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The New Durkheim: Bourdieu and the State

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*Isn't the fundamental thing in Marxism to see society as the assumed foundation of the state?
Do you view the state as the foundation of civil society?*

—Anonymous question put to Bourdieu on March 7, 1991

Bourdieu's lectures *On the State* (delivered between 1989 and 1992) are dazzling. Sweeping from tightly focused reflections on French public housing, through deep analyses of the role of medieval jurists in the rise of the French state, to fascinating discussions of the institution of signature and counter signature in early modern England, the lessons will likely be a resource for generations of scholars as they search for fresh analytic approaches to understanding legitimate political authority. Intellectually they can be situated in three ways: as part of a specifically French tradition of public lectures given at the Collège de France, as a particular stage in the development of Bourdieu's own sociological enterprise and broader engagement with French public life, and as a sustained engagement with Anglo-American historical sociology.

As a text *On the State* invites comparisons to two other courses: Durkheim's and Foucault's. Within this set it is a distinctively open and unfinished work full of paths not taken, reflections on the difficulty of dealing with a heterogeneous audience, and an attractively tentative and exploratory stance toward its intellectual problems. *On the State* can also be situated at a particular moment in Bourdieu's career. His increasing interest in the state in the early nineties derives from two mutually reinforcing lines of influence: the need to account for the emergence of autonomous fields and the rising influence of neoliberalism in French society in late eighties and early nineties. Fields, autonomous spheres of social life with distinctive properties, had always been central to Bourdieu's sociology, but he had never adequately explained their origins. By the late eighties he had come to see the state as closely linked to this intellectual problem.¹ There is also an

1. Patrick Champagne, Remi Lenoir, Franck Poupeau, and Marie-Christine Rivière, "Position of the Lectures on the State in Pierre Bourdieu's Work," in *On the State*, ed. Patrick Champagne, Remi Lenoir, Franck Poupeau, and Marie-Christine Rivière (New York: Polity, 2014), 378–81.

important historical context for the book constituted by the broader set of intellectual, political, and economic trends that were shaping France in this period. After the brilliant season of the late sixties French intellectual life had gone into steep decline during the eighties with the emergence of the new philosophers, a type that Bourdieu dismisses in the lectures as “intellectually worthless.”² The early nineties was perhaps the low point of this development, with many scholars, François Furet in the van, working hard to eradicate hexagonal collectivist, revolutionary, and statist traditions. The book’s sharp and repeated defense of intellectual autonomy, rigorous sociological analysis, and emphasis on the centrality and dignity of the state are perhaps best read as responses to this political and intellectual context. Whatever disagreements one might have with *On the State*, the work must be seen as a courageous and honorable effort to defend both the dignity of intellectual life, and more specifically the French political tradition against a rising tide of Anglo-Saxon neoliberalism.

There is a third intellectual context in which this book should be placed: a sustained engagement with Anglo-American historical sociology. Bourdieu’s own style of work is of course quite different from the research tradition growing out of Perry Anderson, Michael Mann, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, and Charles Tilly. Yet once the state became a central object of reflection in its own right, Bourdieu had to face this work; but he was ambivalent about it. While praising historical sociology’s ability to throw into question the naturalness of current political arrangements, he rejected its fundamental method: comparative history, in favor of something called “genetic structuralism.”³

Having briefly situated the work, I now turn to an analysis of its core arguments. These cluster around three basic questions: “How should the state be conceptualized?,” “Why are modern states so stable?,” and “Where did the state come from?” As I will attempt to demonstrate below, Bourdieu’s essentially top-down, field of power approach to the state creates a number of serious analytic problems that undermine his attempt to provide a properly historical sociology of it. The article ends with a call to reconnect Bourdieu’s analysis of the field of power with a neo-Marxist focus on structures of exploitation as the necessary condition for a properly historical understanding of the state.

2. Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 220. For a brilliant analysis of the broader scene, see Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (New York: Verso, 2009), 145–48.

3. *Ibid.*, 86–91.

I. CONCEPTUALIZATION

The state, for Bourdieu, is a sector of the field of power.⁴ This last is a social space constituted by an opposition between holders of cultural resources (cultural capital) and possessors of economic and political power more narrowly construed.⁵ The agents in these two positions in the field of power are linked. The very conflicts and oppositions among them serve to legitimate the field of power as a whole creating thereby a form of cohesion among the dominant and against the dominated. In his book *State Nobility*, and also in an important article written in either 1985 or 1986, but published in 2011, Bourdieu refers to this as a form of “organic solidarity” among the dominant.⁶ In *On the State* Bourdieu argues that this form of cohesion arises at the point when ruling elites abandon a strictly familial strategy of reproduction for one based on “the school system.”⁷

The state, Bourdieu argues, is a functional requirement of the field of power. Since different agents in the field of power are characterized by different compositions of capital (with some having greater economic, political, or cultural capital) the need arises to regulate the relations among them.⁸ More particularly, possessors of the different forms of capital must come to recognize other forms as legitimate. Thus, for example, feudal lords and merchants must recognize possessors of educational credentials as legitimate members of the field of power. Similarly, intellectuals must come to recognize other power holders, and their forms of capital, as legitimate. This creates a structure of mutual recognition, which is also a structure of mutual antagonism, in which differences within the field of power create a tightly integrated group precisely through intragroup conflict.

The state, further, secures this mutual recognition of the forms of capital by establishing the relative value that each form has. Although these relative values themselves are a stake in the struggle within the field of power, at any given moment their exchange rates are relatively fixed and recognized as legitimate by the actors in the field.⁹ One gets the sense that without the state a mutually

4. Ibid., 3–4.

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 266.

6. Ibid., 388; Pierre Bourdieu, “Champ du pouvoir et division du travail de domination: Texte manuscrit inédit ayant servi de support au Collège de France, 1985–1986,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 5, no. 190 (2011): 126–39.

7. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 290.

8. Ibid., 311.

9. Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 388; Loïc Wacquant, “From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Nobless d’État,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 10 (1993): 19–44, 22.

destructive war of all against all would break out within the field of power leading to a social crisis. Thus, the state, “defined by its possession of a monopoly of legitimate physical and symbolic violence” is what guarantees the mutual recognition of the agents within the field of power who hold different forms of capital.¹⁰ The state, as a monopolist of symbolic power, that is, the power to instill the misrecognition of the actual arbitrariness of power, lays the foundations for a form of “organic solidarity within the division of labor of domination.”¹¹

The brilliance of Bourdieu’s theorization of the field of power as a form of “organic solidarity” is undeniable. By incorporating intradominant class conflicts into an account of social reproduction, he provides a very useful framework for explaining the political stability of advanced capitalist societies. Yet there are notable weaknesses in this general account, which I develop further below. First, Bourdieu’s concept of the state refers exclusively to relations within the field of power. The connection between the state and those agents outside the field of power is a blank. These last are simply “dominated” both politically and symbolically. This claim, however, is analytically insufficient for specifying historically the modern state, and leads to some very surprising gaps in Bourdieu’s argumentation.

The second point is that Bourdieu understands the state exclusively in terms of the sociology of domination. More particularly, Bourdieu does not conceptualize the modern state (or any state) in terms of its relationship to social structures that cannot easily be understood in terms of domination: particularly structures of exploitation. The concept of exploitation has no status in any of Bourdieu’s work, and in fact he suggests that any attempt to relate the state “to the economic conditions in which it functions” is impossible.¹²

One of the reasons that Bourdieu fails to connect states with exploitation is that, perhaps for polemical reasons, he misunderstands the program of Marxist political sociology. He states, “There is a whole Marxist tradition that reduces the accumulation process to an accumulation of material resources. For example, people [Marxists?] say that the state begins with the concentration of resources that makes redistribution possible.”¹³ This is a misleading representation of the position he wishes to combat, and it is not surprising that Bourdieu cites no actual texts in this presentation. For Marx never reduced initial or

10. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 10.

11. Wacquant “From Ruling Class,” 22; Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 388.

12. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 341.

13. *Ibid.*, 69–70.

primitive accumulation to an economic process. In fact, he was at pains to point out that, in contrast to consolidated capitalist societies where class relations were reproduced economically, the construction of capitalist society was a political process involving violence and discipline.¹⁴ Further, the idea that the state begins with “a concentration of resources” is completely alien to the Marxist tradition, which instead has focused on the *variable* relationships between states and structures of exploitation. In any case, Bourdieu’s neglect of this entire set of issues leaves him unable to define adequately the modern state or to pose the key historical problems associated with its emergence. In sum, the French sociologist’s rather narrow focus on the field of power, and reduction of political sociology to the sociology of domination, has important consequences both for understanding the functioning of the modern state, and for grasping its origins. Let me take these in turn.

II. FUNCTIONING

Bourdieu identifies the puzzle of political sociology as the stability of the modern state: the widespread existence of “political order.”¹⁵ Political sociologists, he suggests, are “often struck by the most outwardly striking aspect: rebellions, conspiracies, insurrections, revolutions, whereas what is staggering and amazing is the opposite: the fact that order is so frequently observed.”¹⁶ This is a broadly compelling formulation of the basic problem of political sociology. Surely Bourdieu is right to emphasize order as what is really puzzling.

He also offers an extremely interesting account of this phenomenon. In a neo-Kantian vein, Bourdieu suggests that modern states are stable because they exercise symbolic power imposing cognitive structures on agents through which the state itself is thought.¹⁷ Therefore, men and women incorporate the categories of the state as implicit background assumptions, a form of preconsciousness rather than false consciousness, which he calls “doxa.” Men and women then reapply these categories to the social world thereby further confirming their existence.¹⁸

This powerful neo-Kantian account is so mesmerizing, and so intricately developed, that it almost disarms critique in advance. It may be useful, however,

14. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 896–904.

15. *Ibid.*, 163.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 3–4, 114–16, 163–65.

18. *Ibid.*, 169.

simply to pose the question, “Is this a convincing account of political order?” Can, in short, the notion of symbolic power account for the phenomenon of political order that Bourdieu rightly puts at the center of his enterprise? This is a big question, but three features of Bourdieu’s analysis are striking: first, the absence of any direct theorization or explanation of representative democracy as an institutional form; second, a neglect of the considerable body of evidence suggesting a noncorrespondence between political order and the concentration of symbolic power; and third, an almost complete silence about the role of the means of repression in reproducing the modern state. These gaps, as I will try to demonstrate, are connected to a theory of politics that excludes much of what most sociologists think politics is about.

Democracy, to begin with, in the basic Schumpeterian sense as an institutional system for establishing an alternation of political elites is almost completely absent from Bourdieu’s book and indeed from his political sociology as a whole.¹⁹ In *On the State* Bourdieu mentions democracy in passing in his discussion of public opinion, in his very brief summary of the work of Barrington Moore, and as an ideology of American imperialism.²⁰ In other work Bourdieu develops the idea of the political field, and a sophisticated account of the relationship between party leaders and followers.²¹ But even in his seminal article on political representation, where one might expect a discussion of party systems, voting, and parliament, there is almost no analysis of these issues; instead his discussion turns around the idea that the represented are expropriated of their means of political representation.²² Indeed, even a highly sympathetic observer admits that his work has mostly ignored the standard topics of the political sociology limiting his impact in this field.²³

The absence of procedural democracy as a major object of explanation in Bourdieu’s political sociology is very surprising, because elections are far more directly related to the legitimation of political authority than is the school sys-

19. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27–28; Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 269.

20. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 66, 81–82, 159–60.

21. Mustafa Emirbayer and Erik Schneiderhan, “Dewey and Bourdieu on Democracy,” in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. Philip S. Gorski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 131–57, see esp. 140–44.

22. Pierre Bourdieu, “La représentation politique,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 36 (1981): 3–4.

23. David Swartz, “Pierre Bourdieu and North American Political Sociology: Why He Doesn’t Fit In But Should,” *French Politics* 4 (2006): 87.

tem, which Bourdieu focuses on almost obsessively;²⁴ elections are a key example of the lengthening of “chains of legitimization” that he understands as crucial to the stability of modern political order.²⁵

Further, the contribution of electoral politics to political stability has been extensively analyzed, especially in the neo-Marxist tradition. Bourdieu’s hostility to this work may explain why he does not engage with this dimension of it, although it is highly relevant to his problem. These scholars argue that elections institute a quasi-fictive political equality that masks real inequalities and makes states appear as the expression of a nation constituted of formally equal citizens. In elections individuals do not appear as members of social classes or other interest groups.²⁶ Thus, elections establish a highly individualized relationship to the state; this creates fundamental problems for collective movements aiming to transcend or transform state power. Class interests are delegated to representatives of those interests, and neither classes, nor masses in general, bring direct political pressure to bear on the state.²⁷

There is also considerable evidence that elections are far more important than the concentration of symbolic power in securing the reproduction of the modern state. States that have not established procedural democracy, even when they have concentrated other forms of symbolic power such as language and law, have not necessarily been marked by great stability. The case of France shows this very clearly. If we broadly accept Bourdieu’s account of the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries that there was a gradual concentration of symbolic power in the capital, then an obvious implication of this argument is that one should expect a greater level of political order, especially toward the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A listing of the major political upheavals of French society over the last three hundred years or so does not bear this out: the civil wars of the late sixteenth century, the peasant uprisings and then the Fronde of the mid-seventeenth century, the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century, the July Revolution of 1830, the Revolution of 1848, and of course the Paris Commune of 1871.²⁸ This key case then shows an extraordinary concentration of symbolic

24. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 194, 216–19, 259–60.

25. *Ibid.*, 131.

26. Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review* 100 (1976–77): 28; Göran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* (New York: Verso, 2008), 113.

27. Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13–14.

28. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (New York: Verso, 1989), 91–92, 98–99; Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago:

power, together with a strikingly turbulent political history: hardly good news for symbolic power as a theory of political order.

This is not to suggest that the concentration of symbolic power couldn't be used to understand aspects of these events. Indeed, as William H. Sewell has argued, the Old Regime was riven by an ideological contradiction pitting corporatist particularism against Enlightenment universalism that certainly could be interpreted as a struggle to centralize symbolic power.²⁹ But what the above does indicate is that the concentration of symbolic power is doubtful precisely as an explanation for *stability*, as Bourdieu claims.

The case of the United States is instructive in the opposite sense. One of the features indicating the concentration of symbolic power for Bourdieu is the constitution of a capital and an associated set of provinces. The capital, in a typically Bourdieuan wordplay, is the locus of the concentration of different forms of capital.³⁰ Although there is an interesting and developing literature using Bourdieu to understand features of the US state including social citizenship and the penal system, the historical experience of US state building poses serious challenges to the Bourdieuan framework, at least as articulated in *On the State*.³¹ For in one basic sense the political order of the United States has never exercised a monopoly over symbolic power: it lacks a capital in Bourdieu's sense. Washington, DC, is a bureaucratic power center, not a cultural one on par with New York or even San Francisco. In this basic sense it lacks the degree of concentrated symbolic power, and the province/capital distinction, that Bourdieu sees as typical of the state. (The United States is hardly particular here. The same thing could be said of Germany, Italy, Spain, and perhaps also of the United Kingdom.)

In contrast to the apparent absence of a concentration of symbolic power, one of the most obvious features of US political history is the relatively early con-

University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1–4; Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from Its Origins to 1793* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 127–35; Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 63–92; William H. Sewell Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 199, 246–54; Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789–1799* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 72–85; Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 91–100.

29. William H. Sewell Jr., "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 66–67.

30. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 98.

31. On social citizenship see Chad Alan Goldberg, "T. H. Marshall Meets Pierre Bourdieu: Citizens and Paupers in the Development of the U.S. Welfare State," *Political Power and Social Theory* 19 (2008): 83–116; for a discussion of penalty, see Loïc Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State: Workfare, Prisonfare, and Social Insecurity" *Sociological Forum* 25 (2010): 197–220.

quest of broad male suffrage. Perhaps the single most important fact about American political development is that democracy came prior to bureaucracy in this country.³² Thus, if Bourdieu's account of political stability is correct, one would expect the United States to have a much more turbulent political history than France. However, the US political order has been characterized by glacial stability, apart from the important interlude of the Civil War, from the late eighteenth century to the present day. In sum, when matched as alternative explanations of political order, symbolic power fares quite a bit worse than electoral democracy.

Given that broad patterning, there may be something to be said for Lenin's point that "a democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism."³³ More generally, it is worth conjuring with the fact there are almost no examples of successful revolutions occurring in consolidated democratic states, whether or not they display a high level of symbolic power. It is not clear, in sum, that symbolic power in the neo-Durkheimian sense that Bourdieu uses it is really the key factor in producing political order in advanced capitalist societies.

There is a further difficulty with Bourdieu's understanding of the strength of the modern state: one best indicated by the research of one of his most famous students, Loïc Wacquant. Although Bourdieu defines the modern state as an organization possessing a relative monopoly over the legitimate means of physical and symbolic violence, his substantive analysis focuses *exclusively* on symbolic violence. He offers no theory of the role of physical force in the reproduction of the modern state. Instead, he chooses to eliminate the problem by claiming that violence deployed by the state must be "disguised as symbolic violence," thus occluding the specific importance of physical force as the ultimate backstop of political order.³⁴ It should not be forgotten, however, that modern states possess enormous capacities for physical repression that they exercise on targeted populations to great effect.³⁵

32. Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10; Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 9–10.

33. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), 319.

34. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 203.

35. Loïc Wacquant "Ordering Insecurity: Social Polarization and the Punitive Upsurge," *Radical Philosophy Review* 11 (2008): 10; Wacquant, "Crafting the Neoliberal State," 203–4; see also the penetrating critique in Loïc Wacquant, "Symbolic Violence and the Making of the French Agriculturalist: An Enquiry into Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology," *Journal of Sociology* 23 (1987): 79–80.

Bourdieu's theory of the reproduction of the modern state, to sum up, relies virtually exclusively on the notion of symbolic power as this is transmitted through the education system. In contrast, he neglects both the political institutions of democracy, and the repressive institutions of the army and the police. Surprisingly perhaps, in this basic sense Bourdieu's analysis converges virtually point by point with that of his *bête noire*: Louis Althusser. The Marxist philosopher too ignored democracy and repression to emphasize the importance of the school system as the key "ideological status apparatus" guaranteeing the reproduction of the conditions of production by creating subjects disposed to recognizing both their own social position and the overall social order as legitimate.³⁶

What explains the relative absence of elections and repression in the *On the State*, and more generally in Bourdieu's political sociology? Two possibilities come to mind: one connected to Bourdieu's intellectual sources, and a second to his specific theory of the state. Bourdieu is a highly classical social theorist. His main intellectual references are: Durkheim, Weber, and Marx. He may therefore have been trapped by this tradition to some extent. One of the defining features of the classical tradition is the relatively marginal position of mass democracy among its major objects of explanation. Marx thought, wrongly, that representative democracy and capitalism were in the end incompatible.³⁷ Durkheim thought that representative democracy based on individual voting was an outmoded eighteenth-century phenomenon that neo-corporatism was destined to replace.³⁸ Only Weber understood the deep affinity between modern industrial capitalism and mass suffrage, and only he pointed out consistently that representative government strengthens, rather than weakens the state.³⁹ But the German sociologist also held that there were strong tendencies toward Caesarist domination in modern society, tendencies that could be partially counteracted through political institutions as in the United States and Britain, but that were nevertheless intrinsic to industrial capitalism.⁴⁰ In sum, classical sociology in general left an ambiguous legacy con-

36. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 157, 170–83. For critique see Anderson, "Antinomies," 43.

37. Therborn, *Ruling Class*, 248.

38. Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 98–109. See also M. J. Hawkins's penetrating essay, "Durkheim on Occupational Corporations: An Exegesis and Interpretation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1994): 469–70.

39. Max Weber, "Appendix II. Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany (A Contribution to the Political Critique of Officialdom and Party Politics)," in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1407–10.

40. *Ibid.*, 1452.

cerning democracy, and this may explain its marginal character in Bourdieu's own work. This explanation only partially works, however, because certainly Marx and Weber were quite clear about the repressive nature of modern states.

This suggests that the real problem lies in the basically top-down nature of Bourdieu's understanding of the state that leads him to neglect relations outside of the field of power. As I have shown, Bourdieu refuses to specify states in terms of any particular relations to those outside the field of power. Given this perspective, it is not surprising that Bourdieu would emphasize the symbolic dimension of the state since relations among elites are primarily symbolic. In contrast, both electoral acclamation and physical repression are mostly phenomena that link states to nonelites: precisely the agents that Bourdieu sees as irrelevant to his theory of the state. In sum, the one-dimensional nature of Bourdieu's account of political order is closely related to his basic theory of the state as a sector of the field of power.

III. ORIGINS OF THE MODERN STATE

Finally, *On the State* offers an account of state formation. What is it? This in my view is the most interesting part of the book. Bourdieu suggests that there are three stages in the development of the state: an initial concentration of symbolic capital, which is the precondition for other forms of concentration, particularly the concentration of the power to levy public taxes, the emergence of the dynastic state, and finally the emergence of the what could be called the public state governed by "Reason of State." The real focus of Bourdieu's analysis is the transition between the "dynastic state" and the modern public state. The dynastic state is an enlarged royal household riven by a three-cornered struggle among the monarch, his brothers, and the "members of competence," subordinate officials tied to the king. Monarchs resolve these conflicts through the addition of appanages, new resources, usually land, added to the initial dynastic domain for the purpose of supporting younger sons. Bourdieu argues that typically appanages were gained through marriage.⁴¹

The dynastic state, however, contains certain internal contradictions. Initially, the main strategy of reproducing the political elite is familial. Resources are transmitted through inheritance. Subsequently, with the rise of the members of competence, itself the result of intradynastic struggle, the mode of reproduction becomes cultural, bureaucratized, and scholastic. Elites transmit resources to their

41. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 237–40, 243–44, 258–63.

offspring by guaranteeing them access to the education system and formal credentialing.⁴² This passage, Bourdieu claims, is “difficult to document.” However, the most important actors in this struggle are jurists who have an interest in establishing a depersonalized legal state. Indeed, Bourdieu interprets the French Revolution as a revolt of the jurists who pursue the educational strategy of reproduction against the familial principle embodied in the dynasty.⁴³ In any case, law ceases to be personal law and becomes instead public justice monopolized by jurists who invent the idea of the state as an impersonal power.⁴⁴

All of this analysis is extremely interesting, and much more fully worked out than anything available in Bourdieu’s previously published work. Here, for the first time, we see a clear Bourdieuan historical sociology of the modern state based on internal conflict within the “feudal field” that leads to the emergence of the state as a public institution.⁴⁵ But, perhaps precisely because it is so fully worked out, the basic problems in the perspective also emerge with great clarity.

A useful starting point is Bourdieu’s account of the internal contradictions of the dynastic state. The conflicts within the dynastic household were central to premodern states. The problem of second sons and brothers is one of the dynamics that drove both war, which Bourdieu downplays, and marriage, which he emphasizes. Monarchs had to get land to provide for excess members of their household. But the search for land for the second sons was itself linked to a broader system of social property relations that Bourdieu does not explain at all.

Prior to the industrial revolution, land constituted the primary form of wealth-producing asset in Europe. Furthermore, prior to some time after the fifteenth century in England, agricultural productivity was generally very low. The reason for this is fairly well known. Although lords owned land, they had little ability or incentive to improve productive processes that were effectively under the control of the main direct producers: the peasantry. This is the fundamental context within which impartible inheritance, the main family strategy Bourdieu emphasizes, could produce zero-sum conflicts within dynastic families. Without a way of increasing productivity on the land, more members of a dynastic house required more land if the house was to continue to live at an equivalent material level. Land could be acquired in two ways: either through marriage or through war. These, then, were the two main strategies of reproduction. Further, the

42. *Ibid.*, 194.

43. *Ibid.*, 264–65.

44. *Ibid.*, 209–11.

45. *Ibid.*, 251.

second of these strategies, war, had a tendency to lead to the formation of proto-bureaucratic apparatuses, staffed by the people whom Bourdieu calls “members of competence.”⁴⁶ In short, the intrafeudal dynamics that Bourdieu’s model so effectively describes make sense only within the context of a particular set of property relations. But given his reluctance to theorize the state in relationship to any broader social context, Bourdieu fails to register the significance of this historical specificity.

Despite these limitations, the model of the internal conflicts within the dynastic state is compelling and effective as far as it goes. But once the feudal social context is invoked, a second major problem with Bourdieu’s account becomes obvious: state centralization, at least in early modern Europe, was driven forward not just by intrafeudal elite conflict but also by massive and repeated struggles between peasants and lords. The French peasantry had been able to secure effective possession of its lands by the fifteenth century. In part as a consequence of this relative victory a fusion and consolidation of the French nobility around the monarchy in a tax-state that distributed peasant surpluses among the nobility as centralized feudal rent, had emerged.⁴⁷ Bourdieu’s strategies of reproduction, in sum, depended on a broader social context in which land was the principle means of production and in which yields were low and difficult to increase given the low level of prevailing technique. This context of technical stagnation was itself the expression of a broadly labor repressive agrarian structure. It was the conflicts among lords, and the conflicts between lords and peasants, that dictated the search for appanages and also was behind the rise of the members of competence as monarchs built apparatuses that pointed in two directions: outward to other lords and downward to the peasantry.

The fact that these dynamics were basically intrafeudal raises a further question: was the political and symbolic centralization of the early modern period at all a sign of political modernization—a path to the modern state as Bourdieu holds? This is certainly debatable. The problem is that it is possible to imagine a highly concentrated bureaucratic state without it being particularly modern at all. The obvious example of this is pre-revolutionary France.

46. Anderson, *Lineages*, 31–32; Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” in *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe*, ed. T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236–42.

47. Anderson, *Lineages*, 34–35; Robert Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” in Aston and Philpin, *The Brenner Debate*, 57–58; Brenner, “Agrarian Roots,” 289–90.

But Bourdieu does not sufficiently recognize the difference between centralization and modernization, as can be seen from his tendency to assimilate the seventeenth-century French and English state types to a single model, as when endorsing the writings of the German historian Joachim Stieber, Bourdieu states, "It was only in seventeenth-century France and England that the major distinctive features of the emerging modern state appear."⁴⁸ But what are these features? The existence, primarily, of an autonomous bureaucracy. The problem with this framing is evident. It underemphasizes the huge differences between the French and English states of this period and, more particularly, vastly overstates the "modernity" of the seventeenth-century French state. Recent historical work on the English state in particular has emphasized its striking modernity to its French counterpart.⁴⁹ Especially in excise-tax administration the British state was cheaper and less corrupt, and had developed a greater degree of separation between the official's household and the office than in most other places in Europe.⁵⁰ The picture for France is strikingly different. After all, the main mechanism of integrating both the nobility and the increasingly important merchant elite into French absolutism was the sale of offices, a practice that deeply undermined the coherence of the state and also reached enormous levels precisely in the seventeenth century.⁵¹

The pre-revolutionary French state, in sum, was not at all a modern state, nor arguably was it on the way to becoming a modern state. Instead it was a neo-feudal state based materially on squeezing the peasantry through its officials. The English state was not like this. Its unique strength, becoming evident in precisely the seventeenth century, is that it could tax its landed upper class. Why? One reason was that the landed upper class in England was no longer dependent on squeezing as the French one was. English landlords could pay taxes without this payment threatening their main source of surplus.⁵² The property of English landlords, in this sense, was not "politically constituted" like

48. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 196.

49. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), xiii–xxii; Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 8; see the review in Benno Teschke, "Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation, and the Absence of the International," *Historical Materialism* 13 (2005): 14.

50. Brewer, *Sinews*, 73–79.

51. Anderson, *Lineages*, 34; Richard Lachmann, *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves: Elite Conflict and Economic Transitions in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 133–36.

52. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 476–77; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States: AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 155–60.

their French counterparts.⁵³ Bourdieu does not see these differences, or does not emphasize them, primarily, again, because of his exclusive focus on intradominant or intra-elite relations and his refusal to theorize the relations between the field and power other fields, particularly the economy, which are outside the field of power.

IV. IMAGES OF HISTORY

Having explored Bourdieu's conceptualization of the state, his account of its functioning, and his analysis of its development, I am now in a position to address a set of more general issues concerning his overall account of historical development.

Bourdieu is sometimes presented as a synthetic thinker drawing his ideas in roughly equal proportions from Durkheim, Weber, and Marx: a focus on the symbolic dimension from the first, a sociology of domination from the second, and an interest in class struggle from the third.⁵⁴ However, this renders him far more eclectic than he actually is. For the deep structure of Bourdieu's thought, at least in *On the State*, is very clearly Durkheimian. In particular, his account of historical development is virtually identical to that proposed in *The Division of Labor in Society*. Since this may be a surprising claim, it is worth spending some time justifying it.

Bourdieu presents a strikingly gradualist account of the development of the state dependent on the notion of differentiation as a master process. He argues that the tendency of society to "differentiate into separate and autonomous spheres" is a "law."⁵⁵ This evolutionary stance already places him within the tradition of the *Division of Labor in Society*, but the parallels go deeper. For, like Durkheim himself, Bourdieu sees social integration, or a certain concentration of symbolic power, as both the precondition and outcome of social differentiation. Thus one line of Bourdieu's argument suggests that the concentration of symbolic power is a precondition of social differentiation. This appears particularly in Bourdieu's analyses of the English and Japanese cases. He argues that these cases show how the existence of traditional symbols contribute "to forging

53. Robert Brenner, "From Theory to History: The 'European Dynamic' or Feudalism to Capitalism?," in *An Anatomy of Power: The Social Theory of Michael Mann*, ed. John Hall and Ralph Schroeder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 210.

54. Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 749; Philip S. Gorski, "Bourdieuian Theory and Historical Analysis," in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. Philip S. Gorski (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 362.

55. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 75, 201.

the unit of the population that constitutes the nation, a unit capable of surviving the conflicts and contradictions bound up with the development of industrial society.”⁵⁶

The second line of argument, that differentiation is a cause of symbolic concentration, is well exemplified by Bourdieu’s discussion of the lengthening of chains of dependence and delegation, which once again uses the English example. Here, argues Bourdieu, the developing chains of signatures and counter-signatures affixed to official documents from the king creates the notion of a public entity apart from the monarch himself.⁵⁷

Two responses to this broad view of historical development suggest themselves: one logical and the other historical. At the most abstract level, the central issue around which Bourdieu’s analysis turns is the relationship between social differentiation and symbolic power. This problem is very familiar to students of Durkheim, because it is basically that of the relationship between social integration based on likeness (mechanical solidarity) and social integration based on difference (organic solidarity). Further, with his evolutionary theory, Bourdieu ends up in exactly the same cul de sac as Durkheim:⁵⁸ proposing both that the concentration of symbolic power (analogous to mechanical solidarity) is a precondition of the modern state and that differentiation within the field of power (analogous to organic solidarity) is the cause of the concentration of symbolic power. Given this, it is worth recalling Parsons’s criticism that Durkheim never developed an adequate account of either form of solidarity.⁵⁹ The same is true of Bourdieu. Symbolic concentration is necessary to the modern state, and some states such as Japan and England seem to have been “born with it.” But where it comes from remains deeply mysterious.

Aside from this theoretical criticism, there is also a simple empirical objection. The establishment of centralized political orders, and especially ones with a monopoly on symbolic violence, was not a gradual evolutionary process growing out of social differentiation. Instead, state formation has typically occurred through concentrated paroxysms of violence.⁶⁰

56. *Ibid.*, 153.

57. *Ibid.*, 298–304.

58. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 2014), 215–20.

59. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: Free Press, 1949), 320–21.

60. Anderson, *Lineages*, 98–99; Moore, *Social Origins*, 78–79; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 174–205.

More particularly, the historical record shows that the problem of state formation cannot be divorced from the problem of social revolution without damaging analytic consequences. This can be seen perhaps most clearly in Bourdieu's strange approach to the topic of revolution, and the French Revolution in particular. The great sociologist warns against the "false problem" of the French revolution and dismisses comparative analysts who have structured their research in terms of contrasts among different routes to the modern world in which revolutions play a major role.⁶¹ Thus, Perry Anderson is "pretentious" and "naïve," Marxist writing about revolution is "absolutely without interest," and Skocpol's work is "an obstacle to knowledge."⁶² What does Bourdieu offer in place of these misconceived projects? Inspid Whiggery. The French Revolution "marked a watershed" but "in no way a rupture."⁶³

Bourdieu, in presenting this argument, implicitly suggests that a particularly placid interpretation of English history should be taken as a kind of universal model applicable to France as well. Thus, in place of the misguided attempt to find equivalents to the French Revolution in all national histories, Bourdieu proposes what is perhaps an equally problematic search for "watersheds" rather than "ruptures" everywhere. In support of this view he enlists, rather surprisingly, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer's *The Great Arch*. Bourdieu presents this book incorrectly as "a reaction against the dominance of Marxism in England" rather than what in fact was, a major contribution to historical materialist historiography.⁶⁴ Indeed, the actual argument of this book does not in fact support Bourdieu's Whiggish interpretation, nor does it lend much aid to his broader Durkheimian account of historical development. For Corrigan and Sayer do not at all reject the concept of revolution, and particularly not the notion of bourgeois revolution. Indeed, as the authors state in the conclusion to their book, "We are far from denying the existence of substantial revolutions in English government."⁶⁵ Their project is instead to emphasize the importance of cultural revolution, a concept that, far from being an alternative to Marxism, is of clearly Maoist provenance, for the establishment of capitalism.

61. Bourdieu, *On the State*, 345–46.

62. *Ibid.*, 40, 78, 147, 110.

63. *Ibid.*, 345.

64. *Ibid.*, 147.

65. Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 201.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis above has argued that Bourdieu's theory of the state as a sector of the field of power creates quite serious analytic problems both for understanding the reproduction of modern political order and for grasping the emergence of the state. I made this argument in four steps.

First, I showed that Bourdieu's concept of the state refers exclusively to relations among agents within the field of power. In this sense his is an intra-elite understanding of the state. Further, and as a consequence of this focus, Bourdieu tends to specify the state primarily as a monopolist of symbolic violence. However, he offers little account of the relationship between the state and those outside of power or analysis of other forms of domination aside from symbolic domination.

The second section explores the consequences of this concept of the state for Bourdieu's understanding of its reproduction. I showed here that Bourdieu ignores two large reasons for the stability of modern political orders in the advanced capitalist world: the emergence of electoral democracy, and the repressive power of the state. I argued that in his focus on the education system as the key reproductive mechanism Bourdieu's analysis is virtually indistinguishable from Louis Althusser's, a thinker who the French sociologist often dismisses.

The third section of the article shows that Bourdieu's account of the emergence of the state as the monopolist of symbolic power is vitiated by a set of nineteenth evolutionary assumptions that accord poorly with the historical record and do not adequately specify the fundamental break that distinguishes early modern absolutist states, from modern states. Bourdieu's analysis of the formation of the French state, I suggested, is particularly weak since he conflates the centralization of the early modern absolutist state, which derived from an intrafeudal dynamic, with the emergence of a modern bureaucracy that was a post-revolutionary achievement. I argued, that these weaknesses, like those concerning Bourdieu's account of the reproduction of the modern state, also derive from the French scholar's unwillingness to specify the state as a relationship between the field of power and those outside the field of power.

Finally, in the fourth section I turned to consider Bourdieu's broader account of historical development. Here I suggested that *On the State* reproduces Durkheim's basic argument in the *Division of Labor in Society*. Like the latter scholar, Bourdieu postulates symbolic power both as a precondition for social differentiation, and as its result. His analysis does not adequately the role of revolutionary violence in the constitution of the very monopoly of symbolic power which at the center of his account.

What I would like to suggest, in sum, is that to realize the promise of Bourdieu's analysis of the state his account of domination needs to be reoriented in two main ways. First it must be linked to an account of exploitation and its changing forms. Bourdieu's cavils against the reductionism of Marxist political sociology virtually all miss the point. For the program of this work has never been to reduce the political to the economic but rather to ask what the varying historical relationships have been between structures of domination and structures of exploitation: a quite different matter. The *optique* of "field of power" operates as a set of debilitating blinders in this regard, because it replaces the concrete analysis of the relations between states, dominant and subordinate classes, with the generic category of domination.

The second revision that is badly needed is a thoroughgoing break with the nineteenth-century-style evolutionary schema that haunts *On the State* and other of Bourdieu's books. The historical record does not show that the modern state developed out of a gradual process of differentiation. Rather, it was constructed with iron and fire wielded by real human beings in concrete and dramatic struggles whose outcomes were never determined in advance. No sociological schema, however brilliant, should be allowed to occlude this basic fact.