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Chapter 3: ‘ Bourdieu, ethics and practice’.

Andrew Sayer, February 2009, in press.

Introduction

In adopting social science’s spectator’s view of society, together with its prioritising of positive description and explanation and its wariness of normativity, it is easy to overlook the fact that life is normative; we are evaluative beings – beings whose relation to the world is one of concern. We not only act and make sense of things but continually evaluate how things we care about - including our own well-being - are faring, and often wonder what to do for the best. Perhaps most importantly, we continually assess how we and others are being treated; even though we may be predominantly self-absorbed, we often act towards others, or at least certain others, with regard to their well-being, for example, showing them respect (Filonowicz, 2008; Smith, 1759). Social life would be unimaginable without at least some such behaviour. Moral – and immoral - sentiments such as compassion, shame, resentment at injustice, guilt and contempt, can loom large in people’s lives, and they are frequently prompted by inequalities and domination. But as I shall argue, these are not merely ‘feelings’ or ‘affect’, but assessments of the import of certain social circumstances. To ignore the *import* that things – particularly social interactions - may have for people is to produce a bland, alienated account of social life.

Bourdieu has greatly deepened our understanding of the soft forms of domination and oppression, naming and analysing processes that had hitherto eluded identification. In his more explicitly political speeches and other short articles his anger at social injustice is clear (Bourdieu, 2008). Yet, in his academic work, with one significant exception, individuals are represented not so much as having ethical and political concerns but as having a mastery of certain kinds of practical action which derive from living within the particular social relations and practices available to them in their part of the social field. They cope and compete, but one doesn't get much impression of their ethical and political assessments of their situation. The exception is *The Weight of the World (La Misère du Monde)* and it is significant because it consists mainly of people speaking for themselves rather than Bourdieu's renderings of their situation (Bourdieu et, 1999). While he provides many resources for understanding aesthetic valuations in everyday experience, most famously in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), he says little about people's ethical values and valuations. At best these things might be deemed implicit. Although his concepts of habitus and the logic of practice have certain affinities with a broadly Aristotelian approach to virtue ethics, he stops short of developing such a connection. His approach includes both features which could assist in the understanding of this crucial dimension of life, and features which obstruct it. I shall argue that to unlock the potential of the former, we must alter some of the latter.

I argue that the ethical dimension of social life needs to be taken more seriously in social science, but to understand this dimension we need: (1) a modified concept of habitus that allows room for individual reflexivity and includes ethical dispositions; (2) a focus on emotions as intelligent responses to objective circumstances and as indicators of well-being; (3) a broader understanding of normativity that avoids reducing it to either the pursuit of self-interest and various forms of capital or outworkings of the habitus; and (4) an acknowledgement of human vulnerability and our relationship to the world of concern. A more Aristotelian approach can help in several respects here.

1. The habitus, reflexivity, and ethical dispositions

Most critics of Bourdieu have targeted their fire on the concept of habitus, arguing that it is too deterministic and ignores individual reflexivity and the capacity to behave in ways that are not necessarily accommodative to the dominant social relations or discourses within which they are located (e.g. Archer, 2007). While I partly agree with the critics, I, like Nicos Mouzelis, wish to argue that we still need something like the concept of habitus, albeit a modified version of it (Sayer, 2005; Mouzelis, 2008).

The processes by which we develop a habitus range from a kind of osmosis or unconscious adaptation through to a more conscious process of learning how to do things so that we can do them without thinking. Bourdieu's accounts mostly suggest the former, yet his favourite example of the responses of the competent tennis player actually suggests the latter model. The player can do remarkably skilful things without thinking much about the details of what she is doing, through 'protension' rather than calculation. No two games are the same so it requires attentiveness, responsiveness, strategizing and creativity. Bourdieu often responds to critics by reminding them of the creative nature of the habitus, but he consistently understates the role of reflection and reason both in the acquisition of its constitutive dispositions and in their mobilisation in particular contexts, and more generally in influencing

action. The tennis player has to monitor her practice and concentrate in order to get her strokes right so that she can come to do them not only automatically but successfully, and in a particular game she can consciously choose different strategies. Bourdieu does occasionally acknowledge more conscious reasoning, but only to quickly discount it or reduce it to strategic calculation: “It is, of course, never ruled out that the responses of the habitus may be accompanied by a strategic calculation tending to perform in a conscious mode the operation that the habitus performs quite differently . . .” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53; see also Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu helps counter the kind of sociology which gives an inflated role to norms, making it appear that actors just follow these, either because they have internalised them or because they fear the consequences of not following them. He argues that insofar as they internalise them they do so through practice, through repeatedly having to act within specific kinds of social relation and context so that they acquire the appropriate dispositions, and a feel for the game. Norms may therefore be little more than abstract formalisations of valued dispositions that are largely acquired through practice, and may have little force in their own right.

Margaret Archer is highly critical of the concept of habitus, arguing that it ignores the way in which the constraining and enabling effects of social contexts on individuals are mediated by their own deliberations. Individuals’ internal conversations mediate ‘the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes.’ (Archer, 2007; p. 5). In other words, the effects of discourses and circumstances will depend on *how* they are interpreted, and this in turn depends upon how individuals relate them to their own subjectively defined concerns. Archer’s empirical research on people’s internal conversations provides plenty of evidence to support this (Archer, 2003; 2007). Although Bourdieu does not acknowledge it, the interviews in *The Weight of the World* show individuals discussing how, through their internal conversations, they have made sense of their experiences and responded to circumstances (Bourdieu et al, 1999). However, we need to steer a middle course here that still acknowledges the influence of the habitus. For example, the middle class child may reflect on the things that are expected of her and on the things that her elders have done and come to see that she too can achieve them, but she is also likely to have a sense of entitlement acquired partly through osmosis, through simply being accustomed to having easy access to many of the goods society has to offer. It may simply not occur to her that she might become a cleaner, because such outcomes are not part of her practical experience.¹ Some social influences get beneath our radar, shaping our dispositions and responses without our even noticing them, while others are mediated in a more conscious way.

It is surprising that Bourdieu largely ignores the ethical dimension of the habitus – the fact that it includes ethical dispositions - or in philosophical terminology, virtues and vices - such as a disposition of respectfulness or selfishness. For example, through repetition of certain actions, and through the various kinds of encouragement or discouragement our actions prompt in others within those practices, we might develop a respectful disposition. Again, bearing in mind our comments about lay reflexivity, people may act ethically or unethically on the basis of conscious deliberation as well as spontaneously, without thinking; or sometimes semi-consciously, being just vaguely aware of what they’re doing. We need to acknowledge the whole range. Ethical dispositions, once acquired, have some inertia, but their strength depends on

¹ She might get a temporary summer job as a cleaner as a student, but in the knowledge that it is exceptional and temporary.

the frequency with which they are activated, as well as on our reflexive monitoring of them. Change in such dispositions, so that individuals become more, less or differently ethical, tends to be gradual and again to require practice. For example, in the negative direction, people may find that engaging in minor immoral acts makes the transition to major ones less difficult, though they may realise, usually too late, that they have crossed a moral boundary (Glover, 2001 p.35).²

An Aristotelian approach offers us an understanding of the ethical dimension which embraces both habituation and reflection. People develop embodied dispositions and characters through acting within particular kinds of social relation and context, which then recursively influence their actions: “by being habituated to despise things that are fearful and to stand our ground against them we become brave, and it is when we have become so that we shall be most able to stand our ground against them.” (Nicomachean Ethics, II.3). Aristotle therefore recognised the importance of moral education – whether through teaching or experience, good or bad – in forming such dispositions. While Bourdieu’s sociological account of practice and the development of the habitus has many Aristotelian echoes, Aristotle left more room for reflexivity, responsibility and choice, for there can usually be different responses to any given context. Thus, there is nothing automatic about the development of virtues: people could act in a courageous or cowardly way in response to the same situation, “for we are ourselves somehow part-causes of our states of character.” (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.6).³ Individuals still have some responsibility for how they respond to a given situation. On this view, virtue is therefore more than habit; although the courageous or generous person is one who has developed those dispositions through practice, they still choose to act courageously or generously where appropriate and know why it is appropriate (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 62). In our everyday lives we hold each other responsible for our actions, and assume that we have at least some room for choice. We rarely accept purely sociological explanations of the failure of others to honour promises and responsibilities: a student who blamed her failure to do her essay on her habitus would get short shrift, even from a tutor sympathetic to Bourdieu. This theory-practice contradiction, common not only Bourdieu but in much other sociological writing, illustrates the absurdity of denying everyday lay reflexivity and the way it is presupposed in social interaction. However, we do not have to go to the other extreme of rejecting the concept of habitus, as Archer seeks to do.

Perhaps even Aristotle’s account is a little too rationalistic, and underestimates the way in which we can *also* have ‘unprincipled virtues’, that is, a tendency to act in a reasonable, moral, way, without basing our actions on conscious, rational deliberation and hence without being able to articulate why they are reasonable or moral. Nomy Arpaly provides some interesting reflections on this phenomenon (Arpaly, 2003). One of her examples is from Mark Twain’s novel *Huckleberry Finn*, in which Huckleberry gets to know Jim, an escaped slave. As a product of his time – a time when slavery was not seen as unethical - Huckleberry sincerely believes that the morally proper thing to do is turn Jim over to the authorities. But while he intends to do this, when the opportunity arises, he finds he just cannot do it, and afterwards he feels bad about his moral failings in not turning him in. It seems that in getting to know Jim, he had come to respect him, and to realize that he is a fully-fledged human being, so that at a semi-conscious level returning him to slavery didn’t seem right. Arpaly argues that this divergence between action and conscious reasons (*‘akrasia’*, as philosophers term

² This tendency is taken advantage of in military training: for example, novice soldiers are made to alter their ethical disposition towards violence through bayonet practice.

³ Actually I think Aristotle overestimated the extent to which people are likely to respond to the same situation in different ways, but he is surely right to refuse a wholly deterministic account.

it) is not necessarily irrational but a form of rational behaviour which the actor had not been able to articulate and justify at a discursive level. As Bourdieu himself put it:

“Agents may engage in reasonable forms of behaviour without being rational; they may engage in behaviors one can explain, as the classical philosophers would say, with the hypothesis of rationality, without their behaviour having reason as its principle.” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 76).

Many of our actions are not based upon decisions resulting from systematic deliberation, such as working through a list of pros and cons for some action.⁴ Sometimes we intermittently muse on a problem over a long period without clearly resolving it, and eventually ‘find ourselves acting’ in a way which decides the issue, perhaps ending a relationship, or volunteering to take on an onerous job. Such actions are not purely accidental and arbitrary; the semi-conscious or distracted musings may have changed the balance of our evaluations and priorities. Whether we later come to view them as rational or mistaken depends less on whether we arrived at them by a process of logical deliberation than on the appropriateness of the actions that followed. As Archer acknowledges, our internal conversations may vary from focused and coherent deliberation to fragmented and fleeting musings.

Embodied habits of thought and action can remain important even where we change our minds through deliberating on some issue. Thus if people come to see that something they have believed is wrong through encountering a convincing argument and decide that they should now act differently, this in itself is unlikely to be sufficient to change their ways of thinking and acting completely. For example, even if a white racist comes to renounce her racism on the basis of argument, she may still find herself unintentionally making racist assumptions in everyday life – assuming that the new doctor will be white, that a black child cannot be academically gifted, and so on. Having become consciously and sincerely anti-racist she may feel ashamed about the persistence of these unreformed reflexes, but it can take many years of practice and reflection to re-shape these completely. The process involves not just acknowledging errors of thought and action, but becoming a different person with different embodied habits of thought. Although these examples seem to fit with a Bourdieusian approach, they do involve at least some reflection and deliberation.

Iris Murdoch makes a convergent point, and one which again might incline us to modify, rather than reject Bourdieu’s approach (Murdoch, 1970). She argues that modern philosophy has mistakenly equated normativity with free choice and the empty free will that steps back from, or out of the flow of practice, suspending emotions, abstracting from concrete matters, and deciding how to act purely on the basis of general principles (see also Filonowicz, 2008). Rather, we should understand lay normativity as embedded in the flow of practice and concrete experience, in which we continually monitor and evaluate things, partly subconsciously through our emotional responses, and partly consciously through reflection, whether this involves ephemeral musings or focused deliberation. Although we do much on automatic, we do so with some degree of attentiveness, often noticing failures of things to work out as hoped, feeling good or bad about them in various ways, and it is through these repeated minor evaluations that we confirm or gradually shift our moral inclinations.

“If we ignore the prior work of attention and notice only the emptiness of the moment of choice we are likely to identify freedom with the outward movement [i.e. observable action] since there is nothing else to identify with.

⁴ As Arpaly notes, even where we do deliberate on something, such as where to go for our holidays, we don’t necessarily decide to deliberate on it on the basis of some prior deliberation; it may just ‘occur’ to us to do so.

But if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial.” (Murdoch, 1970, p.36)

Hence:

“Moral change and moral achievements are slow; we are not free in the sense of being able suddenly to alter ourselves since we cannot suddenly alter what we can see and ergo what we desire and are compelled by. In a way, explicit choice seems now less important: less decisive (since much of ‘decision’ lies elsewhere) and less obviously something to be ‘cultivated.’” (Ibid, p.38)

Here, ethical being is rooted in ongoing, often mundane practice, and the feel for how the game is going, including reflections on how we and the things we care about are faring. I suggest that this interpretation should be acceptable to followers of both Bourdieu and Archer.

Given that ethical behaviour can either challenge or confirm existing social arrangements, we need also to address the relation between habitus and habitat and the possible sources of resistance. Bourdieu’s accounts of the development of the habitus seem to imply that whatever the pressures and opportunities facing us in early life, we adapt to them, so that there is a near-perfect fit (or ‘ontological complicity’) between habitus and habitat. Apparently, dissonance can only arise either when we move to a different part of the social field with different influences that do not match those of our habitus, or else as a result of politicisation from some external influence which enables us to think and act differently. But even in early life, we are not indifferent to the processes which shape us, for we can only be shaped in consistent ways if we have certain physiological and psychological capacities and limitations which enable such shaping. This is why socialisation does not work on plants or tables; they do not have the powers and susceptibilities to respond to it. Although we are susceptible to a vast variety of different kinds of socialisation, there are some things we may never get used to, like abuse, and having to endure them produces various kinds of resistance and pathology. Like so much sociology, Bourdieu’s work leans towards sociological reductionism because it lacks an examined notion of human nature, so that, by default, it produces an unexamined notion of human nature as infinitely malleable.⁵ (I shall return to this point later.) The mind-body already has particular aversions and inclinations, including a sense of lack or neediness, before it gets habituated to a position within the social field, *indeed these are a necessary condition of the efficacy of socialisation: without them we would be indifferent to social pressures* (Dean, 2003). That socialisation also generates new inclinations and aversions and modifies the innate ones is not in contradiction with this; rather, as

⁵ Sociological reductionism is also a form of sociological imperialism for it expands the putative domain of the discipline at the expense of other disciplines’ claims. On one of the rare occasions Bourdieu mentions biological nature he notes “One of the tasks of sociology is to determine how the social world constitutes the biological libido, an undifferentiated impulse, as a specific libido.” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 78). A notion like this of what makes us do anything is indeed required, but we need to avoid a sociological imperialism which imagines that the social world can ‘constitute’ – or better, shape - this libido, drive or neediness in just any way, without constraint.

Aristotle argued, new potentialities contingently develop out of innate ones, according to socialisation.⁶

Since the concepts of ethical dispositions and moral sentiments or emotions can be related to that of habitus, the same kinds of qualification that we made regarding the latter apply to them. Just as the habitus need not be in harmony with the habitat or with wider discourses, even during individuals' formative years, so individuals' ethical dispositions need not be entirely consistent with the particular nexus of relations in which they are situated or with wider discursive norms. On the one side there can be a tension between the body/mind and the practices and conditions in which people find themselves; on the other side, discourses, being both fallible and related to a wider range of experience than that available to individuals at first hand, can engender dissonance too. Such differences can generate anomalous behaviour and resistance, whether deliberate or inadvertent. To explain how such tensions can arise we need to proceed to other matters neglected by Bourdieu.

2. Emotions and the habitus.

Given that Bourdieu emphasizes our embodied and partly subconscious practical orientation to the world, it is curious how little he wrote about emotional responses, especially given their influence on action and their connection to the habitus. Even though symbolic domination works partly by producing feelings of inferiority or superiority in people, and hence shame or pride and low or high self-esteem, and even though these are part of the experience of inequality and matter a great deal to people, affecting their psychological and physical health⁷, this emotional dimension is left largely unexplored and for the reader to imagine (Sayer, 2005). Unless we take emotions seriously, we will not understand ethical being and lay normativity in general.

Emotions are clearly embodied, but they should not be reduced to mere feeling or 'affect', and counterposed to reason; rather they are responses to and commentaries on our situations in relation to our concerns (Archer, 2000; Barbalet, 2001; Helm, 2001; Oakley, 1993). They are cognitive and evaluative, indeed essential elements of intelligence (Nussbaum, 2001, p.3). They are strongly related to our nature as dependent and vulnerable beings. They are *about* something, particularly things which are important to our well-being and which we value and yet which are not fully within our control. Thus, the loss of a friend occasions a stronger emotional response than the loss of a pencil. Emotions are highly discriminating evaluative commentaries on our well-being or ill-being in the physical world (for example, pleasure in warmth), in our practical dealings with the world (for example, the frustration of failing to execute some task successfully) and in the social-psychological world (for example, self-esteem or shame) (Archer, 2000; Nussbaum, 2001).⁸ In virtue of these forms of

⁶ "Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this being plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary that we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get first by exercising them . . ." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.i).

⁷ See Wilkinson (2007) on health inequalities.

⁸ This anti-subjectivist, anti-idealist claim that emotions have referents is borne out by social psychological research on aggression reported by Scott (1990, p. 186), which shows that victims' anger towards agents of injustice is not reduced where they displace it onto others or give vent to it in 'safe', legitimate activities such as sports (the 'safety-valve theory'). Experiences of injustice may also make people more disposed to aggression against innocent others, but such displacements have been found

intelligent response, we can speak of ‘emotional reason’. Emotions also *motivate* us to act in certain ways. The coupling of cognitive and motivating properties implies that ‘emotional reason’ figures prominently in practical reason – in reasoning how to act.

The commentaries which emotions provide are *fallible* - but then so too are the commentaries of unemotional forms of reason - yet they are usually adequate enough to warrant being taken seriously. Life without emotions would be hard because without them we would lack a crucial indicator of how the things that matter to us are faring. The relation of particular emotions to specific referents or causes may sometimes be unclear, and the causes may themselves be complex and diffuse - we have all had the experience of being unsure just what has put us in a bad mood - but again that is a good reason for reflecting on precisely what they are about. Particular emotional responses tend to be influenced not only by current events but by the character of our habitus and personality; we may be optimistic and outgoing or pessimistic and reserved, confident or nervous, adaptable or inflexible.⁹ These dispositions appear to be shaped particularly strongly in early life, according to the nature of parenting and position in the social field. Emotions are also culturally influenced. While emotions like anger, happiness, pride, and shame appear to be common to all cultures, *what* they tend to be aroused by varies among cultures, and within them, according to social position. ‘If emotions are evaluative appraisals, then cultural views about what is valuable can be expected to affect them directly . . . ‘ (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 157). Thus in a liberal culture, restrictions on individual liberty are more likely to cause anger than in a communitarian society, which values individual liberty less. Emotions do not escape discursive influences and may be intensified or calmed by them, according to the way in which discourses assess the relative *import* of things.

Emotional responses to the inequalities and struggles of the social field and how people negotiate them are to be taken seriously both because they matter to people, and because they generally reveal something about their situation and well-being, indeed if the latter were not true the former would not be either (Sayer, 2005). At the extreme, emotions such as shame and pride may concern matters which people value more highly than their lives. While the rationalistic tendencies common in social science incline many to ignore emotions, to do so is extraordinarily irrational: ‘simply, emotions matter because if we did not have them nothing else would matter. Creatures without emotion would have no reason for living, nor, for that matter, for committing suicide. Emotions are the stuff of life.’ (Elster, quoted in Archer, 2000, p. 194). Why would people bother to conform or resist, compete and struggle, as Bourdieu notes, if their success or failure made no emotional difference to them? As an opponent of rationalistic approaches to social science, it is surprising that Bourdieu paid emotions so little attention.

We saw earlier that the habitus includes ethical and unethical dispositions. These both influence and are influenced and activated by (im)moral emotions or sentiments such as gratitude, benevolence, compassion, anger, resentment, bitterness, guilt and shame (Smith, 1759).¹⁰ It is these embodied dispositions that allow people often to produce moral responses spontaneously, without reflection, indeed it is interesting that we

not to resolve the problem and the anger remains. Such emotions are clearly not undirected, non-specific urges lacking referents and capable of remedy through just any means.

⁹ My thanks to Linda Woodhead for comments on general emotional stances or dispositions.

¹⁰ In a rare reference to the ethical dimension of the habitus, Bourdieu argues that the word 'ethos' better refers to these dispositions, than 'ethic', which suggests coherent explicit principles (Bourdieu, 1993).

would have doubts about the moral character of someone who couldn't respond morally to events without first deliberating on them. I would therefore concur with Martha Nussbaum:

“Instead of viewing morality as a system of principles to be grasped by the detached intellect, and emotions as motivations that either support or subvert our choice to act according to principle, we will have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning.” (Nussbaum, 2001, p.1; see also Oakley, 1993).

3. Lay normativity, ethics and capitals

At one level, Bourdieu recognized the deeply evaluative character of social behaviour in terms of how people value themselves and members of other groups, and the practices and objects associated with them. However his interests in this regard lay primarily in the valuation of these things in strategic, functional and aesthetic terms. This is partly a consequence of his Hobbesian, interest- and power-based model of social life, and his adoption of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that is reluctant to acknowledge disinterested action, including ethical responses. Any ideas that certain actions may be disinterested are quickly deflated by deriving them from their habitus and interests (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, he is more interested in the fact that goods achieved through disinterested pursuit for their own good often have a higher market value than goods pursued for money or other external rewards, than in the fact that people do indeed often act not for advantage, but because they think that certain courses of action are right or good in themselves. It is a matter of fact of enormous normative importance that people can also value others and their conduct in terms of their goodness or propriety, often regardless of their self-interest, and sometimes in ways that do not match the inclinations of their habitus. Thus, it is a significant feature of struggles concerning inequalities that there are usually some egalitarians amongst the dominant groups who actually seek to reduce the power of their own group because they recognise it as unjust. This recognition need not come merely from political discourse, but from having experienced some other, perhaps smaller, form of injustice themselves, which has heightened their sensitivity to injustice, or simply through being able to sympathise with others who have suffered injustice. The moral sentiment of resentment at injustice is not reducible to a matter of self-interest, but can be felt on behalf of others. As Adam Smith noted, our capacity for fellow-feeling - for understanding something of what others are experiencing, even without their telling us - is crucial to our capacity for ethical action and for the reproduction of social order (Smith, 1759). Although individuals may, depending on their social position, act in largely self-absorbed ways for much of the time, they also usually tend to respect, help or be friendly to certain others some of the time, and to take pleasure in observing others behaving in such ways, even with third persons rather than themselves (Filonowicz, 2008).

We need to beware of a scientific and macho variant of the scholastic fallacy, in which explaining social action purely in terms of power, habitus and self-interest is seen as scientific or hard-headed, while explaining it in terms of morality, emotion, attachments or indeed love is seen as unscientific and sentimental (Smart, 2007). Both are important, indeed some forms of power operate by taking advantage of people’s moral commitments. For example, one of the reasons care-workers are poorly paid is that employers can take advantage of their reluctance to put their clients at risk by going on strike; if they didn’t have that moral concern and commitment they wouldn’t be so easily dominated. We must avoid a common kind of adolescent iconoclasm,

according to which the most cynical explanations of social action must always be the best.

If we are to understand lay normativity and lay ethical being, we therefore need to get beyond the overwhelmingly self-interested and strategic model of action that is implicit in Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals. The concept of capitals reduces the use-values of things or the internal goods of practices to their exchange-value or external goods. These distinctions are fundamental to any understanding of normativity (Sayer, 1999; 2005). Thus, practices like musicianship or medicine have their own internal goods and satisfactions, their own internal standards of what constitutes good work, and these are what many practitioners primarily strive to achieve; but they are quite different from the external goods, like money, praise or prestige, which they contingently bring. Where actors put the pursuit of external goods before internal goods, the latter tend to get corrupted (MacIntyre, 1981).

As I have argued elsewhere, the struggles or competitions of the social field are not merely for power and advantage but are also about how to live; they are partly driven by the search for the good (Sayer, 2005). Thus socialists and feminists seek not to invert hierarchies so they can be at the top and dominate others, but to end domination. Green politics is oriented towards saving the planet, for which gaining power is a means to an end, not the end. That there are often other, sometimes discrepant, motives present in such movements does not mean the 'principled motives' are absent. Social scientists often like to be sceptical of claims like these, though they do not generally apply that scepticism to their own motives. Followers of Bourdieu admire his work because they believe it to be good according to the internal standards of the practice of social theory, not simply because their habitus disposes them to like it or because following his work augments their cultural capital (Sayer, 1999). They may develop a feel for the game of those internal standards, but it includes knowing why they're important, not merely being able to recognize them. In everyday cultural politics, people sometimes seek to distinguish the good from the merely posh (i.e. that which is merely associated with the dominant classes) and the bad from the common (that which is associated with the subordinate classes), rather than conflating the two. Challenges to the alleged superiority of 'received pronunciation' – that is the preferred accent of the dominant classes – are an example of this (Sayer, 2005).

Our attachments and commitments to particular people, practices and things figure prominently among our concerns and our emotional state depends heavily on their condition; while we can generally give reasons for valuing them, our investment in them is also emotional. They become constitutive of our character, so that we define ourselves by reference to them (I am the father of . . . , the partner of . . . , the friend of . . . , an academic, a socialist, etc.). Attachments and commitments develop slowly, through a process of interaction and engagement that again lies between the extremes of osmosis through immersion in repeated practice and reflection removed from practice. They become part of our habitus. We do not simply decide one day that we are a political activist or a musician, but gradually become them through ongoing engagement in politics or music-making. Sometimes we get into these things largely unintentionally in the first instance. However, we tend to reflect on our engagement, though not necessarily in a particularly systematic or concentrated way, and adjust our relation to such practices. We may come to find that they suit us well and matter to us, but we can also be disillusioned and realise that a practice is 'not for us', that it is not what we had expected, or that it is somehow objectionable. People can therefore engage in 'strong evaluation', as Charles Taylor terms it, where they reflect on the

worth of their various ends and reassess them (Taylor, 1985); should they spend more time with their family?; is getting promoted at work worth the effort?; is football taking too much of their life? Bourdieu's account of investments and *illusio* emphasizes the embodied and unreflective elements of the process of forming attachments and commitments, and considers the practices to which the latter relate as competitive games in which we engage unreflectively (Bourdieu, 1998; 2000). Yet many of the practices or relationships to which we become committed are not competitive. Without an acknowledgement of people's reflections on and strong evaluations of internal goods the account represents a demeaning, deflationary account of what matters to people and how they make judgements about their commitments. One might say that this view of practical action is a consequence of a kind of inverted scholastic fallacy in which academics imagine that only they are capable of reflection, deliberation and disinterested judgement.

4. Human vulnerability and concern: Why are we evaluative beings?

Further obstacles to understanding the ethical dimension of everyday life lie deeper still in Bourdieu's work – and in much other social theory - in the implicit model of human social being. Philosophers and sociologists are often wary of committing themselves to any conception of human nature, because they see humans as beings who in some sense are freed from nature by their capacity for reason and cultural variation (which of course itself says something about human nature!). While it is true that what we become depends partly on how we understand ourselves, and different cultures provide us with different ways of making sense of this, and hence allow different forms of self-making, we must beware of the dangers of disciplinary imperialism in attempts to claim human being for philosophy, anthropology or sociology and to resist any concessions to biology and psychology. As we saw earlier, attempts to avoid a conception of human nature result in an unexamined model of people as infinitely malleable. To be capable of socialisation or acculturation, we must have the capacities, susceptibilities and drives that enable them to work on us; the influences of culture have to have some practical adequacy in the way that they engage and co-opt our neediness, and colonise and reshape it.

In everyday life, normativity in the form of ethical concerns is related to (ideas of) well-being. Bourdieu is clearly deeply concerned about social suffering, but his model of human being gives us little idea of why people can suffer, hence why they are concerned about their position and the way they are treated. The dispositions of the habitus do not seem to be related to pain or suffering, or indeed well-being. Yet, well-being and suffering are not merely subjective or purely socially-constructed; neither individual nor collective wishful thinking is likely to have much success in enabling us to flourish. To understand normativity it is vital to address the fact that we are sentient beings who can flourish or suffer – beings who can develop a wide range of capacities but also have many susceptibilities or vulnerabilities. As animals, we live in a state of neediness, in which lack and dissatisfactions of various forms continually produce the desire to overcome them. As social beings, we are in need of others for our physiological and psychological well-being. As beings who easily form attachments and commitments, our well-being becomes connected to theirs, and we become concerned about them. As cultural beings, our emotional responses are influenced by cultural conceptions of what is of value, though not just any construction or construal works, for not just any vulnerability or capacity affecting our well-being can be denied or invented; cultural mediation is not the same as cultural determinism. In consequence of our capacities, vulnerabilities, dependence on others and neediness, *our fundamental relation to the world is one of concern*, not

mere adjustment and accommodation, as Bourdieu's work and so much sociology tends to assume. We are necessarily *evaluative beings* (Archer, 2000); our responses can range from resistance through indifference to enjoyment and investment. It is this vulnerability to suffering and capacity for flourishing that gives experience its normative character, and from which 'the force of the ought' as regards ethical matters derives. Although a complete definition of well-being or flourishing would be impossible, because it is always possible that we could develop new forms of flourishing, or come to realise that we have been mistaken about some aspects of it, the very fact of our survival indicates that we at least know something about it. And the fact that we can also be mistaken about what constitutes flourishing indicates that it is at least partly independent of our judgements. (If well-being were no more than whatever we 'constructed' it as, we could never be mistaken about it.)

Bourdieu brilliantly exposed 'the soft forms of domination' present in social life, but without a clear acknowledgement of our capacity for flourishing and suffering and their specific forms such as fulfilment, love, humiliation and disrespect, his *critique* of symbolic domination was only implicit, for it could not say why there was anything wrong with it. As Habermas said of Foucault, his work is 'crypto-normative', presenting insights into social processes that are likely to trigger emotions of anger, indignation at injustice and compassion in the reader but evading identifications of why things were bad. When we suffer - for example, when we are stigmatised by others - we are, as a matter of fact, in a certain state of being, but also a bad one; someone who didn't understand that suffering was bad, would simply not understand the concept of suffering. The term provides an evaluative description; if we try to re-describe suffering in a way that omits the evaluation, we will *mis-describe* it. An important range of concepts - thick ethical terms, as philosophers call them - concerned with our well-being, such as care, kindness, friendliness, respect, selfishness, cruelty, racism, elude the fact-value dichotomy. Avoiding these terms out of the desire not to make 'value-judgements' not only impoverishes our descriptions, but dulls our sense of why domination and other forms of avoidable suffering are bad.

Like many others, in his academic - though not in his political - writing, Bourdieu preferred not to comment on the very thing that matters most to us - well-being - as if it were merely a matter of convention and competitive struggle, and the few scattered remarks about ethics in his work generally have a deflationary tone, as if ethics were inherently misleading and dubious rather than vital for social order and well-being. Unless we explore various forms of suffering and flourishing and acknowledge the role of emotions in indicating them, ethics becomes disconnected from its reference point and key indicator and is left merely to reside in 'values', as mere subjective judgments having no external warrant.

It is crucial here to appreciate the difference between a merely *conventional* conception of morality, that is, one in which morality which is no more than a set of conventions for coordinating conduct, and a *harm-based* conception of morality, in which it is about avoiding harm and promoting flourishing. As Shaun Nichols shows, research on how people make ethical judgements shows them to be generally capable of distinguishing the two. He reports an interesting study by Nucci of Amish children in the United States in which it was found that 100% of them "said that if God had made no rule against working on Sunday, it would not be wrong to work on Sunday. However, more than 80% of these subjects said that even if God had made no rule about hitting, it would still be wrong to hit." (Nichols, 2004, p. 6). Other studies of children have shown them to be able to distinguish the moral from the merely conventional by their third birthday (Nichols, 2004, p.78). Interestingly, studies of

psychopaths have shown them to be incapable of distinguishing the moral from the conventional, since they think of all wrongdoing in terms of the transgression of norms. By contrast, non-psychopathic criminals are able to appreciate that their actions were wrong not merely because they transgressed norms or conventions, but because they harmed others (Nichols, 2004, p.76). How interesting too that some sociologists should support the idea that actions are only wrong because they are socially defined as wrong!¹¹ Sociologists may sometimes cite actors' moral terms in inverted commas to indicate that they are not endorsing the judgements those terms imply, but it is a mistake to allow this methodological device to become an ontological assumption that they are just conventions rather than judgements about suffering or well-being (Davydova and Sharrock, 2004).

Conclusion

In considering the moral dimension of everyday life there is much of value to draw upon in Bourdieu's work, though, as I have sought to show, at least in outline, we have to modify and add to his basic concepts and approach. This involves firstly acknowledging that the dispositions of the habitus include ethical ones, or virtues and vices, and taking lay reflexivity and judgement seriously, as judgments, and not merely functions of social position (in effect, responding to others' claims by saying, 'they would say that wouldn't they, given their position'). Secondly, it involves taking emotions and emotional reason seriously as informative of people's situations and concerns. Thirdly, it means taking disinterested judgment including ethical and political concerns seriously, instead of seeing them as either competitive and strategic or a function of the habitus. Fourthly, and more generally, we need to acknowledge the fact that our relation to the world is one of concern for well-being, whether our own or that of others and things to which we have become committed. Bourdieu repeatedly insists on the difference between the practical sense or reason we use in everyday life and the contemplative or scholastic knowledge of academic spectators (Bourdieu, 1988, 1998, 2000). While philosophers do indeed have a tendency to reduce practical reason to a product of contemplative reason, they do at least acknowledge that ethical ideas are a major part of practical reason, whereas Bourdieu says little about them. I am well aware that a much lengthier defence of the position I have put forward is needed, but I hope to have at least opened up some worthwhile directions for later, fuller consideration.

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¹¹ This subjectivist view of values goes back 2,300 years to Epicurus, and is reproduced in Durkheim's claim that 'actions are evil because they are socially prohibited, rather than socially prohibited because they are evil.' (Bauman, 1989, p.173).

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