

Hope, habitus and social recognition: A Bourdieusian proposal

Corrado Piroddi 

Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

Correspondence

Corrado Piroddi, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Pinni B, 4th floor, Kanslerinrinne 1, Tampere 33014, Finland.

Email: corrado.piroddi@tuni.fi, corrado.piroddi@yahoo.it

Abstract

This paper provides a conceptual account of Pierre Bourdieu's operational concept of habitus through the lens of social recognition. More precisely, a 'habitus of recognition', or 'recognitive habitus', is defined as a set of perceptive patterns and expectations whose main function is to actualize social behaviour that allows reciprocal recognition among social agents. In this respect, this paper explains why, thanks to the recognition paradigm, we can better grasp how habitus works as a pre-reflective common sense capable of producing coordinated collective actions and social reproduction.

KEYWORDS

Bourdieu, expectations, habitus, Honneth, hope

1 | INTRODUCTION

Through the concept of habitus, Pierre Bourdieu developed a sociological 'theory of practice as the product of a *practical sense*, of a socially constituted 'sense of the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 120–121). Bourdieu has always underlined that the regularities that can be registered in agents' social practices by sociologists, anthropologists, or ethnologists are not generated and governed by rules or models by which agents intentionally inspire their conduct. If there are practical regularities that can be registered empirically, this is because there is a correspondence between the mental, perceptive, and bodily patterns of habitus (second-order objectivity) and a given set of social structures—that is, the social fields with their peculiar shape and distribution of capital (first-order objectivity). In this respect, on one hand, habitus should be considered a

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2021 The Authors. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

theoretical prompt suggesting that the strategies of action of social agents are not exclusively grounded in their rational and reflexive choices. The notion of habitus is a logical and methodological tool that can help social theorists and scientists explain how it is possible for human beings to be involved in multiple social practices at the same time without a continuous reflective activity. In fact, habitus has another purpose: it allows social scientists to develop a critical approach to explaining the logic and nature of social reproduction and domination. Talking about the limits of Michel Foucault's approach, Bourdieu (as cited in Wacquant, 1993) stated:

Foucault ignores the whole process of inculcation of cognitive schemata of perception, appreciation and action, resulting from the internalization of the structures of the world and which, arising out of gentle violence, make gentle violence possible. In short, lacking everything that I put under the notion of 'habitus', Foucault cannot account for the much subtler forms of domination which come to operate through belief and the pre-reflexive agreement of the body and mind with the world (p. 34).

This paper will argue that beyond the original purposes pursued by Bourdieu, habitus could also be employed to deepen the analysis of disinterested relations of social recognition. In this respect, habitus could be a promising analytical tool for considering the social factors that structure some of our basic intersubjective relations of reciprocal recognition and favour their sedimentation and embodiment. More precisely, I assert that habitus can embody systems of expectations and hopes that allow for the realization of intersubjective interactions, such as love, esteem, and respect. In the first part, the paper will describe the inner functioning of habitus as a system of dispositional properties ruled by schemes of perceptions and practical expectations. In the second part, I will illustrate the important role that social recognition has in Bourdieu's account of the social reproduction and internalization of habitus. This section will also highlight the importance of the imbrication of practical attitudes, perceptive schemes, and empirical and normative expectations for the realization of good forms of recognition. The third section will confront the different ideas of Bourdieu and Honneth concerning the nature of ethics and its relation to the process of social reproduction, arguing that their divergences are not incommensurable. The last part will sketch a formal interpretation of habitus as a *habitus of recognition*. The conclusions will briefly discuss some theoretical advantages of my model of the habitus of recognition.

2 | BOURDIEU'S ACCOUNT OF HABITUS: DISPOSITIONS, PERCEPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS

In a canonical passage of *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique*, Pierre Bourdieu (1977a) defines habitus as

a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems (pp. 82–83).

The inner functioning and nature of habitus can be described according to three main characteristics. The first relevant feature is its characterization in terms of *dispositional properties*. A

dispositional property always implies a counterfactual conditional, both at the conceptual and empirical level. For instance, the fact that ‘The object x is fragile’ should be analysed as ‘If x were to be struck, then x would break’. Such a definition of dispositional properties seems to fit Bourdieu’s account of habitus. In fact, Bourdieu conceived of social actions as the result of the relation between the field and capital—that is, the objective structures independent from individual social agents and the habitus’s predispositions possessed by agents themselves. In other words, social actions are an effective product of the encounter of agents’ individual dispositions with

1. the *space of possibilities* of action generated by a social *field* (i.e., a set of norms and rules of conduct that determine the burdens of a specific social context) and
2. a particular form of *capital* (economic, social, cultural, etc.), which establishes the amount and type of power that an agent can employ in a field.

When an agent actualizes a habitus’ disposition, the latter produces behaviour that is coherent with the rules of a specific field. In Bourdieu’s account, this means that there is at least one objective condition, independent from subjective will and desires, that has allowed the realization of such a disposition. Nevertheless, according to Bourdieu, this does not imply the assumption of a strong causal relationship between agents’ embodied dispositions and the peculiar morphology of a field. A field can offer various opportunities to realize distinct behavioural patterns. Social agents can achieve the same goal by adopting different practical strategies from time to time. The perceptive schemes and unconscious beliefs that compose an individual habitus do not necessarily push an agent to actualize a determined behaviour every time the same social condition arises. Similarly, it is possible that the achievement of the same practical outcome might be realizable in multiple manners insofar as it can be produced by different social conditions. Briefly, the space of possible actions generated by social structures, as well as the amount and composition of capital an agent possesses, can trigger a particular agency without necessarily causing its actualization. Habitus merely steers agents toward a set of possible practical reactions that are consistent with the presence of an objective set of different practical options. However, the realization of an action obeys a probabilistic logic, not a mechanistic one.¹ The point that Bourdieu wants to highlight introducing the operational concept of habitus is that, given an objective social space with its set of practical opportunities and material and normative burdens, agents enact specific behavioural patterns because they are *prone and inclined* to do so. If an agent does not possess an assortment of dispositions that are consistent with the practical logic of the objective field, it is unlikely that they can perform actions that are meaningful and reasonable in that social context. External social conditioning can affect the practical agency of individuals, triggering social actions that are reasonable in a particular social environment if and only if agents have developed a system of dispositions (habitus) that is isomorphic to the correspondent system of positions (field). Therefore, the real aim that Bourdieu wants to achieve by introducing the notion of habitus is not to provide an account of the mechanistic relationships that subsist between social reality and individuals. The main objective is to make explicit the preconditions that make the actualization of actions that are *reasonable* in a given social context possible.

At this point, one could go into detail concerning the mechanism that allows the actualization of the behavioural patterns that are inscribed in the habitus in the form of dispositions. If there is no mechanistic relation between objective structural conditions and the dispositional nature of habitus, what is the logic behind the actualization of a practical disposition? According to Bourdieu, it can be grasped if we focus on the idea that habitus allows the intuitive anticipation of the results of an action. Habitus is an ensemble of bodily behavioural postures and

inclinations, which are activated thanks to a system of schemes of perception and expectations (empirical and normative beliefs) that are consistent with social reality.

For Bourdieu, an agent can perform actions that are in harmony with the practical logic of a social field only if they have some expectations related to the probability of success of those actions. Without such a system of beliefs concerning anticipations of the outcome of practical conduct, an agent cannot perform any action that is reasonable in a particular social context. The actualization of a potential practical disposition is not only the product of the relationship between the external stimuli that come from the social world and our perceptive senses. Instead, the activation of the dispositional properties of habitus also depends on our expectations and hopes about the consequences of adopting a certain line of action in certain social circumstances. The external triggers that can be perceived as opportunities to perform a certain action are ineffective if the agent does not possess any hope that can motivate the actualization of the corresponding behaviour (Bourdieu, 2000):

The things to do, things to be done (*pragmata*) which are the correlate of practical knowledge, are defined in the relationship between the structure of the hopes or expectations constitutive of a habitus and the structure of probabilities which is constitutive of a social space. This means that the objective probabilities are determinant only for an agent endowed with the sense of the game in the form of the capacity to anticipate the forth-coming of the game (p. 211).

These last considerations help introduce the third and last relevant feature of the dispositional properties of habitus: their *origins*. Are these systems of perceptive schemes, bodily capabilities, and expectations one anthropological invariant feature of every human being? Are they dependent on the peculiar nature of a social environment? Considering the previous example, Bourdieu (1984) clearly opts for the latter explanation:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. [...] This means that inevitably inscribed within the dispositions of the habitus is the whole structure of the system of conditions, as it presents itself in the experience of a life-condition occupying a particular position within that structure (pp. 170–172).

As a product of external social conditions, the practical choices of social agents are always the expression of preferences that depend on external social conditioning. The content of the expectations and hopes that allow the actuation of a given disposition in a specific social context is the product of the objective position that agents occupy in the social space. Nevertheless, Bourdieu states that habitus operates insofar as the agents perceive their own actions as consequences of their free choices. Reasonable behaviour must be perceived by agents as an outcome dependent on subjective preferences and not as the result of social constraints imposed on them by the objective morphology of the social fields in which they are situated. Agents adjust spontaneously but unconsciously their subjective expectations and aspirations (that is to say, their hopes) to the objective possibilities of action at their disposal in a field, insofar as habitus permits agents to perceive their actions as an outcome of their free choices.²

3 | HABITUS AND RECOGNITION

The following section aims to illustrate the reasons that allow us to reinterpret Bourdieu's account of habitus in intersubjective terms. For doing so, it can be helpful to consider briefly how Bourdieu explains the process of acquisition of subjective dispositions that mirror the objective morphology of a given field. According to Bourdieu, a social field consists of a web of relations of power among individuals, whose positions in the field are determined by the resources that an agent can employ for acting in the field itself. Field's norms and rules of functioning are, in turn, determined by the nature of the capital at stake in the field. In this regard, Bourdieu (2001) is likely to agree with the idea that both the transmission and dissemination of habitus operate through mimetic socialization, which involves the interpersonal level of interaction:

The constancy of habitus [...] is thus one of the most important factors in the relative constancy of the structure of the sexual division of labour: because these principles are, in their essentials, transmitted from body to body, below the level of consciousness and discourse, to a large extent they are beyond the grip of conscious control and therefore not amenable to transformations or corrections. (p. 95)

And again, in *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990):

[T]he process of acquisition—a practical *mimesis* (or *mimeticism*) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an imitation that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture [...] What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is [...]. It is never detached from the body that bears it and can be reconstituted only by means of a kind of gymnastics designed to evoke it, a mimesis which, as Plato observed, implies total investment and deep emotional identification (p. 73).

Therefore, saying that social agents acquire their habitus through interaction with other human beings should be equivalent to saying that social agents develop a specific habitus as they act and move in a particular field. Bourdieu's conception of the social fields seems to imply that an objective structure can generate embodied habitus only through the intersubjective mediation of the actors who take part in a particular social game. As Wendy Bottero (2010) underlined:

The milieu of the field is partly made up of other agents, so the relation between habitus and field is also an encounter *between agents*, with more or less similar dispositions and characteristics. [...] The operation of the habitus, and its intersection with field, is partly a question of the interactional properties of networks, in which our practice is subject to the contingently variable characteristics and dispositions of the people around us (pp. 18–19).

Such a mimetic and intersubjective transmission of practices that involves emotional identifications seems to have a fundamental role in the process of reproduction of both subjective social conducts and objective social fields. In fact, Bourdieu clearly underlines how the individual development of *illusio*, the belief that it is worth taking part in a particular social game, is strongly imbricated with the process of socialization that starts in the family. In this environment, the

teaching of common social practices is possible insofar as parents and children can actualize successful relations of reciprocal recognition (Bourdieu, 2000):

One may suppose that [...] pedagogic work in its elementary form relies on one of the motors which will be at the origin of all subsequent investments: *the search for recognition*. [...] Absorbed in the love of others, the child [...] is continuously led to take the point of view of others on himself, to adopt their point of view so as to discover and evaluate in advance how he will be seen and defined by them. His being is a being-perceived, condemned to be defined as it is by the perception of others. Such might be the anthropological root of the ambiguity of symbolic capital—glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame—the principle of an egoistic quest for the satisfaction of *amour propre* which is, at the same time, a fascinated pursuit of the approval of others (p. 166).

According to Bourdieu (2000), the acquisition of practical dispositions that are consistent with a given social game are subordinated to the interest an agent can develop for such a game and the capital at stake there: 'The game, which both provokes and presupposes investment in the game, interest in the game, produces the forthcoming for someone who has something to expect from the game (p. 212).' In turn, such investment emerges as the result of a dynamic of socialization of libidinal drives. Through socialization, social agents learn to act properly in different social fields so far as their behaviour is rewarded by social recognition (i.e., the approval of others). If so, it is reasonable to conclude that not only the embodiment but also the permanence of a particular habitus depends on its capacity to satisfy human beings' libidinal appetites for recognition.

Nevertheless, what kind of recognition is Bourdieu talking about? More precisely, what are the constitutive features of social recognition? Axel Honneth's paradigm of recognition sheds light on the latter notion that, in Bourdieu's conception, appears to have a primitive, or underdeveloped, status. Axel Honneth's work is meaningful for this paper's purpose, as it bases the origin of the social praxis of human beings on intersubjective recognition. It assumes that the need for recognition is an invariant transcendental characteristic of human beings. For Honneth, the existence and functioning of a particular society are dependent on that society's capacity to satisfy emotional needs connected to our predisposition to looking for others' recognition. In other words, Honneth assumes that individuals learn and interiorize social duties and rules as far as they can gain a beneficial emotional life by acting according to those duties and rules.

Clarifying the nature and main features of the processes of social recognition, over the years, Honneth has identified a number of specific ontological conditions that guarantee the realization of its good forms. The first characteristic is the *responsive and reciprocal nature* of recognition.³ To recognize means to react in the proper way to those positive qualities we perceive in individual and collective subjects, qualities that are objective in a specific social context *S* at time *t*. For instance, to love somebody properly implies perceiving somebody as an individual who is special to us, with emotional needs that deserve support and care. In turn, to realize a good relationship based on love, the recognizee—the beloved person—should perceive the recognizer as an individual whose love is fundamental for the satisfaction of their emotional needs.

The second element concerns the *credibility* and *positive nature* of the *ethical value* at stake in the process of recognition. For instance, nowadays it is neither credible nor morally acceptable to praise somebody for being a humble and devoted servant or honouring somebody for their chivalric virtues. In this regard, a successful process of recognition requires that recognizers and

recognizees have a set of empirical expectations (I believe that most people will behave in this or that way because they did so in the past) and normative ones (I believe that others expect me to conform to certain norms that are collectively accepted), which permit the realization of social attitudes that express recognition.

This factor introduces the third and last one: the *connection between recognition and action*. A successful form of recognition always implies the subsequent actualization of gestures that certify the authenticity of the ongoing recognitive process. According to this feature, love relationships are effective when the persons involved show that they can take care of others despite their particular interests. I express unconditional love to somebody only in the case that I support the beloved person, despite any strategic calculation and for their exclusive well-being.

In light of these considerations, it is possible to appreciate how Honneth's ontological characterization of recognition recalls Bourdieu's conception of habitus. For Honneth, the successful actualization of the dynamics of recognition is determined by perceptive moments and the satisfaction of the social expectations of the individuals involved in the processes of recognition. To recognize somebody means to perceive in other human beings qualities that we have learned to consider normatively relevant in a specific social context and to act consequently—that is, according to the expectations of the person that we want to recognize. Such elements make Honneth's theory of recognition potentially combinable with Bourdieu's account of habitus. In fact, the latter has been described as a complex system of schemes of perception and expectations that allow for the realization of specific bodily dispositions consistent with a particular social environment.

4 | HABITUS AND ETHOS

Another important aspect that deserves discussion is Bourdieu and Honneth's conceptions of ethos and ethics. At first sight, the two perspectives seem to be rather distant, if not conflicting. On one hand, Bourdieu often considers ethics as a mere strategic tool that dominant social groups and agents can employ to stabilize and preserve the status quo. Controlling and monopolizing symbolic capital and power, a ruling class can determine what the access criteria to a given social field are, what can be valued as worthy, and what the relevant social practices are. In brief, the control of symbolic power guarantees the right to define good and bad social actions in a way that mirrors and protects the interests of the dominant agents. On the other hand, against Bourdieu's critical perspective, according to which ethics is mainly an asset of domination in the hands of the dominant agents, Honneth has developed a social and normative theory that conceives of ethical progress in the way we realize our social relations as the main core of the amelioration of society. According to Honneth (1994), society is a complex system of different orders of social recognition that can reproduce itself when it enables human beings to pursue their individual self-realization through forms of cooperation and collective actions that are characterized by mutuality:

[T]he reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee. [...] The aforementioned imperative, which is anchored in the social life-process, provides the normative pressure that compels individuals to remove constraints on the meaning of mutual recognition, since it is only by doing

so that they are able to express socially the continually expanding claims of their subjectivity (pp. 92–93).

However, Honneth himself underlines the fact that the evaluative properties and normative criteria that govern the actualization of the different forms of social recognition (love in the family, respect in the public democratic sphere, or esteem in civil society) are always historically variable and amendable. A given manner of recognizing and being recognized can fail in several respects. First, there can be a discrepancy between the ideal and normative expectations of social agents and the way institutions and peers realize actions that should express recognition. As an example, the ethnic, cultural, and sexual minorities of liberal-democratic countries have often criticized how the discrimination and humiliation they can suffer are in contrast with the principle of equal rights and respect that is supposed to be pivotal in such societies.

Second, a specific form of recognition can become socially insufficient to satisfy both individual self-flourishing and the social reproduction of a given set of collective practices. The progressive extension of suffrage to members of the working class and women, for instance, testifies to the emergence of social claims for the reinterpretation of institutionalized norms of recognition in more inclusive terms. In this regard, the process of symbolic transformation that allows the reproduction of society is inseparable from the process of redefinition and reinterpretation of the values, rules, and norms at work in a concrete society and the best way to actualize them.

The relationships of recognition play a constitutive role in relation to the ontological existence of a society. But their correct implementation is dependent on institutionalized norms and rules that can be subjected to conflicting interpretations and divergent ideas regarding the best way to realize them. Here, apparently, lies the main point of divergence between Honneth and Bourdieu. The latter considers the collective acknowledgement of ethical value an outcome of the symbolic violence that a dominant group exercises strategically over the dominated agents. Instead, Honneth points out that cultural and ethical commonality can arise from a moral agreement between social agents that goes beyond status and class differences.

According to my reading, the differences between the two perspectives can be tempered until we can appreciate their compatibility. Bourdieu's conception of ethos is, in fact, more multifaceted than it appears. In relation to the issue of habitus, Bourdieu has always underlined how habitus can embody ethos in the form of practical dispositions that acquire the shape of a sense of good through the process of socialization. In this respect, Bourdieu has aimed at claiming not only that the normative nature of ethics always obscures or hides ethics' ideological function but also that practices, habits, and customs, which contribute to building up what human beings consider a good life, are inculcated and enacted as 'permanent disposition, embedded in the agents' very bodies in the form of mental dispositions, schemes of perception and thought, extremely general in application.' Furthermore, it is important to underline that Bourdieu has always asserted that the strategic and interested actions produced by habitus are not necessarily selfish and utilitarian. The existence of practices characterized by a normative value depends on the sociological preconditions of their realization (Bourdieu, 1998):

[T]he question of the possibility of virtue can be brought back to the question of social conditions of possibility of the universes in which the durable dispositions for disinterestedness can be constituted [...] If the disinterestedness is sociologically possible, it can only be so only through the encounter between habitus predisposed to disinterestedness and the universes in which disinterestedness is rewarded. (p. 88)

Following Bourdieu, the nature of strategic actions cannot be reduced to the economic idea of the conscious maximization of profit. Bourdieu's conception of interest is more akin to the idea that, through the process of socialization, human beings are put into the situation of cultivating different forms of involvement toward a various range of social praxes. In this regard, the genesis of the habitus that drives human beings to behave in an instrumental way to look for selfish advantage is not related to an invariant anthropological feature of human beings. The logic of a specific social game and, consequently, the type of interest social agents can chase when they are taking part in it mirrors peculiar objective social conditions. In this respect, the adoption of explicitly utilitarian strategies might not be successful in those fields in which it is possible to reach a dominant position by adopting a disinterested behaviour (Bourdieu, 1998):

The behaviors of honor in aristocratic or precapitalist societies have at their origin an economy of symbolic goods based on the collective repression of interest and, more broadly, the truth of production and circulation, which tends to produce 'disinterested' habitus, anti-economic habitus, disposed to repress interests, in the narrow sense of the term (that is, the pursuit of economic profits), especially in domestic relations. (p. 86)

In turn, Honneth acknowledges the influence that some of Bourdieu's ideas have had on his social philosophy. In his early work, in line with Bourdieu's conception of the struggle for symbolic power and capital, Honneth supports the idea that the struggles for social recognition aim to modify the normative and perceptive schemes that are dominant in a given social context. Honneth (1995a) has suggested that inequality does not exclusively concern the maldistribution of material and economic resources but also the unfair and asymmetric distribution of chances of recognition, which is related to the social positions that agents occupy in society:

The existence of a class society based upon the unequal market chances of individual productive agents, but ideologically connected to individual educational success, results in a lasting inequality in the distribution of chances for social recognition. [...] this unequal distribution of social dignity drastically restricts the possibility of individual self-respect for lower, primarily manually employed occupational groups (p. 218).

Honneth (2001) explicitly endorses the idea that the struggle for the redistribution of material resources is always mediated by a struggle for recognition among different groups for the symbolic reinterpretation of the dominant scheme of evaluation and classification in society:

The rules organizing the distribution of material goods derive from the degree of social esteem enjoyed by social groups, in accordance with institutionalized hierarchies of value, or a normative order [...]. Conflicts over distribution [...] are always symbolic struggles over the legitimacy of the sociocultural dispositive that determines the value of activities, attributes, and contributions [...]. In short, it is a struggle over the cultural definition of what it is that renders an activity socially necessary and valuable (p. 54).

In this regard, it comes as no surprise that the Bourdieusian posture recently assumed by Honneth (2017) describes the struggles for the interpretation of ethical values that govern society:

[T]he source of recurrent social struggles is thought to lie in the fact that any disadvantaged social group will attempt to appeal to norms that are already institutionalized but that are being interpreted or applied in hegemonic ways, and to turn those norms against the dominant groups by relying on them for a moral justification of their own marginalized needs and interests (p. 914).

Furthermore, Honneth's model of recognition does not exclude the idea that socially widespread forms of recognition can hide or work in favour of the reproduction of situations of domination. In fact, in some cases, ideological narratives that favour a dominant class can also embody sets of social values and qualities that appear reasonable and appetible to the dominated agents (Honneth, 2007):

By promising social recognition for the subjective demonstration of certain abilities, needs, or desires, they engender a willingness to adopt a web of practices and modes of behavior that suit the reproduction of social domination (p. 342).

Ideological patterns of recognition can thus help a dominant group or class preserve and promote their particular interests without coercion, raising the spontaneous and active participation of the dominated in social practices that favour only a limited portion of the society. The mobilizing power of ideological forms of recognition depends on the credible and reasonable nature of the evaluative vocabulary and the norms that such patterns can offer. Therefore, the degree of normative rationality is not an element that can allow critical theorists to distinguish healthy modes of interpersonal recognition from ideological ones. As Honneth (2007) underlines, only the gap between the promises of recognition promoted by a certain ideology and their material fulfilment can help social theorists discriminate between them and morally positive forms of recognition:

Generally speaking, such ideological forms will attain greater success the more fully they account for the evaluative expectations that point the way toward progress in the culture of reciprocal recognition. But the deficiency by which we might recognize such ideologies could consist in their structural inability to ensure the material prerequisites for realizing new evaluative qualities (p. 346).

To sum up, Honneth recognizes the merits of Bourdieu for his focus on the cultural and symbolic side of social struggles, although he criticizes the French sociologist for a supposed crypt-utilitarianism that affects his proposal.⁴ As explained earlier, Bourdieu's critical sociology is more complex and less monolithic than Honneth believes. Bourdieu has never developed either the idea that ethical consensus can be reached despite relations of power at work in society or that ethics and moral agreement can legitimize structures of power. Nevertheless, his theory of social agency does not deny such a possible development. It does not exclude that there can be disinterested actions if they are sociologically possible and refuses to reduce the practical logic of social practices to a purely utilitarian calculation, driven by the imperative of maximization of profit. In this respect, Bourdieu's conception of ethos and disinterested actions is not necessarily incompatible with Honneth's paradigm of recognition, which strongly connects reciprocity, mutualism, the good functioning of society, and the achievement of a good life.

5 | HABITUS OF RECOGNITION: DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

In order to reinterpret habitus according to the paradigm of recognition, it is of essential importance to understand whether a hypothetical recognitive habitus can reflect the main features of Bourdieu's habitus—habitus as a system of dispositional bodily capacities, habitus as a set of anticipations of the outcomes of practical actions that works as a motivational force, and the capacity of habitus to determine individual choices and preferences according to the objective social structures that have generated the habitus itself. We have said that, according to Honneth's paradigm, recognition is successful, or a recognizer z recognizes a recognizee y , when z perceives in y those positive qualities Q_n that are considered objective and valuable in a given social context at t and when z acts toward y coherently with $(Q_n)y$. In addition, in order to be actualized, successful forms of recognition require that the involved agents possess some reciprocal expectations toward each other that involve ethical values (normative expectations) and some beliefs concerning the behaviour of the other members of their social environment (empirical expectations). In the first respect, recognizers must believe that most people in their society believe that they ought to provide recognition in some specific circumstances. Regarding empirical expectations, recognizers must hold the opinion that the majority of recognizers who belong to their same social sphere tend to conform to the same social behaviour that expresses recognition in some specific circumstances.⁵

When Honneth connects the recognition and satisfaction of normative expectations of social agents, he is arguing in favour of the following point: we tend to conform ourselves to others' expectations in terms of reciprocal recognition neither for instrumental reasons nor because of our subjective beliefs. Acts of recognition that are socially appropriate are authentic insofar as they meet the normative demands and hopes of our peers.⁶ According to this reading, behavioural patterns that express recognition are necessarily enacted under the motivational influence of normative expectations. These are beliefs regarding what other persons who are taking part in a specific social situation in which we ourselves are involved consider a normatively meaningful norm.

In this respect, it seems possible to describe recognition in terms of dispositional properties that are enacted thanks to agents' empirical and normative expectations, which are in turn consistent with agents' social environment. In fact, z has the disposition to recognize every agent in F_X if z possesses the set of bodily skills, perceptive schemes, and normative and empirical beliefs that allow z to express recognition to other agents in F_X . This means, first, that z has to be capable of perceiving in the agents in F_X those properties and qualities Q_n that are considered objective and valuable in F_X . Second, it means that an agent z ought to also be equipped with the relevant empirical and normative beliefs concerning the appropriate social actions to enact in a given social context. The recognizer z must believe that most agents in F_X express recognition when they perceive the qualities Q_n in an agent that belongs to F_X . Furthermore, z must believe that most agents in F_X believe they ought to express recognition when they perceive the qualities Q_n in agents who belong to F_X .

However, if we consider habitus to be a set of recognitive dispositions, then we shall also give an account of recognition as a disposition to be recognized. In such a form, z 's disposition to be recognized is actualized by enacting the recognitive dispositions of a potential recognizer. Acting coherently with some social features, z drives potential recognizers to perceive z themselves according to those characteristics and consequently interact with z . In this sense, we can say that z 's disposition to be recognized by y can be actualized because z has expectations of y 's reaction to specific qualities and actions that are perceived as valuable by both z and y . In other words, if z

aims to be recognized by y as (Q_n)-bearer, then z should know how to act in order to enact y 's recognitive dispositions.⁷ We can establish how such a being-recognized disposition is actualized if we take into account the role-taking capacity of individuals. In this respect, z 's disposition to act as a (Q_n)-bearer depends on z 's capacity to recall y 's reaction to their behaviour. In other words, z as recognizee must have certain beliefs concerning the types of actions that can help them obtain recognition, certain perceptive schemes that allow them to perceive who can properly recognize their qualities once the behaviour that can attract recognition is enacted, and certain empirical and normative expectations concerning the fact that who is perceived as a recognizer should tend to behave as such.

In light of this, given a field F_X in which Q_n are at stake and acknowledged as valuable and objective by the agents in F_X , I suggest defining the recognitive habitus H_R of an agent z in F_X as the set of dispositions that allows z to act in order to recognize other agents in F_X as (Q_n)-bearers and to be recognized by other agents in F_X as a (Q_n)-bearer. We can thus assert that a recognitive habitus H_R is a set of practical dispositions—grounded on practical skills, perceptions, and normative and empirical expectations—that drives an agent z to act in order to behave coherently with other agents and to be treated by the latter according to some specific features Q_n that are considered objective and valuable in F_X .

Let us imagine an economic field F_E in which the set of properties at stake to be recognized (i.e., to be esteemed as a good worker) could be identified not only by the economic wealth of an individual. We can see as salient features the rank a worker reaches in the labor market, their professional successes, creativity, and independence, the number of customers they serve, and the annual growth of their business. These are Q_E that are considered objective and valuable in F_E . Thus, how can we conceptualize the H_R of an agent z that acts in F_E ? As we have said before, we can define H_R as the set of recognitive dispositions that drives an agent z to actualize conducts of action that are coherent with Q_E in F_E . In light of this, on the one hand, z 's H_R should allow z to recognize their partners of action ($x, w, \dots n$) according to Q_E in F_E . In this case, H_E predisposes z to admire and esteem ($x, w, \dots n$) in relation to the evaluation of Q_E that ($x, w, \dots n$) display in F_E . On the other hand, H_E should permit z to be recognized by ($x, w, \dots n$) in relation to Q_E in F_E . In this respect, H_E predisposes z to actualize conducts that are able to drive ($x, w, \dots n$) to provide z with social esteem and admiration. Furthermore, such a dynamic of recognition appears to be capable of explaining how H_E guarantees collective coordination in F_E . In fact, it can be said that the reciprocal ascription of a specific status determines the recognizer to expect from the recognizees a kind of behaviour that enables the recognizer to realize their aims. Thus, taking on the appropriate roles, agents grant each other the coordination of their social conduct.

Let us consider a case in which, given F_E , z is the employer and ($x, w, \dots n$) are the employees. If it happens that ($x, w, \dots n$) display Q_E and z perceives ($x, w, \dots n$) as (Q_E)-bearers, z effectively recognizes them if they are acting according to their status as good workers by, for instance, raising ($x, w, \dots n$)'s wages. The growth in wage is the realization of a social action favourable to ($x, w, \dots n$) that the latter obtained through their recognitive predispositions, which allowed them to be treated as (Q_E)-bearers acting coherently with Q_E in F_E . In other words, ($x, w, \dots n$) improved their job performances with the expectation that z would recognize them as good workers—that is to say, as (Q_E)-bearers—and consequently raise their wages.

In sum, the realization of a particular set of social actions in a field is guaranteed by a dispositional habitus that permits agents to act for achieving and giving recognition, for being recognized and recognizing while playing a specific social game in a field, for increasing their own capital, and for preserving or improving their social position. In addition, the acquisition of habitus depends on a process of socialization that seems to be strictly connected to successful

experiences of interpersonal recognition. These experiences tend to favour the repetition of certain behavioural patterns until they are interiorized in the form of dispositional properties and actualized without constant reflexive activity. In this regard, it is interesting to notice how emotions related to subjective experiences of social recognition and misrecognition are of fundamental importance for understanding not only the process of acquiring a habitus but also its stabilization and, therefore, the reiteration of particular social conduct. For instance, experiencing social esteem tends to reinforce our attitude to repeat actions that are coherent with the rules of the social context in which we are acting. In fact, receiving social esteem is the condition of the possibility to experience self-esteem—that is to say, to perceive ourselves as bearers of a property (or a set of properties) that is normatively relevant in a given social context. Once we gain a positive self-perception, we will tend to re-enact those behavioural patterns that have led us to such a condition, which means reinforcing our empirical and normative expectations and the way we perceive the social world around us.

One possible objection to this account of habitus in terms of recognition could be the following: expectations must be explicit and conscious in order to realize effective acts of recognition. Nevertheless, Honneth (2000) seems to accept that, in general, we act accordingly to a set of behavioural expectations

not explicitly or consciously, but rather implicitly; accordingly, we become aware of the norms that regulate our behaviour in the form of ‘knowing how’ only in those moments when our expectations are disrupted; the interruption of our action forces us to make explicit the portion of our latent background beliefs that is ineluctable for making sense of the situation. I see no difficulty in incorporating this suggestion with the ideas I developed earlier, regarding the basis for acts of recognition in our socially acquired background knowledge: if we think of norms of recognition as patterns of response that we master in the course of acquiring evaluative knowledge, this must be a matter of ‘knowing how’ that we can never completely articulate in explicit rules (p. 515).

In this respect, it seems reasonable to affirm that Honneth would accept the idea that the actualization of social actions, which express recognition and have become habitual, can happen unintentionally.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

What are the theoretical advantages of reinterpreting habitus in light of the paradigm of recognition? First, it might highlight more clearly how habitus can guarantee the inner coordination of social groups and classes, improving Bourdieu’s perspective regarding the inner functioning of habitus. According to Bourdieu, the fact that members of the same social group or class have the same tastes (e.g., drinking beer instead of wine or following soccer instead of cricket) or tend to vote for the same party (e.g., the socialist party instead of the liberal) depends on the fact that they share the same habitus. However, as mentioned before, Bourdieu has usually been charged with adopting a crypto-utilitarian approach, as he often describes the operations of habitus in terms of intuitive calculations of costs–benefits related to the adoption of a given social behaviour. For instance, talking about the opportunity available in the public educative system and the general tendencies of working-class students toward them, Bourdieu (1977b) states:

[T]he negative predispositions towards the school which result in the self-elimination of most children from the most culturally unfavoured classes and sections of a class [...] must be understood as an anticipation, based upon the unconscious estimation of the objective probabilities of success possessed by the whole category, of the sanctions objectively reserved by the school for those classes or sections of a class deprived of cultural capital (p. 495).

According to the previous passage, the propensity of lower-class members to drop out of public educative institutions was a consequence of the class habitus they possessed, which drove them to avoid achieving a cultural aim that was hard to reach in the absence of adequate cultural capital. In addition, Bourdieu seems to provide a circular explanation of the working-class members' behaviour towards education. In fact, following his reasoning, the dominated members of the lower classes are apt to be less cultured than members of other classes because of their working-class habitus: working-class people behave as working-class people because of their working-class habitus.⁸

Nevertheless, if we consider habitus to be a structure that permits not only the implementation of strategic agency but also the actualization of successful relationships of recognition, we could overcome both these shortcomings. Against the objection of crypto-utilitarianism, it could be asserted that the actualization of invariant social behaviour is functional enough to guarantee reciprocal recognition among members of the same social environment. From this perspective, we could say that the tendency of students who came from lower classes to abandon higher studies relied on the fact that to pursue a higher education did not allow any significant form of social recognition among members of the working class and, thus, any benefits in terms of emotional well-being. In the same way, we could assert that it was at least improbable that, pursuing their studies, the members of the working class would have been recognized by students from higher social classes as legitimate members of their social group, given the different social backgrounds and styles of interacting with each other. Against the objection of circularity, it could be argued that to drink beer instead of wine during one's free time or to vote for a specific party can be considered empirical marks that, if needed, can favour reciprocal recognition among social agents of the same group, thus reinforcing social integration and group cohesion. On the contrary, actualizing social conduct that is extraneous to a specific social dimension means putting oneself in a counterproductive condition in which recognition can fail. Following this reasoning, it could be argued that youngsters with a working-class background persisted to behave in the same manner not because their condition of social disadvantage weakened their critical skills, drove them to interiorize a sense of inferiority toward upper-class members, or nullified their capacity to realize oppositional agency. Simply, they carried on behaving so because their recognitive habitus produced actions that allowed them to testify recognition and to be recognized successfully.

Second, connecting recognition and habitus can also shed light on an important idea of Bourdieu, according to which for a habitus to work properly at the unconscious level, it should create in human beings the *illusio* that it is worthy to compete in the social game. For Bourdieu, in fact, a field can reproduce itself only if the agents therein believe that the competition for the accumulation of the capital at stake is worthy and that the agents' investments and efforts in the game are justified. So, how is it possible for agents who are forced to assume a disadvantaged social position by objective social conditions (lack of material resources, poor education, weak social connections, etc.) to develop involvement in a game that they cannot win? How is it possible that they persist in following rules and norms that do not guarantee any meaningful improvement of their own social condition? Bourdieu (1984) states that an answer to these questions can

be found once we consider that 'necessity can only be fulfilled, most of the time, because the agents are inclined to fulfil it, because they have a taste for what they are anyway condemned to' (p. 176). If we assume that the choices of actions produced by habitus possess not only a systemic function but also an expressivist value, then it is clear in which sense habitus inclines agents to spontaneously enact actions and practices that can work for the reproduction, and not for the improvement, of their social condition. From this point of view, the practical preferences produced by habitus can incline an agent to reinforce their normative and empirical expectations, reproducing a specific behavioural pattern insofar as it enables the successful process of recognition for the agent themselves. In other words, habitus can produce actions and practices that stabilize the social condition of an agent, guaranteeing at the same time the reproduction of social order, inasmuch as they permit the agent themselves to achieve forms of social recognition that satisfy the agent's expectations. The actualization of a practice that will not produce any material advantage for an agent could be explained as follows: what they found motivating were the expectations of recognition connected to the implementation of social behaviour, not so much its outcomes in terms of social improvement or maximization of capital.

Third, describing recognition as a process that is partially structured by habitus could be beneficial to the paradigm of recognition itself. Honneth (2018, pp. 204–210) has recently diagnosed a relevant problem that affects the Hegelian paradigm of recognition and, consequently, the models that are influenced by Hegel's thought: the lack of a robust theory of habituation. In this regard, Honneth complains about the absence of a meaningful theory of the development of moral habits that can explain the process of the motivational appropriation of norms that are created collectively. In this regard, developing the concept of 'habitus of recognition' could be the first step toward a perspective that can illustrate the process of individual acquisition and the sedimentation of successful forms of recognition that are collectively accepted. In particular, a suitable formulation of the notion of 'habitus of recognition' should take into account the idea that, through socialization, social subjects reproduce the expectations of their social environment until the point that their personal and individual preferences are consistent with those social expectations themselves.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Corrado Piroddi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3599-9702>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Bourdieu (1990): 'The uncertainty which has an objective basis in the probabilistic logic of social laws is sufficient to modify not only the experience of practice, but practice itself, for example by encouraging strategies aimed at avoiding the most probable outcome' (p. 99).
- ² Bourdieu's critical sociology and account of social action can be seen as a precursor and in continuity with the critical realism developed by Margaret Archer (1995), Roy Bhaskar (1975, 1986, 1993), and Dave Elder-Vass (2010). Apart from the criticisms that these scholars have moved to Bourdieu (see, for instance, Archer (2003) regarding the problem of conflationism in Bourdieu's depiction of habitus), critical sociology and critical realism are both concerned with the study of the relationship of agency and structures in terms of causation, highlighting that the social structures not only constrain but also make possible the exercise of agency. In addition, common to both traditions of thought is the attempt to go beyond the opposition between the individual and society, subjectivism and objectivism, and explanation and interpretation.

- ³ Such features are mentioned in Honneth (2007, pp. 329–330).
- ⁴ In this regard, see Axel Honneth (1995b, pp. 184–201).
- ⁵ The distinction between normative and empirical expectations, as well as the account of their function, refers to Bicchieri (2006): ‘Social norms prescribe or proscribe behavior; they entail obligations and are supported by normative expectations. Not only do we expect others to conform to a social norm; we are also aware that we are expected to conform, and both these expectations are necessary reasons to comply with the norm’ (p. 42).
- ⁶ See Honneth (2000, p. 516).
- ⁷ In light of these considerations, it could be said that a recognitive disposition consists of the capacity of being recognized/obtaining recognition, which differs from the passive power of attracting recognition.
- ⁸ Such an objection has been put forth, for instance, by Burawoy (2012): ‘The propensity to submission is not an invariant but depends on the inculcated habitus. [...] What sort of folk sociology is this, dependent on conventional wisdom and belied by history? [...] Since we have no way of knowing ‘habitus’ independent of behavior, the argument is simply tautological—immigrants and women are submissive because of their habitus of submission as demonstrated by their supposed submissiveness’ (p. 197).

REFERENCES

- Archer, M. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, agency, and the internal conversation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. Leeds Book.
- Bhaskar, R. (1986). *Scientific realism and human emancipation*. Verso.
- Bhaskar, R. (1993). *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. Verso.
- Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bottero, W. (2010). Intersubjectivity and Bourdiesian approaches to ‘identity’. *Cultural Sociology*, 4(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975509356750>
- Bourdieu, P. (1977a). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977b). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel, & H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487–511). OUP.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditation*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Polity Press.
- Burawoy, M. (2012). The roots of domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci. *Sociology*, 46(2), 187–206.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2010). *The causal power of social structures: Emergence, structure and agency*. Cambridge University Press.
- Honneth, A. (1994). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995a). Moral consciousness and class domination: Some problems in the analysis of hidden morality. In *The fragmented world of the social*. Essays in social and political philosophy. New York: SUNY Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995b). The fragmented world of symbolic forms: Reflections on Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture. In *The fragmented world of the social*. Essays in social and political philosophy. New York: SUNY Press.
- Honneth, A. (2000). Grounding recognition: A rejoinder to critical questions. *Inquiry*, 45(4), 499–519.
- Honneth, A. (2001). Recognition or redistribution? Changing perspectives on the moral order of society. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(2–3), 43–55.
- Honneth, A. (2007). Recognition as ideology. In D. Owen, & B. van de Brink (Eds.), *Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory* (pp. 323–347). Cambridge University Press.
- Honneth, A. (2017). Is there an emancipatory interest? An attempt to answer critical theory’s most fundamental question. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 25(4), 908–920. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12321.7>
- Honneth, A. (2018). *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*. Suhrkamp.

Wacquant, L. (1993). From ruling class to field of power: An interview with Pierre Bourdieu on 'La Noblesse d'État'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10(3), 19–44.

How to cite this article: Piroddi, C. (2021). Hope, habitus and social recognition: A Bourdieusian proposal. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12325>