reason; and if reason, and also the universal, moves forward at all, it is perhaps because there are profits in rationality and universality so that actions which advance reason and the universal advance at the same time the interests of those who perform them.¹ (Bourdieu, PM: 126)

I. Introduction

Although Bourdieu officially refused to engage in normative philosophical debates, which he dismissed as ‘merely metaphysical,’ his distinction between moral and practical equality has important implications for theorizing justice generally and democratic practice specifically.² In this paper I make some initial steps toward extending Bourdieu’s sociology into a normative model of democratic legitimacy. I do this by situating my work, as Bourdieu does, within a broad tradition of critical theory. My argument is therefore invested in an egalitarian ethic and accords with Young’s ambition to reduce domination and oppression.³ In this context, this entails developing a model of democratic practice that reduces morally arbitrary practical inequalities in order to promote political practice as a rational movement toward ‘universality’, which is to say the objective and the transpersonal.

Bourdieu spent his scholarly career developing a ‘science of an economy of practice’ based on a fundamental insight: agents act, often though not always unreflexively, based on practical reason. That is, agents make judgments about the demands, opportunities, and obstacles a particular social context offers, the resources they can bring to bear on those opportunities and obstacles, and an estimation of how corollary judgments being made by all other relevant agents will affect their ability to act successfully in social space. On the surface, this economy of

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans., Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 126.

² Pierre Carles, "Sociology Is a Martial Art (La Sociologie Est Un Sport De Combat)," (New York: First Run/Icarus Films, 2001).

³ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 37-37; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

practice appears to conform with basic liberal worldviews. Yet, Bourdieu considered himself and his work to be of the ‘gauche de gauche’ (left of the left), attacking the socialist government he once supported as well as the rising hegemony of neoliberalism and its advocates.⁴ The link between his leftist politics and his critical sociology lies in a fairly radical understanding of the resources one brings to bear within social fields as embodied in significant ways, as something we accumulate in our selves, not only as external commodities to be put to use. As importantly, our opportunities to accumulate and embody the kinds of resources needed to be successful are unequally distributed, these unequal distributions are the products of previous struggles over distribution that have now been relatively stabilized. Therefore, unequal distribution of politically relevant skills and dispositions are historically contingent, relatively durable, but morally arbitrary. By insisting that action is based on practical reason, but that practical reason is fundamentally based on an assessment of the resources one brings to bear on a field of opportunities and that, further, centrally important resources are accumulated and embodied reflections of pre-existing, structurally persistent, and morally arbitrary hierarchies, Bourdieu refuses and attacks what he sees as a liberal tendency to conflate moral equality and practical equality.⁵ In short, Bourdieu’s work can be characterized as an effort to expose the myriad ways in which those with diminished access to embodied and other resources, experience social life as a constant struggle to assert a simple moral equality, “the *legitimacy* of an existence, an

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, trans., Richard Nice (New York: The New Press, 1998); Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, "Newliberalspeak: Notes on the New Planetary Vulgate," *Radical Philosophy* 105, no. (January/February 2001); Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans., Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Loïc Wacquant, "Pointers on Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics," *Constellations* 11, no. 1 (2004): 4.

⁵ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 80.

individual's right to *feel justified in existing as he or she exists*" in the face of persistent and growing obstacles to doing so.⁶

In this paper I will push Bourdieu's distinction between moral equality and practical inequality onto the terrain of normative political theory, a direction toward which he only gestured in his scholarly work. More specifically, I argue that the existence of structurally unequal distributions of embodied, practical resources necessitates a re-thinking of democratic practice. My specific target in this argument is what I take to be deliberative democracy's characteristic commitment to achieving consensus through reason-giving and mutual justification.⁷ Naturally, there are diverse accounts of what deliberative democracy entails or ought to entail and to some extent any effort to characterize an object called deliberative democracy' in a short space must devolve from characterization into caricature. Nonetheless, providing a Bourdieuan counter-point to deliberative democracy's common commitment to consensus through reason-giving will allow me to recommend an alternative conception of just democratic practice. My conception will be power-centered rather than consensus-centered, and the approach I offer will argue that democratic practice is legitimate only with specific relations between distributions of resources and the conditions within which agents can struggle politically.⁸ I begin my argument with a brief account of Bourdieu's 'economy of practice' as the basis for understanding practical reason, social fields, and action. I will then briefly describe

⁶ *ibid.*, 237; Bourdieu et al., 4.

⁷ Simone Chambers, "Theories of Political Justification," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 11 (2010); Simone Chambers, "Deliberative Democratic Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, no. (2003); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "Deliberative Democracy Beyond Process," in *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, ed. James S. Fishkin and Peter Laslett (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁸ The power-centered and agonistic conception I am developing here will almost certainly raise questions about my argument's relation to radical democracy. Distinguishing my account from radical democratic accounts warrants careful consideration, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

Bourdieu's philosophy of science and what Crossley has described as the 'communicative rationality' underpinning this philosophy. Bourdieu's understanding of science paints a picture of how struggles for dominance can lead to progress and might therefore be a model for democratic practice, which I articulate in the third section. In the final section I point to some of the advantages this conception has for thinking about democratic practice and its connection to other areas of normative theory.

II. Field and Habitus, Struggle and Progress

In her review of competing models of the 'formation of the self' (and critique of Bourdieu's conception), Skeggs gives careful attention to the accumulative nature of Bourdieu's account.⁹ In particular, she argues that in contrast to liberal models in which the 'possessive individual' accumulates external resources, Bourdieu's account is rooted in a notion of the self as a set of dispositions through which agents experience and interpret the world. Importantly, as I describe below, these dispositions themselves constitute a resource, a form of capital, which can be deployed in social spaces. Further, because certain dispositions are both particularly politically useful and unequally distributed, those distributions fall within the scope of normative political theory. To get at these dispositions in a way that is useful for my overall argument, however, I begin with one of Bourdieu's key concepts, namely his conception of social fields.

For Bourdieu, a social field is comprised of any set of agents and objects (including, for example, buildings, infrastructure, and rewards, etc.) that are brought into relation with one another through their participation in a shared set of practices. The notion of being in 'relation with one another' risks implying that 'relation' entails a simple question of relative proximity, but Bourdieu has in mind a much more complex set of conditions underpinning 'relation'. Key

⁹ Beverley Skeggs, "Exchange, Value and Affect: Bourdieu and 'the Self,'" *Sociological Review* 52, no. (2004): 86.

elements of this relation include a psychic or affective commitment to the value of the stakes in the field (what Bourdieu calls *illusio*), an unspoken and often unconscious consensus about the meaning of fundamental elements of the field (*doxa*), and a shared logic through which actions within the field are understood. This last feature introduces a distinction between actions that are generally understood to be legitimate and those that are understood to be taboo. Of course what counts as legitimate and taboo themselves may become objects of struggle within a field, but for the most part they are assumed by most actors within a field. Bourdieu occasionally described participation in social fields as akin to a game of cards. A set number of players agree tacitly or explicitly to the rules of the game, which include defining the prizes at stake; players are given a set of cards that are relatively valuable within the terms of the specific game being played; players then make use of the hand they have been dealt to improve upon that hand, or to capture as much of the available stakes as possible.¹⁰ Further, each field – as with each game – demands a specific kind of resource and ascribes a regime of value to the variations of that kind of resource a person might possess. Bourdieu referred to these resources as various forms of ‘capital’, the most important of which include economic (money, property), social (the networks or connections to people an agent can mobilize or draw resources from), and cultural (a variety of competencies which I describe more fully below).¹¹ He also gave particular attention to symbolic capital, which is the recognition an agent receives by virtue of their esteemed position within a social field.¹² Although it requires efforts to do so, any given kind of capital can be transformed into another form as, for example, when someone relies on a friend or business

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans., Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 147-148.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," in *Education, Globalization and Social Change*, ed. Hugh Lauder et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106.

¹² See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans., Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Chapter Seven.

acquaintance to find a new source of employment and thereby transforms social capital into economic capital.¹³

The political field, for example, can be thought of as being comprised of all the people who struggle for political power, or make use of political power, the objects they bring to bear in these struggles, and the stakes or outcomes of these struggles. ‘Political capital’ is all the various kinds of resources agents bring to bear (including economic, social and cultural capital, but also specifically political versions such as electoral mandates, popularity, legal authorization, and so on). Importantly, any particular agent can be relatively proximate to the stakes involved in the political field... the Prime Minister and a citizen who participates in the field only once every four years to vote are both located within the political field, but at palpably different locations within that space. ‘Location’ and other topographical metaphors are essential for Bourdieu’s conception of social space because they describe the relative distribution of resources within a field and therefore the relative power of resource-bearing agents to undertake successful strategies within the field and even to shape the rules of the field itself.

The relationship between location within a field and the success of various strategies within a field is worth exploring somewhat more closely. If we say that the central stake involved in a democratic political field is control of state resources we bring into our analysis a diverse range of strategies for influencing what the state does.¹⁴ These strategies will be understood (generally speaking) as relatively legitimate and taboo. That is, some actions are clearly permitted – campaigning, lobbying, demonstrating – while others are clearly prohibited –

¹³ Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital," 106.

¹⁴ One could, of course, argue that political struggles are not about the state but about control of ‘social resources’, but in keeping with Bourdieu’s own view, my interest is not in developing a typology of fields and determining once and for all what counts as ‘inside’ any given field or ‘outside’ of it. Rather, I am trying to illustrate the kinds of questions an analysis of fields must answer in order to see who is acting, how, for what stakes, and what implications practical strategies have for normative and political analysis.

bribing, bombing, and fraud, for example. Within that context, participants bring into play various resources ('capital') in order to make their actions more successful. Insofar as social fields are social spaces comprised of actors and objects that are related by a shared interest in particular stakes, bound by the rules of legitimacy and taboo, the rules of the field are skewed to value actions supported by some forms of capital more than others. For example, while demonstrations and rallies are legitimate strategies (or, more precisely, strategies that are legitimated by the field in which they are deployed), they don't offer the same direct access to decision-makers as, say, lobbyists enjoy. Therefore, insofar as the resources (capital) required to demonstrate are relatively widely distributed, while the capital required to lobby is not, lobbyists can be said both to occupy a 'better' (higher) position within the field than demonstrators and be better positioned to ensure that the kind of capital they enjoy remains both legitimate and effective.

Bourdieu was particularly concerned with a specific species of capital, namely cultural capital, as it is embodied in agents' dispositions, what he called 'habitus'. Habitus is the embodied set of dispositions by which agents perceive social space, recognize the socially constituted value of actors, objects, and resources within it, and generate actions capable of securing or enhancing their overall store of the capital available for accumulation. Bourdieu emphasizes several core features of habitus.¹⁵ First, habitus is an embodied set of dispositions, cognitive and affective mechanisms through which agents apply schemes of perception, or classification, to assess the practical possibilities and impossibilities presented to them in the minutiae of the daily order of things. By conceiving action as the product of dispositions rather than rational, calculating intention, Bourdieu sought to overcome the assumptions of ahistorical,

¹⁵ Bourdieu, *Logic*, 53.

unconditioned and autonomous subjects characteristic of what he called intellectualist or subjectivist accounts of action, including rational action theory and existentialist philosophy.¹⁶ Second, *habitus* is structured through repeated encounters with its physical and social environment. The structured nature of *habitus* gives it durability (it can change, but incrementally and always in the context of existing dispositions) and transposibility, which is to say that an agent's actions will vary across social contexts but will generally be consistent with the overall tendency of the dispositions the *habitus* organizes. Bourdieu's account of the genesis of the habitus underlines the close relationship between field and *habitus*. Agents acquire *habitus* mimetically through corrections received by authorities (especially parents and teachers) and practical experience of the opportunities and hazards of social existence, which always takes place within hierarchically organized fields.¹⁷ The objects of mimesis transmit their own *habitus* simply by acting in relation to the fields in which they find themselves and therefore transmit a habitus highly attuned to the objective conditions of the transmitters: agents learn to position themselves in space as their parents do, as their school officials direct them to, and as the space of possibilities allows them to. They *adapt* to the demands of their immediate social and physical environ in order to act upon it and thus their habitus are classed, raced, gendered, and so on.¹⁸ Acquisition of habitus is fundamentally reproductive: it inscribes the way things are in our very comportment and in the schemes of perception by which we classify and evaluate the agents and objects around us. In turn, the way things are, inscribed in bodies, becomes the basis of action, which re-inscribes the way things are back onto social space.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 42 and 50-51. See also: Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule..." in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Logic*, 73.
Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 50-51.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, trans., Randall Johnson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 53.
Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 115.

A key implication of this relationship between mimetic accumulation of habitus from people who are already positioned within fields and therefore likely to transmit a habitus that is reflective of that position, is that dispositions and the ability to interact socially they permit – their cultural capital – bears significant class and other markers. In his work on cultural consumption, Bourdieu argues that people raised in class conditions marked by high levels of economic capital tend to develop a different relationship to artistic and scholastic works.¹⁹ Elsewhere he traces the relationship between class background and educational strategies.²⁰ Cultural competence and educational strategies, in turn, have significant implications for how successful an agent is likely to be in political struggles. Bourdieu produced extensive critiques of public opinion polling in which he argues that the likelihood of even having an opinion on political questions is closely linked to class background and gender and is moreover highly mediated by class-based consumption of varyingly sophisticated news sources.²¹ Illustrating the difference between moral equality and practical equality, Jane Ward has shown how working class activists in an LGBT social movement organization were pushed out of positions of authority because they lacked unmarked ‘skills’ that were suddenly required for success in that organization. All of these skills – a ‘professional demeanor’; the ability to draft news releases and other statements in sophisticated, error free language; access to diverse networks (social capital) and so on, were ones that derive from middle and upper class backgrounds rather than working class ones.²² Similarly, Steph Lawler has shown that cultural competence as expressed in a group’s visual appearance can have significant political implications. She compares two

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans., Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 53-56.

²⁰ Bourdieu et al., Part 5.

²¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 408.

²² Jane Ward, "Producing 'Pride' in West Hollywood: A Queer Cultural Capital for Queers with Cultural Capital," *Sexualities* 6, no. 1 (2003).

protests – one comprised of working class mothers and one comprised of upper class mothers. Media portrayals of the latter were respectful, treating the women as legitimate political actors. Portrayals of the latter, by contrast focused on the working class women's appearance, their marital status, and the condition of their homes, all of which was then taken as evidence of their disqualification from making political claims. There is, of course, a long history of working class political claims being dismissed on whatever grounds are convenient, but what Lawler's analysis draws our attention to is that hierarchical distributions of cultural 'competence' as expressed through habitus become unconscious grounds for excluding some groups:

What gives habitus its particular force, in this context, is that power is conceptualized as working such that it is not what you do or what you have, that is marked as wrong or right, but *who you are*. This is not to deny that subjects can resist such a positioning, nor that habitus may be imperfectly aligned with the field. However, it is important to note that there are some people who, by virtue of their habitus, are able to pass judgment, implicitly or explicitly, on others, and to make that judgment count.²³

Following Bourdieu and those who have taken up his work, then, I suggest that communication, political struggle, indeed all social interaction is premised on pre-conscious schemes of perception and assessment, as well as unequally distributed resources, including competencies embodied in our dispositions and therefore prior to conscious, rational deliberation. Here, then, is the key distinction between moral and practical equality and the basis of my claims about the need for redistribution: political struggles and democratic deliberation (as in the committee work analyzed by Ward) alike are structured according to misrecognized, hierarchically organized distributions of relevant competencies and schemes of recognition, despite the official moral equality of the agents involved.

²³ Stephanie Lawler, "Rules of Engagement: Habitus, Power and Resistance," in *Feminism after Bourdieu*, ed. Lisa Adkins and Beverly Skeggs (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 112-113.

On the surface, this would suggest that the legitimacy of democratic practice as a predominantly communicative endeavor (whether in its deliberative or aggregative modes) is doomed to be subverted by not only economic inequalities, but also by unequal access to relevant political skills and pre-conscious judgments about who participants are and they worth of their contributions. Does this mean that democratic political fields are doomed to reproduce and perpetuate inequalities? It is certainly the case that Bourdieu leaves considerable room for pessimism about the possibility of progress. His work is littered with conceptions such as *allogoxia*, the phenomena where dominated groups misrecognize the rules of social space – which, as described above are structured in favour of the dominant – as in their own interests and *conatus*, the confined and confining trajectory of classes and individuals based on the capital they inherit and the structure of opportunities relatively durable social fields offer.²⁴

Among the strongest proponents of this critique, Judith Butler has suggested that reproductivism pervades Bourdieu's sociology insofar as two, circularly related, levels of 'inclination' are at work in his conception of the habitus and field. On the one hand, the habitus is inclined to adapt to the immanent demands of an objectively structured field. On the other hand, objectively structured fields bear their own inclinations in the form of objective necessities. That is, objectively structured fields such as the economy, cultural fields, and so on, develop according to (though not completely determined by) their own internal logic. This double inclination might manifest, for example, in children of working class parents feeling inclined to pursue educational and career strategies (technical colleges as opposed to ivy league universities) based on dispositions incorporated through exposure to working class objective conditions. Prolonged exposure to objective conditions produces a 'sense of the game' and

²⁴ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 185 and 215; Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 453.

therefore a set of strategies based on the anticipated development of those objective conditions. According to Butler, this renders Bourdieu's model deterministic. If he wants to avoid such determinism then he needs to provide an account of habitus that is not already inclined toward (in Butler's sense, determined by) objective conditions.²⁵

There is no question that Bourdieu considered an inclination to adapt to the immanent demands of fields to be not only a central feature of habitus, but integral to its development and essential for his account of practical reason. Further, Butler is correct to suggest that Bourdieu's account depends on fields bearing a certain inclination, what we might more fully describe as a complex interplay between conservatism and dynamism, or inertia and momentum, that marks the habitus and then is marked by the habitus-bearing agents that operate within a field's inclination. Importantly, however, Bourdieu also locates at the core of habitus, or rather at the genesis of habitus in the infant's primary entry into social fields, a desire for recognition.²⁶ The social subject is thereby marked not only by an inclination to adapt, but also an inclination to accumulate (as per Skeggs, above) and therefore to enter various fields as sites of struggle over the resources and rewards those fields offer. In short, Butler is wrong to read field and habitus as only a story about circular reproduction... it is also a story about context-specific, practical, and more or less successful struggle to accumulate various kinds of capital, and above all symbolic capital and the recognition it brings. This struggle and strategic efforts to improve positions is what ultimately allows fields to undergo transformations.²⁷

²⁵ Judith Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic," in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 118.

²⁶ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 166.

²⁷ See, for example: Michele L. Crossley and Nick Crossley, "'Patient' Voices, Social Movements and the Habitus; How Psychiatric Survivors 'Speak Out'," *Social Science and Medicine* 52, no. (2001); Nick Crossley, "From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus," *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 6 (2003).

Nonetheless, it does not help normative theorists to note that Bourdieu's account of field and habitus, rooted in both inclination and struggle, is theoretically capable of accounting for social changes. Feminist, anarchist, and queer thinkers (among others) have all pointed to the dangers of mistaking the movement of one group from a position of being dominated to one of (even relative) domination as the same as progress.²⁸ To permit of a normative account Bourdieu's framework requires a model of field transformation in which field dynamics do not simply reproduce or exacerbate existing maldistributions and arbitrary hierarchies. Bourdieu thought such a model existed in a specific instance of habitus and field existing in a particularly beneficial relationship: the scientific field.

As with any field, the scientific field consists of a set of agents, competitively struggling for a specific stake, according to explicitly and implicitly acknowledge rules of practice. In this case, the stake is *scientific authority*, which is to say the capacity to make scientific claims and have them believed.²⁹ However, Bourdieu argued that the scientific field is unique because the rewards it offers – tenure, funding, prestige – are only available to actors who rely on accepted standards of practice for pursuing those rewards: reliance on evidence, logic, standards of generalizability and communicability, and so on. That is, scientists pursue material and symbolic benefit according to a (rough and evolving) consensus about how scientific knowledge is legitimately produced. The relationship between the dispositions of participants within a specific social field (a willingness to rely on logic and evidence) and the structure of opportunities and rewards that field offers (prestige to those who produce knowledge using logic and evidence)

²⁸ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Richard Day, *Gramsci Is Dead* (London; Anne Arber, MI: Pluto Press, 2005); Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason," *Social Science Information* 14, no. 6 (1975): 19.

comprises what a near unique form of rationality. ‘Rationality’, here, derives from the rules of legitimate action in the system of communication and competition in which scientists are embedded, which ensure that individual and particular perspectives are transcended in favour of viewpoints that are objective, transpersonal, and universal.³⁰

Thus, as in any field, dominant actors undertake conservation strategies, and dominated actors – in an effort to distinguish themselves and to gain for themselves the scientific authority of the dominant – introduce heterodoxy via various subversion strategies.³¹ Major changes to scientific paradigms emerge not through the development of an immanent scientific logic, but through the struggles of dominated scientific actors to gain dominance.³² To emphasize, however, Bourdieu was not suggesting that scientific changes merely reflect changes in power relations.³³ Rather than reducing changes in scientific fields he asks:

What are the social conditions which must be fulfilled in order for a social play of forces to be set up in which the true idea is endowed with strength because those who have a share in it have an interest in truth, instead of having, as in other games, the truth which suits their interests?³⁴

And elsewhere:

So it is the simple observation of a scientific world in which the defence of reason is entrusted to a collective labour of critical confrontation placed under the control of the facts that forces one to adhere to a critical and reflexive realism which rejects both epistemic absolutism and irrationalist relativism.³⁵

Crossley has dubbed Bourdieu’s vision of science, “communicative rationality” to capture a number of features of the vision just described: rationality emerges from human

³⁰ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 123.

³¹ Bourdieu, "Specificity," 30.

³² *ibid.*, 22.

³³ This is, notably, in direct contrast to Foucault’s approach. Staf Callewaert, "Bourdieu, Critic of Foucault: The Case of Empirical Social Science against Double-Game-Philosophy," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 6 (2006): 94. For an excellent overview of Bourdieu’s sociology of science, the complexity of fields and strategies Bourdieu envisioned, and scientific progress see: Charles Camic, "Bourdieu's Cleft Sociology of Science," *Minerva* 49, no. 3 (2011).

³⁴ Bourdieu, "Specificity," 31.

³⁵ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 111.

interactions not isolated individuals or *a priori* logic; these interactions must rely on logic, evidence, shared beliefs (not bribery, violence, threats), which is to say debate must be a ‘regulated conflict’, and reason ought to exclude economic and political weapons in favour of weapons rooted in norms of evidence, charitable efforts to understand one another’s viewpoints and, further, all of these orientations must be reflected both in field and habitus.³⁶

The problem of deliberative democracy I am confronting, however, is the tendency to fetishize reliance on reason, norms of evidence, good logic, and so on at the expense of the key elements of the agonistic elements of Bourdieu’s account: the real struggle (Bourdieu’s work is rife with semi-militaristic references to weapons and war) over status, the pursuit of recognition and symbolic power in the form of scientific authority, indeed the brutality with which scientific struggles take place, and the durable inequalities in the distribution of resources needed to engage this battle, which not only favours some, but excludes others from the game entirely.

III. Symbolic Democracy

In an evocative passage, Bourdieu links his vision of scientific practice to the possibilities of a universalizing democratic practice:

If one wants to go beyond preaching, then it is necessary to implement practically, by using the ordinary means of political action – creation of associations and movements, demonstrations, manifestoes, etc. – the *Realpolitik* of reason aimed at setting up or reinforcing, within the political field, the mechanisms capable of imposing the sanctions, as far as possible automatic ones, that would tend to discourage deviations from the democratic norm (such as the corruption of elected representatives) and to encourage or impose the appropriate behaviours; aimed also at favouring the setting up of non-distorted social structures of communication between the holders of power and the citizens, in particularly through a constant struggle for the independence of the media.³⁷ (Bourdieu, PM: 126)

³⁶ Nick Crossley, "On Systematically Distorted Communication: Bourdieu and the Socio-Analysis of Publics," *Sociological Review* 52, no. (2004): 91.

³⁷ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 126.

In the previous section I tried to capture the specific relation between suitably disposed habitus (those inclined to struggle for scientific authority and disposed toward using scientific norms to do so) and the scientific field (which rewards strategies based on scientific norms) and Bourdieu's claim that struggle carried on within this relation rescues science from relativism and permits the possibility of rationality and universality. In this section I try to resolve some of the conceptual steps needed to move from Bourdieu's sociology of science into a normative account of democratic legitimacy. I do so in three steps. First, I lay out the model I am proposing. Next, I point to two specific features of the scientific field that allow it to function in the way Bourdieu imagines but which are normatively and practically problematic for democratic practice. Finally, I will suggest these problems can be overcome in part by beginning consideration of democratic legitimacy at the macro level, in contrast to the deliberative conception which originally focused on small-group, face-to-face discussions, with more recent debates expanding theoretical accounts up and out to broader contexts. I argue that the power-centered account I am developing requires redistribution of skills and, insofar as that is impossible or not yet possible, compensating measures, namely the collectivization of resources.

Although most of the elements of the model I suggest have been alluded to already, it is worth summarizing its key features somewhat schematically here. In short, I suggest an account of democratic practice where:

- i. Legitimacy derives from a correct relationship between habitus and field wherein the dispositions of participants fit with a logic of practice that rewards certain kinds of actions and where participants openly struggle with one another for the rewards that field offers;

- ii. The ‘correctness’ or quality of this relationship depends on the degree to which “there are profits in rationality and universality so that actions which advance reason and the universal advance at the same time the interests of those who perform them.”³⁸ (Bourdieu, PM: 126);
- iii. An equitable distribution of key resources, especially those potentially embodied in habitus (political opinions, instinct, communication, strategy, all those hidden skills Ward’s account highlights) ensures as nearly universal as possible access to both the dispositions to participate in the field in universalizing ways and in the capacity to do so;
- iv. In contrast to efforts to achieve consensus, conflict is seen to have particular value because it encourages agents to actively mobilize resources to engage in struggles constrained toward the universal; struggle over the rewards of the political field (in terms of state power, but also symbolic recognition, esteem, and other rewards) energizes the relationship and renders it dynamic;
- v. Above all, normative evaluation is system-centered rather than agent-centered model.

I have gone to some pains to situate this account within Bourdieu’s framework because his conceptual tools, habitus and field, prohibit a purely liberal, individualistic, or pluralist reading of the model I have sketched out. Indeed, he insisted that the work of sociologists and social scientists generally is to historicize field and habitus, to reveal the history of one-sided struggles in which the dominant impose rules and, by benefiting from those rules, systematically accumulate the resources needed to reinforce their position and their dominance. The classed, gendered, racialized and otherwise hierarchical production of habitus and the corollary class,

³⁸ *ibid.*

gender, racialized and other hierchically distributed opportunities for success fields offer renders impossible a vision of political struggle in which autonomous individuals do their best to rally other individuals around the best idea, the best argument, or the best justification. This is why my account focuses on the relationship between habitus and field and pursuit of universality; hierarchical distributions are morally arbitrary, institutionalized redistributions of social benefits to *particular* agents and groups. Democratic practice, if it is to have moral value, must be explicitly oriented toward reversing this dynamic.

Of course at this point my account is highly abstract, so I will give some illustration of what I am saying by making an argument about the value of collectivization in responding to the key question of redistribution, which is likely to be the most puzzling element for most readers. To make that argument, however, it will prove useful to acknowledge two major features of the scientific field that appear to be incompatible with transposing a sociology of science into a theory of democracy.

The scientific progress Bourdieu envisions deriving from scientific fields depends on two elements beyond the inclination (to return to Butler's language) of habitus to rely on scientific norms and of the field to reward such adherence. It also depends on two specific features that pose obvious normative problems for democratic practice. The first is that there must be high entry barriers to participation in the field. Bourdieu saw this as essential for ensuring that a habitus-bearing agent, through the lengthy process of investing time and various forms of capital into gaining entry has also thereby fully internalized the norms and demands of that field as a second nature in the habitus.³⁹ This feature needs little normative consideration; most democratic theorists assume that the moral worth of agents suggests participation or the option of

³⁹ *ibid.*, 111.

participation is integral to democratic legitimacy. Such arguments have been well made in terms of autonomy, non-domination, equality, and so on and the value of widespread participation in democratic practices does not need to be rehearsed here.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the functional claim Bourdieu makes about entry barriers is provocative and I return to it in a preliminary way, below.

The second feature Bourdieu emphasizes regarding the scientific field is that it is (or ought to be) relatively autonomous, which can be measured in two ways. First, autonomy correlates to the extent to which only other participants in a field consume goods produced in that field.⁴¹ On this measure, for example, the literary field is less autonomous than the field of avante garde art, where participants in the former (typically) intend their works to be widely read, whereas avante garde art maintains its distinction in large part by remaining unintelligible to the uninitiated.⁴² It is an open question as to how much politicians, pundits and pollsters speak only to each other, but in general we would want the political field to produce and circulate goods fairly widely.⁴³ Indeed, a central value of distributing political skills widely is precisely to permit more widespread participation, recognizing that unequal chances of obtaining the cultural capital necessary to do so is at the core of distinguishing between moral and practical equality and the normative force behind seeking remedies to this maldistribution.

A second measure of autonomy is the extent to which the forms of capital relevant to a field are able to gain purchase within that field. That is, for example, the extent to which agents are only able to use scientific capital (argument, evidence, research design, etc.) and not economic or political capital in order to advance their interests. Here again, Bourdieu probably

⁴⁰ Though Young provides perhaps the most sustained defence of inclusion: Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*.

⁴¹ Scott Lash, "Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Economy and Social Change," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 198.

⁴² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 32.

⁴³ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 172.

envisioned an ideal-type field, and certainly recognized that any given scientific field is embedded within a broader scientific and academic context and that its autonomy is therefore relative.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, one can say scientists undertake research (or ought to, and are open to condemnation if they don't) for scientific reasons, not economic ones (recalling that scientific 'reasons' are not efforts to develop an immanent logic, but to struggle for various rewards, including symbolic capital in the form of scientific authority, which takes the form of struggles using logic and evidence). For democratic theorists, especially deliberative democrats, excluding non-political forms of capital would appear normatively valuable. However, determining what exactly constitutes political capital is a tricky thing. An electoral mandate would certainly be a valued form of capital and (depending on the quality of the electoral process, which is a separate normative question) normatively desirable. Many would also see the value in restricting or at least limiting the role of economic capital in strategies for accumulating political power. But what about social capital, which is the networks an agent can mobilize on behalf of a project or goal? Lobbyists, social movement organizations, neighbourhood phone trees, social media, and social movement organizations all depend on various kinds of social capital to promote political causes. My argument explicitly depends upon social capital as a mechanism to compensate for maldistributions in habitus and other forms of capital. As it turns out, the value of excluding 'non-political' forms of capital from the political field, and from democratic practice, is conceptually uncertain, particularly in contrast to the value of such exclusions from the scientific field.

We can see, then, that in the lengthy quotation with which I opened this section, Bourdieu moves too quickly from his idealization of the scientific field to democratic practice. Aside from

⁴⁴ Camic: 284.

the obvious need to go beyond ensuring the independence of the media, Bourdieu elides, in that passage, the normative difficulties of simply transposing scientific practice onto democratic. A fully autonomous political field seems unlikely, may be conceptually incomprehensible and, ultimately, normatively undesirable. Further, Bourdieu's own lengthy discussions of the class-differentiated hierarchies of political skills raises the possibility that high entry barriers would almost certainly exclude entry of working class and other dominated groups the political field, a condition which appears necessary for the scientific field to function but which Bourdieu would almost certainly not advocate for the political.

In fact, Bourdieu's own political commitments point to how we might resolve this tension. Bourdieu's main political project can be summarized as an interest in universalizing the capacity to engage in politics.⁴⁵ Yet, if the cultural capital, embodied in the habitus, is necessary for such universalization, and cultural capital is distributed in accordance with existing fields, how can this vision be accomplished? The first step is a robust defense of collective action and, implicitly, representative politics. In making this claim I am shifting my attention from deliberative focus on consensus and reason-giving to anarchist rejections of representative politics, particularly as expressed by the labour movement. To be clear, I am not suggesting a naïve endorsement of collectivization. Indeed, I have written elsewhere about the normative shortcomings of the political strategies of the labour movement in the context of the 2010 protests against the G20 meetings in Toronto, as well as the distortions of movement goals and strategies collective identity processes have produced with LGBT and queer politics.⁴⁶ I also acknowledge that, just as deliberative democrats have drawn attention to important elements of

⁴⁵ Wacquant: 12.

⁴⁶ Chris Samuel, "Symbolic Violence and Collective Identity: Pierre Bourdieu and the Ethics of Resistance," *Social Movement Studies* (forthcoming); Chris Samuel, "Throwing Bricks at a Brick Wall: The G20 and the Antinomies of Protest," *Studies in Political Economy* 90, no. (2012).

democratic practice – the importance, for example, of fostering changes in opinions rather than simply expressing a fixed interest – anarchists have made important critiques of identity politics and representative politics.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, political strategies based on representation by political parties, social movement organizations, or even temporary coalitions can provide important grounds for addressing concerns about the autonomy of the political field and the conceptual difficulties of redistributing cultural capital. Indeed, the solution to the question of the autonomy of the field is not to reduce the relevant capital to political capital (as relevant capital is restricted to scientific capital in the scientific field) but to expand what constitutes political capital. Labour movements are rooted in an effort to counter power imbalances between workers and capitalists by collectivizing the scarce resources workers have.⁴⁸ Social movements, at their best, mobilize participants in order to tap into economic, symbolic, and social capital that is insufficient for affecting political change when left in the individual hands of the most dominated actors. Similarly, early efforts at gay and lesbian motivation was oriented almost entirely toward building up social capital by creating spaces for gays and lesbians to gather and to express themselves.⁴⁹ Further, there is ample evidence that participation in collective struggles provides

⁴⁷ The strongest of these arguments is that made by anarchists who argue that at a fundamental level that representation entails falsely imposing identity. For example, Holloway, following Adorno, argues that capitalism reifies action (doing) into being and is characteristic of capitalism's tendency to hypostatize the present, divorce things and people from processes and action, to reify those processes and actions. Collective identity and identity-based politics' failure to escape these reifications deadens lived individuality. In both cases, the central concern is that the delegation intrinsic to representation entails a loss of autonomy and anarchists argue that the ephemeral nature of affinity-based organizing negates the possibility of consolidating power, and thus prevents official imposition of wills on subordinates.

John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 63-64. Francis Dupuis-Déri, "The Black Blocs Ten Years after Seattle: Anarchism, Direct Action, and Deliberative Practices," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, no. 2 (2010): 60.

⁴⁸ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, "Power Repertoires and Globalization," *Politics and Society* 28, no. 3 (2000).

⁴⁹ Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada: Social Movements and Equality-Seeking* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999), 41.

an opportunity to acquire cultural capital that might not otherwise be available due to class and other positions.⁵⁰ Membership in activist networks may also provide psychic resources that allow participants to continue mobilizing and struggling even in the face of short-term political defeats.⁵¹ Finally, participation in various forms of collective action helps foster skills and dispositions which Bourdieu's entry barriers were intended to encourage. Therefore, collective action allows gradual entry into the political system and therefore demonstration of an embodied commitment to the norms of the field without imposing an absolute prohibition on anyone from participating.⁵² To emphasize, given the impossibility of immediate redistributions of the cultural capital required to participate in politics, collectivization in the form of political parties and social movements can fulfill a compensating function. For democratic theory, this entails reorienting attention from face-to-face deliberation to the macro-level. Further, to prevent macro-level politics from simply becoming a way of all against all, the terrain of struggle must be properly constrained.

Both the object and constraining conditions of collective struggle should be a democratic system in which participants are oriented toward the universal (i.e., toward negating the subjective in favour of the transpersonal, the objective, the disinterested) which depends upon the universal itself being a prize garnered in the form of political capital and esteem. What might this look like? An exhaustive list of characteristics is impossible, but we might note that a field that encourages universality discourages goals and tactics that move beyond disruption and onto

⁵⁰ Crossley, "From Reproduction to Transformation," 51.

⁵¹ Dermot Barr and John Drury, "Activist Identity as a Motivational Resource: Dynamics of (Dis)Empowerment at the G8 Direct Actions, Gleneagles, 2005," *Social Movement Studies* 8, no. 3 (2009).

⁵² At this point I want to re-iterate my previously indicated concerns about representative politics. There is certainly a risk of reading collective action as a panacea, when in fact collective actors themselves can be rife with exclusionary practices. This is as true of progressive movements as any other, and even anarchist and other radical groups produce exclusions based on gender and class, as Kennelly has demonstrated. Jacqueline Kennelly, *Citizen Youth: Culture, Activism and Agency in a Neoliberal Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

a spectrum of violence. However, it also recognizes that the difference between rallies or demonstrations and disruptive actions such as blockades and property damage is, in part, a response to unequal distributions of various resources.⁵³ Therefore space needs to be made for disruption provided – and this would require additional normative inquiry – such disruption is itself oriented toward transcending the particular. Notwithstanding the results of such inquiry, the framework I recommend here suggests that disruption can be a good thing insofar as it is a manifestation of conflict and it energizes struggles over political goods. The point is not to eliminate conflict or disruption, but to channel it toward the universal.

Increasingly restrictive state responses to collective claims, particularly in terms of policing and legal restrictions on protest, also ought to be interrogated in these terms. Do police tactics pose threats to civil liberties in the name of order? If so, does that order benefit particular groups or a general interest. I take it as a central tenet of the tradition of critical theory in which I situate my work that order is understood to unequally benefit the most powerful groups in society. Order itself, then, needs to be reconsidered in light of universality versus particularity. Finally, my approach would also suggest that that non-social movement actors bear a moral duty to facilitate social movement activities. This would include such obligations as screening online media comment sections for racist and other particularizing comments, and for political figures to refrain from using political tactics designed to undermine credibility rather than confronting issues.

IV. Advantages for Democratic Legitimacy

The approach I am advocating has a number of advantages, although admittedly those advantages might be most readily visible to those already disposed toward critical theory. At the

⁵³ Donatella Della Porta and Olivier Filleule, "Policing Social Protest," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sara A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 235.

core of my interest in mounting a critical theoretical rejoinder to deliberative democracy is an interest in a politics based on negation rather than justification. This rejoinder allies with diverse scholars who have laid the groundwork for concern that rationalist justifications depend upon the good will of deliberators; faith in good will belies the operation of power. As Melucci persuasively argues, one function of social movements is to render power visible, to awaken us to its presence.⁵⁴ Reliance on justification risks putting us back to sleep. A democratic model centered on struggle forces participants to be thoughtful about, and critical of, not only reasons but also resources. Among these resources are the forms of capital that are not readily visible but that nonetheless pervade deliberation and democracy alike. Redistributing these resources is essential in the long run, and collective action is both an interim form of redistribution and a viable mode of struggle through which the agonistic character of a properly ordered field can be realized.

Indeed, by incorporating Bourdieu into democratic theory as I have done we can align with critical theorists and the Adornian tradition of ‘negating the negation’, to recognize that the ability to produce positive justifications depends upon remaining inside the bounds of debate. Focus on struggle rather than consensus also opens democratic theory to new work on affect and the physicality of politics.⁵⁵ That is to say, the experience of injustice may necessarily be physical and phenomenal and ought to be worked out at the level of struggle and confrontation rather than consciousness, logic, and justification. This is not, of course, to say that reflection, deliberation and debate have no place; not advocating an irrationalist politics. What I am suggesting, however, is that reflection and deliberation (justification) do not need to form the

⁵⁴ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

⁵⁵ Diana Coole, "Experiencing Discourse: Corporeal Communications and the Embodiment of Power," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, no. 3 (2007).

foundation of an account of just democratic practice. Rather, democratic theory ought to focus on the relationship between the embodied forms of capital through which actors engage in struggle and the opportunities political fields offer for universalizing democratic practice.