

# Reflexivity, Relationism, & Research

---

## Pierre Bourdieu and the Epistemic Conditions of Social Scientific Knowledge

---

**Karl Maton**  
University of Cambridge

*Pierre Bourdieu's "epistemic reflexivity" is the cornerstone of his intellectual enterprise, underpinning his claims to provide distinctive and scientific knowledge of the social world. This article considers what this notion offers for research and how it needs to be developed further to underpin progress in social science. Many reflexive research practices are sociological, individualistic, and narcissistic, and the article contrasts this to Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity as epistemological, collective, and objective. The author then illustrates how, despite Bourdieu's intentions, this conception when enacted tends toward the very pitfalls it is intended to avoid. Building on a developing conceptualization of the relations of knowledge, the author identifies this problem as intrinsic to Bourdieu's framework, showing how it bypasses the significance of knowledge structures and so provides the social but not the epistemological conditions for social scientific knowledge. Bourdieu's reflexivity objectifies objectification but needs development to help achieve objective knowledge. The article concludes by introducing the notion of "epistemic capital" as a first step toward developing a properly epistemic reflexivity and so realizing the potential of Bourdieu's enterprise.*

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu; reflexivity; knowledge; legitimation theory; epistemic capital; epistemic reflexivity

In the social sciences, the progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge.

—Pierre Bourdieu (1990)

Art is I; Science is We.

—Claude Bernard (1865/1957)

For any understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's work, the notion of "epistemic reflexivity" is central. In the early 1990s an influential introduction to Bourdieu's work contended:

If there is a single feature that makes Bourdieu stand out in the landscape of contemporary social theory, it is his signature obsession with reflexivity. (Wacquant, 1992, p. 36)

Although the increasing popularity of Bourdieu's work within Anglophone social science during the past decade has contributed to making this focus less singular, one could still argue that what remains distinctive is Bourdieu's "signature obsession" with the epistemological potential of reflexivity. Bourdieu consistently argued that his conception of epistemic reflexivity provided not only a means of developing richer descriptions of the social world but also the basis for a more practically adequate and epistemologically secure social science. Moreover, it underpins his entire relational sociology (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This article critically examined Bourdieu's conception of "epistemic reflexivity," addressing its distinctive contribution to research and how it needs to be further developed to underpin future progress in social science. My focus is primarily the implications of this reflexivity for research rather than its capacity for synthesis or closure of philosophical positions and problems, for as Wacquant went on to state, "Bourdieu's concern for reflexivity, like his social theory, is neither egocentric nor logocentric but quintessentially embedded in, and turned toward, scientific practice" (p. 46).<sup>1</sup> For Bourdieu, the fundamentals, the three Rs, are thus: reflexivity, relationism, and research.

The article comprises three interrelated parts. I begin by contextualising Bourdieu's ideas in terms of the current position of reflexivity within social science research. Outlining several common forms of reflexive research practice, I argue that they exhibit common characteristics as sociological, individualistic, and narcissistic. Second, Bourdieu's intention to provide a collective epistemic reflexivity is introduced. Building on a developing conceptual framework for the analysis of knowledge claims, I address in turn the problems that arise when putting his approach into practice. Last, I identify the source of these problems within Bourdieu's approach and analyse how this may be developed. In short, I argue that Bourdieu's relationism needs development to include a missing epistemic relation for research to become reflexive.

## Reflexivity in Research

To contextualise Bourdieu's distinctiveness, it is useful to first consider the position and nature of reflexivity within social science. In the late 1980s, an introduction to the topic could describe how reflexivity was viewed with antipathy and "ignored, evaded, diminished" by most social scientists (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988, p. 2). Its current po-

sition in the lexicon of Anglophone social science, however, is one of near universal approval. Indeed, it has now become a sin to *not* be reflexive. The term is used as a marker of proclaimed distinction and originality, with position-takings effectively claiming, “I am a reflexive actor producing reflexive accounts of reflexive modernity, while *you* are unreflexive and inadequate, an outdated relic of a bygone era.” One effect of such a position is a proliferation of theoretical definitions and taxonomies of the high status term. Accordingly, the genus *reflexivity* now possesses many different species (endogenous, referential, indexical, constitutive, etc.) and a host of proclaimed parents (Schutz, Garfinkel, Mannheim, Giddens, et al.). Underlying this heterogeneity, however, most discussions of reflexivity share versions of a basic argument that authors should explicitly position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers’ knowledge claims in terms of situated aspects of their social selves and reveal their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions. How reflexivity may be enacted in research practice, however, is less clear. Not only are these protean normative prescriptions typically theoreticist in discourse, neglecting research practice, but research proclaiming itself “reflexive” is also often undertheorised.

In short, the current condition of reflexivity within the social sciences represents a conundrum. On one hand, almost everyone agrees on the virtue of reflexivity in theory and research practice; the term has become part of the “bad faith” of the social scientific field. On the other hand, there is little agreement as to what comprises reflexivity. Reflexivity has become, in other words, a hegemonic value of the social scientific field and a weapon in struggles over status and resources within the intellectual field (Lynch, 2000). Rather than enjoin the struggle between delineated theoretical and normative positions, I shall begin by outlining some forms of actually existing reflexivity.

#### ENACTED REFLEXIVITY

Perhaps one of the most common forms of actually existing reflexivity in research, and certainly its least theorised form, is *autobiographical reflection*, comprising a brief narrative of the author’s journey to the research. For example, at a recent conference a presentation on the history of history teaching in secondary schools began with the author announcing that reflexivity demanded they outline their background of having undertaken teacher training, 3 years of school teaching, and so forth. In this form, one gives a (typically brief and disconnected) biography so that the audience “knows where you’re coming from.” How this personal history relates to the object, methodology, methods, data, or analysis is left unexplained. A similar form is exhibited by what can be characterised as the virtuous researcher, a researching relative of the “reflective practitioner” (e.g., Brubacher, Case, & Reagan, 1994; Schšn, 1995). Here reflexivity is synonymous with thinking critically about one’s research practices and typically made explicit as a conspicuous display of acute self-awareness. For example, one might make public aspects of one’s social identity (as, say, a White, heterosexual male) or provide a “travelogue” or “reflections on fieldwork” wherein one identifies possible sources for the anxiety of influence.

Two further examples, with more radical chic, of how reflexivity is enacted in research may be described as *hermeneutic narcissism* and *authorship denial*. Both begin from the argument that facts are inseparable from the observer and the culture which supplies the categories of description. Both are also characterised by an uneasy awareness of social differences between the observer and the observed and of the symbolic

violence perpetrated by the observer's objectifying gaze. This academic guilt (a self-aware and apologetic version of Bourdieu's "scholastic reason") is typically played out in two ways. In hermeneutic narcissism, knowledge claims shrink into ever-decreasing circles, leading to authors telling us only about themselves, for they feel unable to tell us anything about anyone else (see Maton, 2000). Alternatively, one may find authorship denial, where the researcher attempts to become a neutral conduit or relay by "giving voice to" the observed (Moore & Muller, 1999). As Gellner (1992) described,

It all seems to amount to a kind of collage . . . with a vacillation between the hope that this multiplicity of voices somehow excludes the bias of the external researcher, and a pleasurable return to a guilty recognition that the subject, the author, is still there. (p. 28)

Here, reflexivity is enacted as a game of hide-and-seek; one may in effect play "hunt the author" amid the textual play of voices (or, where these voices are all the author's own, one may have difficulty ascertaining the author's position). Both forms thereby begin by recognising objectification but end by denying it, either through self-absorption or self-denial.

There are, of course, many other forms taken by actually existing reflexivity. I choose these to heuristically and illustratively highlight some of the basic outlines of enacted reflexivity in research distinct from their informing and legitimating theories. What is important is the underlying features these forms share and which, I would argue, are widely prevalent within reflexive research, namely that they are sociological, individualistic, and narcissistic.

*Sociological Reflexivity.* Enacted reflexivity typically addresses the social relation of knowledge rather than its epistemic relation (Maton, 2000), that is, the subject's relation to knowledge (who does the objectifying) rather than the object's relation to knowledge (what is being objectified and how). They offer, in effect, a sociological (or anthropological) rather than an epistemological account of knowledge (Popper, 1972). Moreover, these forms tell us little about how one's social position may affect the practical adequacy of one's knowledge claims and, indeed, may become more about the process of doing the research than any specific results. They thus represent good research practices rather than revelatory bases for knowledge claims—thicker methodology (or, more accurately, method) but thin epistemology.

*Individualistic Reflexivity.* Reflexive research often tends to construct reflexivity as an individual effort to overcome one's own biases, with a romantic and humanist emphasis on subjective commitment to transcending the effects on knowledge of one's social and cultural positioning rather than on the supra-subjective consequences of research practices (Berlin, 1999; Maton, 2002b). At times, it may appear more important that the individual knower show his or her heart to be in the right place than to help establish the collective conditions for providing practically adequate knowledge (Maton & Wright, 2002).

*Narcissistic Reflexivity.* In doing so, such research often focuses on the individual author to the exclusion of everything else—the subject can thereby come to usurp the ostensible object of study. There is, indeed, no logical reason for why anything about the author should be excluded from the discussion. For example, autobiographical reflection might include one's childhood or what one did on holiday, and as a virtuous

researcher I could make public not only that I am Caucasian or male or heterosexual but also that I am 5'7" tall, support Manchester United, and live with two cats. Such revelation reaches its apotheosis in confessional forms of autobiography where the researcher becomes also the researched.

Such practices do not, of course, exhaust the realisations of reflexive research in social science, but they are sufficiently common (more so than might be garnered from theoreticist surveys of the field) to warrant critical attention. For despite the relative sophistication of theoretical accounts of reflexivity, many ways in which it is routinely practised are problematic. The road to reflexive practice is paved with good intentions. However, theoretical intentions are one thing, research effects are another. In short, these types of reflexivity in research represent what one could call *reflectivity* (Turner, 1981; Woolgar, 1988). That is, they comprise (more or less) critical reflections on the author's history, social position, and practices. Here the author looks into the data and typically sees little more than his or her own reflection; they often tell us more about the knower than about any nominal object of inquiry. This is to not to say they are without merit; they open up, for example, new vistas of the research process and the researcher for critical examination. However, whatever their benefits, they are not the epistemological tools they are often proclaimed to be in theoretical discussion. This difference between intention and effect is also reflected in their political stances. Reflexivity has typically been proclaimed as critical and progressive. However, by reducing reflexivity to individualised reflection, the above research practices represent strategies for maximising symbolic capital within the intellectual field at minimal cost. They emphasise individual status (particularly when allied to claims about the "unreflexive" nature of past work in the field) without disturbing the social position and structure of the field as a whole. Ironically, such practices are thereby more oriented toward conserving the status quo than their frequently professed "critical" appellations might suggest. They also fit the wider contemporary individualist political climate, whatever their proclaimed radical credentials. It was against such sociologically reductive, individualistic, and narcissistic forms of reflexivity that Bourdieu posited his notion of epistemic reflexivity, to which I now turn.

### Bourdieu's Epistemic Reflexivity

The role that epistemic reflexivity plays within Bourdieu's work is difficult to overstate. Perhaps more than anything, Bourdieu's voluminous analyses of varied arenas of social practice have shown the structuring effects of social fields on the beliefs, dispositions, and practices of their members. Taking as one starting point a Durkheimian analysis of social change under an increasing division of labour, Bourdieu's conception of society as comprising a series of overlapping social fields of activity or "relatively autonomous 'worlds'" (1994, p. 73) enables a sophisticated analysis of social positionality. Bourdieu's approach refines sociological conceptions of social space and culture. The question of the location of actors within social space is redefined in terms of the more subtle issue of their relational positions within their specific field(s) of practice. Each actor is relationally positioned within a field, this position determining his or her situated viewpoint of the activities of this and other fields. Thus, each actor has only a partial view of the game, acting accordingly. In the academic field, Bourdieu argued, actors attempt to impose this "specific, situated, dated viewpoint" on others in struggles for status and resources (1988a, p. 26). For intellectuals unwilling to capitulate

late to relativism this raises the question of developing analyses of the world that represent more than merely strategic struggles for economic and symbolic capital: How can one overcome the gravitational effects of the intellectual field? This goes to the very heart of Bourdieu's enterprise. To put it another way, Bourdieu's theory begs the (reflexive) question of the extent to which his analyses of the partial and positioned nature of knowledge produced by actors within intellectual fields are more than merely the reflection of his own partial and positioned viewpoint. What prevents Bourdieu's analysis from being merely another strategic attempt to maximise capital in the struggles of the intellectual field? For Bourdieu it is epistemic reflexivity that enables this transcendence. Against phenomenological, postmodern, and other idealist versions of reflexivity, Bourdieu (1994) views epistemic reflexivity as a means of underwriting rather than undermining scientific knowledge; without this *deus ex machina*, his work becomes just another viewpoint among many equally partial and equally valid views.

### THREE RELATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

One way of clarifying Bourdieu's distinctive contribution is to conceive knowledge claims as comprising three interrelated but analytically distinguishable relations: the social relation between the subject or author and the knowledge claim, the epistemic relation between the knowledge claim and its object, and the objectifying

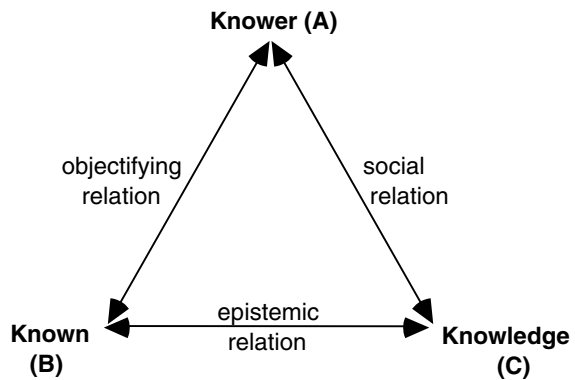


Figure 1. Three relations of knowledge claims.

relation between subject and object (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu's main innovation can be understood as an emphasis on the objectifying relation of knowledge. The reflexive practices discussed earlier focus (as do sociologies of knowledge) on the social relation between knowledge and knower. Philosophical approaches to knowledge typically address the epistemic relation between knowledge and its object. These two approaches have dominated our understanding of knowledge (Maton, 2000). Bourdieu, in contrast, highlights the significance for knowledge claims of the neglected objectifying relation between subject and object, knower and known. Bourdieu's epistemic reflexivity comprises making the objectifying relation itself the object for analysis; the resultant objectification of objectification is, he argues, the epistemological basis for social scientific knowledge.

Bourdieu characterises this epistemic reflexivity as collective and non-narcissistic. First, he argues for "objectifying objectification" on a collective basis (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 71-72). Bourdieu (1990, 2000) identifies three principal sources of potential bias in knowledge claims: the social origins and coordinates of the researcher; the researcher's position in the intellectual field; and the "intellectualist bias," the results of viewing the world as a spectacle. It is not merely the individual researcher who is of interest to Bourdieu here but rather the intellectual *field*. In other words, the "knower" in Figure 1 is pluralised and sociologised. In particular, the focus becomes

how the social position and structure of the field in relation to objects of study shape knowledge claims. The aim is to uncover not the individual researcher's biases but the collective scientific unconscious embedded in intellectual practices by the field's objectifying relations. Bourdieu strongly dissociates himself from "a complacent and intimist return upon the private person" of the intellectual and "self-fascinated observation of the observer's writings and feelings" that encourage "a thinly veiled nihilistic relativism" opposed to "a truly reflexive social science" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 72). Rather, it is the field that must be analysed:

One is better off knowing little things about many people, systematically bound together, than everything about an individual. (quoted in Barnard, 1990, p. 78)

Second, the analysis of collective objectifying relations must, for Bourdieu, itself be a collective enterprise conducted by the social scientific field as a whole (Swartz, 1997). It is not simply a research practice for the individual but "the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 36). So, both the object and the subject of reflexivity are collective (the intellectual field as a whole) rather than individual, and this collective reflexive analysis of collective objectifying relations will, Bourdieu argues, provide an epistemological basis for social scientific knowledge. Thus, whereas many forms of reflexivity are sociological, individualistic, and narcissistic, Bourdieu claims his epistemic reflexivity to be epistemological, collective, and "fundamentally anti-narcissistic" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 72).

### Problems of Enacting Epistemic Reflexivity

The fruits of epistemic reflexivity are, however, not easily reaped. There is, I shall argue, an intrinsic potential for the enacting of Bourdieu's ideas to tend toward a new (albeit subtler) form of narcissistic, individualist, and sociological reflexivity. This tendency arises from two main sources, which I excavate in turn to reveal the focus for future development of Bourdieu's ideas. First, discussions of epistemic reflexivity often tend to interpret its practice in terms of methodological individualism, which when enacted results in recursive regression and narcissism. Second, this individualist interpretation itself follows from the lack of a collective means for undertaking epistemic reflexivity that is not based on the social field of positions of a field. I argue that Bourdieu's approach highlights the objectifying relation between subjects and objects of study at the expense of bypassing knowledge and the epistemological gains its structuring may enable. In short, Bourdieu's emphasis on the objectifying relation of knowledge contributes greatly to notions of reflexivity but comprises an objectifying reflexivity rather than an epistemic reflexivity. Thus, he highlighted something of great significance and pointed the way; what is now required is to continue his work in the direction he has shown and so fully realise its potential.<sup>3</sup>

#### REFLEXIVE REGRESSION

Epistemic reflexivity as currently formulated may lead in practice to recursive regress and narcissism. This results *prima facie* less from Bourdieu's formulations than from how his substantive work is interpreted as exemplifying epistemic reflexivity. For,

while emphasising its collective imperative, commentators often illustrate enacted epistemic reflexivity in individualistic terms. Wacquant (1992), for example, emphasised how Bourdieu “continually turned the instruments of his science upon himself” (p. 36), most notably in analysing his own intellectual field in *Homo Academicus* (1988a). Similarly, commentators as insightful as Barnard (1990), Swartz (1997), and Robbins (1998) typically describe epistemic reflexivity as exemplified by Bourdieu’s analyses of his own social fields. The exercise, such accounts imply, is to analyse one’s relation to the object and so place oneself in the picture. Of course, a collective reflexivity has to begin somewhere and exemplars help light the way. However, the problems arise when one takes these analyses by an individual (however gifted) as guides to practice. For, as Bourdieu argues, an aggregate of individual reflexive studies (even when of the field as a whole) does not equate to a fully collective reflexivity.

That such individual analyses cannot fulfil the epistemological function Bourdieu desires becomes clear when one recognises that one always conducts such analyses from a position.<sup>4</sup> Imagine, for example, an author or knower A, who analyses an object of study B to produce knowledge C (see Figure 2, No. 1). Following Bourdieu’s example, this budding reflexive author conducts an analysis of the relation between himself or herself and the object so as to produce a more reflexive account, that is, the objectifying relation A-B becomes an object of inquiry (see No. 2). Objectifying objectification in this way, however, raises the question of the relation of A to this new object of inquiry (A-B): In what ways does the objectifying relation between A and A-B shape the resultant knowledge claims, C<sup>1</sup>? It becomes, in other words, a further possible focus for reflexive analysis. This recurs, for at each stage the product of reflexive analysis becomes a new object for objectification; it is always produced by a socially positioned actor in an objectifying relation, providing the potential for reflexive regression (see No. 3). This form of reflexivity also quickly becomes narcissistic. Although concerned with “objectifying objectification,” the original object of inquiry tends to recede into the background as author A takes centre stage (see the heuristic formulae of No. 3). Interestingly, when discussing epistemic reflexivity, commentaries often give way to biographical accounts of Bourdieu. Epistemic reflexivity as currently understood may thus avoid intellectualist bias only by succumbing to intellectualist preoccupation. It is important to note that the stages of reflexive analysis I have outlined need not be understood as discrete analyses or moments in time for reflexive regression to remain a tendency of this approach.

In response to this point, one could argue that it is more a question of vigilance and degrees of epistemological reflexivity. This, however, begs the question of when to stop: At what point are one’s unintended, tacit assumptions sufficiently reduced and knowledge claims sufficiently bolstered by reflexivity? Why should knowledge C<sup>n</sup> (produced by *n*th-order reflexivity) be less contaminated than knowledge C<sup>1</sup>? Indeed, one could argue that C<sup>n</sup> involves more objectifying relations and so more potential sources of bias, so that far from reducing the effects of objectification, one may actually multiply them. It is also likely that knowledge C<sup>n</sup> will be critiqued as relatively unreflexive by actors proclaiming reflexive knowledge C<sup>n+1</sup>—a battle of the reflexes. Thus, rather than providing a basis for progress in social science, it lends itself to avant-gardist struggles and recurrent breaks with the past (Moore & Maton, 2001), for there is always room for more reflexivity.

Suggestions (often implied in commentaries) that collective reflexivity comprises everyone emulating Bourdieu as individuals—an aggregated form of methodological individualism—do not, however, result from misunderstanding Bourdieu’s approach.



No.	Form of analysis	Analysis as a heuristic formula
1	A analyses B to produce knowledge C	$A \leftrightarrow B \Rightarrow C$
2	A analyses objectifying relation A-B, to produce more 'reflexive' account C <sup>1</sup>	$A \leftrightarrow (A - B) \Rightarrow C^1$
3	Reflexive regression	$A \leftrightarrow [A - (A-B)] \Rightarrow C^2$
		$A \leftrightarrow \{A - [A - (A-B)]\} \Rightarrow C^3$
		$A \leftrightarrow (A - \{A - [A - (A-B)]\}) \Rightarrow C^4$
		..... etc.

**Figure 2.** The development of reflexive regression.

Rather, they reflect the lack in Bourdieu's framework of a collective means for reflexive analysis of collective practices which transcends social positioning. To explore this is to question the status of knowledge within Bourdieu's approach and to ask whether epistemic reflexivity is indeed epistemological.

#### BYPASSING KNOWLEDGE

Bourdieu's proposed solutions to the problem of reflexive individualism are primarily twofold: the scientific habitus and the autonomy of the intellectual field. Both, it should be noted, focus on social rather than intellectual conditions of social scientific knowledge. First, Bourdieu (1993a) argued the need for inculcating a scientific habitus, "a system of dispositions necessary to the constitution of the craft of the sociologist in its universality" (p. 271). The emphasis is thus on the socialised gaze of people rather than explicit procedures, knowers rather than knowledge (Maton, 2002b). The question remains as to what one is to be socialised into, the structuring of knowledge and practice that gives rise to and is realised by the scientific habitus (Bernstein, 1996; K sgler, 1997). Second, Bourdieu argued for the autonomy from determination of members of the intellectual field. He proposed the "collective intellectual," whereby knowledge producers assert their autonomy as a group, as a means of escaping extra-field influence, and emphasised the role of the organisation of, for example, journals and committees in enabling intra-field autonomy (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 177-178).

In both cases, the focus is on the social properties of the field—habitus and organisation—rather than the structuring of knowledge itself. Scientific knowledge is viewed as flowing from a scientific organisation of the social position and relations of the field. However, this reproduces rather than overcomes the problems of narcissism and regression resulting from individualist reflexivity. For whatever the habituses of actors or organisation of the field, reflexivity is always conducted from a social position. Even if actors share the same habitus and occupy a level playing field, there remains the tendency to regress: Analysis of the effects of social position is always conducted from a social position. In short, the solution to the effects of social positioning on knowledge does not lie wholly with social positioning; we cannot transcend the effects of a field by pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

This highlights the neglected role of knowledge itself in Bourdieu's reflexivity. It shows, in effect, that Bourdieu's relational sociology requires development to include another, crucial relation of knowledge. Epistemic reflexivity emphasises the objectify-

ing relation between subject and object as the source of various biases and the focus for reflexive analysis (see Figure 1). “The important thing,” according to Bourdieu (1993b), “is to be able to objectify one’s relation to the object” (p. 53). The form of knowledge itself is thereby bypassed, short-circuiting relations between knower and known in the production of knowledge. (In terms of Figure 1, C is viewed as simply the outcome of A-B.) In effect, knowledge is viewed as the product of subject-object relations rather than having a structuring significance of its own in shaping the validity of knowledge claims (LiPuma, 1993; Sayer, 1999). The epistemic relation between a knowledge claim and its (constructed) object of study is thus not part of the equation. Bourdieu’s reflexivity is thereby less “epistemic” than “objective” in terms of focus and “social” in terms of basis. In short, Bourdieu’s methodological relationism misses the key epistemic relation of knowledge and so provides a sociological account of knowledge rather than an epistemology. (At times, Bourdieu appears to elide the two [see, e.g., Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991, pp. 69-77].) Without some form of (albeit provisional and transitive) anchor in the world, the epistemological question of how knowledge itself may be specialised by its objects, one is left with the results of sociological reductionism: narcissism and regress.

### Conclusion: Social, Objective, and Epistemic Reflexivity

I have argued that Bourdieu’s conception of epistemic reflexivity reproduces the problems it aims to overcome because it lacks a supra-subjective, non-social basis for transcending the effects of fields. This is to say that the roots of the problem lie not with method but deep down in the theory itself. The question this raises is how it might be developed to realise its potential for epistemologically underpinning social scientific knowledge. Here I wish to highlight, above all, the necessity for notions of the intrinsic and the essential for an approach otherwise fixated on the arbitrary. Such a move is necessary because a fully collective reflexivity requires something that, although socially produced by the field, transcends any particular positions within it.

First and foremost, this requires recognising the role of *non*-social interests in producing knowledge. Bourdieu rightly highlighted the social interestedness of intellectuals and argued that there is no absolute standpoint outside of fields of struggle. However, this does not mean that reflexivity should be reduced to viewing intellectual practices as being solely oriented (consciously or otherwise) by social interests—intellectual commitments are more than this (Schmaus, 1994). While acknowledging the will to power, one need not deny the will to truth. To do so would be to argue that every form of interest counts except for cognitive interest and that we research, teach, present, and read papers only in order to maximise capital. As Bourdieu’s critique of externalism implies, knowledge is socially laden rather than socially determined, whether the “social” here be taken as the extra- or intra-field positions of actors. Perhaps I suffer from “bad faith” or “misrecognition,” but I believe I use Bourdieu’s ideas not simply because of their strategic value but also because they exhibit practical adequacy to what we know of the social world (Sayer, 1999). Indeed, their strategic value at least partly results from their cognitive power. Thus, one must not lose sight of the way in which intellectuals have cognitive as well as social interests and the “simple truth,” as Luntley (1995) put it, that some theories are better at explaining the social

world than others. To avoid the intellectualist bias by seeing bias everywhere is to know the symbolic profit of everything and the truth value of nothing.

In arguing this, I am rubbing against the grain of Bourdieu's work, which focused its critique more firmly against claims to disinterestedness than against reductionist accounts of social interest. However, Bourdieu (1988b) himself described his focus on social interest as "an instrument of rupture . . . the means of a deliberate (*and provisional*) reductionism" (p. 1, italics added). Bourdieu's critique of intellectual claims to disinterestedness and to universal forms of knowledge must be understood (as his own approach emphasises) within the context of its intellectual field. Now that Bourdieu's ideas have gained currency in British social science, the "provisional" nature of this reductionism represents, I believe, the next stage for the development of his ideas. Otherwise, should this "instrument of rupture" become institutionalised, the problems Bourdieu sought to overcome would simply be reproduced in reverse. This does not mean that capital theory need be eschewed; we need not throw the baby out with the bath water, as the competitive logic of the intellectual field tends to encourage. Rather, I suggest we can add to economic and cultural capital the concept of epistemic capital, the ability to better explain the (social) world.<sup>5</sup> This captures the way in which actors within the intellectual field engage in strategies aimed at maximising not merely resources and status but also epistemic profits, that is, better knowledge of the world.

To acknowledge cognitive interests and epistemic capital requires reinstating the significance of the epistemic relation to the production of knowledge, alongside (rather than instead of) its objectifying and social relations. This implies assuming social realist notions of a world independent of fallible knowledge and a focus on the relations between knowledge and these objects of study, in terms of the procedures required to access and achieve practical adequacy to this world.<sup>6</sup> The conditions for progress in social science are, in other words, not only to be found in the social field and habituses of knowers, but also in the structuring of knowledge itself. This is, however, not to argue for an asocial approach. As Popper (1945) argued, if science relied on individual scientists to be objective, it would never be so; they "have not purged themselves by socio-analysis or any similar method" (p. 217). Rather, the practical adequacy of knowledge is underpinned by the intersubjective nature of the scientific method—it is socially produced and maintained. So, ironically, a focus on non-social interests also restores a crucial social aspect of intellectual practice.

Additionally, it is not the virtuous nature of scientists that maintains this state of the field. Indeed, as the sociology of science has frequently shown, scientists can indulge in strategies that would make Machiavelli blush. Nonetheless, selfish, egoistic, and calculating strategies may lead to disinterested outcomes (practically adequate knowledge), for scientists have an interest in disinterestedness, in applying the intersubjective, more or less consensual procedures of their field. That is to say that an individual's social interests may also bring epistemic profit. Bourdieu rightly argued that

a field is all the more scientific the more it is capable of channelling, of converting unavowable motives into scientifically proper behaviour. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 177)

In the terms presented here, this is to say that a field is more scientific the more it is capable of generating epistemic profits. This, however, is not achieved simply through the social organisation of the field. As I have illustrated elsewhere (Maton, 2000), the intrinsic structuring of knowledge formations have a structuring significance for intellectual fields—the form taken by knowledge claims helps shape the social relations

of a field. Bourdieu, for example, highlighted mathematics as a field where actors wishing to triumph over opponents are “compelled by the force of the field to produce mathematics to do so” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 178); Moore and Maton (2001) showed how this is achieved partly by the way in which mathematics is structured as a knowledge formation rather than by its social field.

To conclude, one may return to ABC (see Figure 1). I argued that many “reflexive” research practices represent sociological reflexivity, focusing solely on the social relation between an author A and knowledge C. I showed how Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity as currently formulated tends toward analysis of relations between author(s) A and object(s) of study B: objective reflexivity. To achieve a properly epistemic reflexivity, these need to be supplemented by a focus on relations between the object of study B and knowledge claims C. In other words, a full reflexivity that is collective rather than individualist, procedural rather than narcissistic, and epistemological as well as sociological comprises analyses of the social, objectifying, and epistemic relations (ABC). To put it another way, I began by highlighting that Bourdieu’s three Rs comprise reflexivity, relationism, and research. I have argued that to enable reflexivity to be realised in research, Bourdieu’s relational approach needs to embrace analysis of the epistemic relation. This is, I believe, the next phase for Bourdieu’s conception of reflexivity, and one in which I can happily declare both social and cognitive interest in the accumulation of both symbolic and epistemic capital.

## Notes

1. I will thus not engage in theoretical taxonomy (see Ashmore, 1989 for an idiosyncratic encyclopaedia). I should also emphasise that my focus is on social scientific knowledge rather than society and state that, for brevity, I leave aside questions of whether the nature of social life necessitates reflexive social science.

2. Here I am drawing on and developing a conceptual framework for the analysis of knowledge claims (becoming known as legitimation theory), initially generated in response to an empirical analysis of the rise of cultural studies and subsequently developed through analyses of mathematics, literary criticism, sociology of education, and educational expansion (see Maton, 1999, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Moore & Maton, 2001). The framework, ironically, builds on and integrates the insights of inter alia Bourdieu’s approach while being here developed by analysing this very approach. (The notion of the objectifying relation became clearer through this analysis of the distinctiveness of Bourdieu’s reflexivity).

3. I should emphasise that I am concerned with neither hagiography nor heresy spotting but with how Bourdieu’s ideas may be developed to realise their potential. Sympathetic criticism of Bourdieu’s work is, however, a dangerous task. Not only is his work subject to the very struggles he analyses, but Bourdieu also often seems to inspire an almost religious fervour. Such policing of the theory is contrary to Bourdieu’s approach; he argued not only that theory and empirical development were necessary but also that being a Marxist, Weberian, or (one could add) Bourdieuan is a religious choice and not a scientific one. However, despite Bourdieu’s own strictures, given the competitive logic of the current condition of the social scientific field it is likely that the current analysis is perceived in personalised, dichotomous, and oppositional terms, that is, as for or against Bourdieu. This would, of course, itself serve to illustrate the necessity of the current conceptual development.

4. Wacquant (1992) wrote that no critic has yet raised the charges of narcissism and recursive regression against Bourdieu, suggesting that this seems “to indicate that neither applies in any straightforward manner to Bourdieu” (p. 43, n77). I would concur in that they do not apply *straightforwardly*—the roots of the problem are deep down.

5. I was initially reluctant to suggest a new form of capital, for capitals have proliferated among those employing Bourdieu's approach in empirical research. The latter, however, are not new forms of capital but rather specific kinds of symbolic capital. They result from an often unacknowledged problem with the operationalisation of the concept of habitus. Space precludes detailed discussion here, but habitus shares with epistemic reflexivity the merits and limits of highlighting something of crucial significance without fully realising that conceptual potential. In both cases the problem stems from lacking a means for conceptualising the structuring of practices and thus habituses (see Bernstein, 1996; Maton, 1999, 2000). Typically, this problem has been "resolved" by proclaiming the ability of actors to succeed at practices *X* within a specific context as resulting from the possession of "*X* capital." They thus represent specific forms of *symbolic* capital, their name reflecting the specificities of the field under investigation. Here I am suggesting not a specific form of symbolic capital but a wholly new form of capital that is neither symbolic nor economic. I intend to more fully elaborate on this concept and its applications in future publications.

6. This is not to say that the only answer lies with, for example, critical realist epistemology. I am not highlighting here for any specific philosophy of knowledge. Rather, I am arguing that if we are to take account of such issues as cognitive interests and epistemic capital by analysing the epistemic relation between knowledge and its (constructed) object, then this necessitates considering, first, the world as having an independent existence from knowledge and vice versa (otherwise there is simply conflation of the two and no relation to analyse) and, second, knowledge as fallible (otherwise there is no need for the analysis). Such arguments are to be found in inter alia social realist approaches (e.g., Sayer, 2000).

## References

- Ashmore, M. (1989). *The reflexive thesis: Wrighting sociology of scientific knowledge*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Barnard, H. (1990). Bourdieu and ethnography: Reflexivity, politics and praxis. In R. Harker, C. Mahar, & C. Wilkes (Eds.), *An introduction to the work of Pierre Bourdieu*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.
- Berlin, I. (1999). *The roots of Romanticism*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Bernard, C. (1957). *An introduction to the study of experimental medicine*. London: Dover. (Original work published 1865)
- Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988a). *Homo academicus*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988b). On interest and the relative autonomy of symbolic power. *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychosocial Studies*, 20.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993a). Concluding remarks: For a sociogenetic understanding of intellectual works. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993b). *Sociology in question*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1994). *In other words*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon, J.-C., & Passeron, J.-C. (1991). *The craft of sociology: Epistemological preliminaries*. Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Brubacher, J. W., Case, C. W., & Reagan, T. G. (1994). *Becoming a reflective educator: How to build a culture of inquiry in the schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gellner, E. (1992). *Postmodernism, reason and religion*. London: Routledge.

- Kšgler, H. H. (1997). Alienation as epistemological source: Reflexivity and social background after Mannheim and Bourdieu. *Social Epistemology*, 11(2), 141-164.
- LiPuma, E. (1993). Culture and the concept of culture in a theory of practice. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Luntley, M. (1995). *Reason, truth and self: The postmodern reconditioned*. London: Routledge.
- Lynch, M. (2000). Against reflexivity as an academic virtue and source of privileged knowledge. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(3), 26.
- Maton, K. (1999). Extra curricular activity required: Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of educational knowledge. In M. Grenfell & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Language, culture and education*. Bern, the Netherlands: Peter Lang.
- Maton, K. (2000). Languages of legitimation: The structuring significance for intellectual fields of strategic knowledge claims. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(2), 147-167.
- Maton, K. (2002a, July). "Barbarians at the gates of academe!": The response of education systems to the arrival of new students. Paper presented at Knowledges, Pedagogy and Society: The Second International Basil Bernstein Symposium, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
- Maton, K. (2002b). Popes, kings and cultural studies: Placing the commitment to non-disciplinarity in historical context. In S. Herbrechter (Ed.), *Cultural studies: Interdisciplinarity and translation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Maton, K., & Wright, H. K. (2002). Editorial: Returning cultural studies to education. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5(4), 379-392.
- Moore, R., & Maton, K. (2001). Founding the sociology of knowledge: Basil Bernstein, intellectual fields and the epistemic device. In A. Morais, I. Neves, B. Davies, & H. Daniels (Eds.), *Towards a sociology of pedagogy: The contribution of Basil Bernstein to research*. New York, Peter Lang.
- Moore, R., & Muller, J. (1999). The discourse of "voice" and the problem of knowledge and identity in the sociology of education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(2), 189-206.
- Popper, K. (1945). *The open society and its enemies: Volume II, Hegel and Marx*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Popper, K. (1972). *Epistemology without a knowing subject*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Robbins, D. (1998). The need for an epistemological "break." In M. Grenfell & J. James (Eds.), *Bourdieu and education: Acts of practical theory*. London: Falmer Press.
- Sayer, A. (1999). Bourdieu, Smith and disinterested judgement. *Sociological Review*, 47(3), 403-431.
- Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and social science*. London: Sage.
- Schmaus, W. (1994). *Durkheim's philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schšn, D. A. (1995). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Arena.
- Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, V. (1981). Social dramas and stories about them. In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). Toward a social praxeology: The structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology. In P. Bourdieu & L. J. D. Wacquant (Eds.), *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Woolgar, S. (Ed.). (1988). *Knowledge and reflexivity: New frontiers in the sociology of knowledge*. London: Sage.
- Woolgar, S., & Ashmore, M. (1988). The next step: An introduction to the reflexive project. In S. Woolgar (Ed.), *Knowledge and reflexivity*. London: Sage.

*Karl Maton is currently completing his doctoral thesis (University of Cambridge), which develops a dynamic epistemological sociology of knowledge through analyzing the conditions of emergence for cultural studies in postwar English higher education. He has published articles in cultural studies, sociology, linguistics, and philosophy, and is coediting (with Handel K. Wright) a special issue of International Journal of Cultural Studies and a book collection on cultural studies and education.*