

June 17, 2012, Alexandra Park.

Themes:

Social Complementarity, Doxa, Symbolic Oppression

The Social complementarity

This is the notion that there is no social space that is fully objective in a commonly verifiable sense, since the world is observed through collages of subjective perceptions.



The indication of this is the yin-yang symbol of ancient Chinese philosophy.

When people interact in networks with repeating activities, social relationship and structures will develop, albeit participation will, as indicted, be conditioned by subjective perceptions of their purposes and content. Under such conditions, it should be realized that social structures have manifest, or ontological, existence insofar that they change behaviour.

The inculcation of Doxa

Doxa is a concept developed by French sociologist and social critic, Pierre Bourdieu. Originally it is a classical Greek term meaning 'public opinion', reflected in the endings of the modern words, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, where this meaning is retained.

In general, social relationships are carried forward by culturally embedded norms and rules. The latter can be imposed by power relations or based on voluntary social contracts.

Social contracts can have very loose and, at times, of an entirely spontaneous nature. For instance, when we sit down in a circle in the park, it is an example of a spontaneous social contract formed by people harbouring creative dispositions and based on mutual respect.

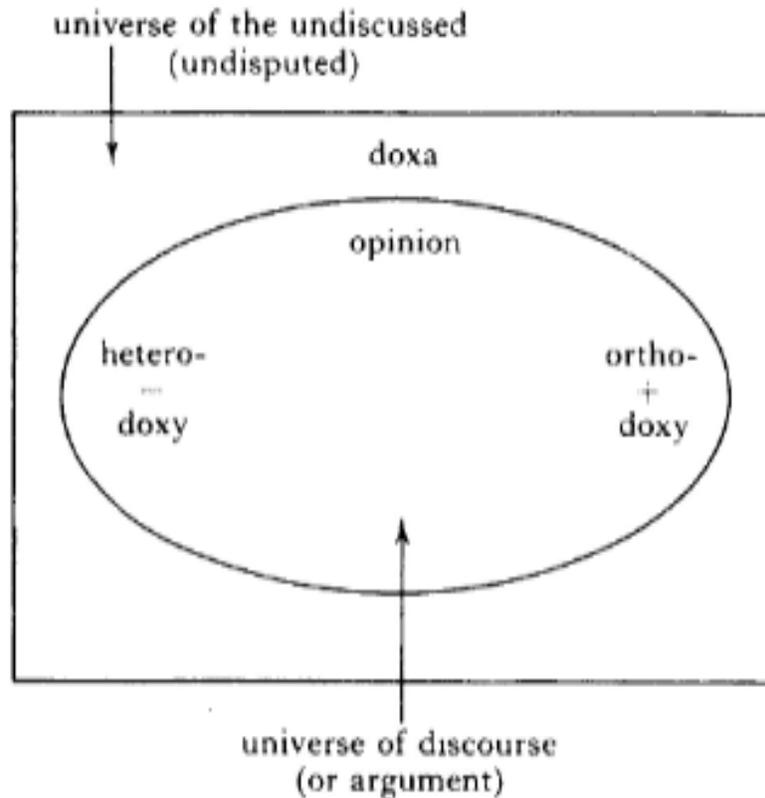
When social relationships evolve into complex structures they tend to develop rules, which—whatever their origin—will be supported by narratives that compel understanding and compliance with the rules and the action patterns that the relationships suggest.

In the case of imposed and power structured relationships that ultimately are based on control of physical force, the narratives devolves into symbolic oppression, the function of which is to minimize the need to execute the physical force, which always risks to engender push-back.

When symbolically oppressive narratives are successful, they inculcate structured misrecognitions—what Bourdieu called ‘doxa’—into the populace. Doxa creates a protective cordon around the hierarchical power relations and abets their perpetuation by the corrosive impact the misrecognitions have on the critical discourses that are the lifeblood of a well-functioning civil society.

The doxical misrecognitions, as it is said, ‘goes from the subject, and comes to the subject’. This indicates that when people are captured by doxa, as a mental self-defence mechanism they will spend considerable energy in spreading whatever false notions the doxa is based upon in order to avoid recognizing the falsity the misrecognition has inserted into their own lives.

When doxa conquers social spaces, it will delimit the spaces in a society where open and mutually respectful discourse is possible. This is shown in the diagram below, which depicts the division between doxa and critical discourse.



From: Pierre Bourdieu "Outline of a Theory of Practice" (1972)

When doxa grows, the space for critical discourse (the central oval in the diagram) shrinks. In case of an authoritarian system primarily reliant on physical force it almost totally disappears, as it for instance happened in Nazi Germany, where those who engage in critical discourse and refuse to adopt the misrecognitions end up behind barbed wire or even are executed.

Of course, the methods of Nazi propaganda and power control were quite crude by the standards of neoliberal capitalism, where the barbed wire is virtual: at the first level a massive space filled with commercial distractions, and, at the second level, the neoliberal doxa coated by the first level's distractions. The combined effect is to engender exclusion and marginalization of those who engage in critical discourse.

Economics as doxa and symbolic oppression.

In current neoliberal capitalism, the dominant power relations are structured by highly asymmetrical money flows and wealth accumulations. In this context, the economic narratives play an important role in the

formation of the doxa, which aim at effacing this reality - the all pervading reality of the economic inequalities that creates islands of wealth such as the gated communities within which the daily routines are obscene levels of trophy consumption. Those islands are positioned amidst a mass of look-alike squeezed middle class suburbs and inner city decrepit poverty zones. All linked by the same drab culture of commercialized spectacles, an endless parade of nonsensical entertainment that slowly kills all ability to think critically.

Economics, as education curricula, has in this environment of vanishing cognitive challenges developed into being a central elements in the neoliberal society's symbolically oppressive structures. It should be noted that already from its inception in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, academic economics had all the hallmarks of a class-based relation. By and large, it can be seen as developing in reaction to the contemporary discourses arising within the upcoming workers movements, which, represented by for instance Marx' early writings and Proudhon were well prior to the first neoclassical economists. Neoclassical economics reflected the fact that the recruitment to the universities at the time was strictly upper class-based, giving the new breed of economists a ubiquitous stake in the matter, a ubiquitous stake in knocking the workers' economists of the stage by declaring them "unscientific" because they dared to openly declare their moral indignation of the capitalist society's rigged outcomes, a basic fact that we still are faced with.