

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 14

Dissecting the “Good Reasons” and Their Link to Rationality

Pierre Demeulenaere

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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.

Gianluca Manzo (Ed.)

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DISSECTING THE “GOOD REASONS” AND THEIR LINK TO RATIONALITY

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Raymond Boudon has continuously highlighted in his work the importance of a reference to rationality as well as to “reasons” and “good reasons” to explain typical social behaviors and subsequent social outcomes. He has also linked this notion of reasons to new developments regarding the very meaning of the concept of rationality, stressing in particular the contrast between instrumental rationality (linked to the so-called “rational choice model”) and axiological rationality. I will try in this chapter to analyze the articulation between rationality and good reasons he has proposed: I will focus on the issue of the possibility of finding out stable common interpretive devices, linked to an idea of “common sense”, a concept inherited from Descartes, as opposed to the variety of divergent either psychological or cultural motives; and on the link between those stable motives and the various normative issues in the social life. Boudon’s aim has been an attempt to unify interpretations of behaviors by displaying motives that can be seen at the same time as stable, localizable beyond social and cultural variations, and associated with a sense of “relevance”, beyond the mere pursuit of one’s self-interest (which can be however included in this sense of relevance). It is this combination of stable and relevance-oriented motives that constitutes the sense of rationality he develops.

I will seek in this paper, following on other papers devoted to this topic (Demeulenaere 2014, 2024) to: first, identify two major contrasted orientations stemming from the common use of “reasons”; second, summarily analyze the roots and the evolution of the use of rationality in the social sciences; and third and finally describe Boudon’s ambition and contribution to this debate and express some reservations about his theorization. In doing so, I will not refer to Boudon’s particular papers or books except when specific quotations are mentioned. He has often repeated his main arguments in his many writings and modified them, step by step, sometimes in a significant manner. A history of his theorizations of the notions of rationality and reasons should be made. This is

not the aim of the present chapter, which focuses on a conceptual discussion of Boudon's theory in its final formulation, expressed, for instance, in Boudon (2009, 2011).

THE REASON AND THE REASONS, AND THE ISSUE OF THE SCOPE OF INTERPERSONAL RELEVANCE

It is common, in everyday life as well as in theoretical literature, to refer to "reasons" to describe the motives that are responsible for one's action: it is possible in this respect to make a difference between a strictly individual preference and a reason that implies some sort of *interpersonal* justification. Thus, a philosopher contrasts two language habits, linking reasons to rationality and justification:

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If someone says "I like coffee," he does not need to have a reason he is merely stating a fact about himself, and nothing more. There is no such thing as "rationally defending" one's like or dislike of coffee, and so there is no arguing about it. So long as he is accurately reporting his tastes, what he says must be true... On the other hand, if someone says that something is morally wrong, he does need reasons, and if his reasons are sound, other people must acknowledge their force. By the same logic, if he has no good reasons for what he says, he's just making noise and we need pay him no attention (Rachels 2003, p. 12).

In this excerpt, a link is made between rationality, reasons, and some kind of "interpersonal justification": a reason is not just the expression of a personal preference, but something that purports some sort of justification that can be vindicated on an interpersonal basis (which must be localized: it could be either a limited given community, or anyone beyond the limits of any group). In fact, this involves two issues: who is concerned by this justification, and what are the means of this justification (and in particular, whether a reference to objective facts is the only basis for such a justification).

However, we can complete this simple opposition between individual preference and reference to "reason" by noting that this interpersonal dimension can have, in the common use, three basic localizations whenever the notion of reason is involved, including simple preferences.

One is the existing link between a given motive and an action: the "reason" why I drink coffee is the fact that I like it, and this already involves somehow an interpersonal dimension, since there is a "public" or an "objective" link between the fact that I like coffee and the fact that I will tend to drink it (although this evidently does not imply that other people should like coffee or drink coffee as

well, which is another issue). This link already involves a notion of *consistency* between two events: coffee liking and coffee drinking.

The second dimension intervenes when I say that the reason why I do not drink coffee is that there is no coffee available. Here again, there is a public or objective link between the reason why I do not drink coffee and the fact that it is not available. This, similarly, does not involve any universalistic reason that people should not drink coffee. Rather, it is an objective fact, triggering the use of “reason”, that if there is no coffee, then no one can drink it. This means that reasons in common language can also refer to environmental constraints that allow some actions but exclude others. Here again, there is a consistency issue, which is that no one can drink coffee if no coffee is available.

Finally, a reason can intervene if I say that people *should* drink coffee (maybe because I believe it is good for their health, and it is commonly assumed that people should take care of their health): this example is certainly debatable, but such a stance would correspond to a reason in a stronger meaning that involves “sound” *common motives* that are supposed to be pursued and to give strength to available choices meant to realize them. Those motives, however, can concern either a given community, with its own specific norms, or, more generally, anyone. They converge or oppose, more or less. This is a central issue: do reasons ultimately rely on variable community norms, or can they be considered as extraneous to them, and as allowing precisely the interpretation of various social norms? Clearly, Boudon seeks to reach the second position: he is not an historicist nor a relativist who would believe that everything is variable, social or historical.

I will now mention classical critiques addressed to a reference to reasons (or motives) as central in explanations for social behaviors. Three are Durkheimian in substance:

1. Motives (or reasons) are not observable, only behaviors are observable, and therefore we have no access to the effective reasons of a behavior.
2. Expressed reasons are not directly responsible for behaviors since they depend themselves on other “social” factors (which people may not necessarily be aware of): the reasons one displays are not the effective explanatory factor of a given behavior, since they depend, on the same time, on general social constraints and on social norms or social trends that drive behaviors in some directions one has not set up on the basis of their own rationality, like suicide tendencies.
3. Therefore, reasons (expressed by actors or reconstructed by interpreters) do not genuinely stem from any general, basic and universalistic sense of rationality (that would be derived from the classical notion of “Reason” as an

ultimate judge of what is appropriate, the way a philosopher like Kant qualifies it), extraneous to the norms and particularities of the social world.

In this perspective, we should either abandon a reference to reasons, because they are not the relevant factors for explaining behaviors; or we could maintain them, but reasons should not be seen as the ultimate relevant explanatory factors, as based on a shared sense of rationality, since they should themselves be in turn explained in a somehow causal and indeed non-rational way.

This can lead either to a *relativistic* position stressing the ultimate plurality of reasons based on a plurality of interests, values, and social norms, corresponding to various possible motives in different communities; or to a causal stance explaining through evolutionary mechanisms (natural or social) the variety and change of such values. In this way, Durkheim had his own theory of the evolution of norms that leads them toward a universalistic unification. Psychology often describes today such causal scenarios where specific norms emerge from specific contexts (Henrich 2020).

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Boudon's theory is different from those two possible paths: on one side he refuses an ultimately relativistic reference to reasons depending on values that cannot be unified by stable interpretive devices; on the other, he refuses a causal (whether natural or social) analysis of the development and change of values, because of the importance of the "meaning" associated with reasons. He will seek thus to combine a sense of reason that is at the same time relatively stable but allows also an adaptation to various individual positions and social situations, and therefore an explanation of the various historical and social norms and behaviors.

Somehow developing one dimension of Durkheim's critique of the use of motives, stressing again their unobservability, Peter Hedström has evoked another argument dependent on it: the fact that a social action can be traced to *many possible* motives, that are not observable as such. This argument can be seen as similar to the one that is found in the philosophy of mind where the "multiple realizability" thesis contends that a single mental state can be realized by many distinct physical states (Fodor 1974). Hedström consequently departs from an analysis based on motives and proposes to replace it by one that relies only on observed *behaviors*. However, when he writes, in the same paper, that "...some individuals may become more likely to adopt the behavior in question when many others have done so, while others may shy away from behaviors that have become "too common", and it is unclear how different mixtures of such groups may affect the collective outcomes they jointly bring about" (Hedström 2021, p. 503) he inescapably refers to what can be considered as typical motives that can be linked to typical actions, although they are not directly observed.

It is clear enough that in certain recurrent circumstances typical motives are triggered and that those motives can lead to typical actions (this scenario giving birth to explanatory models), although it is also equally clear that some situations can trigger *different* possible motives (maybe dependent on other characteristics of the people involved), and that given motives can also lead to different actions. The issue is then to debate whether there is some kind of link between the notion of rationality and those motives, given the plurality of motives and of actions linked to them.

It can be argued that Boudon’s main proposition regarding the theory of action he displays in the explanation of social phenomena is the affirmation of its “rationality” of actors: but what does rationality effectively mean, given the huge controversies it is associated with? Classically and repeatedly, he refers to the opposition between *causes* and *reasons* that has been a major element of the philosophical tradition regarding the analysis of action (Collingwood 1993 [1946]). Boudon’s perspective is to challenge two orientations expressing a *determination* of action either by naturalistic/ psychological factors, or by social/ traditional habits (internalized norms): as opposed to these two orientations, he insists on the “meaning” of actions that are engaged in by actors. He also refers to a *normative* sense of rationality, beyond a mere modeling of certain features of behavior. This normative dimension, obvious in his use of the notion of *good* reasons, is linked to a notion of “relevance” (although he does not use this term), that is some sort of *correctness* of the choice, this correctness depending on norms of validity.

This sense of correctness can already be found in Weber when he mentions a dimension of *richtigkeit* (Weber 1922 [1913]) to characterize rationality in the interpretation of actions. The notion of rationality refers here to the fact that in certain circumstances some choices are *better* than others (for instance in a mathematical calculus), and the guarantee of this superiority is linked to the sense of relevance linked to rationality. Therefore, the notion of rationality corresponds to an interpersonal criterion that goes beyond either cultural norms pluralism, or *unconsciously* determined psychological behaviors (those psychological behaviors can be themselves seen as either “adapted”, notably in an evolutionary fashion, or conversely, ultimately “irrational”). Rationality is therefore a normative reflexive dimension that applies to various normative matters. It is not only reducible to “meaning”, since this notion can be linked to diverse cultural settings leading to the possibility of relativism; the challenge is therefore to find reasons that are certainly meaningful for the actor, but that are also the expression of a sense of relevance beyond a mere pluralistic and relativistic collection of possible motives.

I will contend here that any reference to “reasons” can have two different ambitions: one is minor, the other major. Boudon will seek to pursue the major one, although his examples, in my opinion, often resort to the minor one.

The minor one is to describe the motives a given action can be referred to, namely interests or values (or norms), that are convergent or divergent among people. This does not involve any normative dimension regarding the motives, since there are many observable and often conflicting interests and values that lie behind social actions. For instance, we know that Nazis were antisemitic, and that they acted *according* to this antisemitism. Social sciences do refer to this variety of motives, that can effectively be named “reasons”, only because there is a *consistent* link between the motives and the actions following them. As mentioned before, this use of the notion involves also the constraints of a given situation, that either permit or impede certain behaviors.

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This leads to the second consequence: when we define and model ex ante a set of motives or behaviors that are responsible for anticipated data and consequences (in fertility issues for instance), they are not necessarily stable, since behaviors can change according to a variety of motives that have not been anticipated, and so the model is usually fragile.

Beyond this, a major ambition of a reference to reasons is to try to interpret motives as *good reasons* in certain circumstances, derived from a “common sense” (Boudon 2006): that is beyond the plurality of possible interests and values, to understand some sort of relevance of the choices that are made. It is already the case in the minor situation, where the selection of means is indeed *relevant* toward ends. But the ends are kept outside the relevance scenario. On the contrary, in the major ambition, they are integrated.

I will give a simple example here that seems to me to be rather uncontroversial: firemen services are never interrupted by holidays (although individual firemen take holidays); there is a “good reason” to that, which is that firemen are highly useful in the face of the continuous risk of fires, and that this risk itself never takes holiday. Thus, because of the urgent necessity of preventing a risk that never stops, the service set up to fulfill this function also never stops. I think that here the characteristics of such a situation that allows us to speak of “good reasons” are a sense of relevance beyond the mere *coherence* between motives and action: no one disputes the fact that firemen are useful for combating fires, and no one disputes the fact that the risk never stops; consequently, it is

consistent and coherent that the service devoted to combat fire should never stop. As opposed to the previous case, where the plurality of values or interests limits the scope of explanation in terms of reason, here it is more complete since it produces a convincing analysis based on *stable, common, and uncontroversial motives* that are not dependent on the need for further explanation.

I believe that this was Boudon’s core intention: finding out good reasons, that is shared motives that go beyond the simple consistency of actions with their various ends, various interests and various values, but do include the interests, the motives and the norms themselves as part of the “relevance” picture he describes, depending on a non-cultural “common sense” faculty. This leads to two positions: one is to go beyond mere consistency between motives and actions; the other is to find out stable motives that are not reducible to local community agreements, based on particular social and cultural norms, and the following of rules in a Wittgenstein sense that would be relativistic (Lukes 2008).

This leads to the definition of rationality at two levels (Gibbard 1990): the upper level is the characterization of the norms of rationality (in particular, are they limited to a sense of *consistency* or *coherence*?), and the lower level is their application to given actions and motives, interpreted therefore as reasons and good “reasons”. I would suggest here a distinction that is not made by Boudon: reasons can correspond to motives that are kept outside the issue of rationality, whereas “good reasons” do integrate the motives themselves. It remains to be seen whether this is possible or not.

THREE THEORETICAL STEPS IN THE CLASSICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE LITERATURE REGARDING THE SENSE OF “RELEVANCE” ASSOCIATED WITH RATIONALITY

I will argue here that the early use of the notion of rationality in social sciences has had an immediate normative dimension. It is indeed already the case in Weber’s use of the notion of rationality, in its twofold dimensions, and similarly in Pareto’s conceptualization of “logical” actions. They both have a link with Hume’s legacy (Demeulenaere 2003 [1996]) and its reinterpretation in terms of so-called “instrumental rationality”, which is at the core of the analysis of rationality (Nozick 1993). What does this correspond to? Famously, Hume introduced in the literature two related issues: the fact/value dichotomy and the restriction of the reason’s abilities to the choice of means toward ends, as opposed to the choice of ends themselves, which goes beyond its scope. Hume’s theorization, however, already inevitably involves a sense of “relevance”: beliefs can be said to be *correct* if they are *validated* by empirical evidence, and it is

because of this that what will be later labeled “instrumental” rationality is itself linked to a sense of relevance, since it is based on the fact that an empirical *validation* of the relevant choice of means regarding an end is available, whereas there is no such warrant for the selection of ends themselves. This validation has an interpersonal dimension and can be said to be “objective”. This is the basic “positivistic” affirmation (Comte did refer to similar propositions when inventing the term) that will be so much influential in the economic literature associating economic action with instrumental rationality: the contrast between fact and value (the former being linked to the possibility of correct and therefore “rational” beliefs, and the latter being separated from such an obvious validation, and the related contrast between means and ends). Of course, any such positivistic proposition involves itself normative criteria of validity which can be discussed (Putnam 2002).

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The consequences of this first step are twofold. First, there is no available notion of *utility*, as an interpersonal and substantive point of reference that would allow us to describe what is intrinsically “advantageous” to people, since it inherently corresponds to the potentially divergent valuation of various options. Utility depends ultimately on various preferences that are either linked to psychological factors, the way Pareto describes them, or to social and cultural norms, the way Durkheim does. This means that utility cannot serve as a simple unified “rational” motive for analyzing and predicting the variety of behaviors and of social outcomes. Second, the notion of instrumental rationality is independent of any kind of specific ends, since the focus is only on the choice of available means, which allows the realization of any of them. A religious zealot can thus be rationally instrumental in the pursuit of the realization of their faith. It should be added that since there are often many different ways of achieving a given end, and that they suit more or less the actor, a motive alone is not enough to trigger in a simple causal way a straightforward action: in addition to the selection of ends, the actor must indeed also decide whether they will accept to engage in the action corresponding to the means.

The so-called “rational choice model” is the second step that follows this first introduction of the theme of rationality in the social sciences literature. It is deeply ambiguous regarding its exact content: the selection of ends it involves, the localization of rationality it implies, and its normative significance. Commonly, the rational choice model is said to be linked to “instrumental rationality” and to so-called “utilitarian” self-interests, but also to the realization of one’s preferences *whatever* they are, thus beyond any substantial notion of utility, and possibly including norms and values in substance opposed to self-interests (Sen 1977). However, those three propositions are independent and possibly incompatible. Indeed, the choice of means as such does not imply

any restriction regarding the ends, nor any kind of “utilitarianism”. Utility in this perspective should not be opposed to values, since the variety of the conceptions of utility can include values and normative dimensions. If, conversely, various preferences are introduced in order to solve this problem, then they have no necessary link with either utility (in any given restricted sense), nor with rationality, and they cannot allow the building up of a general predictable model, since they can vary according to different preferences.

Despite the distinction of all those dimensions, major proponents of the model tend to mix them without paying attention to the consequent ambiguities of these various orientations. Thus Coleman explains:

The individual-level theory of action I will use in this book is the same purposive theory of action used in Weber’s study of Protestantism and capitalism. It is the theory of action used implicitly by most social theorists and by most people in the commonsense psychology that underlies their interpretation of their own and others’ actions. It is ordinarily the dominant model of action we apply when we say we understand the action of another person: We say that we understand the “reasons” why the person acted in a certain way, implying that we understand the intended goal and how the actions were seen by the actor to contribute to that goal.

For some purposes in the theory of this book, nothing more than this commonsense notion of purposive action is necessary. For much of the theory, however, a more precise notion is required. For this if I will use the conception of rationality employed in economics, the conception that forms the basis of the rational actor in economic theory. This conception is based on the notion of different actions (or in some cases different goods) having a particular utility for the actor and is accompanied by a principle of action which can be expressed by saying that the actor chooses the action which will maximize utility (Coleman 1990, pp. 14-15).

The simultaneous reference to “reasons”, to “purposive action”, to “commonsense psychology”, and to the “maximization of utility” leads to theoretical confusion: those different concepts do not easily overlap, can be sometimes contradictory, and are certainly not predictive in a simple way of certain types of behaviors based on a unified model.

Regarding the localization of rationality, it implies three possible levels. If the reference is to mere instrumental rationality, it lies in the relevant choice of means, whatever the ends are; if it purports to include a substantial notion of utility (linked to “interests” defined in a specific way as opposed to “altruistic” behaviors and assumed somehow to be rational) the theory faces two recurrent difficulties. First, it is clear enough that people sometimes follow norms and

values, that can hardly be derived from any given interests if they are specified in a narrow sense, or that can be opposed to them, it is incomplete if it wants to make sense of these attitudes (Bowles 2016). Second, if, conversely, to escape this difficulty, the model gives up any substantial notion of utility and relies only on various preferences (that possibly include values), then it has no predictive strength and tends to be tautological: people prefer what they prefer and do what they do, which defines what their interests and their utility are.

Finally, rationality is usually only related to the consistency of preferences. There is a gap regarding this between the two usual presentations of the “rational choice model”. One corresponds to the way sociologists commonly refer to it, including “instrumental” rationality, and often substantial intuitions of what “utility” is supposed to be (although utility, as we have seen, can be derived from various preferences, which are, however, considered as “self-interest” in this respect). As opposed to this presentation, the standard one in economic literature is inspired by an effort developed by Ramsey (1978) at mathematically defining preference functions: utility is only the result of an ordering of preferences, and then the issue of rationality stems from the introduction of the “consistency” assumption in this ordering procedure. There is a subsequent debate about whether this consistency hypothesis has itself a normative significance (Blackburn 1998) or not. At any rate, it is far from the traditional Weberian presentation of instrumental rationality.

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Given all these intricacies, a recurrent move in sociological literature is to try to avoid any reference to normative issues, and to insist on the importance of modeling behaviors, without introducing any reference to rationality. Thus, Homans claims that “in (his) opinion calling the principle ‘rational’ adds nothing to its meaning, provided we are only concerned with how people do in fact behave. ‘Rational’ is a normative term, used to persuade people to behave in a certain way” (Homans 1987, p. 62).

I believe that it is precisely against this possible project of abandoning any reference to rationality that the main contention of Boudon’s theory has engaged, highlighting instead its centrality: if we want to model appropriately people’s behaviors, there is a need to find out the reasons and the *good reasons* they have to adopt one course of action instead of another. He displays, therefore, two main features of behaviors: people often tend to follow their own interests, and even though he acknowledges that these interests are linked to their various preferences, he nevertheless conceptualizes this attitude as an “utilitarian” one. At the same time, he stresses the fact that people also tend to adhere to values, notably beyond their own selfish interests, and sometimes oppose them. He contends, in addition, that these attitudes are not dependent on causal psychological (unconscious, psychological, naturalistic) factors, nor

on causal social norms (that are internalized without any reflexive or critical dimension). He consequently refers to these two typical attitudes in relation to the notions of “instrumental rationality” and “axiological rationality” borrowed from Weber. Those two notions can also be traced to Kant, who had similarly opposed the sense of one’s own interests and the intervention of *reason*, developing a sense of morality. It is interesting to note that this Kantian issue had also been at the root of Durkheim’s theory of morality, which similarly opposes individual interests and a dedication to the sense of duty stemming from social norms. In Boudon’s framework, the intervention of axiological rationality corresponds to three things: There can be “objective” that is in fact universally valid values, beyond the opposition to specific interests; people will often choose to follow those values against their selfish interests in typical social circumstances; however, a certain variation of those values is due either to the various actors’ positions or to the variety of situations themselves.

Boudon has repeatedly situated his analysis in the following of the classics, stressing however that his intention was not to adopt them in a completely faithful manner, but to freely recapture some of their central important intuitions. If we ask now the question of what the norms or criteria of rationality in Weber’s dual theory are, two directions can be traced: on one side there is indeed the contrast between instrumental and axiological rationality, but on the other side those two possibilities are still unified under the label of, precisely, a common underlying reference to rationality as such. Where can it be located, and what are its norms? Weber is not explicit about that, although he refers, as mentioned before, to a sense of *richtigkeit*. Regarding *Wertrationalität*, there is one obvious familiar rationality criterion, which is *consistency* between an action and the value it depends on: the norm of rationality can be said to be simply consistency. Regarding the values themselves, it is not obvious that they can be said to be rational in Weber’s analysis, despite Boudon’s claim to the contrary. On the *Zweckrationalität* side, there is also a *consistency* dimension, which is that if someone follows an end, they should consider the adequate means, and the foreseeable consequences (to see whether they fit with the pursued ends). This is also an issue of consistency. Moreover, Weber emphasizes that there is no sharp and definitive separation between interests and values, since they might overlap. Their major difference is the existence or not of a sense of duty (but somehow it can be said that people can have a sense of duty in the realization of their interests, if they *value* their interests more than anything else; a systematic preference for one’s own interest can also be seen as the effect of a social norm stressing for instance pride based on interests). Thus, the real contrast in Weber’s theorization lies between different types of motives, different types of pressure reinforcing those motives, but the

rationality norms are not themselves so much divided, and they turn mainly around the idea of *consistency* with various motives, basically either interests or values (the two being not completely separable, and the values tending to diverge historically and socially).

Boudon equally refers to different types of motives but interprets them straightforwardly in terms of *reasons* (that is, beyond motives only, motives being interpreted in terms of rationality), resorting, however, to *different types of rationality*. The list of these tends to vary in his successive writings and is certainly broader than Weber's dichotomy between the two kinds (instrumental and axiological). I will seek to analyze the correspondence he makes between typical motives (interests and values), the "(good) reasons" one has to adopt them, and their dependence on a series of types of rationality. Boudon never locates his discussion at the level of the definition of norms of rationality, except by stressing, as we have seen, the general contrast between causes (natural or social) and reasons, which seems to be a common feature of the different types of rationality. Thus, the question is whether there is more in the use of "good" reasons than the mere correspondence and coherence between actions and various types of motives (and the limitations of these by the situation constraints).

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THE ISSUE OF A CONTRAST BETWEEN INSTRUMENTAL AND AXIOLOGICAL RATIONALITY

Boudon announces the necessity to go beyond "instrumental rationality," which includes, in the way it is presented by him, at the same time, the (relevant) choice of means *and* the (equally relevant?) choice of "utilitarian" interests. Therefore, there is a shift toward the ends themselves (interests) that are here integrated into the definition of instrumental rationality he displays, and this instrumental rationality is thus labeled as "utilitarian". We have seen that this move is not necessary and can indeed be criticized because it goes beyond the basic requirement necessary for the definition of instrumental rationality. What Boudon does in effect is to equate different types of motives, derived from either interests or values, to a typology of rationality itself, as ultimately responsible for these different choices. But he does not present a general discussion of whether this corresponds to different norms of rationality; and of why, when people have the choice between interests and values opposed to them (and consequently different "rationalities" themselves in his words), they will decide for one option against another. He sometimes gives examples of the prevalence of values over interests. Regarding, this, he essentially develops the Adam Smith notion of an "impartial spectator" (Boudon 2001) who can define

and adopt moral norms, in circumstances where one’s interests are not directly involved. But this does not solve the problem of the opposition for one person of their interests and their moral sense when they face the two possible choices stemming from two different rationalities.

I will briefly explore therefore a major situation where the contrast between the two attitudes simultaneously intervenes: the social dilemmas, where people have at the same time an interest (specifically defined) in following a norm, and in not following it. I will seek to understand whether these two attitudes can be associated with a difference between two types of rationality (depending on different norms of rationality). It is a type of situation, interestingly, that is not discussed by Weber when he refers to the two types of rationality, nor Pareto, when he contrasts logical action and the adoption of values, although it was already present in Hume, Rousseau, and Kant’s theorizations. In such situations, where, if everyone follows their own interest (specifically defined), the result is bad for everyone, there is a tendency to the emergence (Coleman 1990) of a cooperation “value” that would solve the dilemma. It is commonly labeled in terms of “justice”, as opposed to non-cooperative free riders who are seen as behaving in an “unjust” manner, because they harm others -they impose negative externalities on them by not cooperating. People have, consequently, typically and recurrently, the choice between following their immediate interests or respecting the cooperation value that would enhance everyone’s interests. They can either choose one option or the other. There are in addition social pressures and social sanctions that are devoted to strengthening peoples’ respect for cooperation norms.

Although there is no systematic discussion of the emergence of norms in social dilemmas in Boudon’s work, he does present *examples* of them as a core case for the opposition between interest and values. It is notably the case in his treatment of the paradox of voting (1998). In such situations, people have at the same time an interest in cooperation (voting) and an interest in not cooperating, because one vote does not make any difference in a large-scale election: but if no one votes, the benefits of democracy (which are assumed to be desired) are lost. There is a subsequent demand for norms in favor of voting, which would solve the issue, although everyone has at the same time an interest in not voting, because one vote does not make any difference. I think this is the central case where “axiological rationality” clearly intervenes for Boudon *against* “instrumental rationality”. People decide to vote on the basis of a dedication to democratic values, against the interest they have in not voting.

But does this difference of choices between clearly defined but opposed interests and values imply also different types of rationality, that is, different norms of rationality? There are several things that are indisputable regarding

this: there are social dilemmas, there are cooperative norms, and they lead to typical conflicts between cooperative and non-cooperative strategies in such situations (Demeulenaere 2021):

- They correspond to a common sense of utility shared by all the participants: there is an available interpersonal comparison of utility, which stems here from the fact that, by hypothesis, in such a social dilemma, people have the same ranking of their preferences.
- However, in such situations, there are different possible strategies, and a dominant one, which, when generalized, leads to a general loss for all participants. This is the dilemma.
- Consequently, there is the objective interpersonal definition of a norm that would solve the problem: everyone has an interest in adopting the norm, but also an interest in not adopting the norm if others follow it.
- People thus decide to follow the norm or not: in both situations, there is a “reason”, either to follow one’s immediate interest, or to follow the norm against one’s immediate interest.

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It is interesting to note that in experimental devices that are set up in order to check how people do effectively behave in such public games, they in effect tend to behave *differently* (either on cultural lines or on individual ones, although there are some general tendencies that can be traced) (Henrich et al. 2001). Thus, some people tend to follow the norm, and some do not (it is likely that their behavior depends also on the level of sanctions and of social pressure, and also on the general features of a given society).

However, I do not think that we can deduce from that recurrent situation and those two typical opposed choices, based on the emergence of norms, different “types of rationality” as such in the sense that this would resort to *different norms* of rationality. People act *according* to either their immediate interests or to the norm that solves the dilemma, the norm being also rationally (instrumentally) set up in favor of their interests. These are different possible attitudes, one that can be labeled “selfish”, and one “moral”. But both involve the same criterion of rationality, that is *consistency* toward ends that are pursued but tend to be conflicting. The fact that one acts on behalf of a moral attitude, or conversely on behalf of a selfish one, does not imply that one acts because of a specific “axiological rationality” (except that it is intended toward a moral behavior, because instrumental rationality does not exclude such moral behavior, except if it is arbitrarily defined as excluding it). We can add that the setting of the norm itself clearly obeys instrumental rationality, since its aim is to escape the dilemma and to favor a public interest that is commonly pursued. It can be said moreover that the respect of the norm is consistent with the

pursuit of this public interest aim, that is itself consistent with the realization of one's interest, but eventually conflicts with it. All this had been seen by Hume, Rousseau and Kant.

Although Boudon develops the central example of voting, he does not discuss the general extent of the norms that stem from such social dilemma situations, nor the contrast and possible differences with *other* types of norms. He clearly does not limit to the emergence of norms in social dilemma situations, nor does he make a specific case out of them: he purports to describe a general sense of axiological rationality in situations that do not correspond to the properties of social dilemmas where the contrast between interests and cooperation norms is clearly defined and designed. He seeks to develop a general theory of adherence to norms, not only beyond social dilemmas, but also beyond the Rawlsian limitation to a basic framework where only some limited norms are derived from the ability of reason to select them, whereas all that ambition to reach "conceptions of the good" is seen as going beyond the limits of such rationality (Rawls 1971). This Rawlsian framework tends to define only a limited set of norms, mostly egalitarian and universalistic, that can be vindicated on rationality grounds. Many philosophers have argued that this path is too narrow, and that many other norms can be debated on the basis of *reasons* (Scanlon 1998).

Similarly to that contention, I believe that Boudon's ambition is to interpret, in addition to those basic egalitarian and universalistic norms, the meaning *and* therefore the rationality of *most* conceptions of the good (that is, values), their evolution, and the adherence to them. This leads him to an attempt at interpreting the change of norms and to analyze their evolution in a way that also purports to avoid any relativism. His theory of norms is somehow symmetrical to that of Durkheim, who similarly unifies all social norms as basically dependent on one fundamental social constraint, that of solidarity, analyzing how it applies to different social situations: but instead of those social constraints, what is found in Boudon's theory are the "good reasons" people have to follow such specific norms in different situations. Boudon does make and does accept a difference between cultural variable norms, that do not stem from rationality, and norms that depend on rationality that are adapted to different contexts. But he seeks to maximize the identification of the ones that are linked to good reasons, in the sense of something that escapes the variation of cultural norms but can be interpreted as adaptations of rational attitudes to particular situations with their own limitations. One good example is his theory of magics (2007): a basic similar cognitive ability is adapted to circumstances where the modern notion of natural law is not available, and therefore the contrast between magics and scientific inquiry does not hold.

In order to stabilize the interpretation of those various particular situations and norms, he introduces three major invariable elements, that are seen as pre-cultural, and corresponding to the “common sense” ultimate characterization of behavior:

1. A stable foundational normative reference: the sense of human “dignity”, which is borrowed from Kant.

2. A stable cognitive ability to correctly assess facts. He thus defends the idea of common features of rationality against the idea promoted by Levy-Bruhl of a “prelogical mentality”.

3. A reference to a stable non-cultural “conventional rational psychology”, that differs however from an unconscious psychology (of the Kahneman type) and which is referred to Simmel’s “conventional psychology”. Those two pre-cultural common-sense features are thus summarized:

“To conclude with a definition of the notions of decentration and sociocentrism, we can say that an explanation escapes sociocentrism when it is composed exclusively of two types of propositions: factual propositions subject to empirical verification and psychological propositions belonging to the register of ordinary psychology: that which is also called ‘rational’. It consists of attributing to the subject only immediately understandable motivations and reasons” (Boudon 2006, p. 123, our translation).

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The combination of those stable foundational competences with the variation of individual positions and of social historical situations is made through selection mechanisms that are such that: first, new ideas are invented; second, some of them are seen as “better” than the previous ones; and third, are consequently mostly adopted. This involves at the same time a theory of adaptation and indeed a theory of progress.

I believe, however, that there are four basic difficulties in this scenario: First, the human dignity being considered as a stable value, it is not obvious to interpret the various historical norms that clearly go against it (like norms in favor of slavery). Second, even if we refer to stable psychological aptitudes, many possible outcomes based on them are indeed available, which do not necessarily unify in commonly shared stable norms. They can lead to conflicting norms. It is not necessary that there is *one* solution to any dispute. Boudon’s stance is similar to “the formula offered by David Wiggins (which) is that over a potentially disputed issue, one side can gain the high ground, justifiably talking of knowledge and truth, by showing that there is ‘nothing else to think.’” (Wiggins 1990, quoted in Blackburn 1998, p. 301). But very often, such definitive conclusions are not reached in social life. It is also possible that a common psychology leads to irrational behaviors (Elster 2010).

Third, it is not obvious that the interpretations that are proposed go beyond existing opposed cultural norms. For instance, Boudon, following Weber, describes the interest of Roman Empire state officials in Mithraism, because of their common emphasis on hierarchical bonds. The “good reasons” here clearly correspond to local cultural norms that in no way can be seen as a rational choice in a more ambitious way corresponding to an idea of common sense, making the choice of Mithraism a “good” solution to the choice of a religion. Many examples of such good reasons given by Boudon are thus reframing of cultural norms, and their interior fabric, and this does not help combating relativism because no real sense of progress or adaptation can be localized in such situations. This involves the difference between “meaning”, which can be cultural, and a stronger sense of rationality aimed at finding out ultimately good solutions beyond the plurality of cultures, and making sense of them.

Finally, if there are clearly mechanisms of adaptation, it is not obvious to assert that new ideas are always responsible, on a sole rational basis, for the diffusion of them. Some better (from the point of view of some normative instance) ideas or norms can be available without being adopted. Boudon (1988) has been interested in these phenomena, but he considers optimistically that, in the long run, good norms tend to prevail. We must then wait for the long run to see if this proves to be true.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to assess Boudon’s theory of rationality. I have expressed three main reservations. First, the constant reference to reasons and good reasons does not lead us to a clear break with the variety of social and cultural norms, since the very notion of reasons can include them. Second, the introduction by Boudon of different types of rationality is not clearly articulated in a discussion of the norms of rationality, and its relation to various types of motives. Those two points limit the scope of his great ambition. Finally, the attempt to develop the genesis of values and their evolution in terms of rationality as the result of selection mechanisms is not really supported by empirical evidence.

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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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