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# Cultural capital: objective probability and the cultural arbitrary

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to explicate and locate the concept of 'cultural capital' in terms of

Pierre Bourdieu's

transubstantiation

economically

a process

of the cultural

action is

'objective'

the 'dual'

between

and the

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# Notes

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Bourdieu and Passeron ([1977](#)), *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, will be taken as the major point of reference in this paper because of its influence in the sociology of education. For the general theory of exchange, the unusually accessible Bourdieu ([1997](#)) is the major source.

See, for instance, Bourdieu and Passeron ([1977](#), Book I) and the systematic manner in which the terms ‘arbitrary’ and ‘objective’ and their cognates are used in consistently different ways associated with contrasting logics of description and explanation.

An excellent short introduction to Spinoza is to be found in Scruton ([1999](#); see in particular pp. 15–20). A major historical study concerning his place and influence in early Enlightenment thinking is provided by Israel ([2001](#), see chapter 13). Spinoza's principle work is *Ethics* (Spinoza, [1996](#)).

See, here, Bourdieu and Passeron ([1977](#), p. 119): ‘The opposition between these two types of relation to language stems from the opposition between the two modes of acquiring verbal mastery, the exclusively scholastic acquisition which condemns the acquirer to a “scholastic” relation to scholastic language and the mode of acquisition through insensible familiarisation ...’ It is the latter of these ‘modes of acquisition’ that is the work of habitus and cultural capital and Bourdieu consistently downgrades the former relative to it. The key question is, what provides the grounds for the mode of ‘scholas



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