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Pierre Bourdieu's political sociology and governance perspectives

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The multi-faceted work of Pierre Bourdieu has been widely discussed, if not always understood, outside France. All his major books have received extensive attention and discussion. Many sociologists are by now familiar with most of his principal concepts and arguments. Yet neglected by most observers is the underlying political analysis in Bourdieu's work, both his political sociology and his underlying political project. The purpose of this chapter is to address this gap in the Anglo-American literature on Bourdieu's political sociology. I will argue that there is a strong theory of politics within Bourdieu's work.

Some observers charge that a shortcoming of Bourdieu's sociology is his lack of systematic attention to institutions, including political ones (e.g. Lamont 1989: 782). Bon and Schemel (1980: 1203), for example, observe that his emphasis on 'symbolic violence' is paralleled by neglect of the specific character of political institutions, such as the control of 'physical violence'. Indeed, Bourdieu does not devote much attention to public demonstrations, strikes, police, army, prisons or war. Nor does he devote much attention to those political units, such as legislatures or constitutions, commonly treated as institutions by political scientists and historians. Except for the act of delegating political power, Bourdieu has not devoted much attention to political processes, such as decision making, coalition building or leadership selection.

Many of these criticisms reflect traditional concerns that animate the academic disciplines of political sociology and political science. But Bourdieu's sociology attempts a broader sweep of political issues than those delineated by the boundaries of these academic disciplines. Indeed, I would argue that Bourdieu's sociology makes no distinction between the sociological approach to the study of the social world and the study of the political power. Bourdieu sees all of sociology as fundamentally dealing with power. He therefore rejects the validity of a substantive area of investigation that might be considered as specialised in the study of only the power dimension of social life. He rejects the traditional academic
division of labour between sociology, political sociology and political science. Bourdieu’s political sociology even though he has not devoted much attention to traditional political science concerns, such as the state, elections and voting, parties, pressure groups, polling, and forms of physical coercion and violence. He has, however, been a sharp critic of public opinion polling by arguing that political participation, as in voting, is highly skewed by social class. While the rise of the modern state has not been an ongoing topic of interest, in recent years he has defined a possible extension of Max Weber’s (1978: 56, 65) view of the state as that instance that monopolises the means of symbolic violence. Yet Bourdieu’s study of politics, like his study of the social world more generally, is framed by his concern for ‘modes of domination’. The key guiding question is how non-egalitarian social orders reproduce intergenerationally through the misrecognition of the arbitrary powers that order them (Swartz 1997: 6). Bourdieu’s sociology of symbolic power is in this sense an original, cross-disciplinary political sociology.

Bourdieu and governance

For the purposes of this particular volume on governance, this chapter relates Bourdieu’s work to the governance orientation to politics. It should be stated at the outside that Bourdieu is not a governance theorist. Bourdieu himself does not use the language of governance. He does not cast his work within disciplinary boundaries of political sociology, political science or administrative science where the idea of governance is most widely discussed. Indeed, Bourdieu rejects much of what is advocated under a governance perspective, particularly where normative claims are made about how public policy should be implemented. For example, he is sharply critical of privatising public enterprises and services and decreasing the role of the state, policy preferences favoured by many governance theorists (Merriam 1998: 59). In recent years Bourdieu (1998c) has become a sharp public critic of neo-liberalism, decrying the increasing reliance on market mechanisms for social welfare provision. The focus of Bourdieu’s work is on power, particularly the more subtle forms of cultural power, and not on the concerns of efficiency in political decision making that seem to drive the governance imagination.

Nonetheless, there are points of overlap. Bourdieu has devoted considerable attention to the crisis of education and social service provision in France (e.g. 1998a). He therefore shares with many governance theorists the concern that modern welfare societies face a severe crisis. He has been sharply critical of French state leadership for pursuing its own particular interests to the neglect of broader social interests, particularly where the lower social classes are concerned. He wants, as do many governance theorists, to render public services more democratic. Bourdieu’s approach
to the study of power in terms of fields of conflict rather than focusing
exclusive attention on particular institutions, such as the centralised state,
gives a relational and multi-centred analytical view of power that overlaps
to some extent with the concerns of governance thinkers. In the course of
the chapter I call attention to such points of potential convergence between
Bourdieu's sociology and certain concerns that find expression today in the
governance orientation to the study of politics. This chapter, however, does
not attempt to transform Bourdieu into an unwitting governance theorist.
Moreover I would note, along with numerous other observers (Stoker
1995), that governance today remains an eclectic orientation, designating
a great variety of descriptive, analytical and theoretical concerns. I neces-
sarily have been selective in choice of themes by selecting only those that
seem central to Bourdieu's thinking about politics while drawing compar-
sisons with the general governance framework where appropriate.

The politics of symbolic power
What are politics for Bourdieu? What would be his sociology of politics?
It is useful to distinguish two different ways Bourdieu approaches these
questions. First, he sees power as a central organising dimension of all social
life. Power is not an independent domain that can be separated from culture
or economics but a force that pervades all human relations. Politics concern
the structures and exercise of power; the sociology of politics must reveal
that fundamental dimension of social relations regardless of level of
analysis or substantive area. Bourdieu's sociology of symbolic power and
violence calls attention to that political dimension of all social life.7

Secondly, Bourdieu also thinks of politics as a specific sphere of activity
where the conquest of power is the specific objective. Here his thinking
follows much the lines of Max Weber when Bourdieu proposes his idea of
the political field as an arena of struggle for political capital. I begin the
presentation of Bourdieu's thinking with the first dimension before taking up
his concept of the political field.

A very important feature of Bourdieu's sociology of politics is his social
constructionist emphasis on the symbolic struggle of social life where indi-
viduals and groups compete to impose their respective views of the social
world as universal (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1998: 117). For Bourdieu the
political dimension of social life goes to the very foundation of any collect-
tivity, since he sees all instituted groups as emerging out of a symbolic strug-
gle (struggle over representations) to impose selected representations as
legitimate social identity. Any distribution of properties, such as age, gender,
education or wealth, can serve as the basis of group divisions and therefore
become the basis of political struggle (Bourdieu 1981: 71). Such properties,
or 'capitals', as Bourdieu calls them, require legitimation to function as
power resources. His concepts of symbolic power and violence call atten-
tion to that power dimension where there are particular interests that go
misd recognised as representing universal interests. Symbolic power is a
world-making power, for it involves the capacity to impose the 'legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions' (Bourdieu 1987b: 13, 1989b). Bourdieu sees the very foundation of the social order as a struggle among various collectivities to impose as legitimate their particular identities and definitions of the social world. Symbolic power is a group-making power, for it is able to constitute social realities as legitimate entities. This occurs through struggle over the right to exercise that symbolic function. The task of sociology is to reveal the underlying character of those legitimization struggles. Viewed this way, all sociology for Bourdieu is in fact a sociology of politics.

Bourdieu (1981: 69) argues that political action is possible only because actors have a knowledge or understanding of the social world and are able to act on the basis of that understanding. He rejects the idea that political action is 'determined mechanistically' by the social world in which actors are located. Rather, the external economic and social worlds operate on actors through their knowledge and perceptions. In other words, political action is mediated by symbolic representations (e.g., mental, verbal, graphical, theatrical).

Bourdieu analyses political action as practices that attempt to produce and impose representations on the social world, representations that either lend support to the existing social order or attempt to subvert it. Political protest, for example, begins by a break with, or 'denunciation' of, the taken-for-granted understanding of the social world (the doxa). Bourdieu writes:

Politics begins, strictly speaking, with the denunciation of this tacit contract of adherence to the established order which defines the original doxa; in other words, political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world. (1991b: 127–8)

Here he makes the foundational claim that politics begin when the social order is questioned, that is, when the doxa is challenged. He goes on to say (1991b: 128) that a critical break with the presuppositions of the established social order 'presupposes a conjuncture of critical discourse and an objective crisis, capable of disrupting the close correspondence between the incorporated structures and the objective structures which produce them'. Political action presupposes, therefore, both a 'critical discourse' and an 'objective crisis' (1981: 69).

This political orientation can be seen in the social constructionist perspective he brings to naming and classification. The formation of individual and group identities points to the power to name, to give symbolic identity that both reflects and forms collective social reality. Naming brings into existence. It creates symbolic power. Politics are the cultural construction of collective identities and practices. They are fundamentally linked with the formation of group identities. Bourdieu writes that politics are the site par excellence of symbolic effectiveness, an activity which works through signs capable of producing social entities and, above all, groups.
In *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984a) makes a compelling case for why classification struggles are class struggles. Classification struggles are also political struggles, since they concern processes and effects of drawing boundaries and establishing hierarchies. Bourdieu (1991c) forcefully argues for a social constructionist view that public identity, whether individual or collective, is forged through classification struggles. Bourdieu’s stratification analysis of modern societies is also his political sociology.

**Sociological method and politics**

Bourdieu’s sociology of politics is connected with his constructionist sociological method. Already in 1977 he (Bourdieu 1977) posed a fundamental epistemological problem for the sociological study of politics: how can one study politics sociologically without simply imposing a partisan political agenda. In a paper on the state he (1993b) opens the discussion by stressing how difficult it is to construct sociological knowledge that is independent of the official categories and classifications imposed by the state. He stresses the difficulty of doing a good sociological analysis of politics because we are ‘immersed’ in politics through the mass media. Politics are such a ‘familiar, taken-for-granted world that it is difficult to gain the requisite distance from received views in order to gain a reasonably objective view of politics as a field of struggle (1988c: 2). This calls for a critical and reflexive practice of sociology. Since for Bourdieu, following Durkheim (1966), the sociological method requires breaking with received views of the social world, how is it possible to gain some vantage point on contemporary political life when politics shape much of our everyday lives? Bourdieu’s answer lies in his field analytical approach to the study of the social world. Constructing the field of political conflict and tracing out its historical development are key to Bourdieu’s method. It is by introducing the notion of a ‘political field’ that Bourdieu believes he has found an answer to this dilemma.

In a discussion of the ‘political field’ he (2000a) also identifies this question as an ongoing concern and suggests that the concept of a ‘political field’ has three methodological ‘advantages’ for addressing the problem. First, the field approach makes the very definition of what is political an object of study. Politics is sociologically a constructed object rather than a taken-for-granted reality. Second, his method is comparative historical. Tracing out the historical context that leads to the instituted and commonly accepted political ideas (such as the opposition between the left and the right) is a key technique for breaking with the received views of the political world. Political ideas and institutions are not universal but historically specific. And third, his method is critical rather than prescriptive.

But Bourdieu’s answer is not that sociology can achieve value neutrality in political analysis. He rejects that form of objectivism. Following the field analytical method, sociology can, he believes, transcend the partisanship of choosing sides among available political options. But at a deeper level
'science – and particularly science of the political game – is never totally freed of political force, at least the negative force of critique' (Bourdieu 2000b: 69). Bourdieu holds that scientific analysis of the social world unveils the taken-for-granted power relations of social life; by debunking the received wisdom of social life science exercises a political effect (Swartz 1997: 259–62). Bourdieu's sociology of politics is therefore intimately connected with his politics of sociology.

The field analysis of politics
Political practices, as all practices, occur in structured arenas of conflict called fields. Fields denote arenas of production, circulation and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolise these different kinds of valued resources, or capitals. Fields may be thought of as structured spaces that are organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital.

General characteristics of fields
Bourdieu (1993c: 72) speaks of the ‘invariant laws’ or ‘universal mechanisms’ that are structural properties characteristic of all fields. First, fields are arenas of struggle for control over valued resources, which Bourdieu calls capitales. Field struggle centres around particular forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, scientific or religious. Second, fields are structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital. Fields are stratified by the unequal distribution of relevant capitals and field struggle pits those in dominant positions with more capital against those in subordinate positions with less. Third, fields impose on actors specific forms of struggle. Both dominants and subordinates share a fundamental doxa, or set of rules of the game that specify, often tacitly, the specific forms of struggle that are legitimate. Fourth, fields are structured to a significant extent by their own internal mechanisms of development and thus hold some degree of autonomy from the external environment. Cultural fields, for example, develop their own specific laws of exercise that relate to but do not reduce to economic or political interests. Bourdieu uses the language of ‘relative autonomy’ and ‘structural and functional homologies’ to talk about inter-field relations in terms of isomorphic patterns, or similarity of function, but devoid of instrumental design.

Each field is internally differentiated by a ‘homologous structure’ of an economically dominant and culturally dominated pole and a culturally dominant and economically dominated pole (Bourdieu 1989a: 383). Two major competing principles of social hierarchy – what Bourdieu calls a ‘chiasmatic structure’ – shape the struggle for power in modern industrial societies: the distribution of economic capital (wealth, income and prop-
tery), which Bourdieu calls the 'dominant principle of hierarchy', and the distribution of cultural capital (knowledge, culture and educational credentials), which Bourdieu calls the 'second principle of hierarchy'. This fundamental opposition between cultural capital and economic capital delineates what Bourdieu (1989a: 373-85) calls the 'field of power'.

Bourdieu's field-analytic approach to the study of the social world consists of identifying the various forms that this oppositional structure takes in specific arenas of struggle. The chiasmic structure of economic capital and cultural capital functions as the bedrock of Bourdieu's field analysis and his understanding of social stratification and politics.

Field of power also designates for Bourdieu the dominant class, that group of individuals and families richest in total volume of the most valued forms of capital in modern societies. This dominant class is in turn internally differentiated by an unequal distribution of economic capital and cultural capital. The chiasmic structure of economic capital and cultural capital differentiates intra-class groups in the lower regions of the social class structure as well. The fundamental cultural capital/economic capital opposition in Bourdieu's field-analytic framework, therefore, distributes and ranks all fields of struggle (e.g. economic, administrative, university, artistic, scientific, religious, intellectual), including the social class structure. His field analysis consists of an internal analysis of this cultural capital/economic capital opposition in particular fields of struggle and an externally oriented dimension that situates each particular field relative to the dominant class, or field of power.

Fields vary in terms of their own internal differentiation around their own specific forms of the fundamental cultural capital/economic capital opposition and in terms of their respective proximity to the competing poles in the field of power. For example, even in the economic field one can identify a fundamental opposition between technocratic big business leaders who are rich inheritors of cultural capital and accumulators of scholastic capital and owners of large private-sector family firms who are inheritors primarily of economic capital. Relative to the field of power, the economic field stands at one end where the artistic field centred around cultural capital stands at the other end. The administrative and university fields occupy intermediate positions, with the administrative being situated closer to the economic and the university closer to the artistic. The juridical field, Bourdieu (1987a: 851) observes, obtains less autonomy than the artistic and scientific fields, since it is more closely tied to the political field. This means that art and science are less dependent upon the economy and polity than is law for rewarding careers and developing symbolic systems. The journalistic field, by contrast, is the most dependent upon the administrative and political circles. Thus fields vary in their degree of autonomy from economic interest, political power and cultural authority, and a central objective of Bourdieu's sociology consists of situating different fields of cultural activity relative to the field of power.
The political field

Bourdieu does not offer as detailed or elaborated an analysis of the political field as he does of cultural fields, such as the scientific field or the artistic field (Bion and Schemeil 1980; Caro 1980: 1172). Yet the political field appears to share many of the same properties of other fields: it is a relatively autonomous arena of struggle with its own specific type of capital that has developed historically. But there is some overlap in Bourdieu’s conceptual terminology that confuses and reflects usage in different contexts. For example, at one point (1988a: 545) he specifies that “political field” refers to specifically political institutions and actors (champ politique) and also to the whole field of power relations in politics and society (champ du pouvoir) (emphasis added). Nonetheless, the economic capital/cultural capital opposition applied to the field of French politics reveals a pattern of oppositions homologous to that of the class structure.¹⁶ Predictably, one finds occupations, newspapers and magazines and political parties with a considerable volume of total capital distributed toward the political right whereas those with less total volume of capital are distributed toward the political left. Among those on the political left one finds the French socialists and radical left to hold relatively more cultural capital than members of the French Communist Party.

The political field, however, also has some distinctive properties. The political field is a specific sphere of activity where the conquest of power is the central objective.¹⁷ It is an arena of conflict over the definition and implementation of public policies that are struggled over by political professionals who are increasingly linked with the state. The political field can be described as “a game in which the stakes are the legitimate imposition of the principles of vision and division of the social world” (Bourdieu 2000b: 67). In this respect the political field is similar to other cultural fields of struggle over symbolic power. Both involve symbolic struggle to impose legitimate standards. Indeed, Bourdieu (2000b: 60) draws an analogy in this respect between the religious field and the political field. Both are arenas of struggle over belief in what is the legitimate way to characterise how the social world is organised or should be organised. What is distinctively political in Bourdieu’s eyes is that the political field involves struggles not just over ideas but for a particular type of ideas, that is, “force ideas”, which are ideas capable of bringing about collective mobilisation” (Bourdieu 2000b: 63). Politics is about the mobilisation of public support for particular views of the social world.¹⁸

Political capital

The political field has its own specific currency. Bourdieu (1988c: 1) speaks of ‘political capital’ and refers to it as a ‘particular kind of symbolic capital’. It is “a reputational capital linked to notoriety”, a “symbolic capital linked to the manner of being perceived” (Bourdieu 2000b: 64, 65). Political capital
can mean the capacity to get the vote out, the capacity to organise support for particular public decisions. The capacity to hold a political opinion, to which Bourdieu devotes considerable attention, also represents a form of political capital. The political capital of an individual is largely dependent on the importance of his or her political party and his or her position within that party (Bourdieu 2000b: 65). It is also related to other forms of capital, particularly cultural capital and social capital.

Relative autonomy
The political field in modern France is a self-regulated sphere of public decision relatively independent of moneyed and cultural interests. Here Bourdieu’s analysis is similar to that of Weber, who in critical dialogue with orthodox Marxism stressed the autonomy of the political realm from economic interests.

Bourdieu (1993a: 164) says that ‘politics can be described by analogy with a phenomenon of the market: supply and demand’. That relationship, however, is not direct but mediated by the relatively autonomous structure and history of the field in which politics as a form of culture (i.e. political opinion) is produced and consumed. Here Bourdieu’s field perspective on politics differs significantly from a straightforward supply/demand market perspective. He argues (1993a: 165) that supply of political options does not develop in direct response to popular demand ‘but to the constraints peculiar to a political space that has a history of its own’. By this he means that the supply of political views is shaped by the positions of the producers of political views in the field of political cultural production less by conscious reference to competitors than by virtue of the competitive positions occupied. Demand likewise is determined by competitive position within the class structure. In both cases one needs to understand the relatively autonomous history of each field. Bourdieu’s field analysis of politics entails a broader, more complex analysis than a simple supply/demand equation.

A key implication of the relative autonomy of the political field is that political professionals (party leaders, pollsters, political commentators, etc.) do and say things not in direct reference to voters but in reference to other political professionals holding different positions in the field (Bourdieu 2000b: 57). Their behaviour reflects more directly ‘the structure of the political field’ than the interests of their constituencies (Bourdieu 1985: 738). Bourdieu writes:

It is the structure of the political field, in other words the objective relationship to the occupants of the other positions, and the relationship to the competing stances that they offer, which, as much as the direct relationship to their mandators, determines the stances they take, i.e., the supply of political products. (1985: 738)

In other words, there is an internal dynamic of self-referencing among political professionals that shapes decisively the array of political options
available to the public. Much behaviour of political professionals, according to Bourdieu's field perspective, entails more posturing to differentiate positions or enhance their scope of representation than responsiveness to the direct interests of their constituencies.

Political field analysis implies that political professionals pursue their own specific interests of position that do not necessarily reflect the interests of their constituencies (Bourdieu 2000b: 58). There must be of course some degree of overlap between the political leadership interests and constituency interests for leadership to maintain a minimum of legitimacy. Bourdieu acknowledges this but stresses the disjuncture. Most important among those interests are the ‘reproduction of the political apparatus’ and maintaining one’s position within it. Here he draws an analogy with the Church. The strength of political institutions, just like that of the Church, lies in their capacity to control positions (Bourdieu 2000b: 66–7). Much political behaviour is motivated by the desire to reproduce the political institution by maintaining positions for its members. Thus the idea of field autonomy and its focus on particular interests present a formidable challenge to the ideals of democratic representation.¹⁹ His field analysis is also more relational than traditional structural and state-centred approaches to welfare state politics and thus overlaps with the new thinking of certain governance theorists.²⁰

The idea that political positions are likely to reflect the immediate professional interests of field position more than broader class or cultural affiliations provides a useful meso-level of analysis that improves upon one-sided micro or macro-perspectives. It improves upon the traditional class reductionism of Marxism and the various forms of cultural determinism, such as a functionalist adaptation to societal norms or to the interests of rationally calculating actors. Yet the problems of reductionism and determinism do not go away but re-emerge in a kind of field reductionism and determinism. Bourdieu's politics tend to reduce to field positions.²¹ Moreover the political field perspective leaves unexamined the social processes through which political alliance might be formed or broken. Bourdieu's field analysis of politics needs a social movement component that would examine the actual processes of political action and mobilisation.

Professionalisation and delegation
One of Bourdieu's principal concerns in analysing the French political field is the political effects of the professionalisation and specialisation of the division of labour of symbolic production in modern political life. One effect he stresses concerns the dynamics and consequences of delegated political authority. He examines the mechanism of political delegation by which individual representation and group identity come to be expressed through spokespersons. He explores the complex and circular relationship between the group that selects and creates its spokesperson and the spokesperson who in turn creates the group. He sees in the delegation of
authority a kind of generic antimony between the individual and the group. On the one hand, the individual cannot exist politically without being part of a group. Any delegation is an act of group creation (Bourdieu 1991a: 205). Delegation is an 'act of magic' that enables a collection of individuals to form a corporate body that transcends individuals in significance and purpose (Bourdieu 1991a: 208). On the other hand, by becoming part of a group, individuals 'dispossess themselves in favour of a spokesperson' (Bourdieu 1991a: 204). Bourdieu speaks of this process of delegation in the language of 'bad faith', 'usurpatory ventriloquism' and 'usurpation'. He analyses the situation of the delegate as a 'sort of structural bad faith' in which the delegate conflates personal interests with those of the group, where both individual and group interests coincide. The individual delegate perceives his actions solely in terms of group interests and thereby fails to recognise his own individual interests at work as well. Not bad intentions but formative group processes drive delegation and consequence dispossession (Bourdieu 1991a: 209).22

The effects of delegation are 'dispossession', where subordinate groups give up their political voice to delegated representatives who usurp that delegated power in pursuit of their own individual and organisational interests. Dispossession is enhanced by professionalisation and bureaucratisation. The 'specific logic of delegation' tends to dispossess, in favour of professional officials (Bourdieu 1993a: 166). Dispossession is more likely to occur to those in the dominated classes without much cultural capital. Lacking cultural capital, individuals are more constrained to rely on delegates for their political voice (Bourdieu 1991a: 206). Bourdieu (1991a) clearly has in mind the French Communist Party and its affiliated labour unions in his analysis of political dispossession through delegation. Individuals without alternative sources of symbolic identity – the French working class – are more dependent upon their political party than are those with cultural capital. This enhances centralised party power but at the price of individual freedom and local control.

Thus the delegation of political authority for Bourdieu (1991a: 205) is an important form of political alienation. Ironically, like Michels (1962) in the ‘iron law of oligarchy’, Bourdieu too finds political alienation precisely in those political organisations whose political ideology seems most committed to combating it. In his words (1991e: 174), ‘the concentration of political capital is at its greatest... in parties whose aim is to struggle against the concentration of economic capital’.

Bourdieu’s analysis of delegation suggests that governance perspectives need to be attentive to the potentially stratifying effects of culture in the newly emerging patterns of political arrangements. A shift from the administrative centralism of the traditional Western European welfare state need not necessarily signal a radical step toward more democratic life. Traditional welfare state roles may be displaced by new cultural elites who become significant players in the more decentralised and diversified realm.
of political life. Yet the broad masses of people may not find a new voice or increased representation – a point not sufficiently appreciated in much governance thinking.

The political doxa
Like other fields, the political field develops its own doxa, or political culture, a 'specific competence' which is learned through experience of how to behave politically (Bourdieu 2000b: 58). To be a serious contender in the political field requires a shared belief, regardless of political affiliation, that politics are important, that it takes experience to be a successful political leader, and that political leadership should be reserved for those with the requisite experience (2000b: 56). This political doxa is shared by all political professionals who otherwise compete for political capital.

Bourdieu (2000b: 60) stresses how the political doxa acts as a closure mechanism that erects a barrier to effective political expression for all but the well initiated. While acquired through professional experience, that political culture in France is increasingly becoming part of formal training in a few elite higher education institutions, such as the Paris Institut de science politique and the Ecole nationale d’administration (Bourdieu 2000b: 58–9). French political leadership has progressively passed from the hands of political activists to political professionals.

Bourdieu has been highly critical of the contemporary French political field arguing that it has largely become an enclosed, self-contained universe with less and less contact and understanding of everyday problems faced by French citizens. He sees French political leaders, technocrats, journalists, and intellectuals, all in their particular ways, caught within this closed world and unable to be genuine representatives of the larger public.

Bourdieu’s criticism of the French political elite resonates with those governance voices who want to broaden the reach of democratic processes in modern societies. But in the case of France, Bourdieu sees the French state as occupying a central role in the distribution of power and yet abdicating moral responsibility in ways not found in most governance perspectives.

Bourdieu’s field analytical framework has several features that overlap with concerns expressed by governance theorists. Politics need not be centred around a centralised state. There can be multiple and crosscutting levels and arenas of political conflict and policy formation that involve a great variety of actors and organisations. Field analysis brings Bourdieu close to the analytical level and strategy recommended by Rod Rhodes (1997: 29) for a governance perspective; namely, a 'meso-level' approach that links micro expressions of particular interests with macro power concerns. Thus Bourdieu’s field analytical approach to politics, like the new governance perspective, brings into play a broader range of power centres contributing to political life than do approaches focused on the central organism of government.
Despite the social construction emphasis in much of Bourdieu's work, an emphasis suggesting that politics is a struggle over classifications, meanings, and boundaries one finds a growing emphasis in his later work on the dominating role in politics played by the centralised French state. The state is the ultimate source of symbolic power. It is the ultimate referee of all classification struggles. Thus the state contributes to the unification of a cultural market (Bourdieu 1993b: 54). It is the basis of a national culture. From a governance perspective, this portion of Bourdieu's thinking remains very much in the traditional political theorist mode.

Conclusion

I have outlined key features of Bourdieu's political sociology and suggested comparisons with some of the emerging governance perspectives regarding changing relations between modern welfare states, civil society and markets. Bourdieu anticipates some of the concerns found in governance perspectives, though he himself is not a governance theorist; indeed, he strongly opposes the normative neo-liberal ideas advocated by many governance thinkers. While a sharp critic of the centralised French state and the elitist character of its political class, Bourdieu nonetheless opposes privatisation of health, education and welfare services. He defends (1998c: 110) the need for state power to counterbalance the effects of markets, which, if left unchecked, will ultimately prove 'destructive' of 'collective structures' at the level of the nation, work groups, unions and the family. He urges (1998b) the mobilisation of citizens, particularly critical intellectuals, labour organisations and civil servants in the health, education and welfare sectors of the state, in defence of the social welfare functions historically assumed by Western European states. In response to the challenge of financial globalisation Bourdieu (1998b) would advocate the development of supranational state structures able to regulate international capital flows and markets and protect established collectivities. These views put him quite at odds with much governance thinking.

Nevertheless, other elements of his thought overlap with key concerns of many governance theorists. His theory of symbolic power opens the way to being attentive to new emerging forms of political practices that appear to transcend the boundaries of traditional political institutions (Bang and Sørensen 1999). His field-analytical perspective anticipates new forms of public/private interface that governance theorists stress. Yet the general tone of his political sociology is quite different from that of much governance writing. Jan Kooiman (1993: 1, 6), for example, employs the language of 'co-managing, co-steering and co-guidance' to describe and stress the new forms of co-operation between public and private sectors, and between different levels of decision making. This is strikingly different from Bourdieu's language of 'distinction', 'struggle' and 'domination'. Bourdieu has little to say about modes of co-operation; his fundamental concern is modes of
domination. So while one finds in Bourdieu elements that echo concerns of the growing governance literature, the general tone of Bourdieu’s conflict sociology is quite different from much governance thinking. Still, the impulse to expand democratic processes and to find new ways of doing so is shared by all.

Notes

1 Alford and Friedland (1985), for example, situate Raymond Boudon in the pluralist camp but say nothing of Bourdieu. Bon and Schemel (1980), Caro (1980), Robbins (1991), Wacquant (1992), Swartz (1997), Pinto (1998) and Fritzsch (2000) are notable exceptions, devoting attention to both his political sociology and his underlying political project.

2 I have argued (Swartz 1997) that Bourdieu’s stress on the symbolic aspects of power may lead one to lose sight of the physical and economic aspects. Bon and Schemel (1980: 1202) also make the observation that Bourdieu does not pay enough attention to physical violence, a shortcoming, I might add, shared by many social scientists. Bourdieu sees the material and symbolic aspects as intimately interconnected, but his emphasis on the symbolic dimension may overshadow the physical and material aspects.

3 In contrast to Alain Touraine (1968), Bourdieu has devoted little attention to social movements, including the May 1968 student movement, which was analysed by virtually every French sociologist at the time. Bourdieu’s (1988b; Bourdieu et al. 1971) observations on May 1968 come later and stress the effects of academic professionalisation and social stratification rather than the dynamics of a social movement.

4 Indeed, as Bon and Schemel (1980: 1203) point out, Bourdieu refuses to grant political science the status of a genuine social science. He considers it a form of practical knowledge designed to assist professional politicians in advancing their interests within the political field. He calls it a ‘false science’ in that it legitimates this political practice as ostensibly scientific.

5 Bon and Schemel (1980) and Pinto (1998) make similar assessments of the fundamentally political character of Bourdieu’s sociology.

6 It is noteworthy that changes in American political sociology over the last several years seem more attentive today to the concerns animating Bourdieu’s sociology. American political sociology has experienced a significant shift over the last thirty years from a behavioural to an institutional orientation (Robertson 1993; Orum 1996). There has been a shift away from behavioural studies of parties, voting, political participation, political attitudes, etc., and toward an increased interest in social institutions, particularly the welfare state, and social movements. Moreover, studies are increasingly informed by a historical perspective. With the important exception of his interest in French elites, Bourdieu has never shown much interest in the behavioural orientation of the old political sociology – focus voting, political parties, political participation, etc. Nor did Bourdieu participate in the neo-Marxist-inspired emphasis on the state that grew out of the turmoil of the 1960s. The work of Louis Althusser (1970) and Nicos Poulantzas (1973) contributed significantly to the rise in the 1970s in importance of the sub-fields of world systems, historical sociology and Marxist
sociology (Orum 1996: 140–1). Bourdieu was in fact quite critical of this
Althusserian–Poulantzas emphasis that influenced American political sociology
during that period. Bourdieu is much closer to the more recent emphasis on
social institutions and the history of the modern welfare state that can be found,
for example, in the work of Theda Skocpol (1992; Skocpol and Campbell 1995)
and Charles Tilly (1978) than in the older behaviour orientation in political sociol-
ogy. And Bourdieu has been a sharp critic of rational actor theory (Coleman
et al. 1966; Hector 1987), a rival trend to the New Institutionalism. Indeed, it
is the explosion of interest in culture in American sociology, not the declining
fortunes of political sociology, that has made Bourdieu’s writings so attractive
in the United States.

7 The all-pervading influence of power in human relations is stressed by certain
governance theorists (see chapter 7 of this volume) who are careful not to divorce
new forms of individualism in contemporary political life from power conflicts.

8 The term comes from Nelson Goodman (1978).

9 Bourdieu’s emphasis on symbolic power overlaps with the anti-essentialist
cranks of the governance perspective. Both stress the socially constructed
character of political life.

10 Bourdieu (1988c) is sharply critical of most media-oriented political commen-
tators, who, he believes, do not impose such a break on their observations
and analyses. Rather, they have one foot in science and one foot in politics,
performing a pseudo-science that in fact is oriented to specific political
ends.

11 Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97) defines field as a network, or con-
figuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively
defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon
their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation
(situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose
possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field,
as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordina-
tion, homology, etc.).

12 See Swartz (1997: 118–22) for discussion of the origins and meta-theory of
Bourdieu’s concept of field.

13 He in fact sees this field of power as a ‘transhistorical’ structure whose existence
pre-dates the rise of modern industrial societies. At its most general level, this
chiasmatic structure represents the ‘fundamental opposition of the division of
labour of domination’ across all societies that occurs ‘between temporal and
social powers’ (Wacquant 1993: 24).

14 Bourdieu’s most comprehensive statement of this conceptualisation of the dom-
inant class is to be found in Distinction (1984a: 114–15).

15 Clearly Bourdieu’s political sociology, while seemingly informed by the class-
conflict thinking of Marxism, breaks decisively with Marxist class analysis and
economic determination of politics. Bourdieu (1983a: 136) proposes a multi-
dimensional stratification analysis (multiple fields of struggle develop degrees
of autonomy from each other) and attributes to the political field in modern
societies a degree of autonomy from the economy that is much closer to Weber
than to Marx.

16 This is diagrammed explicitly in Distinction (Bourdieu 1984a: 452).
17 This is similar to Weber's (Gerth and Mills 1970; Weber 1978) idea of the political order.
18 The idea of 'force ideas' to distinguish the political from the religious, the cultural or intellectual is not fully satisfying, however. Religious ideas could also be thought of as mobilising forces; otherwise they secure no following. This points to ambiguity in defining what exactly is in the political field and what is not. Bourdieu acknowledges this ambiguity but contends that the problem lies not in his conceptualisation but in political reality itself. There is ambiguity precisely because the boundaries of what is political and what is not are themselves objects of struggle (2000: 74). Bourdieu has a point here, for the act of politicising an issue points up precisely a struggle over field boundaries -- a good theoretical point but methodologically difficult to operationalise.
19 Bourdieu's view of political leadership as pursuing its own institutional interests resonates with the neo-Marxist view (Block 1977) of the role of state managers within a relatively autonomous state and with democratic elite pluralism (Bachrach 1966; Dahl 1967, 1972; Dye and Zeigler 1978). Bourdieu, however, sees the French state as a good deal more unified than pluralists suggest and more culturally determined than Marxists would allow.
20 I am indebted to Henrik Bang for suggesting this point. Bourdieu, however, would not go so far as Jessop (chapter 6 of this volume) to suggest that the state has lost so much of its sovereign authority that it competes virtually on a par with other centres of power. For Bourdieu the state remains central and should do so.
21 This field reductionist tendency is most striking in Homo Academicus (Bourdieu 1988b: xvii-xviii), where he boldly asserts that political stances among the Parisian professorate originate from their academic field positions rather than from broader class and political influences. Yet his analysis of the literary field seems to guard against this kind of field position reductionism. In this work he says that political stances are mediated more by strategies than by positions alone, that the field of political stances can take on a degree of autonomy of its own, since it is generated by strategies of differentiation in a field where to exist means to differ (1984b: 7, 1991d: 7). Thus the exact relationship of strategies to field positions seems unclear; perhaps Bourdieu sees that relationship varying from one field to another.
22 Bourdieu (1991a: 214) rejects the 'cynical view of the delegate as a conscious and organised usurper' as 'a very naive view, for all its apparent lucidity'. He stresses that the delegation process is generally perceived as a legitimate process and the 'legitimate imposture succeeds only because the usurper is not a cynical calculator who consciously deceives the people, but someone who in all good faith takes himself to be something that he is not'.
23 The dominant role of the French state in Bourdieu's analysis of politics undoubtedly reflects the particular type of state formation in France, reflecting a long national tradition of a highly centralised state with its origins extending back to the old regime. Yet it also stands in tension with the social constructionist orientation of his other work that stresses the micro-level of human agency, Bourdieu aims to incorporate and transcend micro and macro-levels of analysis in his sociology. Yet this part of his political sociology is decidedly more macro in orientation.
References


Bourdieu's political sociology