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EPISTEMOLOGICAL TENSIONS IN BOURDIEU'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Abstract: *This paper explores Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social science. In particular, it aims to show that the common assumption that Bourdieu remains trapped in a positivist paradigm does not do justice to his multifaceted account of social science. In order to illustrate the complexity of Bourdieu's conception of social science, this study scrutinises ten epistemological tensions which can be found in his writings on the nature of systematic forms of knowledge production. In view of these epistemological tensions, a more fine-grained picture emerges which demonstrates that Bourdieu compels us to reflect upon the complexity of the various tasks intrinsic to the pursuit of a critical social science. The paper concludes by discussing the limitations and shortcomings of the epistemological presuppositions that underpin Bourdieu's reflexive sociology.*

Keywords: *Bourdieu; epistemology; knowledge; philosophy of science; positivism; reflexive sociology; social science; sociology of knowledge*

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Epistemologické tenze v Bourdiehu pojetí sociální vědy

Abstrakt: *Článek zkoumá pojetí sociální vědy Pierra Bourdiehu. Analýza osvětluje hlavní epistemologické předpoklady, jež podepírají Bourdieho obranu reflexivní sociologie jako vědeckého snažení. V literatuře převládá názor, že Bourdieu má ve většině svých spisů sklon zastávat pozitivistické pojetí sociální vědy. Při podrobnějším prozkoumání Bourdiehu pojetí sociální vědy se však ozřejmuje, že domněnka o jeho přetrvávajícím zachycení v pozitivistickém paradigmatu nevystihuje komplexitu jeho mnohostranného uvažování o sociální vědě. Tato studie, aby tuto komplexitu ilustrovala, zkoumá deset epistemologických tenzí, jež lze nalézt v Bourdiehu pracích o povaze systematických forem produkce vědění. Vystává tak jemnější obraz, jenž demonstruje, že Bourdieu nás vede k tomu, abychom reflektovali komplexitu různých úkolů spojených s úsilím o kritickou sociální vědu. Článek završuje diskuse nad omezeními a nedostatky epistemologických presupozic Bourdiehu reflexivní sociologie.*

Klíčová slova: *Bourdieu; epistemologie; vědění; filosofie vědy; pozitivismus; reflexivní sociologie; sociální věda; sociologie vědění*

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to explore Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social science. To this end, the analysis sheds light on the main epistemological presuppositions that undergird Bourdieu's defence of reflexive sociology as a scientific endeavour. The predominant view in the literature is that, in most of his writings, Bourdieu has a tendency to embrace a positivist conception of social science.¹ When examining Bourdieu's conception of social science in more detail, however, it becomes clear that the assumption that he remains trapped in a positivist paradigm does not do justice to his multifaceted account of social science. In order to illustrate the complexity of Bourdieu's notion of social science, the following study scrutinises ten epistemological tensions which can be found in his writings on the nature of systematic forms of knowledge production. In view of these epistemological tensions, a more fine-grained picture emerges which demonstrates that Bourdieu invites us, and indeed compels us, to reflect upon the complexity of the various tasks intrinsic to the pursuit of a critical social science.

Despite the fact that it would be erroneous to suggest that Bourdieu's social theory is based on a merely positivist conception of scientific knowledge production, and even if, as shall be shown in this paper, the philosophical assumptions underlying his notion of science are far more complex than commonly acknowledged, it is imperative to reflect upon the limitations

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¹ See, for example: Luc BOLTANSKI, *De la critique. Précis de sociologie de l'émancipation*. Paris: Gallimard 2009, p. 39–82. Patrice BONNEWITZ, *La sociologie de P. Bourdieu*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1998, p. 34. Ciaran CRONIN, "Epistemological Vigilance and the Project of a Sociology of Knowledge." *Social Epistemology*, vol. 11, 1997, no. 2, p. 203–215, here p. 213. Robin GRILLER, "The Return of the Subject? The Methodology of Pierre Bourdieu." In: ROBBINS, D. (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu*. Volume I. London: Sage 2000 [1996], p. 187–211, here p. 201–204. Richard JENKINS, *Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge 1992, p. 60. Richard JENKINS, "Language, Culture and Sociology: Pierre Bourdieu in Context." *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 7, 1994, no. 4, p. 95–104, here p. 102. Nedim KARAKAYALI, "Reading Bourdieu with Adorno: The Limits of Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology." *Sociology*, vol. 38, 2004, no. 2, p. 351–368, here p. 356. Bernard LAHIRE, "Présentation : Pour une sociologie à l'état vif." In: LAHIRE, B. (ed.), *Le travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu : dettes et critiques*. Paris: La Découverte & Syros 1999, p. 5–20, here p. 16. Simon SUSEN, *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology*. Oxford: Bardwell Press 2007, p. 217 and 225–226.

and shortcomings of the epistemological presuppositions that underpin Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. Although he offers an insightful account of the nature of social-scientific knowledge, Bourdieu's epistemological framework suffers from a number of serious analytical flaws. Thus, while the abovementioned epistemological tensions indicate that Bourdieu puts forward a highly differentiated approach to systematic forms of knowledge production, his conception of social science remains caught up in various presuppositional antinomies, which he seeks but fails to overcome.

1. Social science as a scientific project *versus* social science as a political project

The first, and arguably the most fundamental, epistemological tension which can be identified in Bourdieu's writings stems from the recognition that there are compelling grounds to consider social science as a *scientific* endeavour, just as there are good reasons to regard social science as a *political* endeavour. Even though Bourdieu, in most of his writings, embraces both views, he acknowledges that the simultaneous commitment to scientific and political forms of knowledge production is not a straightforward enterprise. Hence, it is worth briefly examining the presuppositional grounds of these two epistemological perspectives.

One of the central assumptions in Bourdieu's oeuvre is the view that the social sciences in general and sociology in particular can and should be regarded as *scientific* endeavours. The "scientific ambition that the social sciences affirm by definition"² is indicative of the fact that the systematic study of the human world is not motivated by the imaginative invention of speculative narratives based on random thought experiments, but aimed at the purposive construction of explanatory models concerned with the methodical exploration of social arrangements. To insist on the idea that the sociological study of reality can be considered a "scientific analysis"³ of society means to suggest that we need to conceive of "sociology as a science",⁴

² Pierre BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris: Seuil 1997, p. 40 (my translation); original text: "L'ambition scientifique que les sciences sociales affirment par définition."

³ Pierre BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Minuit 1980, p. 8 (my translation); original text: "analyse scientifique".

⁴ Pierre BOURDIEU, "Si le monde social m'est supportable, c'est parce que je peux m'indigner". *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*. Paris: Éditions de l'Aube 2001, p. 7 (my translation); original text: "La sociologie comme science".

namely “the science of society”⁵ par excellence. Nevertheless, it is far from uncontroversial on what presuppositional grounds it is possible to justify the claim that a particular mode of thought can be characterised as “scientific”, that is, as an epistemic approach which is founded on the methodical and evidence-based study of reality. In light of his rigorous defence of sociology as “a science”,⁶ Bourdieu cannot avoid being confronted with questions such as the following: “Are the social sciences, and in particular sociology, really sciences? Why do you feel they need to claim *scientificity*?”⁷ Bourdieu’s answer to these questions is symptomatic of his firm conviction that sociology can and should be regarded as a scientific endeavour: “Sociology”,⁸ he states, seems “to have all the *properties* that define a science”.⁹

Amongst the properties of science are three constitutive features of scientific knowledge: first, the *positivity* of scientific knowledge, i.e. the belief in the reliability of experience-based knowledge;¹⁰ second, the *objectivity* of scientific knowledge, i.e. the belief in the possibility of value-free knowledge;¹¹

⁵ See Lahouari ADDI, *Sociologie et anthropologie chez Pierre Bourdieu*. Paris : La Découverte & Syros 2002, p. 195: “Le projet de faire de la sociologie la science de la société par excellence,” (italics in original). See also *ibid.*, p. 196: “En fait, Bourdieu considère la sociologie comme science de toutes les pratiques sociales.”

⁶ See, for example, Pierre BOURDIEU – Jean-Claude CHAMBOREDON – Jean-Claude PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*. Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – Mouton 1968, p. 36, and BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 7.

⁷ Pierre BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble.” In: *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage 1993 [1984], p. 8–19, here p. 8 (with the exception of the word “scientificity”, italics removed from the entire quotation).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* (italics added).

¹⁰ On Bourdieu’s critical account of “positive knowledge”, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 7 and 210. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*. Paris: Minuit 1982, p. 14. Pierre BOURDIEU, “La cause de la science.” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 106–107, 1995, p. 3–10, here p. 8. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*. Paris: Raisons d’agir 2001, p. 11 and 34.

On this point, see also: Catherine COLLIOT-THÉLÈNE, “La Sociologie Réflexive, l’Anthropologie, l’Histoire.” *Critique*, vol. LI, 1995, no. 579–580, p. 631–645, here p. 631–632. Philippe CORCUFF, “Pour une nouvelle sociologie critique : éthique, critique herméneutique et utopie critique.” In: LOJKINE, J. (ed.), *Les sociologues critiques du capitalisme : en hommage à Pierre Bourdieu* Paris: Collection Actuel Marx Confrontation, Presses Universitaires de France 2002, p. 147–160, here p. 149. John CROWLEY, “Pierre Bourdieu’s Anti-Politics of Transparency.” *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, vol. 15, 2002, no. 2, p. 149–166, here p. 152. KARAKAYALI, “Reading Bourdieu with Adorno,” p. 355–356.

¹¹ On Bourdieu’s critical account of “objective knowledge”, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 40 and 210. BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 11 and 14. Pierre

and, third, the *universality* of scientific knowledge, i.e. the belief in the validity of context-transcending knowledge.¹² Positive knowledge in the social sciences is gained from *observing the phenomenal functioning* of the social world; objective knowledge in the social sciences is generated from *describing the relational functioning* of the social world; and universal knowledge in the social sciences is derived from *uncovering the lawful functioning* of the

BOURDIEU, "For a Sociology of Sociologists." In: *Sociology in Question* London: Sage 1993 [1984], p. 49–53, here p. 50 and 53. Pierre BOURDIEU, "The Paradox of the Sociologist." In: *Sociology in Question* London: Sage 1993 [1984], p. 54–59. BOURDIEU, "La cause de la science," p. 8. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 157. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 41. BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 51–52.

On this point, see also: BONNEWITZ, *La sociologie de P. Bourdieu*, p. 17, 18, 34, and 35. Jean-Paul BRONCKART – Marie-Noëlle SCHURMANS, "Pierre Bourdieu – Jean Piaget : habitus, schèmes et construction du psychologique." In: LAHIRE, B. (ed.), *Le travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu: dettes et critiques* Paris: La Découverte & Syros 1999, p. 153–175, here p. 160. Craig CALHOUN, "Habitus, Field, and Capital: Historical Specificity in the Theory of Practice." In: *Critical Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell 1995, p. 132–161, here p. 134. Jean-Yves CARO, "La sociologie de Pierre Bourdieu : éléments pour une théorie du champ politique." *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 30, 1980, no. 6, p. 1171–1197, here 1171–1172. Aaron V. CICOUREL, "Aspects of Structural and Processual Theories of Knowledge." In: CALHOUN, C. – LIPUMA, E. – POSTONE, M. (eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, p. 89–115, here p. 94. Hubert DREYFUS – Paul RABINOW, "Can there be a Science of Existential Structure and Social Meaning?" In: SHUSTERMAN, R. (ed.), *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell 1999, p. 84–93, here p. 89. Dick PELS, "Knowledge, Politics and Anti-Politics: Toward a Critical Appraisal of Bourdieu's Concept of Intellectual Autonomy." *Theory and Society*, vol. 24, 1995, no. 1, p. 79–104, here p. 88. Louis PINTO, *Pierre Bourdieu et la théorie du monde social*. Paris: Albin Michel 1998, p. 125. Loïc WACQUANT, "Epistemic Reflexivity." In: BOURDIEU, P. – WACQUANT, L., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 36–46, here p. 36–37.

¹² On Bourdieu's critical account of "universal knowledge", see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 25. Pierre BOURDIEU, "Espace social et genèse des 'classes'." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 52–53, 1984, p. 3–14, here p. 4. BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 31–32. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 10–13.

On this point, see also: ADDI, *Sociologie et anthropologie chez Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 195–196. BONNEWITZ, *La sociologie de P. Bourdieu*, p. 12–13. Joseph D. LEWANDOWSKI, "Thematizing Embeddedness: Reflexive Sociology as Interpretation." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 30, 2000, no. 1, p. 49–66, here p. 49. Frédéric VANDENBERGHE, "'The Real is Relational': An Epistemological Analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's Generative Structuralism." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 17, 1999, no. 1, p. 32–67, here p. 34–35. Loïc WACQUANT, "Zwischen Soziologie und Philosophie - Bourdieus Wurzeln." In: REHBEIN, B. – SAALMANN, G. – SCHWENGEL, H. (eds.), *Pierre Bourdieus Theorie des Sozialen: Probleme und Perspektiven*. Konstanz: UVK 2003, p. 59–65, here p. 60–62.

social world.¹³ In brief, the scientificity of sociological knowledge depends on its exponents' capacity to demonstrate that its epistemology meets the criteria of *positivity*, *objectivity*, and *universality*.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu admits that “[t]he question of knowing whether or not sociology is a science”¹⁴ is an extremely complex one which can hardly be given a clear and unambiguous answer. In fact, it may well be argued that sociology is a *non-scientific* project if it can be shown that it fails to meet the criteria of science, these constituting a disciplinary framework which is not only based on the methodical and evidence-based study of the world but also oriented towards the generation of positively, objectively, and universally valid knowledge. As Bourdieu remarks, “[s]ociology has the unfortunate privilege of being constantly confronted with the question of its status as a science”.¹⁵ Hence, Bourdieu is willing to concede that there are good reasons to call the alleged scientificity of sociology into question, one of the main reasons being that, in the social sciences, there is a fine line between “scientific work”¹⁶ (*travail scientifique*) and “sociological engagement”¹⁷ (*engagement sociologique*). In other words, one of the key challenges to be confronted when attempting to defend the scientific status of sociology is to face up to the *political* nature of social research in the Bourdieusian sense.

Given that the social world is never simply a world of facticity but always also a world of validity, sociology is bound to confront the paradoxical task of producing both descriptive and normative knowledge about the human world. On the one hand, sociology seeks to provide *descriptive* knowledge in that it aims to give *accurate* accounts of how the social world *is* organised. On the other hand, sociology can generate *normative* knowledge insofar as it is motivated by the ambition to develop *engaged* accounts of how the social world *could and should* be organised. Both in the social world and in the social sciences, factuality and normativity are intimately intertwined. Thus, the interlacement of factuality and normativity is relevant not only to the sociological functioning *of* the human world, but also to the sociological engagement *with* and the knowledge production *about* the human world,

¹³ Cf. Ted BENTON – Ian CRAIB, *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*. Basingstoke: Palgrave 2001, p. 13–22.

¹⁴ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 103 (my translation); original text: “La question de savoir si la sociologie est ou non une science [...]”

¹⁵ BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 8.

¹⁶ BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

for a sociology that fails to account for the ubiquity of normativity is a sociology that does not succeed in explaining the transformability of society. Social arrangements are never everlasting, because the relations established between materially and symbolically interconnected actors are constantly at stake. “One of the major difficulties”,¹⁸ for sociology, “lies in the fact that its objects are stakes in social struggles”.¹⁹ If “criteria of scientificity”²⁰ – such as objectivity, adequacy, and verifiability – compete with criteria of political normativity – such as legitimacy, efficacy, and implementability –, then the sociological project is characterised by both the rigorous search for *scientific validation* and a normative commitment to exploring social potentials for *political transformation*.

2. Social science as an uncovering project versus social science as a reconstructing project

A second epistemological tension in Bourdieu's writings emanates from the assumption that social science can be conceived of as both an *uncovering* and a *reconstructing* project. The epistemological position that social science is essentially an *uncovering* enterprise is founded on what may be described as a positivist view of science. According to this perspective, it is the task of the *natural* sciences to scrutinise the underlying laws that determine the constitution of the physical world, just as it is the task of the *social* sciences to shed light on the hidden forces that shape the organisation of the human world. In Bourdieu's words, “[t]he physical world has immanent tendencies, and the same goes for the social world”.²¹ In order “to uncover the laws that regulate [...] that ‘energy of social physics’”,²² we need to draw an analytical distinction between “visible relations”²³ and “invisible relations”:²⁴ whereas the former are directly *accessible* to human observation, the latter are *hid-*

¹⁸ BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 47: “critère de la scientificité”.

²¹ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 121 (my translation); original text: “Le monde physique a des tendances immanentes, et il en va de même du monde social.”

²² Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, “Interest, Habitus, Rationality.” In: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 115–140, here p. 118. See also Pierre BOURDIEU, *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1990 [1980], p. 122.

²³ BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 13 (my translation); original text: “des relations visibles”.

²⁴ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “des relations invisibles”.

den from immediate scrutiny. If there is no straightforward correspondence between social *appearances*, whose existence is *symptomatic* of the constitution of the human world, and social *substances*, whose existence is *intrinsic* to the constitution of the human world, then there is no reason to believe that common-sense knowledge, which is *derived* from immediate experience, is capable of grasping the complexity of human reality, which *escapes* immediate experience. Indeed, to assume that there is no straightforward correspondence between social appearances and social substances means to suggest that there is no homology between the *phenomenology* and the *ontology* of the social world: the social world *is* not necessarily what it *appears* to be, and the social world does not necessarily *appear* to be what it *is*.

Social science, however, is concerned not only with *uncovering* the underlying structures that constitute the ontology of relationally constructed realms but also with *reconstructing* the symbolic elements that make up the phenomenology of culturally mediated meanings. We need to reconstruct the infinite meanings attached to the world by human actors in order to understand that the symbolically mediated search for intelligibility plays a pivotal role in the construction process of every society. Yet, if we are prepared to give up “the illusion of transparency”²⁵ of the variegated causality underlying the structuration of society, we must also be willing to abandon the idea that ordinary forms of comprehensibility can be a reliable source of representational adequacy. It is for this reason that “reflexive sociology”²⁶ (*la sociologie réflexive*), in the Bourdieusian sense, is opposed to “spontaneous sociology”²⁷ (*la sociologie spontanée*): the former acknowledges the “*principle of the unconscious*”²⁸, recognising that “profound causes which *escape* our consciousness”²⁹ can have significant consequences which *shape* our consciousness; by contrast, the latter remains caught up in the “*principle of consciousness*”, suggesting that central elements which *constitute* our consciousness can have considerable effects *derived* from our consciousness. If

²⁵ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 29 (my translation); original text: “l’illusion de la transparence”.

²⁶ See Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1992. See also, for example, Pierre BOURDIEU, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press 1990.

²⁷ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 93 (my translation); original text: “la « sociologie spontanée »”.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31 (italics added), (my translation); original text: “principe de la non-conscience”.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (italics added), (my translation); original text: “causes profondes qui échappent à la conscience”.

the human “unconscious is made up of its social conditions of production”,³⁰ it is the task of reflexive sociology to bring these conditions to the fore and, in so doing, to problematise the seemingly unproblematic, that is, the ensemble of taken-for-granted assumptions which lie at the heart of the collective unconscious of a given society.

What is most hidden is what everyone agrees about, agreeing so much that they don't even mention them, the things that are beyond question, that go without saying.³¹

In the social world, the most blatant is often the most latent, for our daily immersion in what seems obvious to us makes us blind to relative arbitrariness. Social science needs to bring our background assumptions to the foreground in order to account for the historical contingency that permeates all collectively established modes of intelligibility.

Illusion is not, as such, illusory. [...] Agents have a subjective experience that is not the full truth of what they do but which is part of the truth of what they do.³²

It is therefore the task of sociology to explore social objectivity in terms of human subjectivity and human subjectivity in terms of social objectivity. Even if we seek to *uncover* the underlying mechanisms that determine both the constitution and the evolution of social objectivity, we are obliged to *reconstruct* the various meanings attributed to reality by examining actors' symbolic construction of society.

3. Social science as an explanatory project *versus* social science as an interpretive project

A third epistemological tension, which is closely related to the previous one, derives from the premise that social science can be conceived of as both an *explanatory* and an *interpretive* project. In the philosophy of social science, the tension between these two epistemological positions is generally referred to in terms of the difference between the method called *Erklären* (in French: *expliquer*; in English: explaining) and the method called *Verstehen*

³⁰ BOURDIEU, “For a Sociology of Sociologists,” p. 50.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³² BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 17.

(in French: *comprendre*; in English: understanding).³³ In essence, the tension between these epistemological perspectives illustrates that Bourdieu's conception of social science is based on a twofold concern: on the one hand, Bourdieu regards social science as a tool by which to *explain* the nature of the underlying structures which determine human actors' engagement with the world; on the other hand, Bourdieu considers social science as a tool by which to *understand* the nature of field-specific discourses through which human actors interpret the world. In the former sense, the task of social science is to uncover the *interest-laden lawfulness* of the human world; in the latter sense, the task of social science is to examine the *meaning-laden discursiveness* of the human world. It would be fair to suggest that positivist trust in the explanatory power of modern science and hermeneutic reliance on the interpretive power of human actors are two irreducible components of Bourdieu's reflexive conception of knowledge production.

It is common to conceive of the dichotomous distinction between objectivist and interpretivist approaches in terms of "a traditional contrast between an *empiricist* theory, according to which perception borrows its structures from reality, and a *constructivist* theory which says that objects are only perceived through an act of construction".³⁴ In the former view, we have *direct* access to reality, and science permits us to produce representationally accurate – and, therefore, *objective* – knowledge about the social world. In the latter view, we have only *mediated* access to reality, and science enables us to generate linguistically codified – and, therefore, *interpretive* – knowledge about the social world.

Thus, from a Bourdieusian point of view, the social sciences are confronted with the ambivalent task of producing both explanatory and interpretive – i.e. both representational and expressional, both factual and constructional, both objective and subjective, and both descriptive and normative – types of knowledge. As an *explanatory* form of objective knowledge production, the social sciences need to be guided by principles such as *causality*, *impartiality*, and *symmetry*³⁵ in order to uncover the struc-

³³ See BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 42. See also, for example, Karl-Otto APEL, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*. Trans. G. Warnke. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1984 [1979], and William OUTHWAITE, "Naturalisms and Antinaturalisms." In: MAY, T. – WILLIAMS, M. (eds.), *Knowing the Social World*. Buckingham: Open University Press 1998, p. 22–36.

³⁴ BOURDIEU, "The Paradox of the Sociologist," p. 54 (italics added).

³⁵ See BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 42. See also BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 156–157.

turally determined interest-ladenness of society. As an *interpretive* form of subjective knowledge construction, the social sciences need to be guided by principles such as *signifiability*, *partiality*, and *reflexivity* in order to make sense of the symbolically constituted meaning-ladenness of society. In short, a social-scientific engagement with the world requires both an *explanatory* and an *interpretive* study of human reality.

4. Social science as an assertive project *versus* social science as a reflexive project

A fourth epistemological tension that can be found in Bourdieu's writings arises from the following assumption: social science is to be understood as both an *assertive* and a *reflexive* project. As an assertive project, social science has a *constative* function: its analysis of human reality is based on the methodical representation of social facts. As a reflexive project, social science has a *critical* function: its analysis of human reality is committed to questioning the legitimacy of established forms of normativity. To the extent that a culturally constructed reality is never only an objective world of facticity but always also a normative world of validity, social science is not exclusively concerned with the descriptive representation of social facts but also aimed at the critical problematisation of social norms. Indeed, it is the task of a reflexive social science to question the pervasive *givenness* of relationally constructed forms of reality by shedding light on the relative *arbitrariness* of social normativity. What can be socially constructed can be theoretically deconstructed and practically reconstructed. A critical engagement with society invites us to exploit the intrinsic reconstructability of human reality. The social is never forever, and the task of a critical social science is to translate the alleged eternity of the "for ever" into the genuine contingency of the "for now", thereby opening a horizon of possibilities "for tomorrow".

Yet "reflexivity",³⁶ in the Bourdieusian sense, is not limited to the critical examination of the *social world* but also involves the self-critical problema-

³⁶ On Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

In the secondary literature, see, for example: James BOHMAN, "Reflexivity, Agency and Constraint: the Paradoxes of Bourdieu's Sociology of Knowledge." *Social Epistemology*, vol. 11, 1997, no. 2, p. 171–186. Anna BOSCHETTI, "Réflexion sur le langage et réflexivité." In: PINTO, L. – SAPIRO, G. – CHAMPAGNE, P. (eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu, sociologue*.

tisation of *social science*. Bourdieu's plea to his colleagues to "subject the operations of sociological practice to the polemics of epistemological reason",³⁷ and thereby promote "an attitude of vigilance"³⁸ which obliges sociologists to engage in the "psychoanalysis of the scientific spirit",³⁹ seeks to bring the *sociological background of ideas* to the *sociological foreground of critique*: "an

Paris: Fayard 2004, p. 161–183. Ian BURKITT, "The Situated Social Scientist: Reflexivity and Perspective in the Sociology of Knowledge." *Social Epistemology*, vol. 11, 1997, no. 2, p. 193–202. Patrick CHAMPAGNE, "La sociologie réflexive de Bourdieu." *Sciences Humaines*, Numéro Spécial: L'œuvre de Pierre Bourdieu, 2002, p. 96–100. Yves DEZALAY, "Une leçon de réflexivité." In: MAUGER, G. (ed.), *Rencontres avec Pierre Bourdieu*. Broissieux, Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Éditions du Croquant 2005, p. 233–238. Steffani ENGLER – Karin ZIMMERMANN, "Das Soziologische Denken Bourdieus - Reflexivität in kritischer Absicht." In: BITTLINGMAYER, U. H. – EICKELPASCH, R. – KASTNER, R. – RADEMACHER, C. (eds.), *Theorie als Kampf? Zur Politischen Soziologie Pierre Bourdieus*. Opladen: Leske & Budrich 2002, p. 35–47. Koenraad GELDOLF, "Authority, Reading, Reflexivity: Pierre Bourdieu and the Aesthetic Judgment of Kant." *Diacritics*, vol. 27, 1997, no. 1, p. 20–43. Yves GINGRAS, "Réflexivité et sociologie de la connaissance scientifique." In: PINTO, L. – SAPIRO, G. – CHAMPAGNE, P. (eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu, sociologue* Paris: Fayard 2004, p. 337–347. Johan HEILBRON, "Reflexivity and its Consequences." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 2, 1999, no. 3, p. 298–306. David INGLIS, "Pierre Bourdieu: Science of Science and Reflexivity." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 8, 2005, no. 3, p. 375–379. Jane KENWAY – Julie MCLEOD, "Bourdieu's Reflexive Sociology and 'Spaces of Points of View': Whose Reflexivity, which Perspective?" *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 25, 2004, no. 4, p. 525–544. Hans-Herbert KÖGLER, "Alienation as Epistemological Source: Reflexivity and Social Background after Mannheim and Bourdieu." *Social Epistemology*, vol. 11, 1997, no. 2, p. 141–164. Hans-Herbert KÖGLER, "Reconceptualizing Reflexive Sociology: A Reply." *Social Epistemology*, vol. 11, 1997, no. 2, p. 223–250. Lois MCNAY, "Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 16, 1999, no. 1, p. 95–117. Eric MOLLET, *Bourdieu et Laruelle : Sociologie réflexive et non-philosophie*. Paris: Pétra 2003. Javier NOYA, "La reflexividad de la sociología y la sociología de la reflexividad." In: NOYA, J. (ed.), *Cultura, desigualdad y reflexividad. La sociología de Pierre Bourdieu*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata 2003, p. 42–64. Dick PELS, "Reflexivity: One Step Up." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 17, 2000, no. 3, p. 1–25. Lutz RAPHAEL, "Forschungskonzepte für eine 'reflexive Soziologie' – Anmerkungen zum Denk- und Arbeitsstil Pierre Bourdieus." In: MÜLLER-DOOHM, S. (ed.), *Jenseits der Utopie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 236–266. SIMON SUSEN, *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology*, p. 133–137, 139, 215, 216, 222, 225, 226, 227–229, 235, 236, 243, 249, 256, and 276. Loïc WACQUANT, "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7, 1989, no. 1, p. 26–63.

³⁷ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 13 (my translation); original text: "Il faut soumettre les opérations de la pratique sociologique à la polémique de la raison épistémologique".

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13–14 (my translation); original text: "une attitude de la vigilance".

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14 (my translation); original text: "la « psychanalyse de l'esprit scientifique »".

analysis of the social conditions in which sociological works are produced⁴⁰ is fundamental to demonstrating that intellectual thought is generated in a *value-laden* space shaped by, rather than in a *neutral* space detached from, the constraints of social reality. In this sense, “the sociology of sociology”⁴¹ and “the sociology of other sociologists”⁴² should always be an integral part of the sociology of society and the sociology of other social actors. Only if sociologists, as situated social actors, dare to make their individual unconscious the subject of scrutiny can they produce truly reflexive accounts of the collective unconscious of society.

If, following Durkheim, “the unconscious is the forgetting of history”,⁴³ then, following Bourdieu, “the unconscious of a discipline is its history”⁴⁴ composed of a resourceful background temporality. And if, in accordance with Hegel, consciousness is the capacity for the analysis (*Aufarbeitung*) of history, then, in accordance with Bourdieu, the consciousness of a discipline is its capacity for self-reflexivity (*Selbstbearbeitung*) in relation to a particular field in a given society. To the extent that sociology’s “unconscious is made up of its social conditions of production, marked and forgotten”,⁴⁵ it is the task of reflexive sociology to analyse the conditions of its own possibility in terms of its embeddedness in society. “If sociology is a critical science, that’s perhaps because it is itself in a critical position”,⁴⁶ namely the critical position of being an objectifying part of an objectified society. A truly critical perspective, in the Bourdieusian sense, is always already critical of itself. To regard social science as a critical science⁴⁷ means to suggest that “a science of the unconscious”⁴⁸ needs to objectify the unconscious of science.

5. Social science as an evolutionary project *versus* social science as a canonical project

A fifth epistemological tension which is of considerable importance in Bourdieu’s writings is rooted in the view that social science constitutes both

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “Une analyse des conditions sociales dans lesquelles sont produites les œuvres sociologiques.”

⁴¹ BOURDIEU, “For a Sociology of Sociologists,” p. 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 8.

⁴⁷ See, for example, BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 40 and 46–47.

⁴⁸ See, for example, BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 10.

an *evolutionary* and a *canonical* venture. According to Bourdieu's evolutionist conception of knowledge production, the social sciences are inherently *progressive*.⁴⁹ In order to expose the developmental nature of the social sciences, we need to shed light on the *cumulative* nature of the production of scientific knowledge: knowledge claims can *compete* with each other, they can *contradict* each other, and they can *complement* each other. Regardless of whether the market of knowledge claims is driven mainly by the economic principle of *competition*, the normative force of *contradiction*, or the discursive processes of *complementation*, development of scientific fields is based on the systematic *accumulation* of epistemic representations of the world. In this sense, the social sciences permit us to develop increasingly accurate conceptual tools aimed at uncovering the underlying mechanisms which determine both the constitution and the evolution of the human universe. Put briefly, *scientific* knowledge claims are *cumulative* knowledge claims.

If we recognise the cumulative nature of systematic forms of knowledge production, then we are obliged to accept that both the natural sciences and the social sciences are equipped with the *evolutionary capacity* to develop gradually more accurate accounts of their objects of study. As Bourdieu remarks, “[t]he progress of knowledge, in the case of social science, presupposes a progress in the knowledge about the conditions of knowledge”,⁵⁰ and it is the task of a critical epistemology to account for the evolutionary character of knowledge growth in both the natural *and* the social sciences. From this perspective, it would be erroneous to assume that cognitive evolution, based on constant verification and falsification, is an exclusive privilege of the natural sciences. Insofar as both natural and social scientists engage

⁴⁹ On Bourdieu's emphasis on the evolutionary nature of scientific knowledge, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 7. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*. Paris: Seuil 1994, p. 235–236. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 140. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 34.

On this point, see also, for example: Rolf EICKELPASCH, “Parteiliche Unparteilichkeit. Paradoxien in der Begründung einer kritischen Soziologie bei Pierre Bourdieu.” In: BITTLINGMAYER, U. H. – EICKELPASCH, R. – KASTNER, R. – RADEMACHER, C. (eds.), *Theorie als Kampf? Zur Politischen Soziologie Pierre Bourdieus*. Opladen: Leske & Budrich 2002, p. 49–60, here p. 56. T. M. S. EVENS, “Bourdieu and the Logic of Practice: Is All Giving Indian-Giving or Is ‘Generalized Materialism’ not Enough.” *Sociological Theory*, vol. 17, 1999, no. 1, p. 3–31, here p. 24. George RITZER, “Metatheorizing in Sociology.” In: ROBBINS, D. (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu*. Volume II. London: Sage 2000 [1990], p. 318–329, here p. 325.

⁵⁰ BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 7 (my translation); original text: “Le progrès de la connaissance, dans le cas de la science sociale, suppose un progrès dans la connaissance des conditions de la connaissance.”

in dialogical discourse, they are compelled to revise and reformulate their knowledge claims if required. The symbolic authority of every cognitive claim to scientific legitimacy rests upon its persuasive capacity to evoke discursively defensible forms of epistemic validity.

Yet, just as Bourdieu emphasises the *evolutionary* nature of social science, he stresses the *canonical* nature of systematic forms of knowledge production.⁵¹ Social scientists are, consciously or unconsciously, embedded in particular traditions of thought. As a consequence, their ways of conceptualising the world are, directly or indirectly, influenced by the presuppositional horizons in which they find themselves situated. The existence of various “sociological paradigm communities”⁵² is indicative of the presence of competing sociological traditions: *different sociological thinkers emerge out of different sociological traditions*. The oeuvre of a social thinker emerges in relation to pre-existing oeuvres of social thought. Thus, drawing on the work of Thomas S. Kuhn,⁵³ Bourdieu insists that the progress of knowledge is inconceivable without the formation of “paradigm communities”⁵⁴ and the cyclical emergence of “scientific revolutions”.⁵⁵

From a Bourdieusian point of view, then, the *evolution* of scientific knowledge is contingent upon the *canonisation* of paradigmatic discourses: “the scholars’ actions in the advanced sciences are determined by a ‘paradigm’ or a ‘disciplinary matrix’, that is, a state of scientific achievement which is accepted by an important fraction of scholars and which tends to impose itself upon all other scholars”.⁵⁶ The power of a paradigm is tanta-

⁵¹ On Bourdieu’s emphasis on the canonical nature of scientific knowledge, see, for example: BOURDIEU, “For a Sociology of Sociologists,” p. 49. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 35, 39, 43, and 135–136. BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 46.

On this point, see also, for example: Rogers BRUBAKER, “Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu.” *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, 1985, no. 6, p. 745–775, here p. 756. Alena V. LEDENEVA, “Language as an Instrument of Power in the Works of Pierre Bourdieu.” *Manchester Sociology Occasional Papers*, vol. 41 (November), Editor: Peter Halfpenny, Department of Sociology, University of Manchester, 34 pages, 1994, p. 6–8.

⁵² BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 46 (my translation); original text: “sociological paradigm communities”.

⁵³ See esp. Thomas S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 3rd Edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1996 [1962].

⁵⁴ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques* (see previous quotation).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34 (my translation); original text: “les révolutions scientifiques”.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34–35 (my translation); original text: “Les actions des savants dans les sciences avancées sont déterminées par un « paradigme », ou « matrice disciplinaire », c’est-à-dire un

mount to the power of a culture, for “it determines the questions which can be asked and those which are excluded, the thinkable and the unthinkable”.⁵⁷ To the extent that different scientists function through the construction of particular paradigms, different paradigms function through the creation of particular scientists; *traditions of research* are produced and reproduced by *communities of researchers*, and vice versa.

While the *positivist* conception of science is founded on a *developmental* view of knowledge production, a *pragmatist* conception of science is based on a *canonical* account of knowledge construction. For whereas “positivist philosophy considers the progress of science as a movement of continuous accumulation”⁵⁸ (*Wissensanhäufung*), pragmatist philosophy regards the development of science as a process of constant adaptation (*Wissensanpassung*). According to the former, scientific knowledge needs to be *cumulative* in order to be innovative; according to the latter, scientific knowledge needs to be *adaptive* in order to be effective. Every scientific language game, therefore, is at the same time part of a particular epistemic development (*Wissensentwicklung*) and part of a given epistemic background (*Wissenshintergrund*): every scientific revolution presupposes the existence of an intellectual tradition, just as every cognitive transformation presupposes the existence of a social constellation.⁵⁹ Given Bourdieu’s simultaneous emphases on the developmental and the contextual nature of scientific knowledge, he conceives of social science as both an *evolutionary* and a *canonical* project.

6. Social science as an autonomous project versus social science as a heteronomous project

A further epistemological tension in Bourdieu’s writings emerges from the insight that, paradoxically, social science is both an *autonomous* and a *heteronomous* project. As an *autonomous* endeavour, the success of science is contingent upon its capacity to claim *neutrality*: the scientific field has a tendency to assert its relative independence from other social fields, notably from the political field, the economic field, and the religious field. As

état de l’accomplissement scientifique qui est accepté par une fraction importante des savants et qui tend à s’imposer à tous les autres.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35 (my translation); original text: “Il détermine les questions qui peuvent être posées et celles qui son exclues, le pensable et l’impensable.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34 (my translation); original text: “La philosophie positiviste considérant le progrès de la science comme un mouvement d’accumulation continu.”

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 37 (my translation); original text: “La révolution implique la tradition.”

a *heteronomous* endeavour, the development of science is conditional upon its ability to accept its own *normativity*: the lawfulness of the scientific field is permeated by the interest-ladenness of knowledge production as well as by the interest-ladenness of other social fields.

The assertion of scientific *autonomy* is epitomised in the fact that “[t]he distinguishing feature of intellectuals is that they have *disinterested interests*, that they have an *interest in disinterestedness*”.⁶⁰ In ideal-typical terms, to be scientifically autonomous means to be socially disinterested. In other words, rather than being driven by the interests of other social fields, the scientific field seeks to assert its autonomy by following the interest-laden determinacy of its own field-specific teleology: the search for scientific truths. Different social fields are shaped by different normative imperatives: in the *economic* field, actors may claim to make “business for the sake of business”; in the *artistic* field, actors may desire to create “art for the sake of art”; in the *judicial* field, actors may aim to pursue “justice for the sake of justice”; in the *scientific* field, actors may search to identify the “truth for the sake of truth”.⁶¹ The relative autonomy of fields is founded on their capacity to affirm their sovereignty by virtue of their own ideology and functionality. The lawfulness of a given social field manifests itself in the interested-ladenness of the actions and interactions undertaken within the boundaries of a spatiotemporally structured realm of possibilities. Thus, “studying the appearance of a *relatively autonomous* scientific field and the social conditions of the *autonomization* of this field”⁶² requires accounting for the empowering possibility of epistemic sovereignty.

To be sure, the highest degree of scientific autonomy is inconceivable without at least a minimal degree of structural heteronomy. In fact, Bourdieu reminds us of the dangers arising from the increasing structural heteronomy of the scientific field in modern society: “today, the universe of science is jeopardised by a dreadful regression”,⁶³ that is, “science is in danger and, therefore, becomes dangerous”.⁶⁴ What Bourdieu is particularly wary of is “the intertwining of industry and research”,⁶⁵ which, as he sees

⁶⁰ BOURDIEU, “For a Sociology of Sociologists.” p. 49 (italics added).

⁶¹ See BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 116–117.

⁶² BOURDIEU, “For a Sociology of Sociologists,” p. 50 (italics added).

⁶³ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 5 (my translation); original text: “L’univers de la science est menacé aujourd’hui d’une redoutable régression.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (my translation); original text: “La science est en danger et, de ce fait, elle devient dangereuse.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “entrelacement de l’industrie et de la recherche”.

it, is indicative of “the ‘neo-liberalisation’ of research: the predominance of market imperatives”⁶⁶ in almost every social field, including the scientific field. Put differently, the economic field seems to be strong enough to impose its profit-driven mode of functioning on almost every other social field. “The logic of competition and commercial interests”⁶⁷ has intensified “the sense of heteronomy”⁶⁸ brought about by the systemic colonisation of society and by the functional imperatives of a ubiquitous market economy. To the extent that scientific research is “in the service of the management of the established order”,⁶⁹ it fulfils the *integrative* function of reaffirming the legitimacy of a given society, thereby accepting the systemic imperatives underlying its structural *heteronomy*. To the extent that scientific research is aimed at uncovering the relative arbitrariness of ideological taken-for-grantedness, it fulfils the *subversive* function of questioning the validity of established forms of normativity, thereby illustrating the empowering nature of epistemic *autonomy*.

7. Social science as a unifying project *versus* social science as a divisive project

Another epistemological tension in Bourdieu’s writings can be found in the paradoxical assumption that social science constitutes both a *unifying* and a *divisive* project. The tension between the *holistic* view that science can and should strive to be a unified project and the *differentialist* view that science can and should strive to be a divided project is rooted in the normative discrepancy between the positivist plea for the creation of an *Einheitswissenschaft* (in French: *science unifiée*; in English: unified science) and the hermeneutic insistence on the inevitable existence of *Teilungswissenschaften* (in French: *sciences séparées*; in English: separated sciences). According to the former account, there is *no* significant ontological or methodological difference between the natural and the social sciences. According to the latter perspective, there *are* a number of considerable ontological and methodological differences between the natural and the social sciences.

In essence, the positivist idea of the possibility of an *Einheitswissenschaft* is founded on the holistic belief in the authenticity of an *Einheitswelt*:

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “la « néo-libéralisation » de la recherche : prédominance des impératives du marché”.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “la logique de la concurrence et intérêts commerciaux”.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “le sens de l’hétéronomie”.

⁶⁹ BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 13.

the natural and the social sciences are not fundamentally dissimilar because the natural and the social world are not substantially different. By contrast, the hermeneutic idea of the necessity of the *Teilungswissenschaften* is based on the differentialist belief in the plurality of *Teilungswelten*: the natural and the social sciences are fundamentally dissimilar because the natural and the social world are substantially different. In light of the *positivist* view, both the natural and the social world are determined by underlying mechanisms which shape their respective constitution and evolution; it is the task of science to uncover the underlying causality of reality. In light of the *hermeneutic* view, the social world is fundamentally different from the natural world in that it is composed of purposive and linguistic entities capable of attributing meaning to their existence and to the world in which they find themselves.

Paradoxically, Bourdieu endorses both views, recognising that the social world is both a *lawful* and a *meaningful* – i.e. both a causally and an intentionally determined – universe. On the one hand, and in accordance with what is commonly described as a *positivist* conception of reality, Bourdieu affirms that “[t]he physical world has *immanent tendencies* and [that] the same goes for the social world”.⁷⁰ For this reason, he warns of the dangers of the – somewhat arbitrary – disciplinary separations both *between and within* the natural and the social sciences,⁷¹ whose significance manifests itself in tendencies towards “premature specialization”⁷² in the scientific field. If one succeeds in “getting rid of the trivial difference between human agents and non-human agents”,⁷³ one can transcend the separation between the social and the natural sciences. On the other hand, and in accordance with what is generally known as a *hermeneutic* conception of reality, Bourdieu reminds us that “the critique of mechanical positivism serves to affirm the subjective nature of social facts and their *irreducibility* to the rigorous methods

⁷⁰ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 121 (already quoted above) (italics added) (my translation); original text: “Le monde physique a des tendances immanentes, et il en va de même du monde social”.

⁷¹ See BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 63 (my translation); original text: “On a fait disparaître la différence triviale entre les agents humains et les agents non humains”.

of science”.⁷⁴ Thus, he insists that “Diltheyan dualism”,⁷⁵ which is based on the ontological distinction between the natural and the cultural worlds, is imperative if one is willing to acknowledge that “social facts differ from the facts of the physical sciences”,⁷⁶ since they are permeated by “beliefs or individual opinions”.⁷⁷ In brief, society is shaped by the meaning-donating resources of subjectivity. If one accepts that there is a fundamental ontological difference between human agents and non-human agents, one has to face up to the ineluctable gap between the social and the natural sciences. Given his simultaneous endorsement of the holistic and the differentialist positions, Bourdieu seems to make a case for the paradoxical view that the social sciences and the natural sciences are both united and divided.

8. Social science as a disciplinary project *versus* social science as a transdisciplinary project

A further interesting tension in Bourdieu’s writings stems from the assumption that, in the modern world, scientific modes of knowledge production can be regarded as both *disciplinary* and *transdisciplinary* endeavours. The *disciplinary* nature of science is essentially due to the fact that both the natural and the social sciences tend to develop multiple areas of expertise. Indeed, the discursive specialisation of scientificity goes hand in hand with the structural differentiation of society: just as there are more and more areas of expertise in the advanced sciences, there is a growing presence of specialised fields in advanced societies. *Societies with specialised fields of action tend to produce sciences with specialised fields of cognition.* Weber’s famous rationalisation thesis, according to which the consolidation of modern society manifests itself in the differentiation of three cultural value spheres⁷⁸

⁷⁴ BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 19 (italics added) (my translation); original text: “La critique du positivisme machinal serve à affirmer le caractère subjectif des faits sociaux et leur irréductibilité aux méthodes rigoureuses de la science”.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18 (my translation); original text: “dualisme diltheyen”.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19 (my translation); original text: “les faits sociaux diffèrent des faits des sciences physiques”.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* (Bourdieu quoting F. A. van Hayek) (my translation); original text: “des croyances ou des opinions individuelles”.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Max WEBER, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der Verstehenden Soziologie*. 5. Auflage, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1980 [1922], p. 436, 486, 528, 553, 658, 666, and 672. See also, for example, Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Trans. T. McCarthy. Cambridge: Polity Press 1987

– i.e. science, law, and art – is symptomatic of what may be described as the “disciplinisation” of modern social life and modern social thought: we are literally “disciplined” to live and think in “disciplinary” ways to ensure that we are able to function in a “disciplinary” society. The idea of creating “interdisciplinary social sciences”⁷⁹ reflects an attempt to overcome disciplinary boundaries with the aim of consolidating transdisciplinary territories.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, sociology, in comparison to other scientific disciplines, can be conceived of as a “somewhat *undisciplined discipline*”⁸⁰ in that its very task consists in questioning the legitimacy and uncovering the historicity of disciplinary boundaries by exposing them to the scrutiny of sociological reflexivity. The *transdisciplinary* character of the sociological project obliges us to “abandon the dichotomy between the economic and the non-economic”,⁸¹ as well as other counterproductive oppositions, such as the material *versus* the symbolic, the empirical *versus* the transcendental, the descriptive *versus* the normative, and the universal *versus* the particular – to mention only a few of the most influential antinomies which pervade the disciplinary separations in the social sciences. Sociology, in the most radical sense, is the “science of *all* the practices”⁸² that are present in the human world, for *all* human practices need to be understood in terms of the social conditions of production which allow for the production of social conditions.

The epistemic rivalry between sociology and philosophy constitutes a paradigmatic struggle over the right to be considered the master discipline, that is, the discipline which can claim monopoly over the production of legitimate knowledge. Sociology is to philosophy what science is to religion: an epistemic threat to the self-declared legitimacy of an arbitrary authority. Scientific disciplines impose their authority upon reality to assert the validity of their own epistemic legitimacy. From the perspective of the scholastic

[1981], p. 335; and Larry RAY, *Rethinking Critical Theory: Emancipation in the Age of Global Social Movements*. London: Sage 1993, p. 24.

⁷⁹ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 197 (my translation); original text: “sciences sociales interdisciplinaires”.

⁸⁰ BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 148 (italics added) (my translation); original text: “la discipline plutôt indisciplinée”.

⁸¹ BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 209 (my translation); original text: “abandonner la dichotomie de l'économique et du non-économique”.

⁸² *Ibid.* (italics added) (my translation); original text: “science de toutes les pratiques”.

thinker,⁸³ philosophy can be regarded as “the sovereign discipline”,⁸⁴ thereby degrading sociology to “the stigmatised discipline”.⁸⁵ From a Bourdieusian point of view, by contrast, philosophy should be demystified as “the pseudo-sovereign discipline”, and sociology should be treated as “the anti-sovereign discipline”. For, according to Bourdieu, the ultimate source of legitimacy is not the epistemic authority invented by intellectual thought experiments of scholastic scientificity, but the historical authority derived from relationally defined positions within a conflict-ridden society. The transformation of “the position of sociology within the realm of disciplines”⁸⁶ hinges on recognition of the positional contingencies which lie at the heart of field-differentiated societies. Thus, disciplinary separations are both *real* and *imagined*: as a powerful reality, the modern sciences are *institutionally* divided into disciplinary fields of action; as a powerful imaginary, the modern sciences are *ideologically* divided into disciplinary fields of cognition. On both levels, however, modern social science is conceivable only as both a disciplinary and a transdisciplinary endeavour.

9. Social science as a transhistorical project *versus* social science as a sociohistorical project

A ninth epistemological tension which can be traced in Bourdieu’s writings originates in the paradoxical assumption that social science can be considered as both a *transhistorical* and a *sociohistorical* project. Whereas the former view manifests itself in Bourdieu’s belief in the *Realpotential* of reason, the latter perspective is expressed in Bourdieu’s insistence on the *Realsituation* of reason. Bourdieu repeatedly emphasises the ambivalent nature of reason: the double-edged ontology of human rationality stems from the tension-laden fact that reason constitutes both a *transhistorical* and a *sociohistorical* force.⁸⁷

⁸³ On Bourdieu’s critique of scholastic thought, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 47; BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l’action*, p. 234 and 265; Pierre BOURDIEU, “Sur les rapports entre la sociologie et l’histoire en Allemagne et en France.” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 106–107, 1995, p. 108–122, here p. 115; BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 9, 15, 22, 24, 131, and 143; BOURDIEU, “*Si le monde social m’est supportable, c’est parce que je peux m’indigner.*” *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ See BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 218.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*

⁸⁶ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 209 (my translation); original text: “la position de la sociologie dans l’espace des disciplines”.

⁸⁷ See, for example, BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 25.

As a *transhistorical* force, reason is one amongst other aspects of human life which are “*relatively independent* from their social conditions of production”.⁸⁸ Hence, when reason serves as an explanatory force by which to discover so-called “scientific truths”,⁸⁹ it fulfils the universal function of uncovering underlying laws which govern the constitution and evolution of the world regardless of the historical specificity of a given aspect of reality. Acknowledging that there are certain scientific truths which *transcend* the spatiotemporal determinacy of different societies, Bourdieu explicitly recognises that reason *can* serve as a transhistorical force insofar as both its constitutive nature and its substantive achievements – that is, both reason in itself and scientific discoveries derived from reasoning – can claim cognitive or normative authority independently of the sociohistorical specificity of their context of emergence. In light of the transhistorical significance of reason, Bourdieu warns of the pitfalls of what he considers to be “irrationalist relativism”,⁹⁰ the defence of which has become more and more popular in the contemporary social sciences, particularly with the rise of so-called culturalist and postmodernist approaches in recent decades.⁹¹

As a *sociohistorical* force, reason is one amongst other aspects of human life which can be understood only *in relation to*, rather than *independently from*, “their social conditions of production”.⁹² Nevertheless, it is important to remember that “to make science an object of historical and sociological

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24 (italics added) (my translation); original text: “relativement indépendants de leurs conditions sociales de production”.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “vérités scientifiques”.

⁹⁰ BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 133 (my translation); original text: “relativisme irrationaliste”.

⁹¹ On Bourdieu's critique of postmodernist and culturalist approaches in the social sciences, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, p. 170. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 132–133. BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 47–48. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 5–6. Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, “For a Realpolitik of Reason.” In: BOURDIEU P. – WACQUANT, L. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 174–202, here p. 194. Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, “The Personal is Social.” In: BOURDIEU P. – WACQUANT, L. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 202–215, here p. 203. See also, for example, Keith BASSETT, “Postmodernism and the Crisis of the Intellectual: Reflections on Reflexivity, University, and the Scientific Field.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 14, 1996, no. 5, p. 507–527, and Loïc WACQUANT, “Reason, Ethics, and Politics.” In: BOURDIEU P. – WACQUANT, L. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 47–59, here p. 47.

⁹² BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 24 (my translation); original text: “leurs conditions sociales de production” (already referred to above).

analysis of science does not at all mean to relativise scientific knowledge [...] and thereby reduce it to its historical conditions”⁹³ of production. Rather, it means to accept that both the constitution and the function of reason need to be examined in relation to its social conditions of production, for the most abstract processes of cognition and reflection are embedded in historically specific settings of action and interaction. Every form of rationality is impregnated with distinctive layers of historicity. This is not to suggest, however, that Bourdieu’s “historical contextualism”⁹⁴ and “historical rationalism”⁹⁵ are hidden forms of “historical relativism”:⁹⁶ to historicise reason means to account for the contextual determinacy, rather than the complete relativity, of human rationality. Insisting on the sociohistorical determinacy of reason, Bourdieu explicitly rejects any form of “transhistorical universalism”⁹⁷ which seeks to uncover “transhistorical truths, independently of history, detached from all relations [...], thus, eternally and universally valid”.⁹⁸

Of course, there are a number of philosophical approaches which have sought to provide universalist accounts of the world in general and of reason in particular: Descartes’s interpretation of the relationship between mind and body, Kant’s notion of the transcendental subject, the early Wittgenstein’s inquiry into the underlying grammar of human language, or Habermas’s search for the transcendental conditions of rationally guided and linguistically mediated forms of communication, to mention only some of the most influential philosophical frameworks with which Bourdieu takes issue.⁹⁹ According to Bourdieu, all of these approaches are deeply problematic in that they fail to explain the “contingent”¹⁰⁰ nature of reason, since they overlook, or at least underestimate, the fact that the resourceful power of rationality is always contingent upon the sociohistorical determinacy which underlies every cognitive claim to epistemic validity. Whereas metaphysical philosophy aims to grasp the allegedly *transcendental* conditions of reason,

⁹³ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 8 (my translation); original text: “soumettre la science à une analyse historique et sociologique de la science ne vise nullement à relativiser la connaissance scientifique en la rapportant et en la réduisant à ses conditions historiques”.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “contextualisme historique”.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “rationalisme historique”.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “relativisme historique”.

⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁸ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 10 (my translation); original text: “des vérités transhistoriques, indépendantes de l’histoire, détachées de tous liens et avec le lieu et le moment, donc valables éternellement et universellement”.

⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 10–11.

¹⁰⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 25.

critical sociology “permits us to describe the *social* conditions of reason”.¹⁰¹ Such a sociohistorical analysis of reason allows us to make a case for what Bourdieu refers to as the “*Realpolitik* of reason”,¹⁰² that is, a politics of reason which is capable of mobilising the *transhistorical potentials* inherent in rationality whilst recognising the *sociohistorical determinacy* underlying every claim to scientificity.

10. Social science as an immanent project *versus* social science as a transcendent project

A tenth significant epistemological tension in Bourdieu's writings springs from the assumption that social science is both an *immanent* and a *transcendent* project, that is, it is both a *socially immanent* and a *socially transcendent* project. As a socially immanent project, critical scientific research emerges from *within* the spatiotemporal horizon of a given reality. Therefore, critical researchers need to be prepared to face up to the societal immanence of the most radical forms of reflective transcendence. As a socially transcendent project, critical scientific research can seek to go *beyond* the normative parameters of a given reality. In this sense, critical researchers, in addition to being able to distance themselves from the givenness of their designated sociohistorical horizon, have the capacity to challenge the preponderance of societal immanence through the creative forcefulness of reflective transcendence. A socially immanent undertaking, critical research permits us to examine the spatiotemporal specificity of human reality and thereby capture the *power of relations* which shape the assembled contingency of society. A socially transcendent endeavour, critical research enables us to contribute to the reinvention of human reality and thereby transform the *relations of power* which underlie the contested determinacy of society.

The importance of the transcendent ambition of the Bourdieusian project can hardly be overemphasised. Warning that it would be illusory to think that sociology could be a purely descriptive endeavour concerned exclusively with the representation, rather than the reinvention, of social reality, Bourdieu contends that “*formal or formalistic* minds generally produce wretched sociology”.¹⁰³ A sociology guided merely by the principle of

¹⁰¹ BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 32 (italics added) (my translation); original text: “La sociologie permet de décrire les conditions sociales”.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* (my translation); original text: “*Realpolitik* de la raison”.

¹⁰³ BOURDIEU, “A Science that Makes Trouble,” p. 10 (italics added).

representational adequacy fails to do justice to the transformative potentials of society. All societies are relationally constructed and can therefore be theoretically deconstructed and practically reconstructed. It is the task of Bourdieusian sociology to explore the transformative potentials of society by casting light on the relational constitution of human reality.

Acknowledging that contestability is an integral feature of every society, Bourdieu insists that “[s]ociology is an especially difficult, an especially improbable, science”,¹⁰⁴ for “[o]ne of the major difficulties lies in the fact that its *objects are stakes in social struggles*”.¹⁰⁵ The social universe is not only a world of co-operative entities *united* by their existential dependence on mutual trust and understanding, but also a world of purposive entities *divided* by their interest-laden search for power and resources. The interest-laden nature of social reality manifests itself in the value-laden character of social science; there is no value-free knowledge about reality because all knowledge is produced within a given society. Not even scientific reflexivity can escape the omnipresence of social normativity. Only if we recognise the normative constitution of human reality can we do justice to the transformative potentials inherent in society.

I too sometimes wonder if the completely transparent and disenchanting social universe that would be produced by a social science that was fully developed (and widely diffused, if that could ever be the case) would not be impossible to live in. I think, all the same, that social relations would be much less unhappy if people at least understood the mechanisms that lead them to contribute to their own deprivation.¹⁰⁶

Faced with the challenge of human deprivation, a reflexive social science should aim to contribute not only to the critical *examination* of a society that compels every individual to function in accordance with the instrumental imperatives of an interest-laden reality, but also to the purposive *construction* of a society that enables its members to mobilise their self-empowering resources and thereby realise their emancipatory potentials.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* (italics added).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has examined ten epistemological tensions underlying Bourdieu's conception of social science. The insights of this study, which support the view that Bourdieu's account of social-scientific knowledge production is far more fine-grained than is commonly assumed, can be synthesised as follows.

1. As a *scientific* project, social science is aimed at providing *accurate* accounts of how the social world *is* organised. To this end, it is guided by criteria of scientificity, such as objectivity, adequacy, and verifiability. As a *political* project, social science is committed to offering *engaged* accounts of how the social world *could and should be* organised. In so doing, it is inspired by criteria of political normativity, such as legitimacy, efficacy, and implementability.
2. As an *uncovering* project, social science aims to shed light on the underlying mechanisms that determine both the constitution and the evolution of the social world. To the extent that social scientists seek to explore the immanent tendencies which permeate the energy of social physics with the functionality of social fields, they are concerned with examining the *ontology* of the social world. As a *reconstructing* project, social science aims to interpret the various meanings ordinary actors attribute to reality by means of their symbolic construction of society. To the extent that social scientists seek to interpret the meanings which imbue the energy of social physics with the symbolic resources of everyday hermeneutics, they are concerned with studying the *phenomenology* of the social world.
3. As an *explanatory* project, social science follows the methodological imperative of *Erklären (expliquer)*: social science can be considered as a tool by which to *explain* the nature of the underlying structures which determine human actors' engagement with the world. As an *interpretive* project, social science is motivated by the methodological imperative of *Verstehen (comprendre)*: social science can be regarded as a tool by which to *understand* the nature of the field-specific discourses through which human actors interpret the world.
4. As an *assertive* project, social science has a *constative* function: its analysis of human reality is based on the methodical representation of social facts. As a *reflexive* project, social science has a *critical* function: its analysis of human reality is committed not only to questioning the

legitimacy of established forms of normativity but also to examining the conditions of possibility underlying the discursive exercise of critical reflexivity.

5. As an *evolutionary* project, social science contributes to the *cumulative* production of knowledge. Insofar as discursive truth claims concerning the functioning of the human world may either contradict or complement each other, they contribute to the *progress* of the social sciences. As a *canonical* project, social science is shaped by the *adaptive* production of knowledge. Insofar as discursive truth claims concerning the functioning of the human world emerge out of different intellectual traditions, they reflect the canonical *divisions* in the social sciences. The evolution of scientific knowledge is contingent upon the canonisation of paradigmatic discourses.
6. As an *autonomous* project, the success of social science rests upon its ability to claim *neutrality*: the scientific field has a tendency to assert its relative independence from other social fields. As a *heteronomous* project, the development of science hinges upon its capacity to face up to its own *normativity*: like any other social field, the scientific field is permeated by competing and conflicting interests pursued by positionally situated actors with dispositionally specific resources. The relative autonomy of cognitive claims to epistemic validity cannot be dissociated from the relative heteronomy of all purposive dimensions of social reality, since every quest for scientific neutrality is embedded in a horizon of social normativity.
7. As a *unifying* project, social science needs to recognise that the possibility of an *Einheitswissenschaft* is anticipated by the authenticity of an *Einheitswelt*: the natural and the social sciences should strive for the construction of a unified science, because the natural world and the social world are part of one and the same universe. As a *divisive* project, social science needs to acknowledge that the plurality of the *Teilungswissenschaften* reflects the multiplicity of *Teilungswelten*: the natural and the social sciences are methodologically divided forms of inquiry, because the natural world and the social world constitute ontologically distinct realms of reality.
8. As a *disciplinary* project, social science cannot but accept that the *discursive specialisation* of scientificity goes hand in hand with the *structural differentiation* of society: the increasing number of areas of expertise in the advanced sciences corresponds to the growing amount of specialised fields in complex societies. As a *transdisciplinary* project,

social science needs to question the pervasive taken-for-grantedness of disciplinary boundaries by problematising the relative arbitrariness of specialised fields of knowledge: every attempt to overcome disciplinary boundaries potentially contributes to the consolidation of transdisciplinary territories.

9. As a *transhistorical* project, social science can claim cognitive authority by virtue of a universalising rationality which transcends its own socio-historical specificity: the *force réelle* of the reasoning subject transcends the *situation réelle* of the reasoned object. As a *sociohistorical* project, social science can claim normative authority insofar as it recognises that rationality is always conditioned by its own sociohistorical specificity: the *politique réelle* embraced by a given community is embedded in the *situation réelle* shaped by its own history.
10. As an *immanent* project, social science, even in its most radical and unorthodox versions, needs to face up to the fact that it emerges from *within* the spatiotemporal horizon of a given reality. As a *transcendent* project, social science can seek to go *beyond* the normative parameters of a particular historical constellation, enabling us not only to question the legitimacy of different forms of social organisation, but also to contribute to both individual and collective processes of emancipation.

The detailed examination of the aforementioned epistemological tensions illustrates that the predominant view that Bourdieu's conception of social science is essentially founded on positivist presuppositions fails to do justice to Bourdieu's account of social-scientific knowledge production, which is far more insightful than generally acknowledged. In light of the above analysis, a fine-grained picture emerges which demonstrates that Bourdieu invites, and indeed compels, us to reflect upon the complexity of the various tension-laden tasks intrinsic to the pursuit of a critical social science.

Yet, even if we recognise that Bourdieu's conception of social science is a highly complex one and that, contrary to common belief, he offers a remarkably insightful account of the nature of systematic forms of knowledge production, we need to go one step further and reflect upon the shortcomings and limitations inherent in the epistemological presuppositions of Bourdieusian thought. If, in accordance with Bourdieu, we seek to be genuinely committed to the idea of sociological reflexivity, then it is not only reasonable but also essential to shed light on the pitfalls and problems arising from the epistemological presuppositions underlying Bourdieu's account of

social science. Hence, following the structure of the previous analysis, this paper shall conclude by arguing that, given that it is far from clear whether or not the aforementioned epistemological tensions can be reconciled, the Bourdieusian account of scientific knowledge production is problematic in the following respects.

1. Sociology can be characterised as both a *scientific* project, which is aimed at providing accurate accounts of how the social world *is* organised, and a *political* project, which is committed to offering engaged accounts of how the social world *could and should be* organised. In other words, social research can be guided by criteria of *scientificity* as much as it can be motivated by criteria of *normativity*. Yet, the epistemological tension between *scientism and normativism*, which lies at the heart of the Bourdieusian conception of social research, poses a number of serious analytical problems. Even if we are willing to accept that every society is never simply a world of facticity but always also a world of validity, and even if we share the assumption that sociology should aim to provide both descriptive knowledge *about* and normative knowledge *for* the social world, it is questionable whether or not Bourdieu's claim that "[s]ociology seems to [...] have all the properties that define a science"¹⁰⁷ is reconcilable with his somewhat self-critical confession that "[s]ociology has the unfortunate privilege of being constantly confronted with the question of its status as a science".¹⁰⁸ In essence, Bourdieu's insistence upon the scientificity of sociology rests on his belief in the *positivity, objectivity, and universality* of compelling knowledge claims. What Bourdieu does not analyse in any great depth, however, are the roles of *linguisticity, subjectivity, and relativity* in the normative construction of social-scientific knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Given that every scientific approach to society is conceivable only as a *linguistically mediated* relation to reality,

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ In all fairness, it has to be said that cursory remarks on the role of linguisticity, subjectivity, and relativity in the production of social-scientific knowledge can be found, for instance, in BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 19, 52, 69–70, 99–102, and 158. On this point, see also, for example: Pierre BOURDIEU, "Le champ scientifique." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 8–9 [2-3], 1976, p. 88–104, esp. p. 89–94. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Questions de Sociologie*. Paris: Minuit 1984, esp. p. 19–36, 37–60, 86–94, 121–137. BOURDIEU, "La cause de la science," esp. p. 3–7. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, esp. 141–165. Pierre BOURDIEU, "Wittgenstein, le sociologisme & la science sociale." In: BOUVERESSE, J. – LAUGIER, S. –

the reliability of experience-based knowledge is contingent upon the representational capacity of language. Since every scientific explanation rests upon a *subjectively formulated* interpretation of the world, the possibility of epistemic value-freeness is undermined by the omnipresent reality of positionally structured forms of value-ladenness. If every scientific generalisation about the world can assert epistemic authority only insofar as it recognises the *contextually contingent* relativity of all claims to representational accuracy, then the forcefulness of discursive claims to universal validity hinges upon the spatiotemporally constituted arbitrariness of social legitimacy. In short, the epistemic ideal of scientificity cannot rise above the social constraints of linguistically mediated, subjectively mobilised, and contextually anchored forms of normativity.

2. Social science can be conceived of as both an *uncovering* project, aimed at shedding light on the underlying mechanisms which determine the nature and development of the social world, and a *reconstructing* project, which permits us to study the multifaceted ways in which people's actions are imbued with meaning. Put differently, social science is concerned with both the *ontology* and the *phenomenology* of the human world. It is far from clear, however, to what extent the tension between *ontological realism* and *phenomenological constructivism* can be resolved. Even if we assume that Bourdieu is right to assert that “[o]f all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism”,¹¹⁰ and even if we share the view that a critical “science of the social world”¹¹¹ should set itself the task of “moving beyond the antagonism between these two modes of knowledge, while preserving the gains from each of them”,¹¹² we have to accept that the realist ambition to uncover society's structurally constituted *lawfulness* and the interpretivist mission to reconstruct society's interactionally established *meaning-ladenness* are two entirely different analytical endeavours. If

ROSAT, J.-J. (eds.), *Wittgenstein, dernières pensées* Marseille: Fondation Hugot du Collège de France, Agone 2002, p. 343–353, esp. p. 347–352.

¹¹⁰ BOURDIEU, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 25.

See also original publication: Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, p. 43: “De toutes les oppositions qui divisent artificiellement la science sociale, la plus fondamentale, et la plus ruineuse, est celle qui s'établit entre le subjectivisme et l'objectivisme.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.* (translation modified).

our task consists, first and foremost, in *uncovering* the underlying mechanisms that determine the constitution and evolution of the social world, then the various meanings which human beings attribute, rightly or wrongly, to their existence are relevant only insofar as they shape, directly or indirectly, the structural arrangements that have a constraining influence on their actions. If, by contrast, our task consists primarily in *reconstructing* the infinite meanings that human actors attach to reality through their symbolic construction of society, then the underlying mechanisms by which people's actions are, at least partly, determined are only relevant insofar as they constitute the relationally structured background of a performatively constructed foreground. In brief, the ontology and the phenomenology of the social world are two interrelated but *irreducible* components of the human universe. To the extent that the social condition of being *in* the world and the social construction of meaning *about* the world concern two intimately intertwined but functionally distinct dimensions of human existence, the challenge consists in cross-fertilising the respective insights gained from ontological realism and phenomenological constructivism, while recognising that they designate fundamentally different, albeit not mutually exclusive, epistemological frameworks.

3. Social science can be regarded as both an *explanatory* project, which is guided by the methodological challenge of *Erklären* and thus aimed at examining the functional constitution of social arrangements, and an *interpretive* project, which is motivated by the methodological maxim of *Verstehen* and hence oriented towards exploring the symbolic constitution of social relations. From this perspective, social research is concerned with both the structurally embedded *interest-ladenness* and the symbolically mediated *meaning-ladenness* of the human world. Yet, even if we account for the interdependence of the interest-laden forces and the meaning-laden resources of social life, the epistemological tension between the *positivist* trust in the explanatory power of social science and the *hermeneutic* reliance on the interpretive accomplishments of social actors cannot be resolved simply by demonstrating that the paradigm of *Erklären* and the paradigm of *Verstehen* constitute irreducible components in the Bourdieusian universe of reflexive knowledge production. The point is not to suggest that emphasis upon the explanatory functions of social science and insistence upon the interpretive resources of social actors contradict one another; rather, the point is to acknowledge that it would be naïve to believe that the epistemological

antinomy between the paradigm of explanation and the paradigm of interpretation can be overcome by assuming that they constitute complementary, rather than contradictory, modes of knowledge production. The epistemological divide between the Marxian view that “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided”¹¹³ and the Weberian view that “[s]ociology [...] is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action”¹¹⁴ is indicative of the far-reaching normative implications arising from the methodological *separation*, in modern social thought, between the paradigm of explanation and the paradigm of interpretation. Regardless of whether we subscribe to the positivist view that “the world has been *interpreted* in various ways, while the point is to *explain* it” or to the interpretivist view that “the world has been *explained* in various ways, while the point is to *understand* it”, the paradigm of *Erklären* and the paradigm of *Verstehen* are incommensurable in that their divergent presuppositional horizons generate fundamentally different types of knowledge. The former seeks to uncover the underlying forces of the world *regardless of* ordinary people’s observations and interpretations; the latter aims to study the meanings attributed *to* the world *depending on* ordinary people’s perceptions and representations. To the extent that the paradigm of explanation and the paradigm of interpretation reflect two idiosyncratic epistemological positions, we have to accept that the explanatory study of the interest-laden constitution of society and the interpretive study of the meaning-laden interaction with reality represent essentially different explorative endeavours.

4. Social science can be considered as both an *assertive* project, based on the methodical representation of social facts, and a *reflexive* project, committed not only to questioning the legitimacy of established forms of normativity but also to exploring the conditions of possibility underlying the discursive exercise of critical reflexivity. Nonetheless, even if we share Bourdieu’s view that social scientists should seek to contribute to the possibility of human emancipation as well as to reflexive processes of self-critical problematisation, we must neither overestimate sociology’s capacity to have a substantial impact upon the development of society

¹¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital*. Volume III, chapter 48, 1974 [1894], p. 817, quoted in Jorge LARRAIN, “Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology.” In: MORLEY, D. – CHEN, K.-H. (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* London: Routledge 1996, p. 47–70.

¹¹⁴ Max WEBER, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.). Berkeley: University of California Press 1978 [1922], p. 4.

nor misjudge sociologists' ability to subject the historical conditions of epistemic validity to self-critical scrutiny. The Enlightenment dream of human progress based on individual autonomy and social responsibility has been shattered too often by the ubiquitous power of systemic heteronomy and instrumental rationality. The scientific belief in sociology's capacity to shape, or even steer, the development of society fails to acknowledge that genuine processes of human emancipation are realised not through exogenously stipulated mechanisms of disempowering orchestration "from above" but through endogenously motivated processes of self-empowering exploration "from below". If social scientists are portrayed as the enlightening vanguards of political transformation and ordinary actors are reduced to docile puppets blinded by the false consciousness of doxic illusions, then we relegate the possibility of collective emancipation to the sterile imaginary of intellectual orchestration. If the twentieth century has taught us one lesson, it is that totally administered societies do not need totally administered revolutions.

5. Social science constitutes both an *evolutionary* project, in which the discursive exchange of competing truth claims contributes to the general progress of knowledge, and a *canonical* project, in which the epistemic formation of shared presuppositions is reflected in the emergence of increasingly differentiated intellectual traditions. In this sense, the very possibility of social science not only presupposes an underlying *teleology* of cumulative knowledge production, but also requires the functional *elasticity* of adaptive knowledge construction. Yet, despite the undeniable confluence of the cumulative and the adaptive capacities of scientific research, reflection on the tension between knowledge-theoretic *evolutionism* and field-theoretic *contextualism* poses more questions than it provides answers. In its most ambitious variant, an evolutionist view of human cognition suggests that science permits us to raise *cumulative* knowledge claims which, *regardless of* their presuppositional specificity, allow us to paint an increasingly accurate picture of the underlying forces of reality. Conversely, a contextualist conception of human cognition is founded on the assumption that science enables us to raise *adaptive* knowledge claims which, *depending on* their presuppositional determinacy, authorise us to develop consensual, and hence increasingly diversified, approaches to particular aspects of reality. If the validity of epistemic authority derives from a truth claim's representational capacity to provide a cogent explanatory account based on the closest proximity to the actual functioning of reality, then the

consensual constraints imposed by a given intellectual community can be epistemically transcended only by the evidence-based forcefulness of scientific discursiveness. If, however, the acceptability of epistemic authority rests on the legitimacy granted by a given scientific community, then the ideal of scientificity, based on the belief in representational accuracy and evolutionary knowledgeability, is undermined by the presuppositional arbitrariness which permeates every consensus-based form of canonical taken-for-grantedness. In short, in Bourdieu's writings on scientific knowledge production, the tension between cognitive evolutionism and epistemic contextualism persists.

6. Paradoxically, social science can be conceived of as both an *autonomous* and a *heteronomous* project. To the extent that the scientific field succeeds in defending its relative independence from other social fields, it enjoys a healthy degree of autonomy; to the extent that the scientific field can be colonised by other social fields, it suffers from a considerable degree of heteronomy. Yet, just as we need to acknowledge the paradoxical fact that social research is a tension-laden endeavour which seeks to defend its relative independence from external constraints, whilst having to accept its relative dependence upon these constraints, we have to avoid falling into the traps of *intellectual idealism* and *social determinism*. Bourdieu is right to insist that, at least in principle, all social fields have the capacity to assert their relative autonomy in relation to other spheres of society, just as all social fields are pervaded by a degree of heteronomy which is indicative of their historical determinacy. Even if, however, we assume that the pursuit of a critical social science is inconceivable without the discursive exercise of constant reflexivity, the extent to which the search for scientific autonomy will allow academic disciplines to claim intellectual and institutional sovereignty without being dominated by the structural constraints of a market-driven society remains to be seen.
7. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the natural and the social sciences are *united* by the fact that both are concerned with uncovering the underlying laws which govern the functioning of the world, and they are *divided* by the fact that the social world, unlike the natural world, is a cultural realm constructed by meaning-producing entities, whose anthropological specificity cannot be grasped by virtue of a positivist methodology. In order that we recognise that the social world is both a lawful and a meaningful realm composed of human interactions, we need to face up to the epistemological tension between the *holistic* position, according to which a single world requires a unified science,

and the *differentialist* position, according to which fundamentally different ontologies require substantially divergent methodologies. Considering the fact that in his earlier works Bourdieu clearly favoured the former – arguably positivist – view¹¹⁵, whereas in some of his later writings he moved towards the latter – arguably interpretivist – view,¹¹⁶ at the heart of the Bourdieusian project there appears to lie an epistemological opposition comparable to the philosophical tension between the early Wittgenstein’s logical positivism¹¹⁷ and the late Wittgenstein’s ordinary language philosophy.¹¹⁸ It may be relatively straightforward to identify this tension;¹¹⁹ it is extremely difficult, however, to make sense of it. The paradigmatic gap between the early Wittgenstein’s focus on propositionally structured knowledge claims and the late Wittgenstein’s emphasis on contextually contingent language games is irresolvable to the extent that a *correspondence* theory of truth, founded on the allegedly transcendental nature underlying the logical and representational resources of language, and an *emergence* theory of truth, based on the presumably contextual nature permeating the referential and societal construction of language, cannot exist side by side as reconcilable epistemological positions. Similarly, the paradigmatic gap between the early Bourdieu’s insistence on the interest-laden lawfulness of the social world and the late Bourdieu’s concern with the meaning-laden arbitrariness of the human universe is problematic to the extent that a *positivist* conception of scientific knowledge, which suggests that the social sciences have to confront the explanatory task of uncovering underlying patterns of determinacy, and an *interpretivist* conception of scientific knowledge, which assumes that the social sciences have to take on the hermeneutic task of exploring human actions in terms of their intelligibility, cannot be easily reconciled.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, BOURDIEU, “Le champ scientifique,” and BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, esp. p. 27–49 and 100–102.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Pierre BOURDIEU, “Comprendre.” In: BOURDIEU, P. (ed.), *La misère du monde* Paris: Seuil 1993, p. 1389–1447.

¹¹⁷ See Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*. 6. Auflage, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1969 [1921].

¹¹⁸ See Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. 3. Auflage, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1982 [1953].

¹¹⁹ Of course, Bourdieu was well aware of the philosophical tension between the early and the late Wittgenstein. See, for example, Bourdieu, “Wittgenstein, le sociologisme & la science sociale.”

8. Just as *disciplinary divisions* play a major role in the organisational and intellectual differentiation of the social sciences, *transdisciplinary dialogue* lies at the heart of critical social analysis. Contemporary social research is marked not only by deep material and symbolic divisions between different disciplines, but also by constructive and innovative ways of cutting across established disciplinary boundaries. A curious paradox with which we are confronted is the fact that disciplinary boundaries are both real and imagined: they are *real* because they shape the institutional and ideological horizons in accordance with which social scientists undertake and discuss their research; at the same time, they are *imagined* because clear-cut separations between established modes of research are always to some degree artificial, and hardly any domain in the social sciences can claim to have been monopolised by one particular discipline. Of course, disciplinary traditions have a substantial impact upon the practical organisation and theoretical structuration of scientific research; in this sense, disciplinary boundaries are not only real but tremendously powerful, contributing to both the institutional ramification and the ideological canonisation of knowledge production. Yet, disciplinary comfort zones are never hermetically sealed but are unavoidably influenced by knowledge which transcends epistemic boundaries. In other words, almost no field of research can avoid drawing, implicitly or explicitly, on various epistemic frameworks generated by different disciplines. The question remains, however, whether or not the disciplinary specialisation of knowledge is both an inevitable and a desirable feature of social evolution. Although Bourdieu's field theory is useful in illustrating that societies with differentiated spheres of interaction tend to generate diversified realms of cognition, it does not address the question to what extent the disciplinary demarcation and the transdisciplinary orientation of scientific research constitute *evolutionary preconditions* for the fruitful development and constant improvement of large-scale processes of knowledge production in advanced societies. If disciplinary differentiation and transdisciplinary communication together constitute the *sine qua non* of modern scientific research, then, contrary to Bourdieu's scepticism towards evolutionary theories of society in general and of language in particular,¹²⁰ we need to

¹²⁰ See, for instance, Bourdieu's critique of Habermas's communication-theoretic evolutionism: BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, p. 165, 170–171, and 235–236. BOURDIEU, "La cause de la science," p. 10. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascalienues*, p. 32, 80,

explore the extent to which, in late modern forms of social organisation, the evolution of human cognition is inconceivable without the disciplinary organisation of scientific investigation.

9. Social science can be conceived of as both a *transhistorical* project, whose universalising rationality seeks to transcend the contextual specificity of its own spatiotemporal determinacy, and a *sociohistorical* project, whose normative authority is contingent upon the ideological legitimacy of its own claims to epistemic validity. From this perspective, social research is concerned with the study of both the *universal conditions* of action and cognition, which transcend the spatiotemporal specificity of a given society, and the *particular conditions* of action and cognition, which constitute a praxeological background of historical contingency. Deeply suspicious of universalist accounts of reason and society, Bourdieu sought to shed light on the historical conditions underlying the development of modern conceptions of cognition and action. Yet, although one of the main aims of Bourdieu's work was to overcome counterproductive antinomies in social and political thought,¹²¹

81, 95, 99, 128, 131, 143, 145, 292 n. 13, 296 n. 8, 296–297 n. 9, and 297 n. 10. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Les usages sociaux de la science. Pour une sociologie clinique du champ scientifique*. Paris: INRA 1997, p. 60. Pierre BOURDIEU, “Scattered Remarks.” *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 2, 1999, no. 3, p. 333–340, here p. 338. BOURDIEU, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris: Raisons d’agir, 2004), p. 13. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, “Interest, Habitus, Rationality,” p. 139. Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, “Language, Gender, and Symbolic Violence.” In: BOURDIEU, P. – WACQUANT, L. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 140–174, here p. 147, 154 n. 109, and 156. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, “For a Realpolitik of Reason,” p. 188–189. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 10, 48, and 161–162.

¹²¹ On Bourdieu's ambition to overcome counterproductive antinomies in social and political thought, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 29, 43, 46, 77, 78, 87, 103, 135–138, 178, 202, 209, 234, and 242. BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 43, 46, 78, 87, 103, 178, 202, 234, and 242. Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 35–37. Pierre BOURDIEU, “L'économie des échanges linguistiques.” In: BOURDIEU, P. *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* Paris: Fayard 1982, p. 11–21, here p. 14. Pierre BOURDIEU, “La production et la reproduction de la langue légitime.” In: BOURDIEU, P. *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* Paris: Fayard 1982, p. 23–58, here p. 36. Pierre BOURDIEU, “Espace social et genèse des ‘classes’.” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 52–53, 1984, p. 3–14, here p. 5. BOURDIEU, “The Paradox of the Sociologist,” p. 55, 57, and 59. BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, p. 169. Pierre BOURDIEU, “Stratégies de reproduction et modes de domination.” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 105, 1994, p. 3–12, here p. 3. BOURDIEU, “La cause de la science,” p. 8. BOURDIEU, “Sur les rapports entre la sociologie et l'histoire en Allemagne et en France,” p. 120. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 16–17, 43, 77, 122, 157, 159–160, 163–167, 185, and 225. Pierre BOURDIEU,

substantive parts of his own writings remain trapped in the aporia of paradigmatic oppositions, including the epistemological opposition between universalist and contextualist accounts of knowledge. To the extent that Bourdieu's social theory not only reproduces the antinomy between universalist and contextualist approaches to knowledge but also favours the latter over the former, we are left in an epistemic no-man's-land, in which the transcendental pretensions of metaphysical philosophy¹²² and the relativist pitfalls of postmodern sociology¹²³ are rightly criticised, but in which no viable epistemological alternative is offered apart from a vague plea for a *Realpolitik of reason*,¹²⁴ founded on the legitimate, but not particularly insightful, assumption that in order to understand the historical constitution of knowledge claims we need to examine "their social conditions of production".¹²⁵ The question is not whether or not knowledge and reason are expressed in sociohistorically contingent horizons of cognition and action; rather, the question is to what extent the very possibility of linguistic claims to epistemic validity depends on the interplay between the transhistorical potentials of rationality and the sociohistorical conditions of reality.

La domination masculine. Paris: Seuil 1998, p. 9 and 110. Pierre BOURDIEU, *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Trans. C. Turner. Cambridge: Polity Press 2005 [2000], p. 210–213. BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 7, 24, and 31. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 76, 151, and 153. BOURDIEU, "Wittgenstein, le sociologisme & la science sociale," p. 353. BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 34, 93–94, and 101. Pierre BOURDIEU – Loïc WACQUANT, "Sociology as Socioanalysis". In: BOURDIEU, P. – WACQUANT, L. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Cambridge: Polity Press 1992, p. 62–74, here p. 66. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, "Interest, Habitus, Rationality," p. 121–122. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, "Language, Gender, and Symbolic Violence," p. 151 and 162.

¹²² On Bourdieu's critique of metaphysical thought, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, p. 41, 43, 47–49, 61, 67. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 56, 90, 93, 96, 99–100, 113, 137, 141, 143, and 265. BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 15. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, esp. p. 77–78 and 217. BOURDIEU – CHAMBOREDON – PASSERON, *Le métier de sociologue. Préalables épistémologiques*, p. 101.

¹²³ On Bourdieu's critique of postmodern thought, see, for example: BOURDIEU, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, p. 170. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, p. 132–133. BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 47–48. BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 5–6. BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 47 and 203.

¹²⁴ See, for example, BOURDIEU, *Entretien avec Antoine Spire*, p. 32 (my translation), and BOURDIEU – WACQUANT, "For a *Realpolitik of Reason*," p. 194.

¹²⁵ BOURDIEU, *Leçon sur la leçon*, p. 24 (my translation); original text: "leurs conditions sociales de production" (already referred to above).

10. Critical research, in the Bourdieusian sense, is both a *socially immanent* and a *socially transcendent* undertaking insofar as it seeks to encourage not only a reflective and enlightening, but also a purposive and empowering engagement with the world. Social science can provide fairly reliable descriptions of particular aspects of human reality, while uncovering the relative historical arbitrariness, and questioning the ideological taken-for-grantedness, of all malleable dimensions of society. If, in accordance with Bourdieu, we assume that adequate description *and* radical questioning of the human world constitute integral components of critical social research, then we are forced to abandon a rigid separation between factual statements and value judgements, thereby accepting that objectivity and normativity are both ontologically – that is, in all forms of socialisation – and epistemologically – that is, in all modes of rationalisation – interrelated. Yet Bourdieu’s suggestion that sociology can be conceived of as “a continuation of politics with other means”¹²⁶ is problematic if the reflexive sociologist is portrayed as a scientific messiah who stands above the rest of humanity and whose task is to enlighten all those who remain caught up in the doxic universe of common sense based on habitual misperceptions, stereotypical misrepresentations, and ideological misinterpretations. To be sure, Bourdieu is right to regard sociology as a normative tool which equips us with the conceptual and methodological resources necessary to demystify the taken-for-grantedness of codified social arrangements, thereby reminding us of the relative arbitrariness of established power relations. If, however, critical capacity is conceived of as a professional privilege monopolised by reflexive social scientists trained to “see through” the widely accepted misconceptions derived from common sense and expressed in various forms of false consciousness, then we underestimate the extent to which ordinary people are capable not only of purposive action but also of discursive reflection. If reflexive actors have the ability to question the legitimacy of the relationally constituted elements of their society, this is because the critical position is part of the human condition.

¹²⁶ BOURDIEU, *Science de la science et réflexivité*, p. 193 (my translation); original text: “un moyen de continuer la politique par d’autres moyens”.