

Economists and the Economic Order

The Field of Economists and the Field of Power in France

Frédéric Lebaron

Abstract

Economic beliefs play a central role in the social construction of economic reality. It is necessary to include into the program of a new economic sociology the active contribution of the main « producers of economic beliefs », namely the economists. The role of economists in the reproduction of the social order can, to a certain extent, be described as the function of a central bank of economic beliefs. Economists are the producers of economic beliefs that are received, interpreted, used by various kinds of social actors in everyday life. In a situation of crisis like the one the French government faced in December 1995, it seems more and more obvious that they are becoming the ultimate reference, the « lender of last resort », for most contemporary social actors - economic leaders, technocrats, politicians, unionists, intellectuals, etc. To understand this particular position, one needs to consider economists as members of a specific social field, which has its own laws, regularities and structure. The social characteristics (esp. the distribution of their kinds of capital, and the relative *dispositions* of economists) define their positions in this social space. It is then necessary to determine the relative autonomy of this field, its interdependence with other social spaces (for example the field of enterprises, the bureaucratic, political and media fields, etc.).

The main hypothesis developed here is the idea that the field of economists is less autonomous than it is usually thought to be, at least by many economists, and that its structure is very similar to that of the field of power (and among others, the opposition between economic and intellectual powers). In the general interdependence and homologies between social fields, the logic of the field of economists is a key contribution to the production of the symbolic economic order. The word « science » applied to economics refers not only to an epistemological issue but also to the symbolic aspect of the order we refer to when we talk about « economic reality », « economic argument, « economic constraints », etc.

Keywords : autonomy, economic beliefs, field of power, homology, multiple correspondance analysis, scientific field, scientific capital.

Economic beliefs play a central role in the social construction of economic reality (see, for example, Callon (ed.), 1998, Steiner, 1999). It is necessary to include into the program of a new economic sociology the active contribution of the main « producers of economic beliefs », namely the economists. The role of economists in the reproduction of the social order can, to a certain extent, be described as the function of a central bank of economic beliefs. Economists are the ultimate producers of economic beliefs that are received, interpreted, used by various kinds of social actors in everyday life. In a situation of crisis like the one the French government faced in December 1995, it seems more and more obvious that they are becoming the ultimate reference, the « lender of last resort », for most contemporary social actors - economic leaders, technocrats, politicians, unionists, intellectuals, etc. To understand this particular position, one needs to consider economists as members of a specific social field, which has its own laws, regularities and structure. The social characteristics (esp. the distribution of their kinds of capital, and the relative *dispositions* of economists) define their positions in this social space. It is then necessary to determine the relative autonomy of this field, its interdependence with other social spaces (for example the field of enterprises, the bureaucratic, political and media fields, etc.).

The social domination of economists

As in many countries, economists occupy nowadays a central position in the French public life. One could of course argue that there is nothing new about this. The period between the 16th and 18th century witnessed the appearance of physiocrats and the social rise of the producers of economic discourse (Perrot, 1992). But since the beginning of the 20th century, several studies have shown that their influence is growing in many sectors of the social life (for example Fourquet, 1980, Dulong, 1998). As in many countries, their number has been growing since the beginning of the century, and they are expanding in different sectors (universities, research centres, administration, banks and other big organisations). With the growth of an « economic administration » following World War Two, new positions have been created in the administration, and also, with the development of world finance since the 1970s, in banks and in the financial markets; and the number of economic diplomas delivered increases fast (Lebaron, 1996). Economists participate increasingly to debates within political parties, and are present in the press and the media (Jobert, Théret, 1994), etc. In the 1980s-1990s, this acceleration became even more visible. In the press, economic journalists who have become more and more influential and « professionalized » (Duval, 2000), refer more and more to the economists

specialized in the study of the overall economic climate or macroeconomists and to « economic science » to interpret business cycles, financial evolutions, the « new economy » and, of course, the traditional macroeconomic indicators (which had become, especially after World War Two, the quasi-monopoly of state macro-econometricians, Fourquet, 1980, Desrosières, 1993) and social and economic policy debates. Central banks' leaders, at the centre of political and economic lives, are more and more considered as independent economic experts whose monetary decisions and official declarations inspired by economics have direct effects on the economic dynamics. Economists often publish chronicles or articles in daily newspapers, like *Libération*, *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*, and attend programs on TV (“The News Channel”, “La Chaîne de l'information”), or on the radio (Radio Classique, France Info, etc.). In 1993, an economic newsmagazine, “The New Economist” (“*Le nouvel économiste*”) created a prize to reward the « best economist of the year » (with a selection committee composed of academic, administration and business economists) as is now the case in many countries. During the social crisis of December 1995, economists were very much involved in the struggles concerning the economic and social policies chosen by the government (especially the « plan Juppé », a governmental global scheme which was supposed to drastically reduce public expenses in the health sector and, at the same time, to « reform » public services and state pensions) and participated, along with intellectuals and experts, in the writing of different petitions supporting the government or the workers, or even promoting other political choices : at least five petitions were signed by economists, who were the most involved among social scientists (Duval et al., 1998). In 1997, a « council for economic analysis » (« conseil d'analyse économique ») was created by the Prime Minister (following the idea of an economic councillor inspired by the American Council of economic advisers) to help him make economic decisions, and the most famous French economists were asked to take part in it. Since then, they have published several books contributing to the decision making process, and have helped defining the outline of legitimate debates, for example about working hours, « inequalities and social exclusion », etc. More generally, economists are very often asked to answer strategic questions as regards the possibility of implementing a « Tobin Tax » and regulating the financial markets, or the way to finance the pensions in the future, the effects of a law reducing the weekly working hours, etc. The problems on the political agenda are actually more and more defined by economists and formulated in economic terms, especially of course through the role of the European institutions (Jobert, Théret, 1994) and international organisations (International Monetary Fund, World Bank...). Last but not least, several well-known « professional Economists » have followed a tradition of political commitment - which was accelerated after the nomination as Prime Minister of the « best economist in France » by -and according to- Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1976 - and many have been given responsibilities in governments. The main theoretician of the organisation of private enterprises, the “Movement of French

Enterprises" (Mouvement des entreprises de France, Medef), is also a former academic economist (specialized in wealth and saving); this organisation has recently proposed a « refoundation » ("refondation") of all the social relations in France based on a « radical conservative » economic reasoning. Even in the new left political movements (like for example the NGO « ATTAC », struggling for the "Tobin Tax"), economists are at the centre of the production of alternative discourses. To sum up, there seems to be in France a growing concentration of the production of legitimate discourse in the hands of the specialists of this discipline known as « economics ».

What is an economist?

To understand this process, it is first necessary to interpret the social issues surrounding the notions of « economist » and « economic profession » (Caro, 1983, Coats, 1993). This leads to the question regarding the borders of the field, which is both a scientific practical question (especially for any scholar using statistics - which population, which sample? -) and a theoretical one: who is *in* the field and who is *not*? Even more importantly, we must define what it means to be in or out of this particular sphere of activity? Are some agents more important than others to understand how the field works? It is necessary here to distinguish between the « official » borders of a group (which can be determined by the juridical rules, the administrative arrangements, or the existence of a so-called « profession ») and the real *sociological* limits of the field (Bourdieu, 1992). *Sociological* limits depend not only on existing formal barriers but, more generally, on the investment of social agents in a specific game (*ibid*). A field relies on an *illusio*, that is to say on a sense of the game and an interest to take part in it. One of the differences between the notion of field and the notion of « profession » is that, in the latter case, the existing social and institutional frontiers are often taken for granted. We believe however, that the conflicts related to the definition of the group and of its frontiers should be considered as essential issues because they are themselves matters of struggles.

In economics, as in other disciplines, the notion of « profession » is often used as a rhetorical way to define the group and to exclude amateurs or dissenters (Heilbron, 1984) but this doesn't really work in many sectors of the field where no formal definition has been established and where the controls over practices and titles remain weak (Whitley, 1984, Klamer, Colander, 1990). The field is not only composed of academic economists, as is often claimed because of the fact that they are supposed to possess the « pure » economic knowledge by the academic institutions. Among them, the "core" is relatively small, being composed of academics who publish in very specific journals like *Econometrica*, the *Journal of Economic Theory*, etc., and who share specific values, habits, technical skills, theoretical faith, etc. The historical definitions of « economics » and « economists » can, in fact, be considered as

the most important issues at stake in the struggle because they refer to different sources of authority, of prestige and social power. They depend on the country and the period of observation (Fourcade-Gourinchas, 1998). This struggle is closely linked to another similar one in which the question is: who are the « real » economists and how it is possible to find a clear definition of the term and evaluate the associated skills? The common use of the quotations in scientific journals by academic economists seems to be related to a problem of scientific identity which is attempted to be solved through standardisation, formalisation, scientometrics.

Ethnographic observations reveal constant interactions in the field as regards the criteria which makes it possible to say that « he (or she) is an (a real) economist ». A young economist from the ministry of finance (working at the “Forecast Direction” –“Direction de la Prévision”, as a « chargé de mission ») once gave a rather good definition: « *like everyone, I call economists the people who look like the persons working around me as economists* » (economist, chargé de mission at the Forecast Direction, Ministry of Finance, 1994). Other members of the same institution (esp. « administrateurs de l’Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, INSEE »), who, in this case, are opposed to « énarques », that is to say student at the Ecole nationale d’administration-ENA (Théret, Jobert, 1994) believed that the name « economist » should not be attributed to most of the members of the “Council of Monetary Policy of the Banque de France” (“Conseil de la politique monétaire de la Banque de France”), arguing that they had no qualifications in the field of economics. During the presidential election campaign in 1995, a writer, Paul-Loup Sulitzer, presented himself on TV as an « economist », in spite of the fact that he has no formal qualifications as an economist (he only wrote stories about businessmen). Intense discussions are taking place in the “National Council of Universities” (“Conseil national des universités”), which controls academic careers) and in the “National Centre for Scientific Research” (CNRS, which organises most of the public researchers careers) to determine the degree of scientific legitimacy of economic journals.

Is it possible to isolate a French sub-field, or is it a mistake to do so considering the context of internationalisation of economics, through the academic internationalisation and the growing importance of transnational organisations (public, private, and non-profit organisations)? Economists themselves give some arguments for this autonomization in their methodological and professional discussions about the differences between European and American economics (Frey, Eichenberger, 1992): for many scholars, it seems obvious that European national « professions » still have many institutional national specificities which makes them different from the American economic profession, which is always used as a point of comparison and, often, as a universal model. If a big part of economic research now appears to be « internationalised », as Coats and other scholars show (Coats ed., 1997), it is produced by very specific kinds of economists, like the few ones who write articles in the most prestigious

journals, or the different importers of American economic policy technologies in business or administration, the « technopols » (Dezalay, Garth, 1998). If we take into account the whole national field, we can see that the political and the media spheres, but also universities, work as national sources of prestige and specific authority for some economists. For example, the “Council for economic analysis” or even the “National Council of Universities” can be described as national instances of consecration. Although some economists seem prestigious nationally and internationally, others are only visible nationally. But it doesn’t mean at all that they are less *efficient* in the field.

Autonomy and heteronomy

There is no simple way to determine if a field, especially a scientific field (Bourdieu, 1976) is more or less dependant on other fields, and if they are, on which ones (Bourdieu, 1992). The best answers to this question can probably be found in the various empirical arguments which are given for or against the hypothesis of a weak (resp. a strong) independence. For many economists and methodologists, referring to Popper and the epistemological tradition, economics seems to be a very autonomous scientific field. It uses a very technical and esoteric language, very distant from ordinary perception. It possesses its own norms, its criteria of evaluation, its own system of symbolic gratification with the Nobel Prize as the ultimate reward and various other intermediary rewards (John Bates Clark Medal, etc.). It seems to be scientifically integrated and unified, as shown by the homogeneity of courses in economics with the hegemony of microeconomics, macroeconomics and econometrics and the apparently universal use of the same textbooks, the same reference articles, etc. All those criteria seem to define a very autonomous field. The domination of internal evaluation seems to have been the result of a historical process of autonomization comparable to what has occurred in physics and biology since the 16th century (for example Shapin, Shaffer, 1993, and for a synthesis Gingras et al., 2000). In 1994, a congress was organised in France by academic economists to discuss the following question: « is economics becoming a *hard* science? » (d’Autume, Cartelier, 1995). Some congressists (especially the ones who score the highest at scientometrics) answered « yes »; there seems to be a weak consensus about the social representation of a quasi-natural science. Only a few prestigious economists have expressed some scepticism. Edmond Malinvaud asked in 1996 « why don’t economists make any discovery » (Malinvaud, 1996).

Empirical investigations complicate the issue. First of all, it is easy to contest the domination of internal criteria in the field of economists. The creation in France of the *Nouvel Economiste* prize, the growing visibility of economists as journalists, the birth of the Council for economic analysis are examples of intrusions inside the field of external (media, political) sources of evaluation, which are

getting more and more common and contribute to blur the frontier between the « inside » and the « outside » of the field. Even the « Nobel Prize » was created by a central bank, which is a committed economic actor (See for instance, for a sociological study about the recipients of the Economics Nobel Prize, Lebaron, 2000). A great part of the funds which make it possible to develop research projects are provided by institutions which can benefit from the promotion of certain visions of the economy. The idea that this field is a very autonomous social space is produced by academics recruited and evaluated by their peers, and also by researchers publishing in journals according to formal criteria of evaluation. It ignores the presence within the field of other kinds of economists, working in enterprises or in the administration, who are recruited and evaluated through very different mechanisms: competitive examination, personal co-optation by managers, political conformity, etc. The heterogeneity of the field provides an argument in favour of those who think that the field is heteronomous: very different sources of symbolic capitals compete with one another. For example, a business economist once refused to attend a congress of industrial economics where only academics were invited. The mathematical economists are often criticised by other economists for not being interested in real economic problems but merely in formal puzzles disqualified as « mathematics ».

Another kind of argument, linked to the structural heterogeneity of the field, refers to the level of dissenting scientific points of view inside the field (Bobe, Etchegoyen, 1981, Evans, 1997, etc.). We can consider this as another empirical indicator of scientific integration and autonomy. Since the beginning of the 1980s, many surveys, in different countries, on the degree of consensus among economists, in the US, Great-Britain or France, show that dissenting points of view are very strong as far as economic policies are concerned, and even as far as theories and facts are concerned (for example Frey, Eichenberger, 1992, Fuchs, Krueger, Porterba, 1998).

The data

There are complementary methods to describe the structure of a field. Ethnographic observations help discover different kinds of opposition and differentiations. They make it possible to build the appropriate variables which can be used, in turn, for data analysis (« structured data analysis »). Data analysis then allows to come back to ethnographic observations with a map of the field. The structure of the field is approached through data analysis and ethnographic observations, but this apparently « abstract » construction is a way to generate new systematic observations. In the study of economists, three types of variables were built for this purpose : social (or socio-demographic) characteristics, professional and field position variables and trajectory variables. The hypothesis in this case is that some of the important factors of the structure are to be found in the various social characteristics, in the positions in the field and the trajectory before and after the entrance in the field : to sum up, all the social space characteristics which can be both general and determined directly by the field itself.

In a first global statistical inquiry in this field (Lebaron, 1997, Lebaron, 2000), different types of « economists » are used to build a representative sample of the *efficient* agents in the field : economic researcher and academic economists, administration economists and business economists (among whom one can include some consultants with economic skills). It excludes practitioners –non-economist- who work in the economic sphere (in enterprises), in politics, administration or business (for example as ministers of finance or as managers of big insurance company, unless they are also members of one of the three categories above, which happens to be the case for some of them), but also economic journalists and even some of the writers who publish books about economy without being « economists » as such. They are not involved in the same game and even if they produce economic discourse as politicians, unionists or managers do, and have some economic skills, it does not make them « economists ». Their skills are not recognised by the field as the skills of an

economist. But of course, this view can be argued, because, depending on their position in the field, outsiders are not defined in the same way. A selection of 220 active individuals was made thanks to different sources like annual books from different economic associations or « science societies », the *Who's who in France*, the *Who's who in economics*, guides (like « Le guide du pouvoir »...), diverse directories from the ministry of education (for the academics) or from the administration (for the administration economists). Economists were asked to write lists of who they thought were the « main economists » - of course those lists vary according to the position in the field, in a sort of circular continuous process, which goes on even (may be especially) after the publication of the article. Combining these different sources, the « selection » has specific though not arbitrary properties : Parisians (born or resident), men, scholars from the most prestigious « grandes écoles » (scientific schools : Polytechnique, Ecole Nationale de la Statistique et de l'Administration Economique, Ecole des Ponts ; schools of management : Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales ; administration schools : Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, other scientific diploma), members of the administration (Commissariat général du Plan, Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, Bank of France, etc) and business economists, economists actively involved in associations, in the political field and in the media, economists listed in the *Who's who* or in the *Bottin Mondain*, the most prestigious economists (in the scientific or in the media sector) are all over-represented.

The structure of the field of French economists in the middle of the 1990s

The description of the structure of the field can be carried out by determining the relative positions of economists, the sub-groups, the principles of opposition between them, etc. In the case of French economists, there are many presuppositions about its forms of differentiations, its organisation, its structure. One has to break from the scholastic vision of the field that describes the positions only through the membership to a school, or through a theoretical identity (for example: « he is specialized in the study of wages with rational expectation models »). Schools do exist - they are even at the centre of many strategies - but their very construction and foundation in the field have to be explained by referring to the positions economists occupy in the field.

A social hierarchy within the field of French economists opposes the ones with a large amount of overall scientific capital with the ones with a smaller one. The volume of all kinds of capital appears as the first source of differentiation, which is consistent with works about the social space as a whole (Bourdieu, 1979) and various other fields (for example Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu, 1989, Sapiro, 1996). On the one hand, we find the economists with higher social origins, living in Paris, working in Paris for example in the “National Centre for Scientific Research” or other public research institutions, the administration or certain universities, who have studied and who lecture in the « grandes écoles », who are related to the central bureaucracy, the national political field or the multinational companies. Some of them are members of the aristocracy or the « grande bourgeoisie ». We can find their names in the *Who's who*, or, even better, the *Bottin Mondain* (a directory of the fashionable and prestigious Parisian society). On the other hand, economists originate more often from the “petite bourgeoisie”, live and work in Province, have only worked for universities, even if they sometimes can be linked to the local economic or political demands. They tend to have a far more limited sphere of « influence », are implicated in less prestigious or powerful « social networks », etc. This opposition, which is also, to a certain extent, « geographical » (Paris/Province), generates a system of social distance: people from the

extreme points of this *continuum* have little chance of knowing each other, and even of meeting each other.

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Diagrams 1
and 2
(one page
each)

The Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA)

In Geometric data analysis in the sociological tradition associated to the work of Bourdieu, we have constituted a map of the field under study (Rouanet H., Ackerman W., Le Roux B., 2000). This analysis is based on the results of a MCA (see Rouanet, Le Roux, 1993), with 27 active variables and 75 modalities. Five headings of variables have been built and used as active variables in the MCA : social characteristics (with a total of 11 modalities), scholar trajectory and titles (22), professional position and trajectory (20), associative memberships (10), prestige (6). We interpret here the first three axis ($\lambda_1=0.133$, that is to say 7.49% of global variance and a corrected rate of 37.86%; $\lambda_2=0.113$, 6.38% of global variance and a corrected rate of 23.92% ; $\lambda_3=0.086$, 4.83% of global variance and a corrected rate of 9.81%).

The variables which contribute the most to the inertia of the first axis are : the academic position (0.185), Polytechnique (0.123), the formal qualifications in economics – diplomas (0.117), the place of residence (0.109), Ecole Nationale de la Statistique et de l'Administration Economique (ENSAE= (0.069), and link to the enterprises (0.061). On the side of high volume of the categories whose contributions are superior to 0.03 are : Polytechnique (0.096), no academic degree in economics (0.065),), ENSAE (0.057), residence in bourgeois districts of Paris (0.039), no academic position (0.033). On the other side, they are university in Province (0.063), residence in Province (0.062), agrégation de sciences économiques (0.35).

The variables which contribute the most to the inertia of the second axis are : links with the enterprises (0.107), academic position (0.106), administrative position (0.089), quotation in the Social science citation index (0.087), Who's who in France (0.068), academic qualifications in economics (0.061). On the side of economic and political powers, the categories whose contributions are superior to 0.03 are : studies at Institut d'études politiques (IEP) of Paris (0.048), lecturing at university of Paris IX-Dauphine (0.043), position in a bank or financial institution (0.043), position in an industrial or consulting company (0.043), member of « Cercle des économistes » (0.042), present in the *Who's who in France* (0.039), member of « Association nationale des docteurs en sciences économiques et en gestion » (ANDESE) (0.039), studied at Hautes études commerciales (HEC) (0.031). On the side of intellectual and technical powers, the categories whose contributions are superior to 0.03 are : more than 10 quotations in *SSCI* (0.067), no academic qualifications in economics (0.045), work at INSEE-DP (0.040), Polytechnique (0.037), ENSAE (0.033).

The variables which contribute the most to the inertia of the third axis are : academic position (0.155), membership to the Association Française de Science Economique (0.108), place of residence (0.095), academic training in the USA (0.084), academic qualifications in economics (0.072), political responsibilities (0.070). At the pole of exteriority from national academic and bureaucratic specificities, the categories whose contributions seem the more significant are : studied in the USA (0.073), not member of the AFSE (0.052), doctorate (PhD) in economics (0.040), CNRS (0.035), other academic qualifications in science (0.032), qualifications in management (0.031), national representative or politician (0.031), local representative or politician (0.031). At the pole of implication in national institutions, we find members of the AFSE (0.057), members of the Société d'économie politique (0.038), ENSAE (0.037), members of the leading committee of the AFSE (0.036), Banque de France and public financial institutions (0.031), links to a bank or financial institution (0.030).

The second opposition we can observe also organises the space of the dominant classes: it distinguishes political and economic powers from technical and intellectual powers: it differentiates economists according to the composition of the scientific capital they possess. On the one hand, there are economists whose authority lies on their own works and books, their research activities. These economists tend to be more often quoted in the Social science citation index, which can be used as an indicator of international scientific legitimacy. On the other hand, there are economists who have more direct links with the different forms of non-intellectual power: politics, enterprise, corporate organisations, think-tanks... These "mondains" economists are different from the other ones (who can be described as an « avant-garde »), inasmuch as they are less autonomous, more connected to external powers, less evaluated by their peers than by social demands.

A third opposition, revealed by MCA, refers more to the degree of involvement in national academic or bureaucratic institutions and, at the opposite, in the Anglo-Saxon (esp. American) world. It opposes agents who have studied in the United States and are either scientists in France or politicians with international backgrounds to agents who are more involved in the national scientific and intellectual life, being members of national associations such as the Association française de science économique or the Société d'économie politique.

This structure gives not only an objective basis for the description of positions in the field. It also makes it possible to understand the way in which scientific and political strategies are produced inside the field, and, especially the way in which economists create specific symbolic products, which depend on their positions in the field. It is a sort of matrix of different scientific and social practices, of lifestyles, opinions and scientific conceptions. The strong similarity of this structure with that of the field of power gives more weight to the hypothesis of a weak autonomy of the field. It also shows that this field is a place where any social source of differentiation can be translated into different economic hypothesis, points of view, etc. It shows it is difficult to study the world of economists without studying the economic world and vice versa.

Diagrams and software

The two diagrams reproduced below allow to visualize in the cloud of individuals :

- the space of positions with the projection on the first principal plan of the modality meanpoints corresponding to active modalities with « high » contributions. These contributions to the creation of one of the first two axis is higher than 2%.
- the space of position takings with the projection on the first principal plan of the structuring factors meanpoints : position taking in december 1995, specialisation, current political involvement.
- the cloud of individuals.

MCA was performed with the ADDAD software. The various post-factorial analysis and the resulting graphs have been performed with the EyeLID software, followed by L^AT_EX. EyeLID was developed by Bernard, Rouanet & Baldy, in the Groupe Mathématiques et Psychologie, Université René Descartes, 45 rue des Saints-Pères, 75270 Paris Cedex 06. The EyeLID software combines the following two features: i) a Language for Interrogating Data (LID), whose requests designate relevant data sets of structured data in terms of structuring factors, formally analogous to factors of an experimental design, and ii) the Visualization ("Eye") of derived clouds designated by EyeLID requests. On the LID language : Bernard J.M., Baldy R., Rouanet H. (1988). On the Analysis of Structured Data in Sociology : Bernard J.M., Le Roux B., Rouanet H. & Schiltz M.A. (1989), Bonnet P., Le Roux B. & Lemaine G. (1996), Le Roux B., Rouanet H. (1998). Chiche J., Le Roux B., Perrineau P., Rouanet H. (2000), Bourdieu (1999), Duval (2000).

Space of positions, space of position takings

One of the main hypotheses of the theory of fields is that we can find *homologies* between the space of positions, the space of scientific strategies and the space of position takings, that is to say both scientific and political choices (Bourdieu, 1992). If the observed structure looks like the *expected* one, we can even say that the field analysis helps give *causal explanations* for the differences in position

adopted (Lebaron, Rouanet, 2000). In short, « statistics doesn't explain anything », but a sociological « explanation » can be reinforced by statistical inquiries (Simiand, 1932).

The commonly accepted idea is that theoretical or ideological choices are independent variables, which are not the result of social characteristics. The analysis of a field adjusts this spontaneous perception by re-evaluating social factors in the production of knowledge, without reducing knowledge to a completely relative or contingent good. The scientific choices or orientations in the field of French economists appear to be closely connected to the space of positions and trajectories. As far as the first opposition is concerned, the disciplines of specialisation are divided between « higher » and « lower » disciplines: study of the present state of the economy », macroeconomics, management, microeconomics and econometrics on the one hand, and development economics, labour economics on the other, money-finance and international economics being intermediary. The publishers in which economists publish their articles are also divided in categories: prestigious general publishers, scientific and administrative publishers on the one hand, university and politically involved publishers on the other, *Economica* being the most important. The schools of thought are divided between liberal, Keynesian on the one hand, Marxist and other heterodox people on the other, “regulation and convention schools” (« écoles de la régulation et des conventions ») and « other neo-classical » being intermediary. At the « higher » pole, objects of studies and publishers are more « general », have a national or international perspective, they are more orthodox; the disciplines are socially more prestigious. On the other hand, productions are more local, the disciplines less prestigious and scientific choices are also more dissenting (with heterodox as well as Marxists).

The second opposition divides the field between scientific publishers on one side, Presses Universitaires de France and general publishers on the other. It opposes « école de la régulation et des conventions » and other neo-classical to liberal « schools ». It opposes microeconomics and econometrics to money-finance and “conjuncture”, a higher degree of mathematical formalisation to a lower degree of formalisation. On the one hand, we find more abstract and formal theories which are different from the more practical and « pragmatic » ways of defining and practising economics.

The first two axis provide a quite good description of the positions adopted during the strikes of November-December 1995. The first axis opposes agents supporting the policies of the government and those who oppose them. The second opposition divides the field between those who support or contest the plan from a « left » point of view (the ones who support the reforms of health policy and all those who support the social movement) on the one hand, and those who support or contest the plan from a « liberal » point of view: the ones who think it is a good way of achieving the European monetary union and the ones who think a new tax is dangerous in a phase of conjunctural economic crisis.

There is an homology between this positioning structure in the field of economists and the structures we can observe at the same time (at least from a qualitative perspective based on the various accounts made since then) in different other fields during the December crisis: the international and national political and bureaucratic fields, the field of unions and the field of enterprises (closely interconnected), etc. All those spaces are divided between a dominating orthodoxy (which is strongly represented by international bureaucrats, like Yves-Thibault de Silguy) and its opposition, and, on a second axis, between the forms of support or opposition which can be understood from different points of view (a leftist one, pro-strikes or pro-reform, and a conservative one, ultraliberal and monetarist, or orthodox). In a situation of crisis, all these structures are expressed together and at the same time, the overall order is the result of an addition of all the local field orders and of a specific order between fields, a sort of social hierarchy of fields in which the international bureaucratic and political field is the highest degree. The relative quantitative importance of economists interventions express the « central » position of this field in what we could call the « general equilibrium », that is to say the sum of interdependencies and homologies), between the fields. In these situations of crisis, the field of economists reveals some aspects of its complex function inside the social construction of the economic order.

Economists and the economic order

The field of economists is one of the important places where the economic order is established. It reproduces the laws of its social environment, but it also produces a formalisation, a redefinition of various usual social beliefs. In a way, economics reproduces the structure of the social world in which it is « embedded » and vice versa (Callon ed., 1998). And it is also at the same time a discipline which creates economic reality and transforms the world around it, reforms the states (Fourquet, 1980), creates markets (Garcia, 1986), manipulates prices, budgets, etc.

Why does economics tend to reproduce the established economic order, and to change it in very specific ways which appear to be determined by the leading economic forces? This complex question was answered by Marx, describing and condemning the « bourgeois political economy »: throughout history the dominant ideas have been the ideas provided by the dominant class; political economy is a superstructure of the transformations of capitalism (concentration, world expansion, destruction of local specificities, etc.). This answer seems incomplete at a time of mixed Keynesian bureaucratic technologies, monetarist and neoliberal counter-revolution, especially in central banking and finance, and flourishing mathematical developments of this science, which modify the nature of economic objects as social constructions. It tends to show that the belief in the relative autonomy of this scientific field has been an illusion, in spite of the fact that economists strongly believe in their own

independence and develop their own specific strategies in the « internal » competition, in a specific struggle with class dimensions but which also involves various other resources. One needs to refer here to the more Weberian idea of a *rationalisation* process, which transforms the practices of knowledge production in more and more formalised, standardized and routinized procedures but which, at the same time, can reinforce pre-existing collective beliefs. This process can not necessarily be understood as an autonomization process. On the contrary, while economic beliefs seem to replace religious faith in the process of « evolution » which complicates the production of beliefs, the scientific specialisation can be associated to phases of growing heteronomy, that is to say growing dependency from the political and the economic fields.

Another answer to the question of the relation between economists and the economic order can finally then be found in the general logic of fields. The answer can be found, first of all, in the logic of the specific scientific field of economists, which tends to *reproduce* the structure of the social world in which it is included. This property of the field of economists explains why the symbolic productions coming from the field are so closely linked to ordinary beliefs (and, first of all, those of the economic dominant agents). Secondly, the mechanisms of interdependence and homologies between fields (the « general equilibrium » of the fields) makes it possible to explain the growing importance of a specific field in which the dominant fields, in situations of lacking legitimacy, can find « reasons » to exist.

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