

Book Review

Lane, Jeremy F. (2006), *Bourdieu's Politics: Problems and Possibilities*, London: Routledge, 190 pp, ISBN-13: 978-0415363204.

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In this second book on Bourdieusian social theory, Jeremy F. Lane takes a further step to analyze Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice" particularly in relation to political analysis². By doing so, with the other two books³, the book fills an important gap in political theory by bringing Bourdieu's corpus into dialogue with political theory. Lane makes a significant contribution for with new insights to both social and political literature by clarifying Bourdieusian key concepts "field", "habitus", "symbolic power-domination", and "doxa". The book is to be of great use for both researchers and students especially by providing tools for political analysis.

Jeremy F. Lane, while stressing the significant contribution of Bourdieusian social theory for political theory, adopts a critical attitude for highlighting both problems and possibilities in Bourdieu's theoretical concepts and approach for making political analysis more generally. In order to show these possibilities and problems, Lane delves into Bourdieu's work and highlights the key concepts for different themes. By stressing the directly political activism-interventions of Pierre Bourdieu, chapter one (Lane, 2005; 11-35) elaborates the content and importance of Bourdieu's political activism against neoliberalism by locating them into the national context. In the following chapters Lane engages in more theoretical discussions. In chapter two (2005; 36-53), with the concepts "habitus" and "practice", Lane makes insightful comments by emphasizing the effects of the aesthetic, affective structures of the habitus for influencing agents' political affiliations and electoral 'choices'. In chapter three (2005; 54-75), for the purpose of the book above mentioned, Lane brings together Bourdieu and other social theorists like Laclau, Mouffe, Zizek, Butler and Rancière to highlight and examine certain problems in Bourdieu's theorization of the political, and limitations of Bourdieu's theory of politics. He gives the rise of the Front Nationalé as an example of the failure to grasp the contingent and constructed nature of the values contained in the habitus. By making references to Laclau and Mouffe, he emphasizes that the field of politics cannot be considered a representation of interest since representation is in fact reshapes of the represented. (Lane, 2005; 68)

In chapter four (2005; 76-97), Lane uses a similar way in a complementary manner for what he has done for the concepts habitus and practice in the second and third chapters. This time he subjects "field" to a close scrutiny, by examining Bourdieu's account of the genesis of one particular neo-liberal reform in "The Social Structures of

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² For the first book see Jeremy F. Lane (2000), *Pierre Bourdieu: a Critical Introduction*, London: Pluto Press

³ For the other two books see. Loic Wacquant (ed.) (2005), *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press. David Swartz (2013), *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals: the Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, Chicago: Chicago University Press

the Economy” in some detail. According to Lane, it might be argued that this elision of the political was the characteristic of the tendency of field theory to substitute calculations regarding power resources of groups or individuals in place of influence of a political discourse.

In chapter five (2005; 98-119) Lane brings Bourdieu in dialogue with gender studies. By focusing on “Masculine Domination” he emphasizes the criticisms of Bourdieu’s alleged determinism and failure to give enough importance to the capacity of ordinary agents to challenge normative definitions of gender roles and identities. Examining these criticisms Lane concludes that the account of gender inequalities in “Masculine Domination” is examples of all of the problems with Bourdieu’s social theory that he has identified throughout the book. (2005; 100)

In chapter six (2005; 120-140) the two other books “The Rules of Art” and “Free Exchange” are subjected to review. According to Lane the problem already identified in Bourdieu’s field theory can be seen here again: effacing the power of artefacts by overemphasizing the position occupied by the artist in the context of power relations in an artistic field. In chapter seven (2005; 141-161) Lane examines in more detail Bourdieu’s theorization of universal in his texts such as “Practical Reason”, “Pascalian Meditations”, “The Weight of the World” and “On Television”. Throughout the book Lane repeatedly emphasizes the logic of expressive causality in Bourdieu’s theoretical framework and in this chapter he makes criticisms for the way Bourdieu understands racism as a simple reflection of downward social mobilization.

Bringing Bourdieu’s theory into dialogue with different thinkers from different traditions and using theoretical concepts within different themes such as neo-liberalism, racism, market, universalism, etc. are important contributions to both social and political theory. Yet there are still some lacunas of the book ironically stemming from Lane’s preference of analyzing the concept of habitus and practice separately from tightly related concept of field. This intentional decision, leads the author to comment on habitus unidimensionally. For example, in chapters two and three the “habitus” and in chapter four the “field” is examined as if they do not have any interconnections. This preference means the exclusion of active complicity between habitus and field, where Bourdieu has repeatedly emphasized throughout his career in his work. According to Lane, for example the Front Nationalé does not simply express sentiments and emotions regarding national identity but reshapes their form and contents. But if we think “habitus” with its relation to “field”, Bourdieu’s theory of practice is also powerful enough for such propositions. According to Bourdieu, “... *political life can be described in terms of the logic of supply and demand: the political field is the site in which, through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created*”. (Bourdieu, 1991; 171-2) One can give further examples of power of Bourdieu’s theory – which relies on the theoretical rapports between habitus and field highlighted by him - in explaining the dynamic natures of and the interaction between, political agency and structures. Another scholar deploying Bourdieu’s theory of political field demonstrates that the split of Czechoslovakia was not inevitable and it had become possible as a result of the agency of political actors which reshaped the popular demands. ⁴

⁴ See for further analysis, Gil Eyal (2005), “The Making and Breaking of the Czechoslovak Political Field” in Loic Wacquant (ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 151-177

Lane also remarks the failure to grasp the contingent and constructed nature of the values contained in the habitus. But it seems problematic again. While using the concept “habitus” in relation to “social space” Reed-Danahay clearly illustrates contingent nature of political field with using the Bourdieusian theoretical framework. Reed-Danahay uses the example of Vietnamese American population – a large immigrant group in Texas- which already has the institutional and the material resources but lacks in political visibility has gained a public and political salience after a dispute over community’s flag in an international week in the University devoted to celebrations of international students.⁵ Another example can be found in Turkey’s last presidential referendum. Contrary to the expectations of its constituency the leader of The Nationalist Action Party and its deputies mostly voted for the constitutional amendment and supported the ruling party. According to public opinion polls, however, approximately 70% of the NAP’s constituency voted against the amendment. This case clearly shows that political delegates do not necessarily represent their constituencies’ preferences and interests.

In conclusion, despite above mentioned lacunas in the book, it is a very remarkable contribution that brings Bourdieusian social theory and political analysis together. Thus, it can be recommended to both the students and researchers of political science and sociology.

⁵ See for further analysis, Deborah Reed-Danahay (2015), “Social Space: Distance, Proximity and Thresholds of Affinity” p.90 in Vered Amit (2015), *Thinking Through Sociality: An Anthropological Interrogation of Key Concepts*, NY&Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 69 – 96

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