

Boudon Reexamined

Nuts and Bolts for Contemporary Sociological Science

Gianluca Manzo (Ed.)



Boudon Reexamined presents a selection of short essays by leading scholars from several generations who critically engage and enter into dialogue with the work of Raymond Boudon. Each chapter focuses on a specific topic from his extensive writings. Readers will follow this intellectual trajectory through analyses of early correspondence with Lazarsfeld and Merton, his typology of sociological styles, and his contributions to contemporary analytical sociology, including the notion of middle-range theory. In addition to already well-discussed aspects of Boudon's work, namely his understanding of methodological individualism and the theory of ordinary rationality, the book also explores less frequently discussed topics, including his early interest in formal modeling in sociology and his understanding of the link between interdependence structures and social change. Included in the following pages are new assessments of Boudon's well-known analyses of the inequality of educational opportunity and intergenerational social mobility, as well as his lesser-known substantive contributions to the study of relative deprivation and his early dialogue with game theory. The book also outlines Boudon's study of classical authors, especially Tocqueville, before two final chapters conclude by examining how Boudon's works can be used to teach sociology at the undergraduate and master's levels. Our hope is that *Boudon Reexamined* provides readers with a fresh assessment of his legacy – how his work can be applied to conduct theoretical and empirical research in contemporary sociology, as well as to promote high-quality scientific standards for new generations.

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Chapter 8

Inequality of Social Opportunity:

L'inégalité des chances

Fifty Years Later

Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund

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L'intelligence
du social

**Book series directed
by Pierre Demeulenaere**

The great books of the sociological tradition are either works of theory and epistemology or empirical studies structured by a profound theoretical or epistemological reflection. Émile Durkheim's first three books, *The Division of Labour in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and *Suicide*, each fall into one of these three categories. This heritage represents an impressive growing legacy of authors and works that foster an understanding of social life through the formation of new concepts, models, and interpretations, thereby providing a pathway to deciphering the thickness and chaotic nature of human societies.

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INEQUALITY OF SOCIAL OPPORTUNITY: *L'INÉGALITÉ DES CHANCES* FIFTY YEARS LATER

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Are modern industrial societies meritocratic? If so, education should be the main road to achieved social status, whereas, ideally, ascribed status (social background) should have no effect on achieved status once an individual has reached a given level of educational attainment. Today, we know this is still not the case, yet research also shows that the influence of family background typically diminishes at higher educational levels (Mare 1980; Hout 1988; Breen and Jonsson 2007; Torche 2011).

These insights have developed over the last fifty years, partly influenced by Raymond Boudon, who in 1973 published *L'Inégalité des chances*, a now landmark book on the inequality of educational attainment and social status. One year later, the book was published in English under the title *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality. Changing Prospects in Western Society* (Boudon 1974), with a foreword from Seymour Martin Lipset, who wrote that this book "...gives us a brilliant example of the utility of abstract theory, of a formal social model, in explaining behaviour" (Lipset 1974, p. vi).

Boudon (1974, p. II) argues he aims to address inequality of educational opportunity (IEO) and mechanisms of social mobility that are relevant to understand inequality of social opportunity (ISO). He does this by theoretically assuming that the social mechanisms related to these processes are relatively common across all Western societies, and, inspired by Weber, he then develops a model which "... deals with a kind of ideal-typical processes taking place in Western societies as a whole."

His main ambition is to explain "... *why* the tremendous educational development that occurred in all Western societies following WWII has had so little impact on equality; that is, *why* IEO has decreased so little and *why* ISO, in spite of this development, does not appear to have decreased at all" (Boudon 1974, p. xv, my italics).

He defines the two concepts: “By inequality of educational opportunity (IEO), I mean the differences in level of educational attainment according to social background. By social mobility, or immobility, I mean the differences in social achievement according to social background” (Boudon 1974, p. 1).

Thus, already at the outset, we see the parallels in his conceptualization of the two topics. In both cases, he uses the concept “opportunity,” yet his focus is on outcomes, that is, inequality in achieved education and inequality in achieved social status. Social background affects both. Linking education to social status, the Origin, Education, Destination-triangle (OED) is established. The OED model was well-established in sociology at the time (e.g., Lipset and Bendix 1959; Blau and Duncan 1967), and remains an important model in research on intergenerational mobility (e.g., Eriksen and Goldthorpe 1992; Breen et al. 2004).

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In the first part of the 1974 book, Boudon develops a theory of how individuals form their educational choices, a theory later refined by Breen and Goldthorpe (1997). In this chapter, I will summarize Boudon’s arguments in the second part of his book, where he develops his ‘box model’ of ISO (Boudon 1974, ch. 7) and then establishes what he calls a formal theory of ISO (Boudon 1974, ch. 8).¹

Second, I will briefly refer to the reception of the book, in particular the well-known critique by the American sociologist Robert Hauser, and Boudon’s reply to Hauser. This discussion addresses differences between descriptive and explanatory models. Boudon is clear that the aim of sociology should be twofold: first, we need to be able to describe the reality; and second, to try to explain the patterns we find. To do so, he develops models to improve our insights into processes generating both IEO and ISO.

Before I conclude, I will also discuss the standing of his work today.

FROM INEQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO INEQUALITY OF SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Intergenerational mobility “... is the product of a variety of factors, historical as well as social, economic, and demographic” (Boudon 1974, p. 121). Boudon’s aim is to build a formal model of ISO, give the parameters realistic values, derive conclusions from this model, and then compare them with empirical

1 See in this book, Richard Breen’s chapter for discussions on the first part of *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality*, and Louis-André Vallet’s chapter for discussions on the third part, which only exists in the French version.

studies. He also noted that at the time, there were fewer empirical studies if ISO than of IEO.

Some factors "... play a determinant role with respect to social immobility". First, inequalities in educational and social opportunities change over time. Second, the educational and the social structures change over time. Third, the degree of meritocracy matters, that is, "the role of educational attainment with respect to social status" (Boudon 1974, p. 121). Fourth, Boudon (1974, p. 121) assumes "social heritage" matters for ISO, and defines this concept as the "influence of social background on social status". Finally, he argues, demographic factors, in particular differential fertility, also matter for ISO. He returns to these factors later, and as we will see, to simplify his model, he freezes the social structure. That is, he does not show the impact of changes in the social structure, as he commented above.

He first develops what he calls a "box model", arguing that this model "has the advantage of being very close to sociological theory", yet simpler than the "refined statistical models currently used in social mobility analysis" (Boudon 1974, p. 122).

"THE BOX MODEL": SOCIAL BACKGROUND, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Using data from a British empirical study (Glass 1957), Boudon develops an introductory model by tabulating the son's social status (five categories) as a function of his educational level (four categories) and the father's social status (five categories), i.e., the OED-triangle.² This table (7.1) shows that in these British data, inequality of educational opportunities is high.

Boudon then splits this empirical information into two smaller sub-tables; one (table 7.2) where he calculates the proportion of sons who has reached each educational level as a function of father's social status, showing that IEO is high, and another table (7.3) where he calculates the proportion of sons in each status category as a function of their own educational level, showing that achieved status increases with educational level, in line with what we would expect in a meritocratic society.

2 The socioeconomic categories used by Glass are: C₁ – Professional and high administrative, managerial and executive; C₂ – Inspectional, supervisory, and other nonmanual, higher grade; C₃ – Inspectional, supervisory, and other nonmanual, lower grade; C₄ – Skilled manual and routine grades of nonmanual; C₅ – Semiskilled manual, unskilled manual. The measure of educational attainment has four categories, from S₁ (high) to S₄ (low) (Glass 1957, cited in Boudon 1974, p. 123).

Boudon then produces a third sub-table (Boudon 1974, p. 128, table 7.4), showing proportions of sons in each status category as a function of the father's status. Here he generates three panels: panel a) shows a fictitious tabulation derived from the assumption of a completely meritocratic structure where ascribed status has no effect on achieved status once an individual has reached a certain level of education. These figures are derived by the marginals of the British empirical data, based on the assumption that all associations of sons' and fathers' social status go through education. Panel b) is derived from observation, that is, the British empirical data. Panel c) then, shows the differences between the two panels, that is, the theoretical mobility data generated under the meritocratic assumption, and the actual mobility data.

138 Comparing the outcomes of these three panels, Boudon (1974, p. 128) concludes that the empirical associations (table 7.4, panel b) are closer to the fictitious model based on the meritocratic assumption (table 7.4, panel a) than one might have thought. The fictitious model, based on the meritocratic assumption, captures the situation for people in positions in the middle of the status hierarchy, yet not for people in positions at the top, who are less likely to experience downward mobility than the meritocratic model predicts, and not for people in positions at the bottom, who are more likely to be immobile than the meritocratic model would predict.

The rationale for the box model is very simple. First, "... people are ordered in a lexicographic order as a function of their educational level and social background." (Boudon 1974, p. 129)³ This means that Boudon assumes educational level is more important than social background for access to status positions. Second, he assumes that "the distribution of the available social positions is determined by exogenous factors" (Boudon 1974, p. 129), i.e., the structure of social positions does not change over time. As I will argue later, in line with Hauser's critique, this is a very unrealistic assumption. Third, "the available social positions are granted to candidates as a function of a) their position in the lexicographic ordering and b) a set of parameters measuring the *dominance* of each group in the ordering."⁴

3 S1C1 = Highest educational level and highest background comes first, S1C2 = highest educational level and second highest background, and so on until S1C5; then S2C1, ..., S2C5; then S3C1.... etc., until finally, S4C5 = low + low.

4 Boudon introduces two categories of parameters: Xij's – for instance xij1 – is a measure of the proportion of people in group SiCj who obtain positions of level C1. This is a measure of their dominance of groups located lower in the lexicographic ordering. Thus, dominance is a hierarchical concept. Yij's – for instance Yij1 – is a measure of the proportion of positions of level C1 still available to be filled by lower groups (see p. 129). As he assumes a hierarchical distribution of social status positions, he argues that "The distribution of social positions begins naturally

He constructs the dominance parameters (Boudon 1974, tables 7.5 and 7.6) so that the model shows the following: “For the same type of social background, the dominance (power to obtain the best positions) of a group is higher, the higher the educational attainment of its members” (Boudon 1974, p. 131). Applying these assumptions to the empirical data, Boudon concludes that the effect of class dominance or heritage is unevenly distributed: “... preventing *upper-class* people from being downward mobile and *lower-class* people from being upward mobile”.⁵ This means, he concludes, that the overall picture “... is rather complex.”⁶

MERITOCRACY AND DOMINANCE IN OTHER CONTEXTS

What is the picture in other societies? Is the relative weight of meritocracy vis-à-vis social heritage different in other countries than in Britain? Boudon finds data from the USA and France yet concludes that he cannot use them for his purpose.

For France, he discusses if a table from Praderie (1966, 1967), based on data from the French Bureau of Census, can be applied. He argues, however, that the occupational categories used by the Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE) cannot be ordered into meaningful sociological categories, thus it is impossible to apply the ‘box model’, and therefore impossible to compare France with Britain (Boudon 1974, p. 133).

For the US, he refers to Blau and Duncan’s classic study on the American occupational structure from 1967. They found that education has much stronger effects than social background on people’s socioeconomic status attainment. Their study applies path-analyses, a well-known regression design. Boudon argues that, as the British data shows curve linear effects, he cannot use linear methods (such as path analysis), since these methods will probably

enough at the highest level C1, proceeding in that order, levels C2 through C5.” Certainly, a simplified assumption, not necessarily in line with the way the labour market operates.

- 5 Interestingly, in this part of the chapter, comparing his work to Blau and Duncan’s analyses, he conceptually switches from status to class positions. In the conclusion of this chapter, however, he is back talking about status positions again.
- 6 “[...] the analyses reveals that the main effect of the dominance structure is to give people with C1 background a disproportionate ability to achieve the best social positions, even when their level of education is rather poor, whereas people with C5 background demonstrate a disproportionate weakness in reaching good social positions, even when their level of education is rather high. The effects of dominance appear less marked insofar as intermediate background groups C2 to C4 are concerned” (Boudon 1974, p. 133).

underestimate the effect of dominance. Again, he concludes he cannot apply his 'box model' to these data.

Boudon nevertheless concludes that we might *assume* that "the weight of social heritage relative to meritocracy is likely to be smaller in the United States than in either European country" (Boudon 1974, p. 136). The reason being that he believes that in societies with a more developed educational system, like the USA, meritocratic principles matter more than "social heritage" (Boudon 1974, p. 137).

TOWARD A FORMAL THEORY OF INEQUALITY OF SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

140 Boudon is particularly preoccupied with over-time change of intergenerational mobility. He reminds the reader that the IEO model has shown an "... overall increase in school attendance at each educational level; change in the composition of the student population at each educational level; change in the probability of reaching each educational level as a function of social background, and so on." (Boudon 1974, p. 141), whereas the 'box model' has shown that social status are dependent on social background and educational attainment.

He now (Boudon 1974, ch. 8) develops a theoretical analysis of the mobility model. As with the IEO model, "... we are dealing with an ideal-typical society, and not any actual society" (Boudon 1974, p. 141). He also reminds the reader that there is very little available empirical information on inequality of social opportunities.

RATIONALE FOR THE ISO MODEL

The ISO model builds on the following assumptions: First, that the axioms of the IEO model hold. This implies that the over-time series derived from the earlier analysis (see, in particular, pp. 86-100) are considered valid also for the ISO model. Second, that all members of a cohort are in a mutually competitive situation. Third, the ideal-typical society is characterized by both meritocracy and social dominance (social heritage). In addition, Boudon assumes, as above, a pyramidal structure of social positions, yet now he reduces the social status positions into three groups, with 10 percent in the highest category, 30 percent in the middle category, and 60 percent in the lowest. He also assumes that the structure of status positions is unchanged over time, and identical to the structure of social background (i.e., father's status positions). As noted earlier,

this assumption is not very realistic, yet for simplicity, he keeps the social structure fixed over time.

Boudon also introduces a “meritocratic parameter”. This stochastic parameter, which can take on any value between 0 and 1, is set at 0.70, i.e., a constant. Boudon gives no empirical justification as to why he chooses this number. He applies the meritocratic parameter in a symmetrical way, assuming a queuing process, which means that “... when x candidates whose education is relatively better compete for y relatively better social positions, 70 percent of these candidates will receive the desirable positions if x is smaller than y , whereas 70 percent of the positions will be given to the relatively better candidates if x is greater than y ” (Boudon 1974, p. 143). This means that:

We suppose that most of the best social positions will go to those with higher level of educational attainment, and, among those with the same level of attainment, to those with a relatively better social background. When all the available best social positions have been distributed, the second-best social positions will be distributed according to the same procedure. The process will continue until all available social positions have been distributed, the number of available social positions being assumed to be equal to the size of the cohort (Boudon 1974, p. 143).

The aim of this model is to show that: “The social status an individual is likely to achieve at any of the time periods is a function not only of his social background and his level of educational attainment, but also what we call the *social structure* (number of positions available at each level) and the *educational structure* (number of people assignable to each level of educational attainment)” (Boudon 1974, p. 142-143).

OVER-TIME CHANGE IN THE STATUS EXPECTATION ASSOCIATED WITH EACH EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Boudon starts with a simple model without dominance/social heritage effects, nor differential fertility. The distribution of social structure is constant over time, whereas the educational distribution changes, as more and more people take higher education. He assumes that we have four cohorts ($t_0 - t_3$), which can be used to measure change over time. Each cohort is set to include 100,000 individuals. He simplifies the educational variable used in the first

section of the book, from 9 to 6 categories.⁷ And, as we saw above, he classifies social status positions into three categories.

This model (Boudon 1974, Table 8.4) shows the proportions reaching each social status position as a function of their educational level. Since dominance effects are not included, info on social background is not included, thus, the model is based on the distribution of educational attainment within each cohort, on a fixed social status structure (i.e., the distribution of social status positions does not change across cohorts) and a meritocratic parameter equal to 0.70. Boudon concludes that the model shows "... over-time changes (that is, across cohorts, my comment) in the structure of status expectations associated with the various educational levels" (Boudon 1974, p. 149). He argues the main endogenous factors responsible for the increase in educational demand are a "... complicated function of the combined educational and social structures. A completely accurate picture of the behaviour of this function would require a general mathematical analysis" (Boudon 1974, p. 150), and, in a more complicated version of the ISO model, he argues, this endogenous factor might be introduced.

He is also aware that "The findings derived from table 8.4 are somewhat dependent on the particular and arbitrary assumptions noted in connection with social structure" (Boudon 1974, p. 150). He does not himself undertake these calculations, but he is aware that "If it had been supposed that not 10 percent but, say, 5 percent of the available social positions at each point in time were C₁ (highest level), the picture would have been different" (Boudon 1974, p. 150). Certainly, this would go for both the number of status categories and their relative sizes. He nevertheless believes that the ideal-typical social structure he sketches here may be realistically assimilated to industrial societies in the present state of their development. He also argues, without documenting, that we can be satisfied that "there is good evidence that the parameters employed are realistic" (Boudon 1974, p. 150).

INTRODUCING FURTHER ASSUMPTIONS

Boudon then introduces *dominance effects*. "Dominance has been supposed to be higher, the higher the educational level and, within each educational level, the higher social background" (Boudon 1974, p. 155). Applying the

7 1 College education, 2 Some college, 3 High school graduation, 4 More than 3 years of high school on HC, 5 Not more than 3 years of high school on HC, 6 Elementary school (see Boudon 1974, table 8.1).

dominance effect, set at 0.70,⁸ he finds that the dominance effect does not “... modify significantly the results obtained in the previous sections” (Boudon 1974, p. 156).

He also discusses what would happen if he assumed that the *social structure changed over time*. He does not calculate anything to see what might happen if one assumes changes over time, but provides an intuitive discussion on this topic, and argues that the main conclusion remains “... unless we suppose that social structure moves as rapidly as educational structure does, the foregoing conclusions remain valid: the expectations associated with each educational level will change according to a chain reaction pattern; the structure of social mobility will be scarcely affected; and such changes in the structure of social mobility as observed will not follow any general pattern or trend” (Boudon 1974, p. 160).

Finally, Boudon (1974, p. 160) addresses differential *fertility*, assuming that “... fertility is greater, the lower social class.” Again, he does not show any calculations but concludes that the model is flexible enough to incorporate additional assumptions. He therefore concludes that “... the outcomes drawn from the simple version of the model hold under very general conditions” (Boudon 1974, p. 160).

A SUMMARY OF BOUDON’S ARGUMENTS

Boudon argues that his model describes an ideal-typical society. Second, he argues that his model demonstrates that “... over-time change in social mobility is small and does not follow a general trend or pattern. This conclusion derives from the inability of individuals to control the consequences that are due to the aggregation of their individual decisions” (Boudon 1974, p. 161) about how much to invest in education. This is an important social mechanism.

More specifically, industrial societies are meritocratic, and being better educated will increase people’s chances of reaching a desirable social position. Thus, we would expect increasing educational attainment over time. However, when people in the younger cohorts have higher educational attainment than people in similar situations in the older cohorts, *and* the social structure does not change, there will be more competition for access to the highest status positions, and the outcome would be an increased likelihood for downward

8 This means that “0.70 represents the power of people with background C₁ and educational level S₁ to reach positions of level C₁. But it stands for also the power of those with background C₁ and education S₁ who have not received C₁ positions to obtain priority for C₂ positions. Again, all those who are not located in C₁ or C₂ will be located in C₃” (Boudon 1974, p. 156).

mobility. Therefore, people in younger generations are inclined to pursue more education.

This basic mechanism explains that inasmuch as the educational structure is the result of the aggregation of individual decisions rather than being directly influenced by over-time change in the social and/or economic structure, the discrepancy between educational and socioeconomic structures persists over time (Boudon 1974, p. 161).

Boudon argues that his model shows that “other things being equal, if the stratification system is less rigid, hence if dominance effects are weaker, ISO will decrease or, alternatively, mobility will increase” (Boudon 1974, p. 161). Thus, “... lessening the rigidity of the stratification system is again the only factor that, other things being equal, could reduce ISO (Boudon 1974, p. 162).

Although this has not been shown, Boudon argues that the basic conclusion derived from the ideal-typical model is also valid in egalitarian societies. Also in these societies, high IEO and high dominance are insufficient to prevent, in particular, downward mobility.

RECEPTION

Boudon's book received a lot of attention. Here I will only focus on the most well-known critique, and Boudon's answer.

HAUSER ON BOUDON'S MODEL

In a review essay, published in *American Journal of Sociology*, January 1976, Robert Hauser delivers an important critique of Boudon's model of social mobility. He first points to the fact that the book was very well received at the Eighth World Congress of Sociology in Toronto, which took place in 1974, where “... the hallways fairly buzzed with favourable anticipation” (Hauser 1976, p. 911). He therefore read the book with high expectations but concludes that “...the argument lacks cogency” (Hauser 1976, p. 912). Hauser's critique includes Boudon's method and logic, his use of analytical and observational evidence, and his interpretation of his own findings.

Hauser is skeptical about the structural constraints that Boudon installs in his model. Boudon argues that his model is based on the premise that educational attainment is determined endogenously, whereas the occupational distribution (both social background and achieved status) is identical and fixed over time. The first part reflects the fact that after WWII, more and more young people have chosen higher education. The second part, though, is unrealistic, as one might expect that several factors, such as technological change, and

increasing numbers of well-educated graduates over time would contribute to changing occupational distributions. These structural constraints imply that the conclusion "...that the structure of mobility appears to be almost constant over time" (Boudon 1974, p. 153), should not be surprising, given the way he specifies his models (Hauser 1976, p. 925).

Second, Boudon does not show that educational attainment is endogenous; rather, Hauser argues, this factor is included in one of the parameters. Thus, the so-called paradox, between increasing educational attainment and a fairly stable pattern of intergenerational mobility, is not a paradox. In any case, Hauser would suggest developing a formal demonstration of the paradox, instead of, as Boudon does, using "... only a numerical example based on fictitious data" (Hauser 1976, p. 913).

Third, Hauser has re-analyzed some of Boudon's tables, and criticizes his analyses and interpretations for being wrong, confounding main effects with interactions, and arbitrary mixing absolute and relative measures of effect sizes. For instance, addressing the 'box model', Hauser argues that "Regardless of social background, in most instances it gives persons with the lowest educational category a higher probability of entering the highest social status and a lower probability of entering the lowest social status than persons at the next higher educational level." (Hauser 1976, p. 924.) Which is not what one might expect, given the hierarchical structure Boudon suggests. Hauser also argues that Boudon's argument against linear regression in Blau and Duncan's work is not valid and refers Boudon to read their appendix for a discussion on linear associations.

We should also note that despite his critique, Hauser's review clearly shows that he found the book worthy of a decent academic discussion. Hauser also agrees with Boudon's main policy implication, namely that decreased inequality in educational attainment will not by itself lead to a reduction of social and economic inequalities in society. Thus, they agree that changes in the educational system can only indirectly contribute to reduced socio-economic inequalities.

BOUDON'S REPLY

Boudon's comment on Hauser's review was published in March, the same year. He argues that his aim was "... to try to answer a set of questions, not of the *how much* type, but of the *why* type" (Boudon 1976, p. 1176). He then claims that there are two sorts of models; descriptive models, that must fit the data, and explanatory models, that may not fit the data, yet still increase our

understanding of the mechanisms we want to understand (on this point, see Hedström's chapter in this book).

Boudon argues that his starting point was available descriptive information on the aggregated statistical relationship between education and status. He decided to build a model that could account for "a set of "qualitative" statements – statement of the "more-or-less" type" (Boudon 1976, p. 1177) instead of a model that fitted to a particular context. To answer the *why* questions, he wanted to build an ideal-typical, theoretical model that could describe the basic mechanisms causing this relationship. To build such a model, he argues, one needs to apply the strategy of simplicity, and here he refers to Thomas Schelling's well-known segregation model, which shows the logic of an apparent paradox, namely how segregation could arise as an unintended consequence of fairly tolerant people's behavior. He argues that his goal was similar to Schelling's; he wanted to show "... that equalization of opportunity does not mean equalization of results in an ideal-world" (Boudon 1976, p. 1179). He therefore rejects the critique that his model is "wrong" (as many of Hauser's detailed comments suggest) and argues that his main interest has been in the general phenomena, not that the model should fit a particular data source.

Boudon also gives a better explanation here for his logic of reasoning related to ISO. In a society where inequality in educational attainment has decreased, whereas the structure of social status positions has remained stable, the competition in each cohort for access to the higher positions has intensified, causing people in later cohorts to demand even more education. That is, we are dealing with a prisoner's dilemma game; as each individual does not know what the others in their cohort will do, it is rational to undertake more education to increase one's likelihood of being competitive in the labor market, although the collective outcome of this situation is less than optimal for the individuals as a group (on the link between Boudon's ISO model and game theory, see Dickmann's and Raub's chapters in this book).

Boudon concludes that descriptive models of the kind Bob Hauser applies are useful. He, nevertheless, would defend his own work, since we also need to "... go beyond the statistical relationships to explore the generative mechanisms responsible for them. This direction has a name: theory. And a goal: understanding" (Boudon 1976, p. 1187).

Forty-five years later, commenting this debate, Goldthorpe (2021, p. 182) argues that although Boudon's book can be regarded as successful, the timing of the book "... was unfortunate", as it was published "... just before the implications of the log-linear modeling of mobility tables [...] became fully recognized". This methodological breakthrough (e.g., Goodman 1970), implied that the

previous distinction between structural and exchange mobility was replaced by the distinction between absolute and relative mobility. Goldthorpe also argues that Boudon might have found “...stronger support for his arguments and enhanced his modeling” (Goldthorpe 2021) if he had paid more attention to the data inconsistencies that Hauser addressed.

DISCUSSION

The debate between Boudon and Hauser is well-known in the circles of quantitative scholars of social stratification. Some people argue that Hauser won the battle, whereas Boudon won the war. Hauser was right, addressing Boudon’s models from a methodological point of view. However, referring to Schelling’s model of segregation, Boudon argued that his model was explanatory, and explanatory models do not have to fit a particular set of data, as they are set up to better understand a social mechanism. This argument is appealing, yet perhaps an easy way out of Hauser’s methodological critique.

Schelling’s (1971, 1978) important model is set up to reveal one specific mechanism, that is, why the outcome of a process generated by individual action can be unintended for all involved. This model is very important as it illustrates a social mechanism, yet at the outset, the model is not empirically oriented. In line with Schelling, Boudon also wants to demonstrate why the outcome of a process generated by the actions of individuals can be unintended for all involved. However, his model is based on fictitious data with specific constraints, in terms of fixed structures of social status (both social background and achieved social status), which, as Hauser argues, matters to his conclusions. Thus, the comparison with Schelling’s model is a tall call.

Boudon’s models are initially based on an increasing structural mismatch between supply and demand. Given this structural constraint, his ideal-typical model shows mobility patterns that derive from the inability of individuals to control the consequences that are due to the aggregation of their actions. This is an important mechanism in many contexts, yet in this case, this conclusion is in part a designed outcome.

Boudon argues that his approach is more theoretical than predictive (at the individual level), more analytical than statistical, and he aims to develop “... a formal theory of mobility where opportunities rather than individuals, lead the moves” (Boudon 1974, p. 139).⁹ This is fine. Yet his structural models are

9 In a footnote to chapter 7, Boudon compares his approach to the work of Leo Goodman (1965, 1969a, 1969b), White (1970a), McFarland (1969), Coleman (1971) and Spilerman (1972) with respect to intergenerational mobility. He argues that his

deterministic, and he sets a fixed value (0.70) for the only stochastic parameter he includes (the meritocracy parameter), without any clear justification, and without any sensitivity tests, to test the impact of other values.

A STRUCTURALIST?

148 In several parts of the book, Boudon's arguments are close to what Jon Elster (e.g., Elster 1985) would call *free-floating intentions without subjects* (*aktørløse intensjoner*). In his critique of functionalist theory, such as, but not only, large parts of Marxist theory, Elster points to the often-occurring notion of free-floating intentions, that is, purposes assigned to structures, as if structures have agency, without any references to agents. Boudon talks about social structures interacting with each other, which is a language we would not use today. We can also note that, in several paragraphs, his agency arguments are close to the over-socialized conception of man (Wrong 1961). Yet, I would emphasize that this was written in the early 1970s, when different versions of structural-functionalist theories were highly valued on both sides of the Atlantic. And, to be fair, it is clear that Boudon's models are based on a theory of individual action. In fact, he *develops a theory of action*. In the first part of the book, he emphasizes that actors (including their families) make educational decisions based on their opportunity structure, including their expectations of succeeding in the educational system. These decisions are driven by a desire to avoid downward mobility. The same logic underlies his model of ISO. In a meritocratic society, people's education is the main resource for entry into high-status positions. Boudon assumes that the educational system is expanding, whereas the occupational system is not. Thus, his ISO model is based on a mismatch between labor market supply and demand. His arguments are in line with a prisoner's dilemma game, where increased opportunities make people invest in more educational resources, which results in increased competition in the younger cohorts for access to status positions. One might argue that Boudon here foresees the so-called "educational inflation" phenomenon, where it takes more education to fill positions than before.

Thus, Boudon cannot be characterized as a structuralist. Even here, with an explicit aim of developing a formal theory of intergenerational mobility, he is attentive to the consequences of his structurally deterministic model for the individuals, and he argues that part of the changes in opportunities are due to

own approach may not be better, but it is different. Their approach is "... basically statistical", whereas his approach is "...algebraic and attempts to relate closely measurement to sociological theory" (Boudon 1974, p. 139, n.6).

the unintended consequences of individual action. Thus, underlying the whole argument is a theory of action; more specifically, a theory about educational investments, which can be modeled (e.g., Manzo 2022).

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL POSITIONS

Boudon (1974, p. 163) refers to the discussion on how sociologists measure social stratification. In a footnote, he writes: “In spite of the plentiful supply of literature, we have no satisfactory theory on stratification in industrial societies. Dahrendorf’s (1967) impression that present stratification theory is an “*Oedes Land*” (i.e. a “desert”) is probably common to many sociologists. Since mobility theory is largely dependent on stratification theory, a completely satisfactory theory of mobility belongs to the future.”

On the occupational distribution, Boudon assumes a pyramidal shape. Most theories of social status, socioeconomic status, or social class are based on some sort of hierarchical logic. But, he argues, the classification and ordering of the occupational categories “... is always more or less arbitrary” (Boudon 1974, p. 150). He constructs this structure so that “10 percent of the available social positions are C₁ (highest level), 30 percent are C₂, and 60 percent are C₃ (lowest level)” (Boudon 1974, p. 143). He admits that the results of his models might be different with a different classification of social status, yet, as Hauser also points out, it is strange that he did not try to manipulate the values of his parameters to see if this mattered to his outcomes. Given the fact that he knew about Schelling’s segregation model, where Schelling performs sensitivity analyses, and given that Boudon did include some sort of numerical simulation, by varying parameters, in his other models, it is surprising that he did not do so for his model of social opportunities.

I would take this one step further. All occupational-based typologies can be criticized, both for their theoretical basis and for their classifications. In my earlier work, I was involved in the class-and-gender-debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which in part also discussed the most influential class model (Erikson and Goldthorpe) for neglecting women’s work.¹⁰ This class model was revised, so that several female-dominated non-manual occupations are now usually seen as part of the working class (Eriksen and Goldthorpe 1992), and most of us who work with social stratification today would rely on the

10 This class typology was empirically developed based on information about men’s work- and market-situations, and if one includes women into the usual class categories, the heterogeneity within the classes was noticeable (Birkelund 1992; Birkelund, Goodman and Rose 1996).

revised version of this model. Yet I still think occupational classifications into social classes are somewhat arbitrary, thus I agree with Boudon who argues that this is a complicated process “... which raises questions of what *social classes* might be distinguished as underlying an arbitrary list of *sociooccupational categories*” (Boudon 1974, p. 157).¹¹ An alternative strategy could be to not to use social class schemes at all if one has better information available. And often this is the case. Boudon argues that “[i]ncome categories could be used as well as social status categories without altering the conclusion” (Boudon 1974, see footnotes, p. 162-163), and many sociologists now measure social inequality in the labor market using information about people’s income or earnings, often recoded into a rank variable, for instance, with deciles from 1 (highest), through 5 (middle), to 9 (lowest) (e.g., Bloome 2015; DiPrete 2020; Engzell and Mood 2023). This gives us a relative measure of inequality, in line with Boudon’s hierarchical conceptualization of social status.¹²

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CONCLUSION

Nearly 50 years after the publication of Boudon’s book on *Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality*, we can conclude that the IEO model is still important. The model has been successfully developed to help us better understand individual-based rational action regarding educational attainment (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997).

Yet, Boudon’s ISO model is not equally important today. His model is deterministic. Although he includes a stochastic parameter, he sets this parameter exogenous. Moreover, his assumption that the social structure does not change over time is clearly unrealistic. This means that if we want to use his model of social opportunities today, we will need to make it more realistic, address sensitivity analyses more clearly, and reveal a stronger connection between individual agency and the unintended aggregated outcomes.

At the theoretical level, however, his insights are still important. It is not enough to describe reality; we also need to understand it, and an important tool then is to build a theoretical model that can help us understand the social

11 Boudon (1974, p. 157) argues that “[i]t is beyond the scope of this book to go further into this complicated process, which ... is certainly one of the most heavily debated topics among sociologists”.

12 The growing focus on earnings mobility has likely been spurred by the increase in income inequality that has taken place in several countries, particularly in the US, as well as evidence that high levels of inequality tend to go together with low levels of mobility – the so-called Great Gatsby Curve (Krueger 2012; see also Durlauf et al. 2012).

mechanisms involved, causing the outcomes we observe. Descriptive analyses are very useful, as they also rely on analytical models, often set up as a causal map of interconnected variables (such as the OED-triangle). Yet, to understand a social phenomenon, we need a theory of individual action which situates individuals within their opportunity structure. In the case of ISO, changes in the educational system and changes in the social structures could imply that individuals find themselves in a prisoners' dilemma situation, with increased competition for social positions, where the best individual strategy does not produce the optimal outcome for them all.¹³

I would summarize my comments as follows:

First, Boudon addressed important societal topics, asking what kind of society we are living in, and how we can understand it.

Second, he was specific about the fact that sociology and social science need to theorize – and that the main tools are our conceptualization of social structure and individual action. This insight is still important.

Third, he saw the need for developing a formal model to better understand social mechanisms, which could help us address the *why* questions. This insight is still important.

Fourth, he was empirically oriented, and aimed to calibrate and compare his theoretical models with real-life data. Again, this is also important today.

Fifth, the debate with Robert Hauser shows two different sociological profiles at their best. Today, we can rely on them both. Following Hauser, we need to emphasize methodological skills and logic reasoning. Following Boudon, this can best be done if we are explicit about constructing analytical models based on sociological theories, including assumptions about agency and structures.

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¹³ Alternatively, aware of the so-called educational inflation process, some people might be less interested in pursuing higher education. In the years after Boudon's book, there has been a notable decline in post-high school education among men: On average across OECD countries in 2023, 54 percent of younger women have a tertiary degree compared to 41 percent of younger men (OECD 2024, p. 19). This development is, in part, consistent with Boudon's thinking; perhaps a decline in the desirability of higher education could be a response to fewer opportunities? And increased competition from women? Certainly, this topic deserves more research, spanning time and space.

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ACCLAIMS

This remarkably well-structured volume accomplishes two feats at once. It offers a critical engagement with the multiple facets and contributions of Raymond Boudon's sociological oeuvre, for example: the modeling of relative deprivation, the generative approach to social stratification, the plea for methodological individualism, the analysis of unintended consequences and social change, the epistemology of sociological investigations, and the reflection on rationality and belief formation. Through this critical engagement – here is the second feat – this volume tackles substantive and methodological issues central to contemporary developments in the discipline of sociology, whether the focus is on formal models, simulation work, counterfactual reasoning, social mobility and its measurements, the significance of Rational Choice, or our understanding of processual dynamics.

Ivan Ermakoff, Professor of Sociology,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Without indulging in praise, this collective volume – bringing together 18 substantial chapters – aims to shed light on the enduring legacy of Raymond Boudon's sociology. It addresses a notable gap: the lack of a detailed, multifaceted examination of the work of one of the foremost figures in both French and international sociology. The reader will find not only an assessment of Boudon's intellectual contributions but also a critical appraisal of their limitations and the avenues they open for further research into contemporary issues. The book will appeal both to specialists familiar with the evolution of Boudon's thought over time and to those wishing to discover it, explore it in greater depth, or draw upon it for teaching purposes.

Gérald Gaglio, Professor of Sociology,
Université Côte d'Azur

This book is a splendid tribute to Raymond Boudon, one of the most important sociologists of the second half of the 20th century. The contributions, in their appreciative and critical aspects alike, clearly bring out the intellectual depth and challenging nature of Boudon's work and its continuing relevance in the study of modern societies.

John H. Goldthorpe, Emeritus Fellow,
Nuffield College, University of Oxford

This collection of papers, expertly curated by Gianluca Manzo, is as wide-ranging and thought-provoking as Raymond Boudon himself. It is sure to stimulate interest in a now-sometimes-forgotten giant of French sociology.

Neil Gross, Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology,
Colby College (Maine)

This Memorial Festschrift honors Raymond Boudon (1934–2013) by considering his contributions to conceptualization, theory, and empirics, as well as their associated methods, across foundational topical domains in sociology and guided by expert commentators. It is not only a superb assessment, and its value will grow in three main ways. First, like most Festschriften, it provides a portrait of the growth and trajectory of Boudon's ideas, embedded in his relations with other scholars, both teachers, peers, and students. This portrait will grow over time. Second, as the historian David Knowles wrote about the *quaestiones quodlibetales* of the medieval university (especially the University of Paris) and the debates held during Advent and Lent when anyone could ask any question of any master, Festschrift discussions are a valuable index to what is “in the air” – in this case both when Boudon was working and now. Third, Boudon believed in the promise of mathematics, and it will be possible to trace over time the progress of the $X \rightarrow Y$ relations in the book, as they travel from general functions to specific functions.

Guillermina Jasso, Professor of Sociology,
Silver Professor of Arts and Science, New York University

This book is not a hagiography. Unusually, its title truly reflects its content. Twenty-two sociologists from different countries and different generations take a fresh look at the work of Raymond Boudon. In keeping with his approach but without complacency, they highlight the theoretical and methodological contributions of his sociology, its limitations, its errors, its relevance for teaching sociology to the new generations, and the perspectives that remain open in several thematic areas.

Dominique Vidal, Professor of Sociology,
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