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Andrew Sayer, 'What Are You Worth? Recognition, Valuation and Moral Economy, published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YN, UK, at <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Sayer-What-Are-You-Worth.pdf>

Publication Details

This web page was last revised on 5th December 2003; the paper was previously published at <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc069as.html> in 2001

What Are You Worth? Recognition, Valuation and Moral Economy

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Paper presented to the British Sociological Association annual conference, Manchester, April 2001

(placed on www: 09 May, 2001)

"This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect, persons of poor and mean condition, . . . is . . . the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments." (A. Smith, 1759) (1)

Introduction: ambivalence/unease about class

Class is an embarrassing topic. 'What class are you?' or 'What class are they?' are not easy questions, particularly if the person asked ponders the implications of their answers, or if the questioner is of a different class from the person being asked, and especially if there are others of different classes present who can hear the answer. They can be unsettling because they could be taken to imply further unsettling questions, such as: What are you worth? and Do you think you're worth more/less than others? Even if we want to say that class has nothing to do with worth, that only makes the existence of class inequalities more troubling. What is at stake is the disjunction between economic valuation and ethical valuation.

Tutors who try to get new undergraduates to talk about class face familiar responses of unease and evasion. This happens because, like it or not, class raises issues of the relative worth of individuals, and about differences between how people are valued economically, and



how they are valued ethically (2). As the students gain more experience of sociology they may gradually lose this unease as they learn to objectivise class and disassociate it from their sense of themselves in relation to others, indeed learning to become a sociologist can seem like a process of learning to bracket out these concerns. While experienced sociologists might put the novices' unease down to naivety about sociology, and feel superior about their own ability to confront class dispassionately (3), I would suggest there is something to be said for inverting that valuation: while the beginning students have not yet unlearned their very justifiable sense (albeit a scarcely articulated sense) of the moral problems of class, sociologists have unlearned them and become de-sensitised to them.

Recent research on class reveals that, notwithstanding the desertion of class in some parts of the social sciences, class continues to figure centrally in people's lives, especially for those who lack the privilege to be able to ignore it. It is a central theme in the interviews conducted in France by Pierre Bourdieu and associates published in La Misere du Monde/The Weight of the World (1999). It is central to the young working class women studied by Beverley Skeggs in North-West England (Skeggs, 1997), and to the working class, mainly unemployed people in South Yorkshire studied by Simon Charlesworth (2000). In their recent study of class identification in North-West England, Mike Savage, Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst (2000) encountered a palpable unease and defensiveness among respondents about their own class identity; while many were willing to situate others in terms of class, [others, that is, who were not present to witness how they were being classed] and sometimes to locate their own social origins in these ways, they were in varying degrees evasive, ambivalent and defensive about their own current class.

All these studies, and others, show that class remains a highly charged issue because of the associations of injustice and moral evaluation. As Savage et al put it " . . . they [their interviewees] know that class is not an innocent descriptive term but is a loaded moral signifier." Moreover, class comes across as a matter of concern to people not so much in terms of inequalities in material resources, but as a source of stigma. In other words, the class politics of recognition may be more of an issue than the class politics of the distribution of income. This double basis to the politics of class is reflected in the different meanings of 'la misere' in French, pointed out by the translator of Bourdieu's La Misere du Monde, referring to " . . . both *poverty* in economic but also in spiritual and indeed moral terms, and also *misery*, that is the suffering, unhappiness, and misfortunes of the collectivity as well as the individual." (Bourdieu, 1999, p. viii).

Yet while lay people sense the moral implications of class, one wonders how many sociologists do. As Honneth notes, contemporary sociology has difficulty registering struggles arising from the moral experience of disrespect and tends to transform these into categories of interest (such as 'cultural capital' and 'symbolic profit') within a basically Hobbesian model of social conflict (Honneth, 1995, p. 163). It is not just that class has become 'non-grata', as Michele Barrett famously remarked, but that even where it is acknowledged still to be important it is studied in terms which miss much of its experiential significance (Barrett and Phillips, 1992). However, there are some striking recent exceptions to this, such as the recent studies mentioned above, which serve to make these oversights more noticeable.

In this paper I want to speculate on the reasons for this unease and ambivalence about class, arguing that it is a reasonable rather than a mysterious response, and that it is sociologists' blase amoralism which is at fault. I shall then go on to relate these responses to questions of recognition, and to the relations between economic evaluation and ethical evaluation, and between worth and status. Given the importance of Bourdieu's work in interpreting the divisions of the social field and how they are lived, I shall comment on his work, contrasting his recently translated La Misere du Monde (Bourdieu et al, 1999), which is highly attentive to 'moral experience', to his earlier work where it was hidden by his use of categories of interest.

In order to be able to appreciate the moral experience of class it is necessary to appreciate in what respects class is different from other forms of inequality and difference such as gender, ethnicity, as these may account for the differences in lay persons' responses to it. I also believe it helps to consider the normative issues that class raises, both because actors themselves tend to think about class normatively, indeed sometimes in ways that resemble



those of moral philosophy. I shall therefore begin with some remarks concerning these two matters.

First Preliminary: In what respects is class different from gender, ethnicity, etc.,? (4)

Class and gender differences - and often ethnic differences too - are closely associated with one another - so much so that the subjective experiences of these tend to be inseparable. However, class and gender are different kinds of inequality arising from radically different kinds of process. For the purpose of this paper I shall follow Diane Coole (1996) in addressing class in the following sense - as a type of 'structured economic inequality which often correlates with cultural differences in values, perspectives, practices and self-identity but which is not primarily produced by cultural distinctions (Coole, 1996, p17), a definition which I take to be compatible with Bourdieu's sense of 'class'. As Coole argues, classes are not primarily life-forms requesting recognition as legitimate, (though demands for recognition of some aspects of particular class cultures might be made); they are not differences to be celebrated; they cannot be reduced to their performances; they cannot be subverted by parody; and, unlike gender, class "does not need denaturalizing since everyone agrees it is conventional." (p.23)

Class differences do not derive primarily from misrecognition, but from the often unintended effects of the pursuit of individual interests and 'the invisible hand'. The resulting continual shifts in employment and profits characteristic of capitalism, can and often do operate regardless of identities and recognition. (5) Whether people find, retain or lose their jobs as wage-labourers depends on whether there is a market demand for whatever commodities - material or non-material - they produce. When consumers switch from buying typewriters to wordprocessors the fortunes of the respective workers producing those goods are likely to diverge, as jobs are lost in the former sector and added in the latter. Further, some new people may be able to become capitalists in the expanding sector. However, the resulting inequalities are not the result of discrimination by consumers according to the identities of the workers producing those goods, for they are likely to be ignorant of or indifferent to their identities. Such class inequalities - which are a normal part of capitalism - then are indifferent to identity. (6)

Things are utterly different, where gender or ethnicity are concerned, for here, the root cause of inequalities are cultural, identity-sensitive and identity-constructing mechanisms/discourses of sexism, racism, (and similarly, homophobia, with respect to sexuality). With respect to their *gender* men and women experience what we might call first-order moral judgements and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding them as men and women - e.g. as 'good' girls or boys, and mothers and fathers, and different standards (i.e. double standards) are a prime constitutive force in the (re)production of gender differences and relations. (They are incidentally residual pre-modern forms of identity insofar as "one's standing in society and one's status as a moral and political agent were fused" (Honneth translator, p.xiv))

With respect to their *class*, things are different because while their class position may influence (distort) others' judgements of them (see below), people do not normally belong to a certain class primarily because of others' judgements of them. People are born into an economic class or have it thrust upon them through operations of market mechanisms which are largely indifferent to their moral qualities or identity, and insofar as they are responsible for any upward or downward social mobility this is mostly a movement between class positions which arise largely for other reasons. For example, if you produce typewriters and people stop buying them, you are likely to become unemployed, regardless of your identity or moral standing. In this case moral judgements have an indirect and reflective rather than productive relationship to class, though they may also help to reinforce class differences and keep people in their place.

Although class is normally produced regardless of identity, it is of course, like gender, hugely important for *forming* subjective identities and the habitus. Both habitus and the social field are deeply classed - and we would add - gendered, affecting us at a largely pre-discursive level which is evident in our comportment and tastes and pre-reflective feelings and responses. As Annette Kuhn puts it, "Class is something beneath your clothes, under your



skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (Kuhn, 1995; see also Charlesworth, 2000). Class habitus can affect the allocation of individuals to different class positions, but these are not necessary for the production of the divisions of social class or the division of labour. Thus while who gets what kind of job is very sensitive to habitus, the rise of capitalist classes and the deepening of the division of labour which, along with gender, structure the social field have quite different origins.

No matter how deeply class and gender are etched into us as dispositions or how deeply the subjective experience of class and gender are intertwined - so that it is scarcely possible to think about one in terms which are neutral with respect to the other - the origins or causes of class and gender differences are radically different. The subjective experience of class is, in the first instance an effect, not a cause or necessary condition of the production of class in capitalism, whereas the subjective experience and identities are necessarily constitutive of gender. So while class and gender seem to co-exist everywhere, the fact that no-one has ever managed to demonstrate why gender could not exist in a classless society or class in a non-gendered society demonstrates the contingent nature of their ubiquitous association (Sayer, 2000).

At the same time, normative arguments about economic (re)distribution presuppose positions regarding recognition. Thus egalitarian arguments about economic distribution are based on a recognition of individuals as of equal worth at some level. The politics of distribution therefore presupposes a politics of recognition, though not just in terms of identity but also in terms of worth. Nevertheless, as we argued, class is not generally dependent on recognition.

Second Preliminary: Normative and Positive Standpoints

In coming to this topic I have been influenced by the work of Adam Smith, particularly his Theory of the Moral Sentiments (1757), not only in its subject matter but in the type of discourse and its implied relationship to its audience. (7) Smith was not an egalitarian. He explicitly accepted the existence of different classes as legitimate, although he did have moral objections to the treatment of the labouring classes or 'orders' (1776) and to the way in which economic inequalities encouraged vanity and distorted moral judgement, elevating appearances over worth. Regarding the type of discourse, in retrospect many would regard his work as pre-social scientific because it intermixes positive analysis and normative commentary to the point where it is difficult to distinguish them. This would seem to imply a relationship between author and reader which is different from that of modern social science; readers are addressed not only as people who are interested in and possibly knowledgeable about how the social world is, but who are concerned with what constitutes virtue, and moral social order, indeed with how to live and how to order society. For Smith, it would seem, to anticipate Marx, the point of his moral philosophy was indeed to change the world, not merely describe it.

While it is common to regard this intermixing of normative and positive as antithetical to social science, I do not. Normative views do not *necessarily* distort positive interpretations, and of course they highlight what might be significant about the world to us, and many apparently descriptive concepts - such as 'development' - are simultaneously evaluative. Over the last 150 years, as a result of the attempt to expel values from science, an extraordinary imbalance has arisen between the sophistication of our positive knowledge and the embarrassingly ill-thought out nature of our normative views. I believe we should pay attention to what has been lost in this de-valuation of science, the flip-side of which has been a de-rationalisation of values. I shall therefore ignore the taboo on intermixing normative and positive discourse.

I also believe that lay moral sentiments often resemble those of philosophical positions on ethics, or rather the latter articulate, formalise, follow through and evaluate the former. Furthermore, over recent centuries there have been strong feedbacks between lay views and social developments on the one hand and developments in moral and political philosophy on the other, just as there are between lay and social scientific concepts of class. Thus the development of both egalitarianism in both lay and academic thought is a joint product of both lay political and philosophical argument and struggle. Normative thinking - again in lay as well as academic thought - about how we should treat others, about worth, about how we should live, can of course be exceedingly complex, but this is not necessarily a sign of confusion. My



hunch is that the complexity of lay ambivalence about class reflects the complexity of the moral issues at stake. On the other hand, it would be naive to rule out the possibility of confusion and misconception. (8)

Why is class so difficult to talk about?

I would like to venture an explanation for the commonly observed, unease, ambivalence and defensiveness about class, by highlighting some of the key moral and political issues posed by class. I shall argue that we need to probe further into the moral significance of class for people if we are to understand their embarrassment and ambivalence about it.

My explanation is simple, consisting of three kinds of argument, the first concerned with the injustice of class, the second with its distorting effect on moral sentiments, and the third with the injuries caused by class.

1. Defensiveness in response to the injustice of class.

There is a widespread sense in lay thought - sometimes articulated, but often only subconsciously felt - that class differences are at least in part unjust, insofar as individuals' position and life chances are a matter of luck, according to the accident of birth. Insofar as actors recognize this injustice - and it is hard for them not to - it prompts mixtures of guilt, resentment and defensiveness, and the balance of these feelings and the ways of handling them are likely to vary according to class position.

Nevertheless, despite the major role of luck, individuals' subsequent fortunes might also be influenced by their own efforts and merits, and so, unsurprisingly, the better off and the upwardly mobile are likely to appeal to these as a defence against any (usually unspoken) accusations of being beneficiaries of luck within an unfair game. Characteristically, the defensiveness takes the form of individuals making exceptions for themselves, acknowledging that while parental class position is a matter of luck, in their own case, and perhaps that of other similar people, their current adult position is a consequence of hard work and talent, and hence justifiable because deserved. In the case of the upwardly mobile, it may even take the form of a heroic narrative in which the individual overcomes the injustice of a lowly class position and moves upwards by her own efforts.

It is nevertheless only a partial defence of class inequalities, as it does not discount that luck is still also an influence on class and life chances, and does not deny altogether that these last into adulthood. Some people may try to defend class differences as wholly the product of merit, but it is striking - and pleasing! - to see no such defence in the responses reported by Savage et al. Their unease about class seems to acknowledge and reflect its injustice. Insofar as people evidently sense that luck and injustice characterise class, they find themselves wanting both to acknowledge its unfairness as a social structure and wanting to exempt themselves from complicity in it or from having gained unfair advantage due to it, indeed to claim credit for having apparently overcome it. Hence their reluctance to class themselves is not usually coupled with a denial of the existence of class or of its arbitrariness with respect to the fortunes of others. They are not saying they are good people because they are middle class, but they have made it into the middle class because they are worthy people, even though not all middle class people are, and even though making it into the middle classes is not the only possible fate of the meritorious and worthy. In either case, there seems to be an implicit recognition that class is problematic. They are resisting not so much the fact of class as its propriety (9).

There are further reasons why the appeal to desert is difficult and hence why those who make it do so in rather defensive ways. These are articulated in the corresponding literature on equality in moral philosophy. Here it is common to argue that if talents are innate they are clearly undeserved and therefore warrant no special reward; or, if they are acquired, their acquisition owes much to whether conditions were favourable in early life, which of course depends much on class and gender. Even the motivation and the amount of effort people put into their activities may be a product of class and gender background; where there are good prospects (though not too easily gainable) motivation will be encouraged, where there are none, it will not. Although these are somewhat sophisticated arguments against simple justifications of class position in terms of desert, I would suggest that there can sometimes be



glimmers of awareness of them in lay thought, and these too are likely to prompt defensiveness.

Not all reactions to class inequalities are so generous. While natal class is a matter of luck, the poor are typically expected to attempt to strive to escape from their unfortunate position. This is evident in the long history of discourses which distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor, albeit in increasingly euphemized ways, as in recent 'workfare' discourse. On the one hand these recognise the arbitrariness and unfairness of class, but only for those who supposedly deserve help, while treating class inequalities as justified for those who are undeserving. Meanwhile, affluent people who live off the labour of others are rarely seen as undeserving.

2. Class and the distortion of moral sentiments

The second source of defensiveness has to do with the problem identified by Adam Smith, that moral sentiments about others can easily be corrupted or distorted by differences in wealth. This distortion results in double standards, so that the same behaviour is judged more favourably when it involves the rich than when it involves the poor. (10) For example, attitudes to young men being drunk and disorderly depend very much on their class.

Beverly Skeggs' work on young working class women and their struggle for respectability shows their often painful awareness of being judged more severely than middle class women (see also Reay, 1999). The search for respectability is a game which is rigged so that they will usually lose. As is also evident from the personal narratives in the transcripts in Bourdieu et al's *The Weight of the World*, resentment about this stigmatisation is often stronger than resentment about lack of material wealth.

Thus, moral stigma is frequently attached to those who are worst off in class terms, and correspondingly, a moral privilege is attached to high class. Bourdieu calls this phenomenon, which often responds primarily to superficial appearances, 'class racism'. These corrupted moral sentiments work against the idea that class is arbitrary and unjust, providing class inequalities with a spurious justification. Whereas, according to the critique of class as an injustice, being working class or in the class of the unemployed, has little or nothing to do with desert or virtue, the corruption of moral sentiments by wealth insinuates that it does. (11) Of course, these class-distorted moral sentiments are themselves unjust.

Although the use of double standards in moral judgements of the behaviour of people in different classes is common, it is also often opposed and rejected, and indeed refusals of such distortions of moral sentiments and judgements are a common part of lay discourses of class. The contestation, as well as the deployment, of such judgements, are part of the struggles of the social field. However, as we shall see, these rejections can sometimes have the counterproductive effect of concealing rather than challenging the injustice of class just noted. Thus a common response, evident in some of Savage et al's interviewees' comments is simply to refuse such evaluations and assert that 'we are as good as them'. While this seems a confident and proper egalitarian response, it can sometimes also have quite perverse effects which legitimise or hide inequality because an oppressed person who is nevertheless confident of her own worth may use this to argue that class doesn't matter - 'it's what you're like as a person that matters, not class' - thereby belittling the effects of class.

Similarly, answers like 'I don't believe in class', given by new sociology undergraduates when embarrassed by being asked about class are instructive. Even when the tutor says 'I'm not asking you whether you think it's a good or bad thing, I'm asking you whether it exists and makes a difference', the answers often continue to be evasive and blur the distinction between the positive and the normative; 'I believe what matters is who you are, not what your parents did or what school you went to' is a refrain I've heard from such students. (Again there is a nice ambiguity in this since it both discounts class while allowing those with class advantages to take credit for what is actually undeserved.) Equally, relativist responses - everyone is different but equal - also have the conservative effect of endorsing current inequalities.

What is going on here? The embarrassment and evasion indicate a strong moral sentiment/belief that class differences are illegitimate, being based largely on luck, rather than



worth or merit. The lucky may realise that they are lucky and not want to be seen as claiming superiority because of this, while the unlucky/poor will quite reasonably resist any conclusion that they deserve their disadvantages. Rather than dismiss such sentiments as missing the sociological point, and as an ideology which serves to obscure class, I think they should be taken seriously - both sympathetically and critically.

By the same token, the advantaged may use the same appeal to moral equality to patronise the disadvantaged while distracting attention from their own undeserved class advantage, for example arguing that they don't think of themselves as morally superior while seeing no problem with inequalities in economic, cultural and social capital - the latter are presumably alright because they don't make you a better or worse person. (12) In Conservative politics, we frequently encounter a hypocritical coupling of class-distorted moral judgements with assertions of moral equality, using the latter to deny that their own class privilege matters.

However, on the part of the disadvantaged and harshly-judged, we often find not simple rejections of such judgements but more ambivalent and painful reactions. As Skeggs' study shows particularly clearly, the distortion of moral sentiments according to class can also produce painful inner turmoil as a result of the opposing pulls of both wanting to refuse the perceived external judgements and their criteria and wanting to measure up to them - both to reject respectability and to be respectable. This tension is also evident in the interviews in The Weight of the World, and in Sennett and Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class (1973, p.25).

3. Injuries of class

This concerns a moral dilemma which can be not merely difficult but excruciating: If class position, or indeed gender, fundamentally affect peoples lives, disadvantaging and even injuring some while advantaging and empowering others, then they affect the kind of people individuals become. The injuries result both from the material lack and inequalities produced by processes of capitalist uneven development, and from the effects upon individuals and groups of the class racism or distortion of moral sentiments noted above. It is therefore unsurprising that the disadvantaged should lack self-respect, be aggressive, or that the rich should be arrogant and patronising. Though both liberal and radical egalitarianism often find it difficult to acknowledge, if class damages, then this implies that people themselves are damaged, often in ways which not only limit their potential but lead to anti-social behaviour. (13) If they are indeed damaged then we are faced with a dilemma - real or apparent. On the one hand, insofar as we recognize the undeserved nature of these injuries, we might want to excuse any problematic behaviours that result, and maintain that in principle the injured are worthy of equal moral respect, although this is understandably difficult to follow in practice. On the other hand, we cannot escape the negative judgement of their behaviour, for if it wasn't a problem then class could not be said to be damaging.

In response to this dilemma it is common for the behaviour of oppressed groups to be either pathologised or patronised: Walkerdine and Lucey, commenting on this dilemma in relation to working class families, write: "This attempt to rescue, to make working-class families 'equal but different', still denies oppression in a liberal endeavour to produce equality out of a misplaced pluralism." (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1987, p.7). Bourdieu (2000, p.75-6) talks about a similar oscillation regarding popular culture - "One cannot, in fact, without contradiction, describe (or denounce) the inhuman conditions of existence that are imposed on some, and at the same time credit those who suffer them with the real fulfilment of human potentialities . . ." This exposes the fundamental question facing any egalitarian philosophy: what kind of equality - or equality of what and in what terms? (Phillips, 1999).

Class pride

Although I have argued that evasiveness about class is understandable because of the normative implications of class, there are still some - seemingly fewer than before - who take pride in their class position. The possible normative grounds for such an attitude are again worth considering.

Pride in being working class implies very different normative grounds from pride in being middle or upper class. In the case of those who are proud to be working class, this has a rationale, in that they occupy the moral high ground as a consequence of their lack of any



undeserved advantage relative to others, and indeed they could claim to be owed a debt because of their disadvantage and social exclusion. They may also take pride in lacking the pretensions and affectations associated with insulation from the pressure of economic necessity. This is also of course why those who are born into the middle or upper classes are falsely consciousness [sic] if they imagine this is something to be proud of, for this is a result of an accident, not their efforts. Pride in being working class can also be problematic, if implies or invites an acceptance rather than a contestation of class.

There might however be class-specific cultural goods one feels fortunate to be associated with, and indeed feel proud of, if only by birth, but this doesn't justify your class position, for this is a matter of good fortune not a reflection on your moral worth. One might also ask whether the cultural forms are celebrated because they are good or because they are posh, or in the case of working class cultural forms because they are good, or because they are not posh. (It is tempting to consider whether inequalities prompt a corruption of the aesthetic as well as the moral sentiments.)

Bourdieu and the moral economy of class.

Bourdieu's use of economic concepts of capital - primarily cultural, social and symbolic, as well as economic - for understanding the distinctions, inequalities and struggles of the social field, is brilliantly illuminating (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). But there are also problems with this interest-based and habitus-based view of inequalities.

Firstly, this approach obscures the moral dimension of these struggles. While Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodied and unarticulated character of the processes generating distinction and struggle is important and compelling, it is overstated if, as often seems to be case in his work - at least until recently, the role of actors' moral sentiments and judgements is either ignored or reduced to an emanation of their habitus. (14) The struggles of the social field that form the centrepiece of Bourdieu's best-known work, Distinction, are examined through economic categories which inevitably have the effect of treating matters which are at least partly to do with recognition and how it is granted or withheld, as if they were to do with distribution - of capital and (symbolic) profits (Honneth, 1986). Where neoclassical economists invoke preferences to explain behaviour, Bourdieu invokes habitus; in neither case do considered moral choices and judgements find a place. While the mechanisms which produce class inequalities are indeed largely ones of identity-indifferent economic distribution, the inter-subjective responses to relative class position and their associated habituses are a matter of recognition, involving precisely the kind of corruption of moral sentiments that Smith identified.

Secondly, Bourdieu not only uses economic categories of distribution where there is still a place for categories of recognition, but categories which conflate rather than distinguish use-value from exchange-value. In this respect his concepts resemble those of neoclassical economics rather than those of classical political economy, Use-value refers to the specific qualities which goods have which are useful, such as the nutritious quality of food or the entertaining quality of a film. Hence differences in use-values are qualitative. Exchange-value, by contrast, refers to how much any particular good can be exchanged for a certain amount of another. While exchange-value tends to vary positively with use-value, so that people are likely to be willing to pay more for something that is more useful than something which is not, this is not necessarily the case, and lots of indispensable, very valuable things, like water, have lower exchange-value than quite dispensable things, like gold. When Bourdieu uses concepts like social and cultural capital, he conflates their use-value or worth, with their exchange-value; thus he does not distinguish between the use-value indicated by an educational qualification such as a good examination pass in mathematics - the use-value of being able to do mathematics - and the advantages vis-a-vis others that may bring in terms of status, and earning power. In noting how this and other forms of capital yield profits in terms of advantages to their holders, he appears, like one of Oscar Wilde's characters, to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. One of the key points about the struggles of the social field is that they are about the difference between these. Hence they are about *both* recognition and distribution, about the difference between ethical evaluation and economic valuation. They are not only about the relative rates of exchange of different forms of capital,



but about the relative worth (use-value) of different kinds of good (*is that good art, good music, is that a qualification which shows real merit, etc.?* or are they merely posh). The struggles of the social field are also about whether these differences in use-value are appropriately valued in terms of exchange-value (does *x* *deserve* their status, their respect/disrespect, their wealth/poverty?).

While Bourdieu's Distinction does not make this vital distinction explicitly, the critical force of concepts like 'misrecognition' and 'symbolic domination' imply that the status of exchange-value of capital can indeed be unrelated to the worth of the goods with which they are identified, whether those goods be possessions or behavioural characteristics (virtues and vices). To misrecognise a social group is to value them wrongly, not in terms of price or status alone, but in terms of status or standing in relation to their moral and economic worth. Without a distinction between worth and status or price, or between use-value and exchange-value there is nothing to criticise in the inequalities and struggles of the social field, for they would amount to nothing more than a battle for power for its own sake, without any possibility of legitimisation or delegitimation of anything (Sayer, 1997). (15)

Thirdly, in discounting actors moral judgements - either by ignoring them or reducing them to emanations of their habitus and position in the social field - and by implicitly prioritising interest as the basis of social struggle, Bourdieu adopts a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than a hermeneutics of sympathy.

However, there are strong signs that Bourdieu has changed. Ironically the transcripts in The Weight of the World provide as good as any corrective to this cynical, interest-based approach, for they provide powerful illustrations of actors' moral judgements and objections to various social practices. Reading these accounts, one doesn't have to go to the opposite extreme of suspending all doubt or suspicion, to recognise within the accounts struggles to find a good, moral way of living; they depict moral careers. (16)

Of course these accounts are not products of pure reflection independent of habitus, nor are they independent of available discourses and narrative forms, but I would insist that they are to a significant extent consciously considered accounts, in fact one has the impression that many of the interviewees in The Weight of the World, churn through their moral evaluations of their own lives and those of others incessantly, indeed to the point of obsession. The accounts are not only about lack of capital of one form or another but about perceived - but not necessarily unjustified - disproportions between status and worth. They are not only about failure to achieve money and status but about disappointment over failure to realise aspirations and carry through commitments - that is projects which are valued in themselves, rather than instrumentally for what advantages they might bring them.

Given this burning sense of injustice among those who feel they have lived their lives morally but nevertheless lost, it is not surprising that those who are more fortunate are defensive about their class. The theoretical lesson here is that we should not allow a proper recognition of the embodied and unarticulated nature of many processes of social differentiation to obscure the fact that many struggles of the social field also involve active monitoring and evaluation of self and others in terms of justice and morality. Without this, the struggles of the social field become no more than groundless battles for power for its own sake, and in which actors' evaluations of themselves and one another can only be seen as ex post rationalisations - attempts to make a virtue out of necessity and luck. In moving beyond a crypto-normative hermeneutics of suspicion, Bourdieu's work has become more political, not less.

Finally, The Weight of the World relates the politics of recognition and distribution together - without conflating them, for it centres on *two* senses of poverty - not only economic, material inequalities but also 'positional suffering' (p.4), to do with misrecognition and (undeserved) low social standing. Moreover, while its treatment of recognition deals with recognition of 'identity', it also goes beyond this to recognition of worth, that is recognition which is conditional upon what people do rather than upon their 'identity'.

Just as assessments of use-value are plural, corresponding to the myriad of different, incommensurable goods, so valuations of virtues and vices are plural and incommensurable (Anderson, 1993; Van Staveren, 1999). But class differences are primarily to do with



inequalities on a single dimension - money and economic power. How much are you worth? is an objectionable kind of question because it implies that individual worth - which is something which requires an appreciation of a large range of different qualities relevant to different aspects of life - can be reduced to a crude, one-dimensional monetary measure. But then class tends to have that very effect. Class can help or hinder you regardless of your qualities, and it can also affect whether you are able to acquire them in the first place.

The struggles of the social field are neither purely about self-interest and power or purely about judgements of worth, but both of these. The corruption of moral sentiments involves an illegitimate slippage from economic valuation to moral evaluation. Actors - in differing proportions - both resist this corruption and reproduce it; they both resist the reduction of worth to economic valuation and reproduce that reduction when they judge others according to indicators of wealth, whether directly or via their habitus. Insofar as they do the latter, Bourdieu's earlier work - especially Distinction, which makes an equivalent reduction - appears reasonable. Insofar as they resist this reduction and evaluate others on moral grounds and assess use-values, virtues and vices, it is not.

One of the striking features of Savage et al's respondents' comments about class was their desire to be ordinary. There could be many reasons for this, but one possibility again has to do with egalitarianism. The desire to be ordinary could imply a refusal of status, of pretension and condescension - a wish to remove the barriers of status which impede one's relationships with others - so as to feel neither the embarrassment of being deferred to and resented nor or feeling inferior and deferential to others. One of the common mistakes critics of egalitarianism make is the idea that egalitarians want to suppress individuality and make everyone the same. Egalitarians have often responded to this by pointing out that an important justification of equality of recognition of moral standing and distributional equality is that it allows everyone equal opportunity to develop differences, and for abilities, virtues and vices to be valued appropriately, without distortion from morally-irrelevant differences of class, gender, race, sexuality or age. If only we could remove these morally-irrelevant differences we could be valued for what we are - different, distinctive individuals. This is why, pace Savage (2000, p.156), it makes perfect sense to want to "'flip' between being ordinary and distinctive at the same time?" As Tawney, argued, in order to respect each other for what we are, we must cease to respect each other for what we earn. (Similarly, regarding aesthetic judgements. the rise of the cultural omnivore and the levelling of status differences between elite and popular culture could be interpreted not as products of a desire to homogenize but a desire to judge particular cultural goods as good or bad regardless of their class associations.)

In Distinction, Bourdieu regards this desire as itself associated with a particular habitus and position in the social field, and as a hopeless illusion - in his wonderful metaphor, as a dream of social flying, escaping the gravitational pull of the social field (Bourdieu, 1984). The whole purpose of Distinction is to counter the view that judgements of taste are or can be disinterested and free of the influence of the habitus and the struggles of the social field. What Bourdieu does not tell us is whether he intends this as a claim about a contingent fact or about a necessary feature of any society. The former implies that as long as we happen to live in a society structured by class, gender and other divisions, their influence upon aesthetic judgements is inescapable, but that if those divisions were to be broken down, disinterested judgement could become possible. As I have argued elsewhere, the status of Bourdieu's work as a critique of the social order would be contradicted by the second position, that disinterested judgement is impossible whatever the structure of society. A critique (and Bourdieu's use of terms like 'symbolic violence', 'domination' and 'misrecognition' indicate that he is criticizing social practices themselves) implies that things could (and should) be different. If, on the other hand, things can only be this way, then like the movement of the planets, there is no point in railing against them (Sayer, 1999).

Conclusion

" . . . within academic sociology, the internal connection that often holds between the emergence of social movements and the moral experience of disrespect has, to a larger extent, been theoretically severed at the start. The motives for rebellion, protest, and resistance have been transformed into categories of 'interest', and these



interests are supposed to emerge from the objective inequalities in the distribution of material opportunities without ever being linked, in any way, to the everyday web of moral feelings." (p.161)

Class has been a relatively neglected and unfashionable topic of late, but its salience and influence remain, and recent work on the subjective experience of class brings home its moral significance, and shows how recognition is about more than identity and also concerns moral worth. As Honneth urges, rather than reduce the struggles of the social field around race, class and gender to matters of interest and habitus, we need to recognise their normative, particularly moral content. This is not to deny the importance of habitus and its subconscious influence over behaviour, including behaviour towards others in different parts of the social field, or of the pursuit of self-interest, but as Adam Smith argued, there is also a continual self- and mutual-monitoring of behaviour according to moral sentiments and norm, and this goes beyond habitus and interest.

Egalitarianism has spread significantly over the last two centuries, but it has done so unevenly, confronting some inequalities later than others - gender later than class, for example. When advances in combatting inequalities in recognition and distribution are made in one area they throw hitherto overlooked inequalities in other areas into greater relief. However, while egalitarianism with respect to gender, race and sexuality has made significant advances in recent decades, the older egalitarian opposition to class has faded in mainstream politics. Capitalism can accommodate the former advances but it cannot accommodate too much egalitarianism with respect to class, though it could function with less extreme class inequalities than currently exist. Thus it is no surprise that equal opportunities policies ignore class, even though there are no good normative grounds for ignoring it.

As a result of this uneven development, coupled with the powerful countertendency of self-interest, egalitarianism in popular thought co-exists uneasily with snobbery and 'class racism', racism itself, and sexism, ageism and homophobia. Some years ago, Billig and co-authors noted how even inegalitarians such as racists often qualify their racist opinions with liberal egalitarian remarks ('I believe in equality but . . .'), a tendency evident in some of the comments made by Bourdieu et al's interviewees, and one noted much earlier by Myrdal in The American Dilemma. Billig et al argue that these qualifications are not merely evidence of deference to middle class interviewers but of an ambivalence resulting from having to confront dilemmas (Billig et al (1988)). As I have shown, recognition of worth in the context of structural and undeserved inequalities is inevitably difficult and dilemmatic. Unease - rather than matter-of-factness - about class is perfectly reasonable. It is not surprising that people find class embarrassing, for embarrassment, and indeed shame, are appropriate responses to the immorality of class.

Notes

1. Those familiar with Smith will know that the omitted parts of this quotation are important for understanding Smith. However, delving into this would require a substantial digression which does not affect my argument.
2. While I shall use the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' interchangeably in this paper I am aware that they are sometimes distinguished, so that one refers to rationally-derived principles and the other derives either from a particular community or way of life or (less commonly today) from human nature. I do not need to distinguish them for the purposes of this paper and I wish to include all of these senses.
3. Such a view reveals a lack of reflexivity, for those who are currently professional sociologists belong by definition to the same class, even if they originate from different classes, so in talking class with one another they have less to be embarrassed about than have lay persons when asked about class by those from other classes.)
4. I refer here only to capitalist classes.
5. Sometimes distinctions made on the basis of gender or ethnicity may push individuals into a particular class; for example, gendered systems of inheritance may allow the eldest son to become a petty-capitalist through inheriting a family firm, while daughters are



disinherited and propelled into the labour market as wage-labour. However, the position of capitalist or wage-labourer can exist independently of these mechanisms and hence such practices are merely contingently related to capitalist classes, not necessary conditions of them.

6. This does not mean that these identity-neutral mechanisms have identity-neutral effects, since it is not unusual for workers of different gender and ethnicity to be segregated in different kinds of work, and in particular, for those who are subject to racism and/or sexism to be confined to those jobs most vulnerable to employment. Yet even then, if they lose their jobs because consumer tastes have changed, this is still a case of an identity-indifferent mechanism impacting on an identity-differentiated context, and it is the latter, not the former, which is responsible for the gendered or 'raced' outcome.
7. I refer here to the Adam Smith who wrote this as well as The Wealth of Nations, and who bears scarcely any relationship to the Adam Smith invented by neoliberals on the basis of a handful of quotations taken out of context from the latter.
8. Those who are alarmed by the (correct) implication that this assumes the existence of 'false consciousness' should note that it is a corollary of fallibilism, and if they believe in fallibilism, they should ask themselves how they can exempt lay beliefs from fallibility, but not their own.
9. Compare Parkin's classification of meaning systems of class (Parkin, 1973).
10. Of course we now know that there are other important sources of distortions of moral sentiments and judgements besides those of inequality of wealth. They concern gender, race, age, sexuality, cultural difference, style, beauty and ugliness, all of which are associated with double standards and undeserved kinds of recognition; what is acceptable in a man is unacceptable in a woman, what the beautiful can get away with the plain cannot, and so on. However, as we argued earlier, in these cases, the distorted moral sentiments are not merely reacting to inequalities caused by other means, as in the case of Smith's example of responses to inequalities of wealth, but are a prime cause of the inequalities in the first place.
11. Though it now seems perverse, Smith criticised this distortion while defending class on other grounds.
12. Sometimes egalitarianism often mutates into what might be called anti-meritocratic egalitarianism, or more simply relativism - one which is reluctant to acknowledge any kind of inequality as (un)deserved/(un)merited e.g. a reluctance to accept that some forms of knowledge or some explanations are better than others - 'they're just different' relativism, of course, is a conservative doctrine in the sense that if anything goes everything stays, as John Krige put it. So you get a spurious egalitarianism which allows the lowly to say the dominant are equal to them - when of course they are not - an egalitarianism that tolerates inequality, including unmerited inequality. Saying those above us are no better than us may be a way of challenging their authority or a way of justifying it or at least condoning it - it's OK because we're all equal really - they're just different, not unequal.
13. Equivalent failings also exist among the dominant - for example, arrogance and indifference to those less fortunate themselves.
14. Other features of Bourdieu's work, particularly its crypto-normativity - its reluctance to make explicit the grounds of its critique - reinforce these problems (Sayer, 1999). However, more explicit and moral-political forms of criticism are evident in his recent work, (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu et al, 1999).
15. That worth (moral or otherwise) and use-value are contested in no way compromises the distinction between value/worth/use-value and price/exchange-value/status, for while the former are contested in terms of their different qualities (skill and power in sport, ability to listen, understand and advise in counselling, ability to amuse in comedy, the know-how and skill of the surgeon) as opposed to the quantitative matter of how much money or social advantage vis-a-vis others the former bring.



16. As is evident in some of the racist comments made by poor white French people about their Algerian-origin neighbours, they also show how, tragically, those who have suffered both materially and in terms of status and stigmatisation, frequently try to salvage self-respect by using the same kinds of stigmatisation against those whom they deem to be below themselves. When they do this they actively reproduce the same kind of unwarranted moral disapproval from which they themselves suffer.

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