



‘Class is Always a Matter of Morals’: Bourdieu and Dewey on Social Class, Morality, and Habit(us)

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Abstract

This article argues that all judgements or statements about social class are inherently moral in that they implicitly advocate how people should (or should not) act. The argument extends Bourdieu’s linking of social class and representation by introducing Dewey’s intertwining of morality and habit. It is suggested that Kant’s apparently distinct critiques have set up three domains – knowledge, morality, aesthetics – which modern thought has treated as radically discrete. Although successful in linking the objective and the aesthetic (social class and its representation), Bourdieu was unable to incorporate the moral. Dewey’s reconceptualization of morality and habit is presented as able to overcome this limitation. The introduction of morality is intended to reflect the contingent and complex operations of social class. The article aims to destabilize contemporary conceptions of social class by clarifying the enduring moral aspect which supports its conceptualization and existence.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Bourdieu, Dewey, habit, habitus, morality, Simmel, social class

Introduction

Social class is often associated with complex forms of moral disapproval (see Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2005, 2010). For example, there is a tendency to portray some of those who receive social security benefits as ‘lazy’, thereby invoking a form of moral judgement, in that the supposed laziness is seen as blameworthy, a moral failing, which the individual needs to address. This is opposed to the purportedly more virtuous individuals who work hard but are, perhaps, ‘just about managing’, leading to the acronym ‘JAMs’ (Frayne, 2015). This differentiation between the ‘lazy’ and the ‘hard-working’

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invokes a *moral* disapproval that reinforces and perpetuates divisions within and between social classes. It may be tempting for social theorists to argue that such moralized judgements are, themselves, 'wrong'. But according to what criteria would this 'wrongness' be established? Are such judgements 'objectively' wrong, in the sense that they are not an accurate description? This may well be the case, and it can be argued that 'class differences [themselves] lack moral justification' (Skeggs, 2010: 349). Yet, is such an argument sufficient to counter the *force* of a judgement of 'laziness', which appears to draw its strength precisely from its *moral* overtones?

While some, such as Winch (1958), have sought to reduce morality to an epiphenomenon of differing cultural, social or historical arrangements, this is not the line that will be taken here, as it runs this risk of undermining the very force of deploying the moral as a critical term.¹ If morality is a historical and cultural variable, it becomes harder to explain what is 'good' or 'bad' about stating that one class is 'good' and another 'class' is bad. One aim of this article is to reclaim the moral aspect of judgements about social class. This might enable social theorists to fight fire with fire – without falling into an overly simple social constructionism while simultaneously *not* assuming or asserting that there is a genuine realm of objective morality. Instead, it will be argued that modern thought, after Kant, has been confronted with three *apparently* distinct realms: the scientific, the moral, the aesthetic.² Questions of objective knowledge are taken to inhabit a different realm from those of beauty.³ And both of these are distinct from questions of morality. This rather schematic description is not intended as a definition but as a first indication of the problematic which will be addressed throughout this piece. In this respect, it is worth noting that the subtitle of Bourdieu's (1984) text *Distinction* is '*A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*'. Bourdieu situates his own account in dialogue, or perhaps even confrontation, with Kant's account of taste. A pivotal element of any such confrontation is Kant's claim, in his *Critique of Judgement*, that taste is, by definition, devoid of interest in any specific object: 'Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest' (Kant, 1982: 50). Bourdieu (1984) argues that this is a misrecognition of the role and status of taste. For Bourdieu, taste operates in an insidious manner and he traces the complex manner in which such judgements *do* have an interest in creating and maintaining social class boundaries, even while declaring their inherent disinterest. However, as will become clear as the argument of this article unfolds, Bourdieu's position ultimately ties social class and its representation together so tightly that they become mirror images of each other, and this excludes the possibility of giving due place and force to any moral element.

This article seeks to extend the reach of Bourdieu's critique by introducing a moral element to judgements about social class. There are two reasons why the development of such a position is required. The first is to give more purchase to sociological critiques of social class, and judgements about social class. The second is to demonstrate that the apparently factual statements of those politicians and economists who follow the neo-liberal line, already invoke, even if tacitly, the worth, the superiority, the innate 'goodness' of the market. Free-marketeers do not simply make statements of fact, they make statements and judgements about what ought to be – markets ought to be allowed free rein. What appears, or claims, to be an objective statement involves a moral judgement as it

implicitly indicates how people *should* behave. It is because free-marketeers believe themselves to be ‘objectively’ right that they maintain that their economic and political policies are not just ‘correct’ but indicate, and provide a judgement on, the *best* way to act, to live. This article attempts to help bring to light this moral element which is involved in any claim about social class and the supposed laziness of certain benefit-seekers or the moral rectitude of those who work hard, who strive, but are ‘just about managing’.

The key resources for this article are the texts of Bourdieu and Dewey (and to a lesser extent, Simmel). I have already outlined some of the relevance of Bourdieu to this argument. There are a number of reasons for turning to Dewey. The importance of Dewey for thinking about questions of value has recently been highlighted by Heinich (2020). Dewey refuses to separate morality from the messiness of the industrial and political world. Instead, he sees morality as inherently ‘social’, rather than individual. Second, Dewey refuses to predicate morality on questions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’. What is of interest is not some ethereal realm of ‘the good’, but the consequences of action in the contemporary world. Morality is to be approached and judged in terms of its effectiveness: ‘the only good which can fully engage thought [. . . is] the present meaning of action’ (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 281). Third, Dewey outlines morality as tied to the capacity to act in the here and now, and he links this notion of the ‘capacity to act’ to that of habit, which he views in terms of disposition. As will be seen in the sections that follow, this elision of habit with disposition and the capacity to act will act as a fulcrum which will enable a critical comparison to be made between the work of Dewey and Bourdieu. This article will also touch on Simmel’s (1902) claim that transforming a dyad (in this instance – social class and the aesthetic) into a triad (social class, the aesthetic and the moral) introduces a more complex set of relations, as ‘the decisive modification of the configuration from within, occurs only through the addition of the third party’ (Simmel, 1902: 165). The point is not to conflate the factual, the aesthetic and the moral but to outline their multi-faceted operations in any attempt to define, discuss, categorize or judge social class (including this article itself).

The article is divided into a number of sections. It starts with an initial orientation of the concepts of habit and habitus, followed by a critical analysis of Bourdieu’s positions on the reality of social class, the importance of representation, and his rendering of morality in terms of the universal. This sets up the key elements of the argument which the subsequent discussions of Dewey aim to develop. Overall, the article aims to situate the moral as a critical and crucial aspect of all approaches to social class – so that class is always a matter of morals.

From Habit to Habit(us)

The term ‘routine’ haunts the UK government’s scheme (ONS [Office for National Statistics]) for identifying social class via occupation with its delineations of ‘routine sales and service occupations’, ‘semi-routine clerical occupations’, among many other such phrases. Here, routine signals repetition and a lack of autonomy. This is opposed to the supposed self-definition and control which is associated with middle-class occupations. This is why media representations of the working class and their tastes, eating habits and so on do indeed, as Skeggs (1997, 2005) argues, contribute to maintaining the power

relations involved in establishing and maintaining class differences. The image is that of a working class whose members in both their work and culture simply repeat; their life is habitual. Worse, the working class have 'bad' habits; they smoke, repeatedly eat the 'wrong' kind of foods and the like. In this way it is made to appear that progress, health and development come from those who are not bound by habit.

There has, however, long been a tension between those theorists who emphasize the mechanical aspect of habit – such as Descartes and Kant – and those who focus upon habit as an agent of change – Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze (Malabou, 2008: vii) and Ravaissou (2008 [1838]).⁴ On the one hand, habit is seen as something which determines behaviour, something which constrains free activity. On the other, habit is viewed as something productive, as an on-going, almost creative, aspect of existence. Bourdieu is aware of this dichotomy and resolutely avoids the word 'habit', as he is keen to distance his concept of habitus from any notion of some kind of fixed, internal compulsion: 'One of the reasons for the use of the term habitus⁵ is the wish to set aside the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme' (Bourdieu, 1977: 218, footnote 47).⁶

In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu only uses the word 'habit' when talking of 'eating habits'. Instead, he makes extensive use of the term 'disposition' to explain what he envisages as a key aspect of habitus.

The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being, a habitual state* (especially that of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*. (Bourdieu, 1977: 214, footnote 1. Emphases in original)

As Richard Nice, the translator of this text, states: the word 'disposition' has a wider, more 'positive', sense in French than it does in English (see Bourdieu, 1977: 214, footnote 1). For Bourdieu, habitus is a matter of potentiality and capacity precisely insofar as it indicates a disposition which enables responses to novel situations. In this respect, it is not to be envisaged as fixed, deterministic, or immediately constraining. For example: 'the *habitus*, like every 'art of inventing', is what makes it possible to produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable' (Bourdieu, 1977: 55. Italics in original). Habitus is inventive. Habitus enables action, rather than inhibits it. It allows for the solving of problems. Taken in this light, Bourdieu's concept of habitus appears to be a long way from any simple notion of routine, unthinking, habitual behaviour.

As will be seen in more detail later in this article, Dewey offers a broadening of the concept of habit which enables it to be rendered both in terms of Bourdieu's notion of habitus and as a moral matter. For Dewey, morals, in the sense of virtues and vices, *are* habits: 'All virtues and vices are habits which incorporate objective forces. They are interactions of elements contributed by the make-up of an individual with elements supplied by the outdoor world' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 16). Morals and morality do not spring from within the human individual but from the individual's relation to the environment, the 'elements supplied by the outdoor world'.⁷ It is in this sense that virtues, vices and hence morality are 'real'; they comprise elements of the 'outdoor world' but become so apparently ingrained that the 'good' habit is not identified as a habit at all, but as springing from,

or signalling, the inner dedication, conscientiousness, ‘goodness’ of the individual involved. Those who speak persuasively or are accomplished at playing the piano are taken to exhibit skill or commitment; these are taken to be virtues, to be ‘good’. This links to Bourdieu’s description of habitus, as cited earlier, as a disposition which indicates a ‘habitual state’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 214, footnote 1). In the French original, the phrase translated as ‘a way of being, a habitual state’, is ‘une *manière d’être*, un *état habituel*’ (Bourdieu, 2000 [1972]: 393. Emphasis in original). Stress is laid on the character, the quality, the *manner* of being which is expressed in a ‘habitual state’. Disposition is more than a tendency, it is the very ability to be and act in a certain way. This is an important insight which is shared by Bourdieu and Dewey: the key to their understanding of habit and habitus is a ‘way of being’ or a ‘manner of being’. As Dewey puts it: ‘The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts’ (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 42).

This focus on modes of behaviour, as opposed to individual acts, will enable a reconceptualization of habit and morality as it allows for a reconsideration of the relationship between morality, habit and class (bearing in mind the apparent link between repetitive, routine, habitual occupations and social class). To draw together the work of Dewey and Bourdieu, it might be better to talk of ‘habit(us)’ which is characterized by capacities and dispositions. In order to reapproach the concept of morality, as set out by Dewey, it is necessary first to examine the strengths and limitations of Bourdieu’s linking of social class to the aesthetic. This raises an important question regarding the very reality of social class.

The Reality (or Otherwise) of Social Class

‘Social classes do not exist [. . .] What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as *something to be done*’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 12. Emphasis in original).⁸ Just as it is impossible to draw a line between the old and the young or the rich and the poor (Bourdieu, 1987: 2), it is impossible to observe, define or know where a class begins and ends. Social class, in so far as it constitutes a set of relations in social space, is not a ‘thing’ which can be observed, which can be known, as such, for it does not exist in any substantial sense (Bourdieu, 1987: 3) but only ‘on paper’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 7). This might seem to undermine an important element of the argument being set out in this article. For, if classes do not exist, then the claim that Bourdieu sets up a dyad between the ongoing but ‘objective’ constitution of social class and the operations of representation might find itself on uncertain ground. That is to say, if social classes cannot constitute an object of knowledge (because they lack actual existence), then the charge that Bourdieu has tied together the elements of Kant’s first and third critique, that of objective knowledge and that of aesthetic judgement, to the exclusion of the moral, might lack bite.

One response to such a charge is that Bourdieu’s stance does not exclude the possibility of studying class. Rather, the call is for closer attention to be paid both to the posited ontology of social classes *and* the status of the analytical tools constructed in order to ‘know’ class. The task is not to overstate or misrepresent either the knowledge that is constructed or that which is supposedly known. This is perhaps difficult to do, precisely because the silent

but widespread legacy of Kant's division of the 'objective', 'subjective' (aesthetic) and moral realms suffuses much of modern thought. And Bourdieu makes this difficulty clear:

this is where things get complicated: it is in effect quite likely that the product of the relational mode of thinking [. . .] will be interpreted in a realist and 'substantialist' way: 'classes' as logical classes – analytical constructs obtained by theoretically dividing a theoretical space – are then seen as real, objectively constituted groups. Ironically, the more accurate the theoretical construction of theoretical classes, the greater the chance that they will be seen as real groups. Indeed, these classes are based on the principles of differentiation which are actually the most effective in reality, i.e., the most capable of providing the fullest explanation of the largest number of differences observed between agents. (Bourdieu, 1987: 4)

To reapproach this problem, it is helpful to follow closely Bourdieu's assertion that social class is 'something to be done' (as cited earlier); it needs to be *made* or *constructed*. Bourdieu asks us to take the title of EP Thompson's work *The Making of the Working Class* both seriously and literally (Bourdieu, 1987: 8) to the point that it becomes clear that 'this class is a *well-founded historical artefact*' (Bourdieu, 1987: 8–9). Bourdieu further insists that 'the *criteria* used in the construction of the objective space and of the well-founded classifications it makes possible are also instruments – I should say weapons – and stakes in the classification struggle which determines the making and un-making of classifications' (Bourdieu, 1987: 9). The fact that classes have to be made, they do not exist "ready made" (Bourdieu, 1987: 3), situates the construction of social class as a locus of sets of relations of power. This does not entail that social class is *only* a social construction, in the sense of a linguistic construction, a figment of some symbolic collective imagination. Rather, the very activity of 'knowing' social class is a political one, in that this knowing contributes to the constituting of groups of people in the world as social classes. This constitutes a relational reality, rather than a substantial one – and this is the ontological core of Bourdieu's sociology ('the real is the relational' (Bourdieu, 1987: 3)). The relational differences and spaces within which individuals and groups act and inhere in the world do not comprise objects which can simply be observed or known. Yet their constant construction, formation and reformation is a real factor in the world, and has consequences for those groups, individuals, and the world. Knowledge of, discussion of, analyses of, social class (such as the argument of this article) are one aspect of the ongoing formation of the relationality reality which comprises what we call social class.

It is for this reason that Bourdieu is able to talk of 'this political work of *classmaking*' (Bourdieu, 1987: 8). There is always a political aspect to discussions of social class. But, as I want to argue throughout this piece, this political work involves not only the work of representation (the symbolic and aesthetic) but also moral work. We can only fully explain and counter the political element of class-making if we are able to recognize this moral element. Before turning to this, it is first necessary to look at the details of how Bourdieu correlates social class and its representation.

Bourdieu on Social Class, Representation and Morality

As has been seen, Bourdieu insists that social class is constituted, partially at least, through classificatory struggles. 'Struggles over the appropriation of economic or cultural goods

are, simultaneously, symbolic struggles to appropriate distinctive signs in the form of classified, classifying goods or practices' (Bourdieu, 1984: 249). For Bourdieu, aesthetic judgements are no more and no less than distinctions which mirror and reinforce social divisions (such as social class). The 'objective'⁹ aspect of social class, as experienced and lived (for example, in terms of differences in life-expectancy), is a relational reality, predicated on differences and distinctions, and it has its corollary in representation, the symbolic, matters of taste and aesthetics. In this way, the elements of Kant's first and third critique form a dyad whose elements inform and reinforce each other. The reason that one set of judgements, distinctions, classification becomes more highly valued than others is that such judgements both constitute and are constituted by wider social and economic conditions. Aesthetic judgements, as expressed in matters of taste, reflect and reinforce the interests of the dominant, while appearing to be disinterested, in the Kantian sense: 'one only has to realize that the classificatory schemes which underlie agents' practical relationship to their condition and the representation they have of it are themselves the product of that condition' (Bourdieu, 1984: 483–484). The representation of the relation to the real condition is a product of that condition. Bourdieu ties the real conditions and their representation into a loop, or dyad.

It could be argued that Bourdieu has fallen into a very specific version of the 'correlationist circle' (Meillassoux, 2008: 5). The circle is not *within* one domain but *between* two domains – the formation, reformations and analyses of social class and the 'aesthetic', as constituted by the symbolic representations which legitimate those formations and analyses. A circle, or better, a feedback loop is set up between the aesthetic and the actual. As a result, the realm of morality is either excluded or subsumed within the aesthetic. This suggests that judgements about what is 'wrong', in moral terms, always proceed from, inhabit, and 'represent' an ongoing symbolic power struggle. The moral becomes an epiphenomenon of (symbolic) power struggles rather than occupying its own realm. Class appears *as if* it is a moral issue when it is really a question of the power, right and authority to classify. It is really a matter of (symbolic) violence.¹⁰

The tendency for the moral to be subsumed into the aesthetic is not only to be found in the texts of Bourdieu but in the work of others such as Lamont (1992) whose aim to trace the moral aspect of culture in the French and American upper-middle class is announced in the title of their text: *Money, Morals and Manners*. Lamont envisions morality in terms of 'the criteria that people use to define and discriminate between worthy and less worth persons' (1992: 1) which is predicated on the creation of 'symbolic boundaries – the types of lines that individuals draw when they categorize people' (1992: 1). The drawing of such boundaries, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion involved in this, are not, however, different in kind from the drawing of cultural boundaries through the operations of taste. Lamont attempts to grant a specificity to the moral boundaries as follows: '*Moral boundaries* are drawn on the basis of moral character, they are centred around qualities such as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity and consideration for others' (1992: 4). Yet, the reading of the interviews which comprise the basis of Lamont's research either emphasize the cultural element ('Julien feels superior to people who "watch television everyday"' (1992: 88)) or reduces the moral character of others to a matter of *taste* for the interviewee: 'He described to me the kind of people he likes thus [. . .] "I like people who are honest"' (1992: 24). Just as it is difficult to 'derive an ought from an is',¹¹ it is hard to see how an 'ought' can be derived from statements

involving taste, from an ‘I appreciate’, ‘I like’, ‘I prefer’. As a result, morality is again subsumed into the cultural. The possible triad is reduced to a dyad.

Clarifying this moral element, which inheres within all judgements about social class, is one key aim of this article. Before turning to Dewey on morality, it is worth spending some time considering Bourdieu’s own thoughts on morality.

Bourdieu’s Morality

One element of the argument of this article, that Bourdieu ties the ‘objective’ and the ‘aesthetic’ in too tight a dyad, might seem to suggest that Bourdieu has no position on morality or ethics. This is not the case. Bourdieu’s text *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Bourdieu, 1998) comprises a collection of essays previously published in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The choice of the title for this collection is notable and it is certainly no accident that *Practical Reason* echoes Kant’s second critique – *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant, 1997). Bourdieu may not replicate Kant’s categorical imperative – in which the call is only to act in such a way that you could also will that such an action were universalizable; that is to say, could become a universal law – but, as will be discussed later in this article, Bourdieu’s rendering of the moral as related to matters of the universal, does suggest a Kantian legacy.

Bourdieu wants to locate virtue, ethics and morality within the social, political and economic conditions of the possibility of disinterestedness, as exemplified in a virtue such as generosity. The very possibility of disinterestedness is the marker of morality, for Bourdieu, and he devotes a whole chapter to this very question – ‘Is a Disinterested Act Possible?’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 75–91). The crux of his argument is that any such ethical or moral act can only be made possible within a ‘field’ or within a specific ‘universe’. This is the kernel of his approach to the universal which sets him in a skewed relationship to Kant’s ethics. The founding sense of the universal, for Bourdieu, is that it applies to all members of a group.¹² Indeed, it is that which constitutes the group as a group. In this way, he talks of ‘the formal universal principle (*universal since it applies to each group member*) that is constitutive of the group’s existence’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 141. *Emphasis added*). Bourdieu’s universal arises from the fabrication of a (social) universe, with its accompanying field, which thereby constitutes a particular universal. ‘Thus, for the question of knowing if virtue is possible, one can substitute the question of knowing if one can create universes in which people have an interest in the universal’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 89).

This rendering of the character and genesis of sociality obliges Bourdieu to posit morality solely in terms of the universal and it is this which situates him within a specific rendering of the Kantian legacy, as signalled in the title of the collection of essays – *Practical Reason* (or, better, ‘Practical Reasons’ to reflect the number of universes and fields).¹³ As opposed to the Kantian position where the (moral) universality stems from the affirmation of an individual subject that their moral maxim is universalizable, Bourdieu’s universes and universals arise from the affirmation of and by a *group* that *that* is the rule or value to which all members of that group are subject. ‘The (mental) representation the group has of itself can only be maintained through the incessant work of (theatrical) representation, through which agents produce and reproduce (albeit in and

through mere fiction) at least the appearance of conformity to the group's ideal truth or ideal of truth' (Bourdieu, 1998: 142).

Such universality gains its strength not from any specifically moral element but from the apparent ability to render the values of a specific universe (or social group) as universal. Therefore, Bourdieu talks of the paradoxical foundation of ethics, which he describes as 'the political struggle for the monopoly of symbolic violence, for the right to say what is right, true, good, and to define all so-called universal values, where a reference to what is universally just can be the most important weapon' (Bourdieu, 1998: 143). This returns us to the more familiar foregrounding of representation, the aesthetic, and taste, through the operations of the symbolic:

all universal values are in fact particular, universalized values [. . .] all the things the dominants celebrate, and in which they celebrate themselves by so celebrating (culture, disinterestedness, the pure, Kantian morality, Kantian aesthetics [. . .] can only fulfil their symbolic function of legitimation precisely because they benefit in principle from universal recognition – people cannot openly deny them without denying their own humanity; but, for this reason, the behaviours that render them homage, sincere or not, it matters little, are assured a form of symbolic profit. (Bourdieu, 1998: 90)

The success of the 'dominants' in imposing their celebration of specific culture, (Kantian) aesthetics, and (Kantian) morality, is predicated on their success in representing themselves as a 'real' universal, as opposed to a forced particular universal which reflects the interest of a certain group. This is not only the basis of social class divisions but entails that questioning such representations would involve the questioning of one's own humanity. This seems like a *moral* issue. But on what basis can this morality be established? This returns us to the question that is one main concern of this article – namely: Is it possible to delineate a conceptual and practical space in which the moral can operate, can hold its own?

Bourdieu's retention of a form of the universal loops the moral into the universal through its (unwarranted) ability to represent itself as legitimate and hence, almost paradoxically, as universal. Morality is subsumed into representation. This undermines the possibility of rendering or accounting for the force of moral judgements except in terms of some kind of a universal which draws its force from the imposition of a certain scheme of representation. In this respect, the moral has no force of its own. Or, if it does, it is beholden to a warped version of Kant's categorical imperative, one based on the supposed universalization of group rather than individual representations.

Symbolic violence, representation, the aesthetic and taste are the real harbingers of morality, within Bourdieu's account. And yet, on more than one occasion, he calls for a *realpolitik* with regard to politics and morality.

Political morality does not fall from heaven, and it is not innate to human nature. Only a *realpolitik* of reason and morality can contribute favourably to the institution of a universe where all agents and their acts would be subject – notably through critique – to a kind of permanent test of universalizability which is practically instituted in the very logic of the field. (Bourdieu, 1998: 144)

Morality too needs to be made. For Bourdieu such making is accomplished through critique. And sociology can partake in this critique. However, the test of this critique is universalizability, and this ties the question of morality either to the realm of legitimate representation (including matters of taste) or a rather wrangled version of Kant's categorical imperative.

Rethinking Morality (and Habit)

An anonymous reviewer of a draft of this article suggested that Bourdieu considers 'the aesthetic 'as "a masked expression of moral disgust to ways of life of the working class"'. This is indeed the point that I am trying to make but it appears that it is not one that Bourdieu can make, as Bourdieu remains firmly within the remit of taste: 'social space may be construed as a structure of probabilities of drawing individuals together or apart, a *structure of affinity and aversion*, between them' (Bourdieu, 1987: 7. Emphasis added). For Bourdieu that which draws individuals together into a group (which may later be analysed through the logical construct of a social class) is a 'structure of affinity and aversion'. This may sound like a moral matter but Bourdieu is prevented from rendering aversion in terms of morality through his locating of morality within a very specific rendering of the universal.

In this article, I want to argue that it is possible, indeed simpler and yet more powerful, to develop a *realpolitik* which is based neither on the universal nor on critique but on Dewey's more immediate and practical insistence that morality is tied up with the here and now.

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey (1935 [1922]) sets out to link morality, habit, custom and class. A major part of the modern problem of accounting for morality, according to Dewey, is the supposition that morals occupy a realm which is divorced from the messiness and practicality of the industrial and political world. To counter this difficulty, Dewey insists that morals and morality do not make up some kind of interior realm within humans, they must be situated within the immediacy of the world. 'The cost of confining moral freedom to an inner region is almost the complete severance of ethics from politics and economics' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 9). Dewey does not want to pay this price, and for good reason. To make morality a private matter would be to put it on the same plane as taste; as apparently utterly subjective. Dewey insists that traditional approaches to morality have focused on the individual, or individual acts. In doing so, they have ignored the fact that 'Morals *are* social. The question of ought, or should be, is a question of better and worse *in* social affairs' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 319. Emphasis in original). The emphasis on 'better and worse', rather than 'good' or 'bad' as the cornerstone of morality requires a shift from the 'habit of identifying moral judgment with praise and blame' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 319). This is especially pertinent with regard to questions of morality and class, and points to the need to challenge the unthinking judgements, in terms of praise or blame, of the actions and attitudes of those deemed to be members of a specific social class.

Instead, Dewey proposes a broad definition of morality: 'morals has to do with all activity into which alternative possibilities enter. For wherever they enter a difference between better and worse arises' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 278). Situated within his demanding version of pragmatism, Dewey dislocates morality from questions of 'good' and 'bad'. He rejects any ideal notion of what constitutes 'the good': 'no evil presents itself as evil. Until it is rejected, it is a competing good. After rejection, it figures not as a lesser

good, but as the bad of that situation' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 278). Dewey also eschews any moral framework which claims to operate in abstraction from the immediacy of the world: 'morality is a continuing process not a fixed achievement' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 280); 'the good is now or never' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 290). This urgency of morality adds an edge to Dewey's ideas and builds on his vision of morality as a matter of alternative possibilities. By not stipulating or starting with any prior definition of 'the good', Dewey broadens the scope of morality to the extent that 'Potentially [. . .] every and any act is within the scope of morals, being a candidate for possible judgment with respect to its better-or-worse quality' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 279). It is not possible, prior to a given situation or event, to determine whether an act is moral or not. The crux of the issue is the potential for an act to be involved in a matter of 'better-or-worse'. Morals and morality are ongoing questions. 'Because there is no final recipe by which to decide this question all moral judgment is experimental and subject to revision by its issue' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 279). What is required is a recognition of the intimate links between actions, judgements and morality which make up everyday life. These are elements which are constantly made, unmade and remade. Attention needs to be paid to how this is done, and strategies developed which recognize the contingency of the world. Dewey's version of morality is not based on any fixed notion of the 'good' or 'bad', 'vice' or 'virtue' but, rather, on the effectiveness of actions. As a result, he manages to establish morality as a distinct realm, yet one which is always implicated in the messiness of the political, economic and actual world.

This approach can both strengthen and be strengthened through a comparison with Bourdieu's description of class struggle as the ongoing battle for establishing legitimacy over representations. 'What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization' (Bourdieu, 1984: 479). What Dewey adds is a recognition of the role of morality within such battles through the notion of alternative possibilities to action. As Bourdieu makes clear, the operations of taste play a profound part in the sustenance of social class boundaries. But is there not also a moral element, one which goes beyond the aesthetic but plays an equally insidious role? To respond to such a question, it might be best to combine Bourdieu and Dewey via a reconceptualization of the concepts of habit and disposition to move toward the notion of habit(us).

For, as Dewey points out, a habit can be expressed in individual, one-off acts.

Repetition is in no sense the essence of habit. Tendency to repeat acts is an incident of many habits but not of all. A man [sic] with a habit of giving way to anger may show his habit by a murderous attack upon someone who has offended. His act is nonetheless due to habit because it occurs only once in his life. (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 42)

Habits may exhibit some kind of repetition, but they do not have to do so. An act of theft by a miserly person may be the only time that they steal, but it is also an example of a habit, insofar as Dewey describes habit as a tendency or capacity. Dewey makes it clear that his approach puts strain on the usual conception of the term habit:

The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use [. . .] But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense

acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity [. . .] If the facts are recognized we may also use the words attitude and *disposition* [. . .] the latter conveys explicitly the sense or operativeness, actuality. Attitude and, as ordinarily used, *disposition* requires a positive stimulus outside themselves to become active. If we perceive that they denote positive forms of action which are released [. . .] we may employ them instead of the word habit (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 40–41. Emphases added.)

Habit is disposition, in the productive, creative sense that Bourdieu envisages his concept of habitus. Dewey, however, retains the more commonplace term ‘habit’ precisely to emphasize (with Bourdieu) that such dispositions are acquired. Moreover, this morality is not individual but abundantly social.

Dewey’s very particular rendering of the role and status of the social can help avoid any charge of simple social constructionism whereby morality is reduced to a cultural variable, relative between (and perhaps within) social groups, cultures and societies and constantly shifting over time. For Dewey, the sociality of morals lies not in their being a reflection of some prior structure, a mental epiphenomenon, but in the fact that moral judgement, judgements about ‘better or worse’ *do* play an active role in the world:

that moral judgment and moral responsibility are the work wrought in us by the social environment, signifies¹⁴ that all morality is social; not because we *ought* to take into account the effect of our acts upon the welfare of others, but because of facts. Others *do* take account of what we do, and they respond accordingly to our acts. Their responses actually *do* affect the meaning of what we do. (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 316. Emphasis in original)

What others do and how others live affects our behaviour. A recognition of this will deepen our understanding of the complexity of the world, of the imbrication of facts, aesthetics and morality and, furthermore, ‘protects us from thinking that welfare can consist in a soup-kitchen happiness, in pleasures we can confer upon others from without’ (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 293). Dewey’s emphasis on the role of the outdoor world, the environment, and morals as objective also moves beyond the dyad of social class and representation, as set out by Bourdieu (where the ‘agents’ practical relationship to their condition and the representation they have of it are themselves the product of that condition’). The insistence that questions of better and worse, rather than good or bad, are potentially implicit in all acts and judgements would both allow for moral questions to be situated within discussions and analyses of class but would also undermine those who frame such questions in terms of ‘praise’ and ‘blame’. The recourse to morality, as advocated in this article, is not in itself moral, in the traditional sense that it is based on some undefined ‘ought’. It is, however, ‘moral’ in Dewey’s sense of morality as both a matter of the facts and of what can be done. Some of the implications of this position will be drawn out in the next section.

Class is Always a Matter of Morals

There are two interlinked reasons why a return to morality could be of use for social theory. First, it can bring to the surface, and provide a riposte to, the latent but insidious

moralism inherent in free-market economics, where the supposed ‘goodness’ of the market is offered as innocent, objective, self-evident, when the judgements that are made always invoke an element of the moral, be it in terms of the laziness of benefit-seekers or the virtuous character of those who are ‘just about managing’. The problem arises in the apparent split between three realms of thought and life, fact, morality and aesthetics – as envisaged by Kant’s three critiques. If Bourdieu has linked the objective and representation aspects together too tightly, this could, perhaps, be remedied through a detour through that which is leftover, from the remainder of modern thought, namely, morality. The introduction of morality as a third element acts, as Simmel puts it: as a ‘prophylactic prevention of unification’ (Simmel, 1902: 184). Morality, therefore, unsettles the axis between social class and representation, with the likelihood of one being incorporated or explained via the other. The triad of morality-representation-social class characterizes the complex and shifting dynamics between these elements, where one element might temporarily side with another, only later for this temporary association to be challenged and changed through their relation to the third. Introducing a third element establishes ‘a tension and latent antagonism between the others [. . .] through the mere possibility of giving [. . .] adherence to the one or to the other’ (Simmel, 1902: 178). On certain occasions, social class and representation will appear to be synonymous, as Bourdieu makes clear, yet such an apparent stability is always shadowed by the implicit morality which haunts such judgements and statements (such as those to do with ‘laziness’ or ‘hard-working but “just about managing””).

This triad of the objective-aesthetic-moral points to the inherent contingency of social class, which is constantly remade, justified, and reinforced. This is the strength of Bourdieu’s account; to insist upon the role of the diverse cultural (and according to the argument being set out here, moral) elements of struggles over the formation and reformation of our world. The apparent stability of social class is sometimes effected through the realm of representation, at other points the moral element is brought to the forefront to bolster the supposed objectivity of statements and judgements about social class. But the moral always hovers in the realm of alternative possibilities, of what could be, what could have been; in the fact that judgements of class have consequence and contribute to the world, making it better or worse.

As mentioned toward the start of this piece, the notion of the habitual, through the term ‘routine’, runs through official government delineations of social class. Mentions of ‘routine’, in government or sociological categorizations of social class are not innocent; in their attempts to characterize the lives of others, they invoke notions of spontaneity, or the lack thereof, the capacity to act, or to determine one’s actions and time, and this helps establish an implicit hierarchy.¹⁵ The deployment and discussion of social class, even by sociologists, is never neutral, and can never inhabit only the realm of the ‘objective’. For, as both Bourdieu and Dewey make clear, this objective realm is tied up with those of the aesthetic *and* the moral. Discussions of social class, such as those developed in this article, are part of the wider network of ‘class-making’. They are, therefore, always political, but also *moral*.

Recognizing the objective-aesthetic-moral triad might enable the complex machinations which go into class formation to be further clarified. This is not to suggest that an abstract framework can be produced to explain all such instances, for it is the very

shifting from one element of the triad to another which characterizes the ongoing and changing instantiations of social class. As Dewey makes clear, there is no 'good' to be aimed for. Instead, there are always matters of 'better or worse' that can be identified and attempts made to remedy or ameliorate. Dewey's account takes on a political hue at this point, in that it indicates not that something *should* be done, but that something is *always* done with regard to the lives of others. And it is here that morality and the economic coincide.

Moreover, seeing and judging (including making moral judgements about social class) is a way of acting as much as a way of thinking. Bourdieu and Dewey agree that habit(us) is not deterministic but has duration, in terms of being a sedimentation of the environment within us and our bodies. Aesthetic judgements may have their own slant, in that they appear to inhabit the realm of taste, but they also rely upon the broader remit of morality, because they characterize habitual ways of acting, *even if a specific judgement is only made once*, as Dewey makes clear. A way of thinking is also a way of acting. As Haraway remarks, we need to 'become answerable for what we learn how to see' (Haraway, 1991: 190). This implies that those who judge the habits or habit(us) of individuals in terms of social class should be answerable for how they see. In turn, the justifications for judging such judgements will be entirely pragmatic, in the bold sense that Dewey develops; that is, these judgements are local, and are only justified by the specifics involved without recourse to anything beyond. It also means that the grounds for such judgements will be temporary, not written in stone as a set of principles or rules. There is no need for a recourse to an individualistic humanism to support such a position. Habit(us), dispositions and morality do not arise from some interior realm, they are not hidden within a self. Nor do they imply the following of a fully external set of rules or criteria. Habits and dispositions comprise 'positive forms of action' which require an external environment (or field). They are 'adjustments *of* the environment, not merely *to* it' (Dewey, 1935 [1922]: 52. Emphasis in original.) Following Dewey, *how* we see, speak and 'do' the environment is what constitutes morality. This aspect of the argument can, therefore, incorporate certain elements of the liberal tradition without being constrained or compromised by such an outlook. In this respect, it is possible to see class as something which involves the amount of control a person has over their acting and thinking. 'Class matters because it creates unequal possibilities for flourishing and suffering' (Sayer, 2005: 218).

In conclusion, it is possible to assert that morality is pivotal to both social class and to judgements about social class. Sociologists and social theorists should not be wary of the moral element of their judgements; they should bring them to light. It is not possible to be solely 'objective' with regard to social class. Marx was right in his asides on morality, such as: 'there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and *moral* element' (Marx and Engels, 1996: 90. Emphasis added). The implicit praise of capitalism by free-marketeers often masks that their position is one with moral overtones; by implicitly praising the market they condemn other forms of organization. The morality of class is not confined to the aesthetic judgements which reinforce distinctions between classes via power, or symbolic violence. Nor are moral judgements about class simply expressions of an emotive or aesthetic disapproval, for example in terms of disgust and shame. It is worse than that. Capitalism, as a way of acting, speaking and judging, is itself a habit that is hard to break.

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Notes

1. It is interesting to note that Durkheim's first attempt to ground sociology was not founded immediately on concepts of sociality but of morality, as clear from his first book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1984). See, Halewood (2014: 23–37) for a fuller discussion of this.
2. It should be noted that neo-Kantian philosophers, such as Dilthey (1976), while agreeing with Kant's general scheme, felt that he had 'missed out' an exposition of those categories of thought which were to be applied to the social, or more specifically, the cultural realm, and that one important task for the social sciences was to elaborate such categories.
3. Of course, and as will be discussed in more detail later in the article, Bourdieu was aware of some of these issues and this is why he was able to talk of 'an anti-Kantian "aesthetic"' (Bourdieu, 1984: 41).
4. The recent renewal in interest in the work of Ravaisson (2008 [1838]) signals the continuing importance of such debates. For Ravaisson, habit is tied up with change. Habit 'supposes a change in the disposition, in the potential, in the internal virtue of that in which the change occurs' (Ravaisson, 2008 [1838]: 25).
5. As Crossley (2013: 139) reminds us, the term 'habitus' was not coined by Bourdieu; it was previously used by Mauss, and also Husserl. In this quotation, however, Bourdieu refers to Hegel as his source of this 'non-mechanical' concept of habit.
6. While some commentators, such as King (2000) and Lovell (2000), have tended to read habitus as intrinsically deterministic and constraining, others, such as Wacquant (2016) and Probyn (2000), have recognized that habitus is, in Bourdieu's words, 'an infinite capacity for generating' (Bourdieu, 1990: 55).
7. Meillassoux defines correlationism as thought's inability to access the 'great outdoors' (Meillassoux, 2008: 7). Dewey's serendipitous use of this term signals one way in which he overcomes the latent correlationism inherent in Bourdieu's overly tight linking of social class and representation, as will be discussed later in this article.
8. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this aspect of Bourdieu's argument and the problems that it posed for my argument, as set out in an earlier draft.
9. I have used inverted commas to show an awareness of the difficulty, as discussed in the previous section, of assigning any simple reality to social class, while also insisting upon the importance analysing what constitutes such apparent divisions.
10. This summary of Bourdieu's position is partially derived from comments made by Bev Skeggs on an earlier version of this article. I am extremely grateful to her for her input and for treating my reading of Bourdieu with generous but trenchant criticism.
11. This phrase is taken from David Hume who pointed out the fallacy of trying to derive statements about how the world ought to be from statements about how the world is. This stance is sometimes termed 'the naturalistic fallacy' and points to the difficulty in moving from statements of fact to statements about value, or prescriptive statements. A similar position can be found in the 'fact-value' split which arose in the 19th century with the development of positivism, which sociology has tried to counter since at least the time of Weber (1949).

12. Bourdieu even goes so far as to state the following: 'I believe that a comparative anthropology would permit us to say that there is a universal recognition of the recognition of the universal: it is a universal of social practices recognizing as valuable forms of behaviour that have submission, even visible submission, to the universal as a principle' (Bourdieu, 1998: 88).
13. It should be noted that the original title of Bourdieu's collection of essays, in French, is *Raisons Pratiques*, using the plural form to indicate that there are, perhaps, many reasons (Bourdieu, 1994).
14. Syntax altered: 'signify' in original.
15. There are affinities between elements of this argument and those of EO Wright (1985).

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