

World Political Science Review

Volume 1, Issue 2

2005

Article 2

Political Taste as a Marker of Class: A Bourdieu Approach to the Study of Public Opinion Formation

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Originally published as Slothuus, Rune 2004. "Politisk smag som klassemærke: en Bourdieu-approach til studiet af politiske holdninger." *Politica* 36(3): 311-332. Reprinted with permission from *Politica* (Denmark).

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***Political Taste as a Marker of Class: A Bourdieu Approach to the Study of
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Rune Slothuus

Abstract

Even rough groupings of individuals according to education and occupation reveal marked differences in opinions. What explains the relation between position in the social structure and political views? Building on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory on social praxis and his three-dimensional class concept, the article answers this question. A Bourdieu-inspired analysis reveals larger social differences in opinion formation than previous studies. Even within an apparently homogenous group of political science students there are clear and systematic differences in opinions that can be traced back to the individual student's social background. The article also shows that the ability to articulate an opinion is socially conditioned.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gitte Sommer Harrits, Trine Bjerregaard Larsen, Martin Munk, Kristian Mygind, and Niels Christian Sørensen for helpful and encouraging comments and suggestions to earlier drafts of this article. Annette Andersen provided helpful secretarial assistance.

Slothuus, Rune 2004. "Politisk smag som klassemærker: en Bourdieu-approach til studiet af politiske holdninger." *Politica* 36(3): 311-332.

Analyses of political values and opinions show that earlier social cleavages are diminishing, citizens are cognitively mobilized, new non-material values are gaining more significance, and class-voting is declining (see, e.g., Dalton, 1996; Goul Andersen and Borre, 2003; Inglehart, 1990). Simultaneously, a bulk of recent studies of citizens' political opinions demonstrate a relationship between individuals' position in a societal social structure and their political opinions. Thus, in Denmark educational level is related to opinions on immigration, punishment and criminal justice, postmaterial values, foreign aid spending, The European Union, gender equality, and democratic values, while occupational category and public/private employment are related to opinions on the size of government, economic redistribution, and state control with business (e.g., Borre and Goul Andersen, 1997: 59-63, 136-139; Gaasholt and Togeby, 1995: 74-104; Jakobsen, Reinert, and Thomsen, 2001; Svensson and Togeby, 1992: 117-121). These socially conditioned patterns in opinions are found in comparative European studies as well (e.g., Inglehart, 1990: 162-168; Schweisguth, 1998).

This empirical pattern raises an interesting question: Why does an individual's position in the social structure of society still seem to be so consequential for how this person thinks about politics? Or, in other words: What is it about a certain social position that apparently generates specific political opinions? In the otherwise exhaustive literature on formation of political opinions and values it is difficult to find compelling answers to this question. Thus, this article contributes to the study of political opinions and voting behavior with needed new inspiration from a different angle. Specifically, in this article I illuminate the extent to which French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory on social praxis helps to answer why people have the opinions they have. Bourdieu offers a bold suggestion of why and how particular social positions generate particular opinions as the theory simultaneously contains a psychologically oriented model of individuals' perceptions and appreciations and links them to individuals' class positions.

Three central elements in Bourdieu's research approach or epistemology can illuminate why he is potentially attractive in studies of political opinions. First, Bourdieu insists on exceeding a number of "artificial" oppositions in the social sciences thus reaching beyond objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu, 1990a: 25-29). That is, Bourdieu simultaneously involves objective material conditions like distribution of money and titles, and subjective circumstances like individuals' experiences, perceptions, and habits.¹ This enables him to point to a homology or matching between social and mental structures (see, e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). If we are to understand the relation between the location of individuals in the social structure of society and their opinions, we obviously need such an integration of the two perspectives. Bourdieu undertakes this integration by weaving together a "structuralistic" and a "constructionist"

¹ For a fine introduction to the discussion of subjectivism versus objectivism, see Hay (2002) and Sil (2000).

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approach to the social reality. As a first break Bourdieu overrides the everyday common sense perceptions, and the objective structures – spaces of positions – are constructed. In a second break individuals' immediate experiences are reintroduced so that the schemes of perception and appreciation (or taste) – the dispositions – that from inside structure their behavior and beliefs about the world around them can be explicated and analyzed (Wacquant, 1992: 10-11).

The second element in Bourdieu's epistemology is his insistence on, with the breaks described above, constructing the object of analysis from scratch. Hence it is not given in advance which social classes exist or which opinions or interests are attached to particular social positions. This explorative approach, combined with the methodological pluralism Bourdieu advocates, is a clear strength in the study of political opinions in societies that undergo considerable change. For example, knowledge and other resources may be just as significant as money and ownership of means of production in terms of understanding the social and political differentiation in society.

Constructing the object of analysis from scratch like this is further related to the third element in the Bourdieu's epistemology, namely his perception of the social world as structured relationally, not substantially (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96-97). Because "social identity is defined and asserted through difference", and because differences are recognized as social differences they "become sign systems that are socially qualified (as 'distinguished', 'vulgar' etc.)" (Bourdieu, 1984: 172). Hence, importantly to the study of political opinions, an individual's opinions cannot be understood in isolation from the opinions of other individuals. Which specific (substantial) opinions at a given time are attached to a particular social position can only be understood relationally with respect to what other individuals in other social positions think. This approach also contains a dynamic understanding of attitudinal differences, as they are never fixed but can change in response to, e.g., changing power relations between classes and successive changing perceptions of the political and social authority of these classes.

This also highlights that in addition to the epistemological advantages to the study of political opinions, Bourdieu's theory of social praxis offers a number of concepts and insights developed exactly to understand and explain social differences in opinions and perceptions of reality, and furthermore, the social role opinions play as well as the potential dominance associated with how different classes act politically. In light of all this it is surprising how modest an impact Bourdieu at this point in time has had on studies of political opinions.²

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to adjust Bourdieu's theory of social praxis to the study of individuals' political opinion formation. Specifically, the

² A search of 48 political science and sociology journals in the JStor database reveals almost no studies of political opinions drawing on any of Bourdieu's concepts (although see Bryson, 1996). Sniderman, Jackman, and Tiberj (2001) discuss Bourdieu in relation to survey methods, and in a Danish context Dahl (1997) makes use of Bourdieu but neglects the objectivist moment in Bourdieu's analysis. Apparently Martin Munk has combined Bourdieu and the study of political opinions most directly but his work is unpublished (personal communication). For a study related to the task here, see Harrits (2001).

article will assess to what extent Bourdieu's theory and concepts are a fruitful basis for studies of individuals' political opinions and will outline how such a Bourdieu-inspired research effort can be undertaken. The article is mainly theoretical, although it will clearly point to empirical analyses, some of which will be carried out on a tentative basis. The article first places political opinions in a social context; then individuals' "consumption" of opinions is discussed; and finally the homology between the field of production and the field of consumption of political opinions will be analyzed.

Political Opinion Formation as Social Praxis

Bourdieu understands all praxis socially. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu displays a comprehensive analysis of taste, first of all in the domain of art and culture, but it is a main thesis in the book that all kinds of taste and consumption can be understood socially in relations to each other. Taste is a particular propensity and capacity to appropriate – or judge – different objects, ways of consumption, and behavior, and taste thus generates a particular lifestyle where an individual's tastes in different domains (e.g., furniture, clothes, travelling, and newspaper reading) are different expressions of the same lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984: 173). But not all individuals have the same taste. Bourdieu illuminates how particular objective living conditions generate particular ways of perceiving, judging, and acting, and hence tastes function as markers of 'class' (Bourdieu, 1984: 1-2):

“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.” (Bourdieu, 1984: 6).

This wording addresses the taste in art but as the same underlying logic applies in all fields the same mechanisms of classifications and distinctions can be expected to be valid in politics. Particular political opinions or kinds of political taste are perceived as crude or unsophisticated while others are viewed as varied and thoughtful according to the dominant perception of what constitutes legitimate opinions. Hence, also political opinions – as an expression of political lifestyle – have a social function as markers of class.

The formation and acquisition of distinct opinions on and perceptions of politics take place in the field of political opinions. Instead of a concept of 'society' Bourdieu works with 'the social space', which consists of the social classes positioned relatively to each other, and this social space is subdivided into a range of relatively specialized and autonomous fields, each with its own logic, covering different domains such as the scientific field, the literary field, etc. The concept of field is crucial in Bourdieu's analyses and denotes "a structure of objective relations between different positions of force" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101). These different positions are occupied by actors depending on their capital, and from these positions they struggle for appreciation and power in the field. In the field of political opinions, actors

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compete to define the political world, what to think about it, and for the power to define it.

The field of political opinions can advantageously be conceptualized as divided into a field of production and a field of consumption, like Bourdieu's field analyses in *Distinction* (1984: 226-232). His major contribution to understanding how and why individuals' social position predisposes particular political opinions lies in the analysis of the field of consumption of political opinions. However, the analysis of distinct individuals' and classes' (consumption of) opinions cannot be undertaken without also analyzing the range of opinions they can choose from. This point is especially relevant as far as explaining the specific opinions individuals in specific positions express at a given point in time. Thus, at the end of this article the discussion will be expanded to illuminate also the field of production of political opinions and the homology between the fields of production and consumption. In the following discussion empirical illustrations will be included to substantiate and put the theoretical arguments into perspective. This approach is in accordance with the use of analytical concepts Bourdieu advocates, i.e. not as fully completed research programs but as a starting point for practical studies and empirically oriented discussions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 76-77).

The Field of Consumption of Political Opinions

A Bourdieu-inspired field analysis consists of three necessary and internally connected steps or moments. The first moment is to locate the field in relation to the field of power. The second moment must establish the objective structure of the relations among the different actors in the field, i.e. their positions. The third moment is to analyze the *habitus* of the actors, i.e. their dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 104-105). Thus, objectivist moments (the first and second) and subjectivist moments (third) are integrated analytically.

The Objectivist Moment

Relation to the Field of Power

The field of consumption of political opinions consists of all individuals acting politically by taking positions on political issues. As children have an awareness of being part of a political community and of possessing incipient political opinions already when they start school (Easton and Dennis, 1965; Easton and Hess, 1962), the field of political opinions must also consist of people who cannot vote. With this broad boundary, the field will include all of 'the social space' with the possible exception of a probably small part of the population who is not aware of the existence of politics. The point is that even though political tastes can be expected to have a lot of different expressions in content as well as in form – that is, how a person takes on a political position and motivates his opinion – it is left to the empirical analysis to assess the boundaries of the field. Thus, as the boundaries of the field of political opinions are equivalent to those of the social space, the field of power is incorporated in

the field of consumption of political opinions where it is in a dominant position relative to other positions the field of consumption of political opinions.

The Positions in the Field

In Bourdieu's analysis of social praxis, the class concept, which is tied to the mapping of positions in the social space, is central to understanding differences in individuals' schemes of perceptions, appreciations, and actions. Like Bourdieu's other concepts class should be understood in relation to specific empirical analyses, and the usefulness of the concept assessed according to its contribution to explaining variance (Bourdieu, 1987: 6). In fact, according to Bourdieu, properly defined social class provides the best prediction of praxis (Bourdieu, 1991b: 248), and the class concept is characterized as "a universal principle of explanation and classification" (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). To the analysis of social differences in political opinions exactly the link between objective structures and the actors' mental structures and praxis is the fundamental strength of Bourdieu's concept of class. However, this linkage cannot be properly understood without the mediating structure *habitus*, as will be explained below.

The aim of mapping the positions in the field of consumption of political opinions is to be able to identify important classes and class fractions in the same way as Bourdieu (1984) is able to on the basis of his analysis of the social space in France. Thereafter, in the subjectivist moment of the analysis, it is possible to examine potentially class-based political lifestyles in Denmark as would be expected in light of Bourdieu's findings.

In accordance with his methodology of breaking with prior understandings of the social world Bourdieu takes pains to develop his class concept (Bourdieu, 1984: 101-125). Bourdieu urges a break with linear thinking, focussing instead on the "structural causality of a network of factors" (Bourdieu, 1984: 107). Looking only at the direct correlation between an independent variable (education) and a dependent variable (opinion) blurs the complete system of relationships that are the actual principle accounting for the specific strength and form of the correlations between the particular variables (p. 103). Instead Bourdieu emphasizes class as a relational concept: "Social class is ... defined by ... the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices" (Bourdieu, 1984: 106).

Bourdieu denotes these "pertinent properties" as capital. Capital should be understood as a sort of energy, which exerts its power only in relation to a field (Bourdieu, 1984: 133; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101). A particular type of capital must be converted into and recognized as a power resource to obtain valence in the field. It is this valuation of a given form of capital that determines how the actors are positioned in the field, who will occupy dominating and dominated positions, respectively, and hence the distribution of power. Thus, in the social space and every field there is an ongoing struggle among actors about what kind of capital is legitimate.

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Based on exhaustive empirical studies this conceptualization allows Bourdieu to construct the social space in three dimensions: Vertically, positions are differentiated by overall volume of capital, “understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital” (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Horizontally, positions are differentiated by the relative distributions of economic capital versus cultural capital. Economic capital mainly consists of resources like income and property while cultural capital summarizes formal education and titles, courtesy, and confidence and skills in coping with the legitimate language and other codes in the field. The third dimension is constituted by the development over time in volume of capital and composition of capital (trajectory), both with respect to movements of individuals and classes over time. Thus, a class is constituted by individuals with the same position in the social space (Bourdieu, 1984: 114-125; 1987: 4). The relational character of the class concept is underlined by the observation that individuals in the same class are sharing not only the intrinsic conditions, i.e. particular material conditions of existence, but also its relational conditions, i.e. positioning relative to the position of other classes, as being above, below or between them (Bourdieu, 1984; 172; 1987: 6). Thus, a class can change position in the social space even though its material conditions of living are unchanged if for example the relative position of another class is strengthened.

In relation to the field of consumption of political opinions in Denmark, the same patterns can probably be expected to apply, in part because they express fairly general mechanisms, which Bourdieu earlier has extended from the French case to the US (Bourdieu, 1987: 4), Germany, and Japan (Bourdieu, 1998: 1); in part because the field of consumption of political opinions is almost coinciding with the social space. Other kinds of capital could be considered – e.g., Harrits (2001: 120) discusses “national esoteric” in relation to a growing number of immigrants in the Danish population, and Bryson (1996) constructs a “multicultural capital” in her analysis of musical taste and political tolerance – but as only a tentative empirical analysis will be conducted in this article, the most important kinds of capital in the field of consumption of political opinions can be limited to economic and cultural capital. However, what kinds of capital actually exist must be subject to empirical exploration.

Based on the kinds of capital mentioned it can be expected that the field of political opinions can be divided into three main classes – upper class, middle class, and lower class – like Bourdieu (1984) finds in the social space in France where particularly the upper class is internally differentiated in class fractions according to their composition of capital. However, a more detailed analysis of differences in political opinions would require the construction of more specific homogeneous classes. Indeed, the advantage of the Bourdieu approach to political opinion formation is precisely that the number and the character of classes are not predetermined, which makes the analytical framework suitable for discovering new attitudinal cleavages and distinctions. Empirically, a more detailed analysis could possibly draw on data from the Danish General Election Study project, which contains detailed coding of respondents according to occupational categories equivalent to those used utilized by Statistics Denmark (see Goul Andersen et al., 1999: 38-41). The interesting question now is how particular (objective) positions in the field of consumption of political opinions

generate particular political opinions, and this points us to the subjectivist moment of the analysis.

The Subjectivist Moment

The most central element in the analysis of individuals' political opinions is the concept of *habitus*. According to Bourdieu, the individual's habitus determines how the individual perceives and judges the social world and acts in it, including forming political opinions and expressing them. Habitus is closely linked to the individual's objective position in the social space as it is formed by the opportunities and constraints this position provides. Habitus acts as

“systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 53).

Since the habitus is the link between the objective structures (habitus as a structured structure) and the subjective structures (habitus as a structuring structure), that is, the schemes of perception and appreciation, the objectivist moment is also necessary and interesting to the study of political opinions. Habitus is the embodiment of the social structures and encompasses cognitive, motivational, and bodily structures. Of special relevance to the study of political opinions, this includes, e.g., cognitive capacity, a tendency to search for and comprehend new information, attitudes (in a bodily sense) expressed during political discussion, the language spoken and so on.

The political taste is generated by habitus. To understand how this happens we must first acknowledge that habitus equips the individual with particular schemes of perception. As these schemes of perception through habitus are created by the social world itself, this world will seem natural, and the schemes will function as a filter that sorts and classifies information according to its consistency with prior experiences and perceptions. Thus, habitus tends to favor experiences that help to reinforce it, and this mechanism serves to protect the habitus against change (Bourdieu, 1990a: 60-61). Through such objectively structured filters actors in the field of consumption of political opinions perceive political statements and information about events and conflicts and decide, often unintentionally, to reject or accept these messages.

Secondly, the habitus equips the individual with particular schemes or criteria of appreciation according to which the perceived social world is judged. These criteria are a result of both the objective conditions that have structured habitus and, relationally, which tastes habitus in other objective positions have generated. Bourdieu does not reject that individuals have an active understanding and construction of the social world (Bourdieu, 1990b: 130). Habitus is exactly a generative mechanism making “the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions possible - and only those” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 55). Hence, an individual's social

position does not fully determine his or her political taste as the habitus allows some clearance within the constraints of social structure.

Thus, differences in individuals' political taste result, both, from systematically different perceptions of the social world and – even if there were no differences in perception – from systematically different assessments of this reality. Because there are particular classes of objective conditions there are particular classes of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a: 60). Hence, political taste is class-specific, and thus a particular political lifestyle (positioned in the space of lifestyles) corresponds to a class of objective positions (positioned in the space of social positions). Political lifestyle – at least in the analysis of the field of political opinions – consists of political taste for a range of opinions on concrete or more general political issues (the supply of political opinion products). Tastes for single opinions relate to each other in “a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention” in the field, thus constituting different dimensions of the lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984: 173).

It is these patterns of political taste, put together political lifestyle, that the subjectivist element in an empirical analysis of the field of consumption of political opinions must illuminate. The scope of this article allows only an illustrative analysis. As discussed above, the objective positions in the field are differentiated according to overall volume and relative composition of economic and cultural capital. Overall volume of capital can be measured by a variable of occupational status with three categories: workers, lower salariat, and higher salariat, as this variable contains both cultural capital (higher skills in salariat) and economic capital (higher wages in higher salariat). The structure of capital is simply measured by occupational sector as public sector employment indicates greater weight of cultural capital relative to economic capital and private sector employment indicates greater weight of economic capital. Obviously, this operationalization is far from fully satisfying Bourdieu's considerations on measurement. However, as a rough indicator of possible class-specific political taste and as an initial empirical test of Bourdieu's ideas in the domain of political opinion formation this analysis is an important first step.

Table 1 displays distributions of six issue opinions across six different class positions. It turns out there are clear differences in political taste across these objective positions, thus supporting the expected class-specific political tastes. Looking more closely at opinions in the specific classes reveals an interesting pattern. On issues relating to the government's role in income distribution, social welfare, and control with business, the economic upper and middle classes distinguish themselves by generally opposing interventionist policies, whereas the cultural upper class distinguishes itself by expressing considerable “tolerance” toward developing countries and criminals. Interestingly, differences between the cultural and economic class fractions are apparently much less pronounced in the lower class, which might indicate that individuals in these objective positions simply possess much less of the capital necessary to make distinctions, mirroring analyses in Bourdieu (1984).

Table 1. Political opinions in three social classes, divided in class fractions by relative weight of cultural capital (public sector employment) and relative weight of economic capital (private sector employment), respectively. Percentages

Opinion items	Upper class Higher salariat		Middle class Lower salariat		Lower class Workers	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
The differences in living standards and incomes are still too great in our country - <i>Agree</i>	52	22	61	45	55	51
Public expenditures on environmental problems should be increased - <i>Agree</i>	42	31	47	44	53	41
Social reforms have gone too far in our country. More than now, people should manage without social security – <i>Agree</i>	29	46	19	33	25	27
Business men and industrial leaders should be intitled to determine their own business to a greater extend – <i>Agree</i>	38	67	46	66	48	59
Violent crimes should be punished far stricter than they are today – <i>Strongly Agree</i>	38	58	62	66	62	75
Public expenditures on aid to developing countries should be increased – <i>Agree</i>	18	5	10	8	8	5
N (smallest)	106	135	205	164	118	289

Data: Danish National Election Survey 1998 (also see Goul Andersen et al., 1998; 1999). All “Don’t know” responses omitted from this analysis. Opinions in the entire voter population, see Table 2.

However, a subdivision of more homogenous groups of individuals in the same objective position permits a more detailed analysis of how the specific classes’ and class fractions’ capital and relations to each other affect their political opinion formation. In addition, the third dimension in Bourdieu’s concept of class – trajectory – should be considered as well. To meet these two ends the analysis above was extended with the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Political opinions among political science university students, by trajectory, compared to the voter population. Percentages.

Opinion items	All voters, 1998	Political science students, 1994-2000			
		All	Father’s occupational category		
			Farming, nursery, fishery	Private service industries	Art, education, childcare
The differences in living standards and incomes are still too great in our country - <i>Agree</i>	49	28	11	26	39
Public expenditures on environmental problems should be increased - <i>Agree</i>	40	55	35	48	64
Social reforms have gone too far in our country. More than now, people should manage without social security – <i>Agree</i>	31	25	38	30	18
Business men and industrial leaders should be intitled to determine their own business to a greater extend – <i>Agree</i>	60	43	63	52	27
Violent crimes should be punished far stricter than they are today – <i>Strongly agree</i>	64	27	34	31	19
Public expenditures on aid to developing countries should be increased – <i>Agree</i>	7	29	19	21	38
N (smallest)	1.895	1.363	86	223	304

Data: Survey among first year students at Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus, pooled data from 1994 through 2000. All voters: From Danish National Election Survey 1998: See Table 1. All “Don’t know” responses omitted from this analysis.

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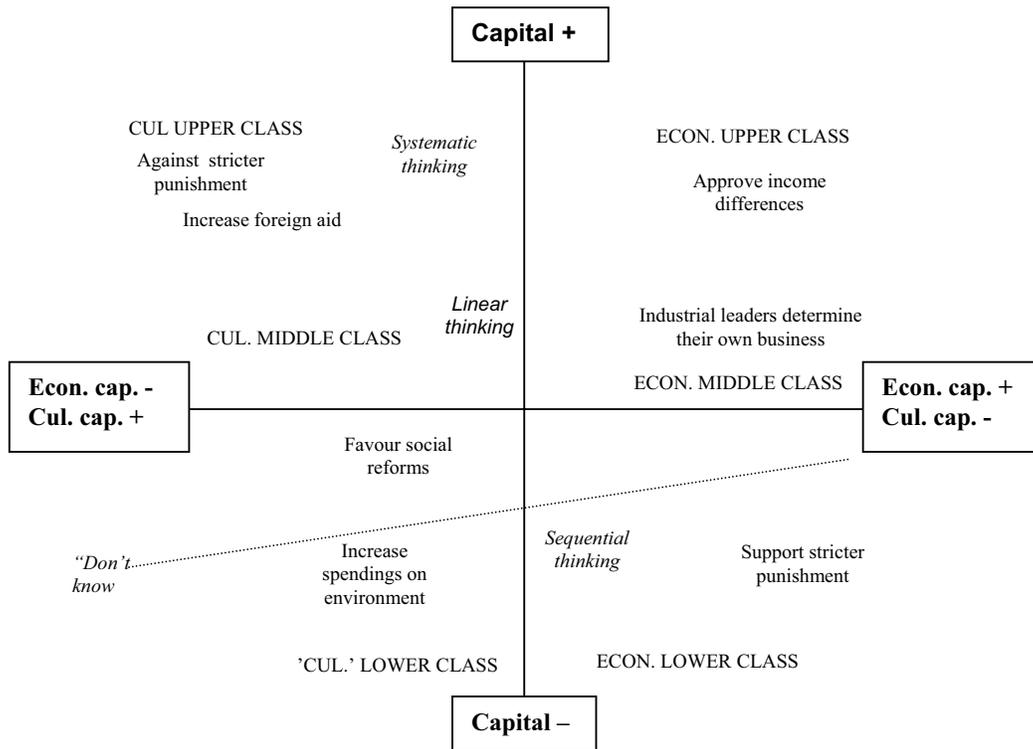
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The results in Table 2 display opinions on the same six political issues as in Table 1, now among first year political science university students, compared to the mean opinion distributions of a representative sample. Political science students are a fairly homogenous group of individuals in nearly the same objective position: about the same age, a common background in college, same choice of university study and apparently agreeing that politics is interesting and important. Thus, compared to the population at large these individuals in this specific position in the field of consumption of political opinions would, on average, be expected to express distinct political opinions. And they do. On five out of six issues their opinions are different from most Danes' in that they respond more favourably to criminals, developing countries, environmental protection, and government control with business, and they express less concern about inequality in incomes.

However, the really interesting story in Table 2 is that even in this apparently very homogenous group of students, their individual trajectories – their whole history expressed in their habitus – turn out to have a vast impact on their political taste. If the students are subdivided according to father's occupational category (only three categories shown) clear and robust distinctions among groups emerge. On each opinion question asked, students with a father employed in farming, nursery, or fishery (relatively more weight of economic than cultural capital) constitute one extreme position, whereas students with a father employed in art, education, or childcare (relatively more weight of cultural capital) constitute an opposite extreme position. On half of the opinion questions they even express opinions that place them on each side of the population mean. Noteworthy, however, on those issues where the cultural upper class members most clearly distinguish themselves through their political taste – namely on opinions toward criminals and developing countries, see Table 1 – students from rural areas approach their fellow students most (even though they are still rather extreme). Thus, on those two issues their political taste is developing the distinctive signs corresponding to the social position they are on their way to occupy.

Taken together, the results in Tables 1-2 confirm that Bourdieu's three-dimensional class concept can lead to new insights in political opinion formation that are more sophisticated than, e.g., the new politics/old politics dimension proposed by Borre (1995; 2003), which furthermore says nothing about the objectivist moment in the analysis. The results here suggest that it is possible to construct a space of political lifestyles in the field of consumption of political opinions and that these political lifestyles are homologous to objective class positions in the field. This is illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, as some analyses of political behavior conclude, "all talk about *class parties* must end" (Andersen, 1999: 89, emphasis in original), such conclusions can be taken as evidence of outdated or poorly constructed class concepts and such examples just underline the need for a 'Bourdieuian brake' in the study of political opinion formation.

Figure 1. The field of political opinions (illustrative model)



Note: CAPITAL LETTERS = class positions (objectivist moment), *Italic* = form of opinions, i.e. the kind of political thinking, cf. Rosenberg (1988), see discussion below, Ordinary font = opinion positions (content or substance of opinions), *Dotted line* = dividing line between many/few "Don't know" answers in survey – the slope illustrate a hypothesis that more weight of cultural capital decreases propensity to answer "Don't know", see discussion below (all three subjectivist moment). This figure should be regarded as an illustration only of the data in Tables 1 through 3 and the following discussion.

According to Bourdieu the observed class differences in political taste should be interpreted in light of the social role political opinions play. Thus, to analyze the results reported above more critically it is necessary to further explain the implications for opinion that individuals perceive the social world both as socially structured and as 'natural' because their schemes of perception are a product of the objective structure. As mentioned, through their habitus individuals recognize differences as social differences. All practices and differences "function as distinctive signs, and as signs of distinction, either positive or negative, and this happens outside any intention of distinction" (Bourdieu, 1990b: 133).

Also political opinions are such distinctive signs functioning as markers of social differences. Following the results in Tables 1-2 it looks like "tolerant" opinions on criminal justice and aid to developing countries function as important distinctive signs and hence as a marker of class to the cultural upper class – a point also students from rural areas have grasped – while the cultural capital pole, in general, appears to distinguish itself by "socially responsible" or "equality-oriented" opinions. This latter interpretation does not rule out the possibility that such opinions (also) are an expression of material interests, such

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that low-paid individuals – or those in dominated (cultural) positions in the social space – are most favourable to economic redistribution and equality because they personally feel the consequences of inequality in incomes. Such an interpretation is well in accordance with the notion that “habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu, 1984: 170). Specifically, the “solidarity” of the cultural upper class with the dominated classes low in overall volume of capital can be taken as a reaction to the fact that the cultural fraction of the dominant class is being dominated by the economic fraction of that class.

Some analysts of political opinion formation suggest that highly educated individuals intentionally express “racially tolerant” opinions when asked in a survey while betraying themselves as intolerant when faced with concrete choices about contact with other ethnic groups (Jackman, 1978; Jenssen and Egesbak, 1994). It is not obvious how Bourdieu would respond to these results. He would probably not reject the existence of such fully intentional attempts at distinction – “Bourgeois respondents particularly distinguish themselves by their ability to control the survey situation” (Bourdieu, 1984: 174) – but according to Bourdieu the expression of political opinions is overwhelmingly governed by a practical rationality: “There is a production *of* difference which in no way the product of a *search for* difference” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 100, emphasis in original).

This social esoteric is the key to understanding how social dominance is maintained. Here the individual’s habitus as a product of the objective class position is central. Habitus’ schemes of perception are not only able to recognize social differences as differences in valence and place the individual in this social hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167-168). By recognizing the limitations in the volume of capital in a given objective position, habitus adjusts and equips the individual with dispositions, expectations, and perceptions that correspond to necessity. Habitus simply “tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 61). The schemes of perception and appreciation of the habitus are by and large non-conscious and unwilling avoidance strategies (ibid.). In other words, the habitus simply protects against disappointments and embarrassing moments by avoiding situations and thoughts that imply such a risk. Thus, actors in dominated positions pretend that social differentiation in the social space is natural and fair and hence avoid realizing the symbolic violence they are subjected to. They know and accept their social ‘place’ but thus misrecognize that the differences are socially and not naturally constituted.

“The sense of one’s place, as the sense of what one can or cannot ‘allow oneself’, implied a tacit acceptance of one’s position, a sense of limits (‘that’s not meant for us’) or ... a sense of distances...” (Bourdieu, 1991b: 235).

Obviously, this point has important implications for how we understand individuals’ political opinions because it enables a more detailed interpretation of opinions expressed by respondents with different habitus and

thus political taste. Some especially illuminating data to substantiate these implications is found in a survey of young Danes conducted by the Danish National Institute of Social Research (Hansen, 1982). Although the data was collected nearly three decades ago and therefore not accurately describe opinions today they illustrate a more general underlying social mechanism. Table 3 displays opinions across a range of issues among two groups of 22 year-olds from unskilled working class families. One of the groups consists of respondents attending higher education at the time of the survey, whereas the other group consists of respondents who were unskilled workers at the time. Comparing opinions across these two groups reveals exactly the misrecognized dominance. Thus, most workers reject the statement that the common worker has too little say in their work place, while among respondents in higher education more than twice as many think the workers have too little say. The even more pronounced difference in opinions on the question of attending rallies is perhaps more understandable, but it reflects exactly the same underlying dominance mechanism. Not even on the most tangible – wages – are the workers as critical as the students. The surprising observation is not that so many student respondents are expressing left-wing opinions (the survey is from 1976), but that so few worker respondents do.

Table 3. Differences in opinion among students in higher education compared to unskilled workers, both groups 22 year-olds, of unskilled worker family background. Survey from 1976. Percentages

Opinion items	Now in higher education	Now unskilled worker
Agree that wage differences in society are too great	87	69
All wrong that "one should not attend a political demonstration"	85	29
Agree that "the common worker does not have enough say in the work place"	52	22
N (smallest)	46	149

Source: Hansen (1982: bilagstabel 14, excerpt).

The results in Tables 1 through 3 raise an important but still unanswered question: If political opinions function as distinctive signs, what determines which specific opinion positions become markers of class? As noted, the answer will be given in the analysis of the homology between the field of consumption of political opinions and the field of production of political opinions in the next section. Before that, however, the analysis of the content of opinions can be further elaborated by analyzing the form of opinions. Because different individuals have different capital (*habitus*) and thus different schemes of perception and appreciation, it is possible that the expression of apparently similar opinions conceal huge social differences beneath the surface. One of Bourdieu's criticisms of the survey method is precisely that it assumes that all opinions count equally or express the same kind of underlying considerations or reasons (Bourdieu, 1997: 225). Thus, if only the stances taken are analysed the actual social differences are understated (Bourdieu, 1984: 174, 453).

A simple illustration of this point can be given by analyzing who answers "Don't know" in opinion surveys, that is, who does not even possess enough capital to form or choose an opinion? Bourdieu (1984: 399-405) shows substantial social differences, and 30 years later Danish data reveals essentially the same pattern. Table 4 displays large differences in the

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distribution of “Don’t know” answers: Female respondents much more frequently refrain from expressing an opinion than male respondents. Even among higher educated, marked, although smaller, gender differences are found (data not shown). A comparison of individuals with no formal education beyond the basic level with individuals with a longer further education (university level or equivalent) shows an equally clear pattern of who cannot even pick a response category. The non-educated refuse to take a position up till three and a half times more often than the highly educated. Berinsky (2002) finds the same social pattern in the US. Through the lenses of Bourdieu’s theory these results should be interpreted to support that women and those who have lower levels of education are politically dominated.

Furthermore, in line with Bourdieu’s (1984: 174, 453) results, the Danish data shows that the further a political issue is from personal experience, the larger the social differences, while on the other hand nearly everyone can form an opinion on ‘ethical’ questions (law and order, immigration, social justice). The fact that some people have so little capital that they give up when asked about their opinion is further reinforced by another mechanism as part of the avoidance strategies of the habitus: If you are not capable of forming political views, you are not willing to either. You loose (or never have) interest – what Bourdieu denotes *illusio* – in playing the game in the field of consumption of political opinions (Bourdieu, 1984: 409).

Table 4. “Don’t Know” responses on eight opinion items. Percentages

Opinion items	Gender			Education*		
	Women	Men	Difference % points	None	University	Difference % points
Violent crime should be punished far stricter than it is today	2	1	1	2	1	1
Immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national culture	2	1	1*	1	0	1
The age for early retirement should be raised to 62 years in parallel with the rising number of elderly people	6	4	2*	8	4	4
High incomes ought to be taxed more strongly than they are today	3	1	2**	2	0	2*
The net annual values should be abolished#	14	5	9***	15	7	8**
The EU should play a global and military role corresponding to the economic importance of the EU countries	23	9	14***	22	5	17***
The government has too little control with the investments of private corporations	27	11	16***	25	9	16***
The European Parliament should have more power relative to the Council of Ministers and the Commission	30	13	17***	29	8	21***
N	921	1080		505	185	

Notes: Cell value is per cent Don’t Know. * Education: “None” refers to no education beyond up to ten years in primary and secondary school. “University” is at least a master’s degree from a university. #A highly debated tax on home property.

All response categories ranged on a five-point scale from “quite agree” through “neither agree nor disagree” to “quite disagree” and a “don’t know” category.

Significance levels: *** = $p < 0,001$; ** = $p < 0,01$; * = $p < 0,05$.

Data: Danish National Election Survey 1998. More information on variables etc. in: Jørgen Goul Andersen, Johannes Andersen, Ole Borre, and Hans Jørgen Nielsen (1998). *Danish Election Survey 1998. Code Book and Marginals*, Århus: Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus.

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However, the social differences are even more pronounced than the “Don’t know” responses reveal. The “Don’t know” category covers a range of different considerations and reasons. Some people are ambivalent and in doubt due to extensive knowledge and very sophisticated considerations about the issue in question, while others have never heard about the issue, and such reactions are not randomly distributed across positions in the social space (see, e.g., Chong, 1993; Feldman and Zaller, 1992). A similar point can be made regarding consistency of opinions. This is illustrated in a study of political opinions among school children in seventh through ninth grade by Jarlov and Togeby (1977). As they conclude, the children’s cognitive development is a necessary but not sufficient condition of forming crystallized and consistent opinions, as a substantial level of political involvement will be another necessary condition of well-structured opinions. Thus, opinion formation does not follow an even pattern across children (Jarlov and Togeby, 1977: 165). However, these authors do not explore whether the differences in opinion formation they find are class-specific. It is reasonable to expect the children’s level of political involvement to vary systematically in accordance with the cultural capital, especially educational level, of their parents. This next step is taken by the Bourdieu approach, thus contributing with a social understanding of individuals’ opinion formation.

An American study (Rosenberg, 1988) with the same psychological approach as Jarlov and Togeby accommodates a similarly interesting perspective. Based on experiments and in-depth interviews Rosenberg illuminates that his participants form opinions through three structurally different processes – sequential, linear, and systematic – representing a growing sophistication and cognitive complexity in political reasoning. However, Rosenberg does not explore participants’ social position although he suggests it would be plausible to link the three ways of political thinking to socio-demographic correlates like education and class (Rosenberg, 1988: 558). This idea is incorporated in Figure 1 above.

Also in this example the usefulness of Bourdieu to studies of political opinions is significant. The empirical results provided by the psychologically oriented studies become even more interesting when viewed through Bourdieu’s social optics. The concept of habitus provides a tool to not only understanding differences in political opinion formation but further links these opinion processes to the social structure of society. Bourdieu constructs a typology of three ways individuals can form a political opinion: (1) based on one’s “class ethos”, which functions as a formula generating coherent opinions based on pre-reflexive everyday experience, (2) in accordance with “a system of explicit, specifically political principles” or “axiomatics” (i.e., political ideology), or (3) through a two-stage choice by first identifying with a political party and subsequently following the position of this party (Bourdieu, 1984: 418). Thus, differences in political opinions are not only about what people think but indeed about the different ways they think and argue. The tendency in the upper class to emphasize form over substance in, e.g., art and cooking, has its parallel in politics. This whole insight into the socially conditioned generative mechanisms challenges the issue voting models in voting behavior research in Denmark (and beyond), which does not

hesitate to conclude, “issue voting is a phenomenon in all parts of the voter population not limited to a minority of politically enlightened” (Borre, 1999: 181). Thus, a Bourdieu-inspired analysis would make clear that not all voters base their voting decision on the same kind of thinking or logic.

Political taste is a marker of class because the habitus produces systematic social differences and distinctions with respect to both the actual stances taken (the substance of opinion) and the way people form opinions. But what determines the specific expression of these symbolic struggles for positioning, that is, why a particular opinion on a particular issue is linked to a particular class position? To answer this we have to expand our analysis to the field of production of political opinions and the homology between the fields of production and consumption.

The Homology between the Production of Political Opinions and Consumption of Political Opinions

In the field of production of political opinions the agents struggle to legitimate and accentuate particular opinions and perceptions. Access to the field is restricted as it requires a certain kind and volume of capital to participate in the struggles of the field and the production of political products (such as opinions). Who the actors specifically are can only be identified after empirical analysis. As Bourdieu insists in a relational and not substantial analysis it cannot be determined in advance that, e.g., interest organisations or policy experts are part of the field. It is beyond the scope of this article to undertake a detailed analysis of the field of production of political opinions in Denmark. However, to answer the question about the usefulness of the Bourdieu approach to the analysis of political opinions it is sufficient as a first step to note that according to Bourdieu the actors in the field of production are positioned relative to each other according to their volume and composition of relevant capital and its trajectory. To these objective positions in the field correspond some subjective dispositions, i.e., opinions, perceptions, and behaviors (habitus) and thus particular opinions etc. in the field of production are linked to particular objective positions, in a similar fashion as they are in the field of consumption.

Which specific opinions (position-takings) actors in the field of production of political opinions will take or produce is determined by their habitus and by the competition in the field, that is, the other actors' positions and capital (Bourdieu, 1984: 231):

“[I]t is the structure in the field which ... determines the stances taken, through the intermediary of the constraints and interests associated with a given position in the field.” (Bourdieu, 1991a: 184)

Characteristic to the ongoing struggle for positioning in a field is that the dominated actors through resistance will constantly try to change the reward

Slothuus: Political Taste as a Marker of Class mechanisms and logic of the field, what Bourdieu denotes *doxa*.³ Probably the best recent example of a successful strategy of changing the *doxa* in the Danish field of production of political opinions is the Danish People's Party's challenge to Danish immigration policy. The earlier heterodoxic position of the party has gained legitimacy to an extent that has markedly changed the actual governmental policy on this issue, and it is now the position of the left-wing parties that fights against *doxa*.

Changes in the field of production have interesting implications to the specific, substantial consumption of political opinions. Even though there is an interaction between the field of production and field of consumption Bourdieu claims that the field of production exerts the largest influence, as "the relation between supply and demand takes a particular form: the supply always exerts an effect of symbolic imposition" (Bourdieu, 1984: 231; also see Bourdieu, 1991a: 172).⁴ Thus, not only is there a homology between objective positions and subjective dispositions in a field, but also a homology between opinion positions in the field of consumption and the field of production.

This homology occurs because individuals in a given position in the field of consumption develop a taste for exactly those opinions supplied by producers in a similar position in the field of production. The dominated in the field of consumption of political opinions demand the opinions supplied by the dominated in the field of production of political opinions. It is important to note that similar positions in the field of consumption and field of production, respectively, should not be confused with the same living conditions (Bourdieu, 1991b: 245) – producers are always in better material positions than their consumers. Thus, again positions should be understood relationally and, crucially, if a particular position is in a dominated or dominating position relative to other positions in the field. Even though politicians from a political party can be located in a more privileged position than the population as a whole, the party can be located in a dominated position in the field of production of political opinions, and the party will hence sell its opinion products primarily to consumers in a similarly dominated position in the field of consumption of political opinions.

This "objective orchestration of supply and demand" (Bourdieu, 1984: 230) arises from the fact that all specialized fields

"tend to be governed by the same logic, i.e., according to the volume of the specific capital that is possessed ... and from the fact that the oppositions which tend to be established in each case between the richer and the less rich in the specific capital ... are mutually homologous ... and also homologous to the

³ The concept of *doxa* is particularly elaborated in Bourdieu (1977: 159-171).

⁴ Bourdieu's emphasis on elite actors as the driving force in shaping individuals' political opinions is found also in more psychological studies of mass opinion in the US (e.g., Zaller, 1992) and Denmark (e.g., Gaasholt and Tøgeby, 1995; Tøgeby, 2004), though without a discussion of Bourdieu.

oppositions which structure the field of the social classes (between the dominant and the dominated) and the field of the dominant class (between the dominant fraction and the dominated fraction” (Bourdieu, 1984: 232).

Again, the mediating link establishing the functional and structural homology between the field of production and the field of consumption is the individuals’ habitus because habitus produces a particular political taste that reflects the individual’s objective position (Bourdieu, 1984: 230-232).

The formation of opinions on environmental protection in Denmark illustrates the homology between the fields of production and consumption. A green party never gained success among the Danish electorate but exactly because the environmental movement and The Green Party intensified the competition in the field of production of political opinions, the established parties – The Social Democrats, The Social Liberals, and also the left-wing parties - all had to take clear stances on the environmental issues in response to the increasing competition in the field to maintain their relatively dominant positions (cf. Goul Andersen, 1990). The homology between the field of production and the field of competition had the effect that the clear pro-environment opinions produced by the Social Democratic Party changed opinions among workers with the result that Danish workers hold much greener environmental opinions than workers in most other countries. Thus, from 1981 through 1989 the opinion balance between environmental protection versus economic growth changed from 15 per cent pro-environment to 61 per cent pro-environment with no change in the social composition in the party’s electorate (Goul Andersen, 1990: 201).

Exactly why and how this correspondence between objective positions and taste in the two fields occurs – and how tight the homology can be expected to be – is not fully specified in Bourdieu’s theory and can be perceived as a weaker part of his argument. On the one hand, the field of production cannot function without counting on already existing tastes (Bourdieu, 1984: 230), and the dispositions in the field of consumption do affect the competition in the field of production “by favouring the success, within the struggle constituting the field, of the producers best able to produce the needs corresponding to” the tastes in the field of consumption (p. 231; also see Bourdieu, 1991a). Still, on the other hand, the field of production (the supply) “always exerts an effect of symbolic imposition” (Bourdieu, 1984: 231).

As of now, the homologies could be understood in such a way that being in a dominated or dominant position, respectively, provides you with a particular view of the world which is expressed in corresponding opinions. Thus, again differences must be understood relationally, never substantially, as a relatively dominated position in the field of consumption that corresponds with the relatively dominated position in the field of production.

In sum, the homology between the field of production of political opinions and the field of consumption of political opinions thus explains what

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opinions are consumed in what classes as political taste in the field of consumption corresponds to homologous positions in the field of production. This explains why Danish workers are comparatively 'greener'. According to the Bourdieu approach the Social Democratic Party as a result of the changing competition in the field of production of political opinions was forced to voice pro-environmental opinions and thus "imposing" a greening of working class opinions. However, while the Bourdieu approach provides us with a compelling explanation of social differences in individuals' political opinions the explanation of the classes' concrete opinions on specific issues is less developed.

Conclusion and Discussion

A Bourdieu approach offers a theoretically interesting and empirically fruitful perspective on citizens' political opinion formation. The most important insight is the illumination of the social role of political opinions as distinctive signs marking identity and betraying class position. The central point is that habitus is a socially conditioned generative mechanism equipping the individual with both schemes of perception and schemes of appreciation and hence a particular political taste.

In this way habitus specifies and explains how and why objective social position is related to particular political opinions. Political taste across a variety of domains composes a political lifestyle, and positions in the space of political lifestyles correspond to objective social positions. The political taste is expressed not only through specific opinions but also through the ability to form opinions at all and through the ways this position-taking occurs. Thus, the class-specific combination of capital and *illusio* generates widely varying dispositions to and capacities for motivating and giving reasons for political opinions. In relation to these observations the Bourdieu approach provides a critical dimension by directing attention on habitus perceiving social differences as natural differences because habitus itself is a product of these differences, and hence it is unrecognized that through differences in opinions is exerted symbolic violence serving to maintain the dominant position of the upper class by defining the political taste of this class as the legitimate.

The elaboration of the Bourdieu approach now enables us to more fully answer the empirical question in the introduction of this article: It is the material and symbolic possibilities and constraints in a given social position that through the habitus generates a particular political taste. Thus, education is an important cleavage on such issues as The European Union, immigration, and criminal justice because these questions requires a certain amount of capital and a certain kind of language for individuals to be able to distinguish themselves by expressing "tolerant" and "progressive" opinions. The public/private occupational sector cleavage expresses different compositions of the kinds of capital and different experiences, thus disposing individuals in positions with relative weight on cultural capital to favour equality and individuals in possession of a relatively large weight of economic capital to favour free market policies. However, such specific consumption of opinions cannot be understood without keeping in mind that the specific opinion

positions individuals in a class tend to choose must be understood in relation to the competition in the field of production of political opinions. Just as there is a homology between the positions in the field of production and the field of consumption, there will be a homology in political taste.

However, albeit the relationship between social position and political taste to a large extent was captured by Bourdieu's three-dimensional concept of class and explained by differences in habitus, not all individuals in the same adequately defined class position express the same opinions. This fact is not rejected by Bourdieu as he emphasizes precisely that there is no full determinism in habitus. However, it is a limitation in the Bourdieu approach that it cannot account for these differences in opinion. Thus, it is necessary to further elaborate this element of the theory just as it is plausible that other factors besides class contribute to generate political taste.

Another limitation in the Bourdieu approach to the study of political opinion formation is the in part unclear specification of the homology between the field of production of political opinions and the field of consumption of political opinions. Further elaboration is needed on what generates this correspondence between producers and consumers and such an extension will make it possible to further illuminate the interplay between politicians and citizens in the opinion formation processes. Also the struggle about *doxa* in the field of production will need a closer relation to the model of structural homology to better understand when and why there may be divergences between positions in the two fields and thus what generates stability and change in political taste.

The theoretical and empirical contributions of the Bourdieu approach to the study of political opinions must be assessed comparatively to other plausible and fruitful approaches. Compared to more psychologically oriented approaches studying political opinions in connection with individuals' cognitive schemes (e.g., Conover and Feldman, 1984) and political awareness and media impact (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991; Zaller, 1992), the Bourdieu approach contributes by linking these dispositions and competences to habitus and capital thus revealing their social anchoring and origin. A further dialogue with cognitive psychology might indeed be fruitful (see, e.g., Bloch, 1985; DiMaggio, 1997; Howard, 1994) both with respect to empirically mapping habitus and to illuminating differences in opinion within the same class position which, e.g., might be explained by differences in individuals' cognitive development not determined by social position.

Also explicitly non-psychological approaches are in need of the concept of habitus to analyze the link between social and mental structures. In traditional class analysis (cf. Goul Andersen, 1991) opinions just follow from class position without further explanation of this relationship and in, e.g., *Cultural Theory* different "ways of life" with their cultural biases apparently float without being linked in anyway to objective structures (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 1990).

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The strength of Bourdieu's theory of social praxis is exactly the ability to understand and explain the relationship between class position and political taste, and thus the social role opinions play. In doing so the Bourdieu approach contributes to the study of political opinions breaking with the perception that opinions are (only) an expression of either self-interest rationality or reflexive value rationality and with the idea that all citizens by engaging in political debates can affect politicians' opinions and hence the actual policy. Political tastes function as markers of class, and the ability to behave in the field of political opinions is socially conditioned.

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