

Sociology

<http://soc.sagepub.com/>

Class, Moral Worth and Recognition

Andrew Sayer

Sociology 2005 39: 947

DOI: 10.1177/0038038505058376

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://soc.sagepub.com/content/39/5/947>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[British Sociological Association](http://www.britishsociologicalassociation.org.uk)

Additional services and information for *Sociology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://soc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/39/5/947.refs.html>



Class, Moral Worth and Recognition

■ **Andrew Sayer**

Lancaster University

ABSTRACT

The article advances a case for greater consideration of the moral aspects of the experience of class, and the concerns that people have regarding their class position and how others view them. First it outlines an approach to understanding lay normativity, especially morality, in which moral sentiments are viewed as evaluative judgements on how behaviour affects well-being. Drawing upon concepts from moral philosophy and examples of moral boundary drawing and shame, it argues that lay morality is weakly differentiated and assumes a universalizing character. Secondly it considers the close relations between economic distribution and recognition, arguing that it is necessary to distinguish between conditional and unconditional recognition, and internal and external goods in order to understand the struggles of the social field. Class inequalities render equality of conditional recognition impossible, because they prevent equal access to practices and goods worthy of recognition.

KEY WORDS

class / emotions / moral worth / recognition

Introduction

Class, unlike, say, ethnicity, is not a social form or identity demanding recognition as legitimate (Coole, 1986; Fraser, 1999). Low income people are not disadvantaged primarily because others fail to value their identity and misrecognize and undervalue their cultural goods, or indeed because they are stigmatized, though all these things make their situation worse; rather they are disadvantaged primarily because they lack the means to live in ways which

they, as well as others, value. Certainly, some may be consigned to the working class because of racism or other identity-sensitive forms of behaviour, but these are not necessary conditions of being working class. The lottery of the market and of birth and the intergenerational transmission of capitals can produce (and have widely produced) class inequalities even in the absence of these forms of discrimination.

Despite the fact that people inherit rather than deserve their natal class, they may feel class pride or shame and care a great deal about how they are positioned with respect to class and how others treat them. They are likely to be concerned about class in terms of recognition of their worth, and want to be respected or respectable. But recognition and valuation are in part conditional on what people do, how they behave and live, so 'class concern' is also about having access to the practices and ways of living that are valued, and class of course renders this access highly unequal. The inequalities in resources and opportunities themselves have little or nothing to do with the moral worth or merit of individuals but they have a major impact on the possibility of achieving valued ways of life that bring recognition and self-respect.

In this article I want to argue that we will better understand the implications of class if we probe lay normative responses to it, particularly as regards how people value themselves and others. If we are to understand the significance of class we need to take lay normativity, especially morality, much more seriously than sociology has tended to do; without this we are likely to produce bland, alienated accounts which fail to make sense of why class is a matter of concern and embarrassment to people, or as Savage et al. put it, 'a loaded moral signifier' (Savage et al., 2001; see also Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998; Sayer, 2002; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). Sentiments such as pride, shame, envy, resentment, compassion and contempt are not just forms of 'affect' but are evaluative judgements of how people are being treated as regards what they value, that is things they consider to affect their well-being. They are forms of emotional reason. Such sentiments may vary in their distribution across the social field, but they can also be partly indifferent to social divisions, for they are responsive to – and discriminate among – standards, situations and behaviours, which vary partly independently of class and other divisions. I shall argue that we cannot grasp the moral significance of class unless we take notice of this dual character of lay morality. We also need to deepen the analysis of relations between recognition and economic distribution by distinguishing between conditional and unconditional recognition and the different kinds of goods which people value, to take account of how their normative rationales differ. In all these matters, I believe that sociology can benefit from drawing upon certain concepts and analyses from moral philosophy.¹

I begin with the neglect of lay normativity and especially lay morality in contemporary social science, and the consequent difficulty it has in understanding why social life is a matter of *concern* to people. Next I illustrate the dual differentiated and universalizing character of lay moral valuations by reference to the paradoxical example of 'moral boundary drawing'. I then

comment on the moral sentiment of shame, this being a powerful element of the experience of class, and one that again depends on moral and other norms being partly shared across classes. In the final section I examine the relations between recognition and economic distribution with respect to class, in order to illuminate how and why class is associated with shame and pride, and then conclude.

Lay Normativity and Morality

With some partial exceptions,² modern social scientists are trained to bracket out normative matters and adopt an exclusively positive (descriptive and explanatory)³ approach to the world, rather than evaluating what is good or bad about it. This has had two unfortunate effects; first, that unless they also happen to have had some training in political and moral philosophy, social scientists lack expertise in normative thinking; and secondly that in their positive studies, they often overlook the normative character of everyday experience, or at least fail to take it seriously as anything more than ‘affect’, or internalization of ‘norms’ as conventions regarding behaviour, or an expression of ‘values’, understood as subjective matters having no rational basis. Hence the scholastic fallacy goes beyond the tendency, identified by Bourdieu, for academics to project their discursive, contemplative orientation to the world onto those they study (Bourdieu, 2000): it involves a failure to grasp not only the predominantly practical character of everyday life but its *normative* character. Actions are mainly explained externally, in the third person, as products of social position and influences, discourses, cultural norms, or indeed habitus. But in their own lives, people, including off-duty sociologists, are *concerned* about what they do and what happens to them and *justify* their actions rather than explain them externally. Even sociologists do not explain their interventions in debates or committees by reducing them to functions of their position within the social field but according to what they think is the best thing to do or argue. Of course our justifications are indeed influenced by our social position and by wider discourses, but reflexivity is needed not only to examine such influences, but also to examine what they do *not* explain, that is how everyday situations often require us to make decisions and *justify* what we do, for the appropriate behaviour is not simply prescribed by external forces or cultural scripts.⁴

We are normative beings, in the sense that we are concerned about the world and the well being of what we value in it, including ourselves. The most important questions people tend to face in their everyday lives are normative ones of how to act, what to do for the best, what is good or bad about what is happening, including how others are treating them. The presence of this concern may be evident in fleeting encounters and conversations, in feelings about how things are going, as well as in momentous decisions such as whether to have children, change job, or what to do about a relationship which has gone bad. These are things which people *care* about deeply. If we ignore this lay

normativity or reduce it to an effect of discourse or socialization we produce an anodyne and alienated account of subjectivity that renders our evident concern about what we do and what happens to us incomprehensible.

We derive our concerns from culture but in relation to our capacity as needy beings for being enculturated. As Kathryn Dean argues, following Arendt, our development as social actors from a state of radical incompleteness and indeterminacy as newborns depends on 'cultural parenting' which develops in us concerns (Dean, 2003). But of course not just any object can be enculturated or be concerned about anything.⁵ To be capable of enculturation, and of having concerns and commitments, of worrying about what to do and what would be for the best, we must be particular kinds of being. We are concerned about things because we feel or believe them to have implications for our welfare or that of others that we care about. For this to be possible we must be the kind of beings which are capable of flourishing or suffering and of registering (albeit fallibly) how we are faring (Archer, 2000; Nussbaum, 2000, 2001). As Adam Smith argued, we are vulnerable, deeply social beings who are not only physically and economically dependent on others but also psychologically dependent on them and in need of their recognition (Smith, 1984[1759]). A purely one-sided explanation of this need that invokes just social relations or culture or discourse is itself radically incomplete.

One could try to use the category of 'affect' to identify concerns, but there is a danger that this may affirm an opposition of reason and emotion, and a disengagement of emotion from what happens to people, so that it becomes 'merely subjective' and lacking any rational content, and so that it becomes unclear how concerns can be *about* anything. It is perhaps significant that when we speak of 'affectations' and 'affecting' a certain manner, we mean precisely to draw attention to their simulated – or rather dissimulated and false – character. Rather I suggest that we need a more cognitive view of emotion as a form of evaluative judgement of matters affecting or believed to affect our well-being (Nussbaum, 2001; see also Archer, 2000; Barbalet, 2001; Helm, 2001).⁶ Emotions may be expressive but they are also about what we believe to be happening regarding things which we care about. Of course they are fallible judgements, but then so too are the judgements of unemotional kinds of reason. Their fallibility derives from the fact that they are about something which can exist or occur independently of them, and hence about which they can be mistaken. They are both subjective (a predicate of subjects) and (fallibly) objective. When someone says that they 'have good reason to be angry', they imply that someone has done something that objectively harms them, such as injuring them or slandering them. Likewise feelings associated with class such as envy, resentment, compassion, contempt, shame, pride, deference and condescension are *evaluative* responses to particular properties of class inequalities and relations. They are influenced but not predetermined by position within the social field. Different cultures may give us different things to value, for example, different things to feel proud or ashamed of; this is demonstrated by Michèle Lamont's comparative studies of French and US middle- and working-class men

with regard to their social positions (Lamont, 1992, 2000). Nevertheless the capacity to feel pride and shame appears to be universal.⁷

Much of our normative orientation to the world is at the level of dispositions and emotions, indeed not only aesthetic but ethical dispositions can be part of the habitus, acquired through practice as intelligent dispositions which enable us often to react appropriately to situations instantly, without reflection (Sayer, 2005).⁸ In order to understand our normative orientation to the world we therefore need to avoid treating fact and value, reason and emotion, as opposed, and acknowledge that while emotions and values are fallible they are not irrational or 'merely subjective', but are often perceptive and reasonable judgements about situations and processes.

While normativity embraces aesthetics and functional valuation of things, for example, regarding the efficiency of an organization, it is the moral dimension of lay normativity that I want to emphasize. By this I mean simply matters of how people should treat others and be treated by them, which of course is crucial for their subjective and objective well-being. It includes but goes beyond matters of justice and fairness, to relations of recognition, care and friendship, and it implies a conception⁹ of the good life. Lay morality may be formalized in norms but it is more effective in influencing behaviour in the form of learned dispositions and moral sentiments, which are acquired through ongoing social interaction, as explored by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith, 1984[1759]). It is important to note that to refer to such matters as moral is not necessarily to express approval of them; from a normative point of view, researchers may consider some norms and practices to be immoral that actors consider moral.

Insofar as sociologists have been interested in lay normativity, they have emphasized its social differentiation, that is how it is both sensitive to and influenced by social position. There is plenty of evidence of this for things like voting behaviour and taste – for example in Bourdieu's analysis of aesthetic judgements and their relation to actors' habitus and position within the social field (Bourdieu, 1984).¹⁰ But in the case of morality I wish to argue that we cannot understand it unless we recognize that it also spills out beyond such divisions and sometimes ignores them. It is in virtue of this that moral sentiments can inform resistance as well as conformity to class and the normative valuations which commonly accompany it. Like Smith, I wish to argue that *moral* judgements are likely to be *less* sensitive to the social position of the valuer and the valued than is the case for aesthetic judgements (Smith, 1984[1759], V.2.1, Part V: 200). As we shall see, this has crucial implications for the experience of class that are likely to be missed if we just relate such matters to social position. The first reason why we might expect morality to be less socially variable than aesthetics is that morality is primarily about relations to others, about how people should treat one another in ways conducive to well-being. How you dress or whether you like tattoos or wallpaper make much less difference to the well-being of others than how you treat them – whether you are honest or deceitful,

generous or selfish, respectful or contemptuous.¹¹ Thus it is therefore easier to be pluralist about aesthetics than about moral matters.

Second, moral understandings underpin all kinds of social interaction, both between members of different groups and among members of the same group. The informal moral education that we gain in early life teaches us that we can be well or badly treated by members of our own group, for example by our siblings, and sometimes that even members of stigmatized other groups may behave in ways we consider to be moral, contradicting negative stereotypes of them. The qualities we consider to be good and bad regarding behaviour do not correspond neatly with social divisions. The moral dispositions and sentiments that we develop have a generalizing or universalizing character. This derives not from Kantian deductions but, as Smith argued, from the ongoing mutual and self-monitoring that occurs in everyday interactions with others, imagining what our behaviour implies for others and how it will be viewed by others, and generalizing from one kind of moral experience to other situations which seem similar. In monitoring our own conduct according to its effects and the responses of others in different social situations we develop a complex set of ethical (and sometimes unethical) dispositions, partly subconsciously and partly through reflection and repeated practice. Of course, moral beliefs may sometimes endorse inequalities and relations of deference and condescension, but they also embody notions of fairness and conceptions of the good which can prompt resistance to domination. Moral systems usually have internal inconsistencies which can be exploited, for example by applying a norm of fairness which is common in one kind of practice to another where it is lacking. To imagine that morality was *never* indifferent to social divisions would be to imply that people only ever act with 'double standards', never consistently. Clearly they do sometimes use double standards, often in ways which tend to reproduce social inequalities, as is the case with gender, but some degree of consistency is intrinsic to morality insofar as it refers to people with similar capacities for flourishing and suffering, and often lay criticisms of inequalities appeal to these.¹²

I shall argue that, although the fact that morality is sometimes indifferent to social distinctions may simply seem less interesting from a sociological point of view, it actually helps to explain the significance of such distinctions, which is why they are a matter of moral concern. The imagined or real challenge 'think you're better than us, do you?' both highlights and attacks double standards. I now want to discuss two examples of the moral experience of class which illustrate this dual quality.

Moral Boundary Drawing

One of the ways in which lay morality has been registered in recent sociology has been in relation to 'moral boundary drawing'. This term denotes the way in

which social groups often distinguish themselves from others in terms of moral differences, claiming for themselves certain virtues which others are held to lack: we are down-to-earth, they are pretentious; we are cosmopolitan, they are parochial; we are hard-working, they are lazy, and so on (Lamont, 1992, 2000; Southerton, 2002). It is particularly strong in groups that are anxious about their position in terms of both how they are regarded from above and the risk of falling into the groups they despise and fear below them. It is evident in extreme form in the 'Beltway' community in Chicago studied by Maria Kefalas (Kefalas, 2003). This consisted of white upper working-class and lower middle-class residents who regarded themselves as honest, self-disciplined, self-reliant, hard-working people, taking pride in their houses, gardens and community. They saw and attempted to construct themselves in opposition to those poorer white and black residents of the inner city who they saw as feckless, ill-disciplined, immoral and involved in gangs and drug culture. On the face of it, this fits comfortably with sociology's interest in social differentiation, and might be taken to illustrate the way in which moral dispositions and norms vary according to social position.

However, first it is important to note that while the possession of the claimed virtues is held to be localized, the valued norms themselves are assumed to be *universally* applicable.¹³ The working class do not say down-to-earthness is good only for their own class, the middle classes do not say cosmopolitanism is only a virtue in the middle classes. They claim that these things are good for everyone, only that they have them while their others unfortunately lack them. If the values were not believed to be universally applicable, the others could hardly be disparaged for allegedly failing to live up to them. Second, in virtue of this assumed universalism, moral boundary drawing is *open to falsification*. This was dramatically illustrated in the Beltway case, when two teenage girls were murdered. The trauma of this event for the community was greatly compounded by the discovery that their killers were not, as they instantly assumed, black gang members from the inner city, but two white teenage boys from Beltway itself. One was the son of a police officer, the other the son of a fire fighter – archetypal respectable working class occupations – and both were members of a local, Beltway gang. As Kefalas records, the residents went to considerable lengths to resist this threat to their identity, but the origin of the murderers was undeniable.

Shame

Shame is a particularly powerful emotion and one that is often associated with class (Skeggs, 1997). While it is deeply social in that it is a response to the imagined or actual views of others, it is also a particularly private, reflexive emotion, in that it primarily involves an evaluation of the self by the self.¹⁴ It is often regarded in sociology as an emotion which tends to produce conformity and social order (Barbalet, 2001; Scheff, 1990). Shame is evoked by failure of an

individual or group to live according to their values or commitments, especially ones concerning their relation to others and goods which others also value. It is commonly a response to the real or imagined contempt, derision or avoidance of real or imagined others, particularly those whose values are respected (Williams, 1993). To act in a shameful (or contemptible) way is to invite such contempt, including self-contempt. It may be prompted by inaction as well as action, by lack as well as wrong-doing. Particularly where it derives from lack rather than specific acts, shame may be a largely unarticulated feeling existing below the threshold of awareness – one that is difficult ‘to get in touch with’ – yet still capable of blighting one’s life.

Like all emotions, shame is *about* something: it assumes referents in terms of failings, actual or imagined. Also like other emotions, it is a fallible response in the sense that it can be unwarranted or mistaken.¹⁵ The person who through no fault of their own has a despised body shape or who cannot afford fashionable clothing, has done nothing shameful, but might still feel shame. Equally, the complementary feeling of contempt may be unwarranted, if it is unrelated to any shameful or contemptible behaviour for which the despised can reasonably be held responsible. This is the case with class contempt.¹⁶

Shame is in some ways the opposite of self-respect and pride, but they are also related. To experience shame is to feel inadequate, lacking in worth, and perhaps lacking in dignity and integrity. Self-respect derives from a feeling that one is living a worthwhile life and a confidence in one’s ability to do what one considers worthwhile. Thus, the chief sources of self-respect among the American working-class men interviewed by Lamont derived from their self-discipline, their ability to work hard, provide for and protect their families, and maintain their values in an insecure environment (Lamont, 2000). Although deeply private, self-respect is also an inescapably social emotion: it’s impossible for us to maintain the conviction that how we live and what we do is worthwhile if there are no others who think so (Rawls, 1971: 440–1).

It is therefore clear that, as the psychologist Sylvan Tomkins argued, the negative feeling of shame is dependent on a positive valuation of the behaviours, ideals or principles in question (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 136ff; see also Nussbaum, 2001: 196; Probyn, 2004). It is only if we have certain expectations of ourselves and our society that we can be shamed. This central feature of shame is commonly overlooked by sociological accounts whose disciplinary inclination to emphasize external social influence leads them to treat shame as merely the product of external disapproval (e.g. Scheff, 1990). To fail to act or live in a way which one does not care about need not provoke shame. To be treated with contempt by others for whose values one has no respect might induce sadness and anger but it does not induce shame. The worst kind of disrespect, the kind that is most likely to make one feel shame, is that which comes from those whose values and judgements one most respects. Hence, the stronger the commonality of values, the greater the possibilities for shaming. Class inequalities mean that the ‘social bases of respect’ in terms of access to valued ways of living are unequally distributed, and therefore that shame is

likely to be endemic to the experience of class. If there were not at least partial cross-class agreement on the valuation of ways of life and behaviour, there would be little reason for class-related shame, or concern about respectability.

The shame response is an important mechanism in the production of social order, indeed it is hard to imagine how there could be much social order without it, for through it people internalize expectations, norms and ideals, and discipline and punish themselves. The capacity for shame is one of the mechanisms by which people are ensnared by cultural discourses and norms, in all their diversity,¹⁷ although the metaphor of being ensnared is also too passive, for the need for recognition, whose pursuit always carries the risk of failing and being shamed, drives us to seek out ways of acting virtuously from among the many possibilities. All this is not to deny the common presence of power in social settings involving shame, but on their own, concepts of power, whether in capillary or arterial form, cannot explain the internalized normative force and selectivity of shame responses (Foucault, 1977). In this context, we might note that, although not directly acknowledged by Bourdieu, a capacity for shame is a necessary but rarely acknowledged condition for symbolic domination, indeed the latter is scarcely intelligible independently of this emotion.

However, shame is not merely an emotion that produces social conformity, for sometimes it may promote *resistance*. Those who are fervently anti-racist, for example, may speak out against racism in situations where doing so might invite contempt. If we had no normative commitments, then it is hard to see why we would ever want to resist and how we would ever be shamed, because we would simply 'go with the flow', accepting whatever the pressures of the moment required. However, the anti-racist who keeps silent when others make racist remarks is likely to feel shame for conforming instead of resisting. Shame can therefore produce either conformity or resistance, but we cannot make sense of this if we reduce it to no more than a product of fear of external disapproval.

When faced with conditions that are shaming because they give people little alternative but to live in ways they do not consider acceptable, there is always a temptation to reconsider the valuations giving rise to the shame, de-valuing what others value, and valuing what others despise. To the extent that the working class refuse what they are refused, as Bourdieu put it, they avoid the shame that accompanies lack, indeed this may be a motive for their refusal, though of course this involves refusing what may be valuable, and hence increasing their others' disdain for them (Bourdieu, 1984). By contrast, the desire to be respectable and recognized as such is a shame response dependent on some degree of positive feeling towards what is lacked (Skeggs, 1997).

Shame in response to inequalities is likely to be the stronger where actors have individualistic explanations of inequalities and where there are hegemonic norms rather than disputed ones. Thus the more that working-class parents are ambitious for their children and the more they accept dominant values regarding education, the more vulnerable they become to shame if the school system rejects them.¹⁸ The black working-class youths studied by Jay Macleod, who

believed in 'the American dream' of individual responsibility for one's own fortune, were more vulnerable to shame than their white counterparts who rejected it (Macleod, 1995). Similarly, the French working men studied by Lamont were less likely to feel shame than their US counterparts because they had a more structural and politicized understanding of class (Lamont, 2000).

Recognition and Distribution, Internal and External Goods

If we interpret recognition broadly as being about recognizing someone's moral worth as a person, rather than as a person of a particular identity, as has recently been common in discussions about the politics of recognition, then we can identify certain relations between recognition and distribution. First, in order to justify any particular moral-political stance on economic distribution, we ultimately have to appeal to matters of recognition; in the case of an egalitarian politics of distribution, a recognition of all as of equal moral worth, equally needy, equally deserving (with appropriate adjustments for unavoidable and benign forms of difference) (Honneth, 1995). But there is also a relation in the opposite direction, from recognition to distribution, for recognition is a matter of deeds as well as words. If I were Prime Minister and told voters that my government viewed everyone as of equal worth, but then presided over a distribution of basic resources to those same people that was significantly unequal, they would be justified in saying that my fine words were contradicted by my deeds (Fraser, 1999; Yar, 2001). In this way recognition and distribution can be mutually supportive or capable of contradicting one another.

In practice, economic distribution may bear little or no relation to moral worth or other forms of merit, although the rich may try to claim that they deserve their wealth, thus implying that unequal economic distribution follows proper recognition of unequal worth. A critic might reply that being wealthy does not indicate that one is a better person, and reject the assumption that economic worth is a measure of moral worth, and hence that economic distribution is a measure of the recognition one deserves. Such an objection is ambiguous for it could be construed either as claiming that equal worth does not require confirmation by equal distribution of income or wealth, or that it does indeed deserve and require just that. New Labour would presumably deny that economic inequalities reflected different judgements of the moral worth of people, and argue a) that inequalities are needed to give the price incentives allegedly required by a dynamic economy, and b) that success should be rewarded. Interestingly, Hayek, the leading neoliberal theorist, argued that market outcomes were as much a product of luck (e.g. due to differences in scarcity) as the merits of market actors (Hayek, 1960). (In fact he worried about whether young people should be told this, lest it de-motivated them!) So instead of appealing, implausibly, to the alleged meritocratic character of the capitalist

social order, one could say, like Hayek, that economic distribution is largely a matter of luck, for which no-one is responsible.¹⁹

This acknowledgement of moral luck is absent in a common false assumption that lies behind many lay reactions to class, namely 'the belief in a just world' (Lerner, 1980). This is a belief in the 'moral well-orderedness' of the world, so that good intentions straightforwardly produce good actions with good effects, which in turn proportionately reward the actor, 'giving them their due'. Hence, the extent to which individuals' lives go well or badly is believed to be a simple reflection of their virtues and vices. It refuses to acknowledge the contingency and moral luck which disrupt such relations arbitrarily. Many things happen to us – good or bad – which we do not deserve, and they can not only influence specific outcomes of our actions but shape the kind of people we become: they happen regardless, driven by forces which have nothing to do with justice or human well-being (Nussbaum, 1986; Smith, 1984[1759]). While philosophers tend to portray these as random contingencies impacting on individuals and coming from nowhere in particular, they also include the largely unintended but systematic effects of major social structures such as those of capitalism and patriarchy. Under capitalism inequalities are not merely effects of transhistorical moral luck, or indeed of the lottery of the market, but of legally enforced unequal property rights. In other words, it is possible to identify structural features of society that add to the lack of moral well-orderedness of the world, and do so not merely randomly but systematically and recurrently, so that the goods and bads tend to fall repeatedly on the same people, creating continuities in the reproduction of class and geographical inequalities.

The world always seems fairer to the lucky, but even the unlucky may prefer to avoid the pain of resentment by being generous and saying things like 'if they've earned it, they deserve it' about the rich (passing over the ambiguity of 'earned', which can mean either 'worked for and deserved something', or simply 'received payment'). Ironically, the belief in a just world motivates actors both to be moral and to blame the unfortunate and disregard injustice, by attributing disadvantage to personal failure. Thus welfare benefits for the unemployed are unpopular with many US citizens because they believe in the particular version of the idea of a just world embodied in 'the American dream' (Gilens, 1999; see also Kefalas, 2003; Lamont, 2000; Macleod, 1995).

We can take the analysis of class and recognition further by using two distinctions. Charles Taylor distinguishes between two kinds of recognition: a) unconditional, where it is given to people by virtue of their humanity, equal worth, equal neediness, or more concretely by virtue of their standing as citizens, b) and conditional, where it is dependent on their behaviour, character and achievements. Conditional recognition might be reflected in expressions of approval or status, envy or prestige, or in terms of payments of money (Taylor, 1992). Alasdair MacIntyre calls these 'external goods' (MacIntyre, 1981). These are distinguished from 'internal goods', which are the satisfactions, achievements, and skills that might be gained through involvement in a

'practice', be it a kind of work or sport or art. Roughly speaking, other things being equal, practices tend to be satisfying partly in relation to their complexity, and their scope for the development of skills. Where we excel in such practices we may also gain external goods in recognition of our achievements. MacIntyre accepts that people need external goods but argues that internal goods can be gained and enjoyed even in the absence of related external goods.²⁰ However, external goods without corresponding internal goods are empty. We want not merely recognition but to have done things that deserve it and if we get it without having done anything that warrants it then not only might we feel guilty (and perhaps that the recognition is insincere and patronizing) but we have missed out on the internal goods which they are supposed to acknowledge. Assurances from the Right that class does not exist because everyone is supposedly recognized as being of equal worth or value have this spurious character.

MacIntyre's definition of practices is rather restrictive and arguably elitist, but it could be stretched to a wider range of activities and indeed to relationships such as those of parenting, which also have their own internal goods, and for which 'good-enough' performance can bring recognition. In allowing for conditional as well as unconditional recognition, we can make a connection to the struggles of the social field as being both a competition for internal and external goods, and a struggle over the definition of internal goods, or more generally over what is worthy of esteem. While Bourdieu rightly emphasizes such struggles over definitions of goods, his concept of capitals conflates internal and external goods, and therefore obscures their different sources and normative structure (Bourdieu, 1984; Sayer, 1999, 2005). Life politics are not only about the struggle for power and esteem but over the nature of internal goods (just what is valuable and important?) and who should have access to them and hence to the distribution of external goods (praise, esteem, money) in response to those who achieve them. In practice, access to money is largely a function of power, and even where money is a reward or payment for the achievement of internal goods, it has to be remembered that access to the practices embodying those internal goods is highly unequal in morally arbitrary ways, particularly with respect to gender, class and 'race'. However, from a normative point of view, external goods should be deserved and hence related to qualities that people actually have, and as Bourdieu and Weber noted, one of the striking things about the powerful is that they usually try to present their dominance as legitimate and merited (in terms of achieved internal goods and other qualities) even though they might still be able to maintain their power without doing so.

In order to understand the struggles of the social field we therefore have to go beyond the matter of distribution and recognition to the question of recognition for what? What is (held to be) worthy of recognition and reward through distribution? They are not simply about power per se: the dominant would hardly be dominant if they were not able to monopolize the most valued goods, which gave them advantages over those who lacked them. Dominant values are not necessarily identical to the values of the dominant. Others may share them,

and not necessarily because they have been conditioned into believing them, as a sociologically reductionist iconoclasm would suggest, but because they probably rightly judge them to be important for their well-being.

Here we can make a connection back to shame, for shame may be engendered by invidious comparison with others who have been done better than ourselves in competition for goods which we value, such as educational achievements (Tomkins in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 161). Within the educational systems of class societies, the shaming of those who fail is a structurally generated effect, as Bourdieu's extensive research on such systems demonstrates, even though it is felt as an individual failure (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996). Those who believe that society is basically meritocratic are most vulnerable to shame.

Thus, one of the most important features of class inequalities is that they present people with unequal bases for respect, not just by being objects of *unwarranted* respect or disdain, but as having unequal access to the practices and goods that allow them warranted respect or conditional recognition. Being able to participate in practices and such relationships and gain their internal goods if one so wishes is crucial for well-being, though access to them differs radically across the key social divisions of gender, class and 'race' and across others too. They also figure prominently in the kinds of things that bring external goods of conditional recognition. To get more equality of recognition we need not merely a different view of and way of behaving towards class others but more equality of access to the social bases of respect and self-respect, and being able to participate in such practices and relationships is crucial.

Incidentally, in this respect, class is significantly different from gender and 'race'. Whereas sexism and racism are primarily produced by 'identity-sensitive' behaviour and can hence be reduced by people changing their attitudes and behaviour towards others, class inequalities need a great deal more than an elimination of class contempt to erode, for they can be produced by identity-indifferent mechanisms of capitalism, such as the unintended effects of changes in consumer spending on workers: they need a redistribution of resources.²¹ It is easy for the rich to 'recognize' their others as equal, but giving up their economic advantages is quite another matter. Thus, as Nancy Fraser argues, an appropriate slogan would be 'no recognition without redistribution' (Fraser and Naples, 2004).

Conclusion

I have tried to further understanding of class by emphasizing the moral dimensions of how it is experienced. People are evaluative beings. We need to take the normative rationales implicit in the way people value each other seriously, as evaluations of themselves and others and of what enables flourishing or suffering, involving implicit ideas about the good, and not simply as social facts about their holders. These moral beliefs and standards are generally assumed by

actors to be universally-applicable. Such rationales may be flawed, as we saw in the case of the belief in a just world, and therefore they must be viewed critically, but they can also reveal much about people's situations. Here certain ideas from moral philosophy, including a broadly cognitivist view of emotions such as shame, and of recognition and internal and external goods, can help illuminate lay normativity, for they are based on attempts to understand this from the standpoint of actors rather than spectators, as matters of justification rather than external explanation. Recognition of others is partly conditional upon behaviour and achievements, and these depend on access to valued goods and practices. Class contempt and moral boundary drawing exacerbate the effects of class, but distributional inequalities in access to valued practices and goods in any case render equality of conditional recognition impossible.

Notes

- 1 This article builds upon ideas introduced in Sayer (2005).
- 2 Feminist scholarship is a partial exception.
- 3 A 'positive' approach is, of course, not necessarily positivist.
- 4 For an insightful analysis of this modern shift from justification to external explanation and the alienation of social science from the actor's point of view see Manent (1998).
- 5 Any object can be externally culturally *construed* in various ways, but this is different from being internally restructured by cultural constructions.
- 6 There are, of course, many qualifications to be made to this simple claim, particularly regarding the narrative character of emotions and the influence of significant events in early life on them (Nussbaum, 2001).
- 7 This does not necessarily mean it is innate; it could still be a product of socialization.
- 8 It is interesting that we would have doubts about the moral character of someone who could not respond morally to everyday events without first deliberating on them.
- 9 This lay 'conception' of the good is likely to be much less examined than a philosophical conception of the good, and consist mainly of taken for granted cultural assumptions.
- 10 However, a careful inspection of Bourdieu's data shows that many of the relationships are quite weak.
- 11 Of course the distinction between aesthetics and ethics is sometimes fuzzy; for example where modes of dress are seen as indicators of respect for others.
- 12 Though obviously fallible, moral imagination is a crucial pre-requisite for many kinds of social interaction, and it can include recognition of difference as well as similarity.
- 13 This does not mean that they are universally-*held*. Thanks to a referee for pointing this out.
- 14 'Shame is the most reflexive of the affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost' (Tomkins in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 136).

- 15 This is less obvious than in the case of its opposite, pride, instances of which are often described as 'false'.
- 16 Following the work of Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) and Cheshire Calhoun (2003), I argue elsewhere that there are also more chronic forms of class-related shame that involve a feeling of inadequacy even in the absence of specific failures (Sayer, 2005).
- 17 In this way, far from contradicting this kind of universalism, cultural variety actually presupposes it (Collier, 2003).
- 18 This is borne out by Diane Reay's research on working and middle-class mothers' experience of putting their children through school (Reay, 1998) and also the experience of academics of working-class origin (Reay, 1997).
- 19 Hayek used this argument to refuse calls for redistribution, arguing that inequalities might be unfortunate for some, but there was no injustice in this respect, since no-one need have acted unjustly to bring it about.
- 20 This was also Smith's view (Smith, 1984[1759]).
- 21 I acknowledge that identity-sensitive mechanisms of class contempt, racism, sexism, and so on, can also help reproduce class inequalities but these are contingent rather than necessary conditions of the reproduction of classes in capitalism, for class could exist even in their absence (see Sayer, 2005: ch. 4).

References

- Archer, M.S. (2000) *Being Human*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barbalet, J.M. (2001) *Emotions, Social Theory and Social Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bartky, S.L. (1990) *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Class*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Calhoun, C. (2003) 'An Apology for Moral Shame', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 11(2): 1–20.
- Collier, A (2003) *In Defence of Objectivity*. London: Routledge.
- Coole, D. (1986) 'Is Class a Difference that Makes a Difference?', *Radical Philosophy* 77: 17–25.
- Dean, K. (2003) *Capitalism and Citizenship: The Impossible Partnership*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fraser, N. (1999) 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation', in L.J. Ray and A. Sayer (eds) *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*, pp. 53–75. London: Sage.
- Fraser, N. and N. Naples (2004) 'To Interpret the World and Change It: An Interview with Nancy Fraser', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29(4): 1102–24.

- Gilens, M. (1999) *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Hayek, F.A. (1960) *The Constitution of Liberty*. London: Routledge.
- Helm, B.W. (2001) *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation and the Nature of Value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Kefalas, M. (2003) *Working-Class Heroes: Protecting Home, Community and Nation in a Chicago Neighbourhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lamont, M. (1992) *Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Lamont, M. (2000) *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Imagination*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Harvard University Press.
- Lawler, S. (2000) *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects*. London: Routledge.
- Lerner, M.J. (1980) *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion*. New York: Plenum Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1981) *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- Macleod, J. (1995) *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low Income Neighbourhood*, 2nd edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Manent, P. (1998) *The City of Man*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2000) *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2001) *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Probyn, E. (2004) 'Everyday Shame', *Cultural Studies* 18(2/3): 328–49.
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reay, D. (1997) 'The Double-bind of the "Working Class" Feminist Academic: The Success of Failure or the Failure of Success', in P. Mahoney and C. Zmroczek (eds) *Class Matters: Working-Class Women's Perspectives on Social Class*, pp. 18–29. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Reay, D. (1998) *Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling*. London: University College London.
- Savage, M., G. Bagnall and B. Longhurst (2001) 'Ordinary, Ambivalent and Defensive: Class Differentiation in the Northwest of England', *Sociology* 35(4): 875–92.
- Sayer, A. (1999) 'Bourdieu, Smith and Disinterested Judgement', *The Sociological Review* 47(3): 403–31.
- Sayer, A. (2002) "'What are You Worth?": Why Class is an Embarrassing Subject', *Sociological Research Online* 7(3), URL: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/3/sayer.html>
- Sayer, A. (2005) *The Moral Significance of Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheff, T.J. (1990) *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotions and Social Structure*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

- Sedgwick, E.K. and A. Frank (eds) (1995) *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage.
- Skeggs, B. (2004) *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, A. (1984[1759]) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.
- Southerton, D.K. (2002) 'Boundaries of "Us" and "Them": Class, Mobility and Identification in a New Town', *Sociology* 36(1): 171–93.
- Taylor, C. (1992) 'The Politics of Recognition', in A. Gutmann (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princetown, NJ: Princetown University Press.
- Williams, B. (1993) *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Yar, M. (2001) 'Beyond Nancy Fraser's "Perspectival Dualism"', *Economy and Society* 30(3): 288–303.

Andrew Sayer

Is Professor of Social Theory and Political Economy in the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University. His books include *Realism and Social Science* (Sage, 2000) and *The Moral Significance of Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). He currently holds an ESRC fellowship to work on the moral dimension of social life, particularly with regard to economic relationships or 'moral economy', and on lay normativity generally.

Address: Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YD, UK.

E-mail: a.sayer@lancaster.ac.uk