

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 18

Boudon's Legacy

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From a Teaching Perspective

Gianluca Manzo

ISBN : 979-10-231-5285-2



L'intelligence
du social

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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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for Contemporary Sociological Science

SORBONNE UNIVERSITÉ PRESSES
Paris

With the support of Sorbonne University
and of the Fondation Simone et Cino Del Duca – Institut de France.

Sorbonne Université Presses is the publishing house of Sorbonne University,
affiliated with the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

© Sorbonne Université Presses, 2025
Print version ISBN: 979-10-231-4019-4
Epub ISBN: 979-10-231-4587-8
Full pdf ISBN: 979-10-231-4588-5

Page layout: Laurent TOURNIER
PDF: Emmanuel Marc DUBOIS/3d2s

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BOUDON'S LEGACY FROM A TEACHING PERSPECTIVE

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From the perspective of sociology of education, university teaching remains, in industrialized contemporary societies, the privileged means of transferring the knowledge regarded by a given generation of scholars as the most valuable and advanced for the cognitive and practical training of the next generation (Brint 2017, chs. 1, 2). One way to address the question of one author's legacy thus is to ask whether they should be included in the syllabus of a university class, and, if so, what aspects of their work should be presented to students. I will follow this approach to reflect upon Boudon's legacy in this chapter.

In particular, I imagined an institutional setting in which I was given the opportunity to design a two-semester introductory course in sociology for first-year Master's students that had to meet the three following constraints: first, the course's main goal must be to provide practical guidelines on how to design sociological research; second, the course's secondary goal must be to help students to think about the current state of sociology as a discipline; and third, at least two-thirds of the course's reading assignments must rely on Boudon's oeuvre. Such an imaginary setting put me in a moral-dilemma-like situation regarding my sense of responsibility as a teacher. This responsibility compels me to select the best pedagogical resources for students, but may collide with my sense of loyalty to the authors of the past generations that I admire, given that the desire to show respect is a possible bias in one's capacity to honestly judge the relevance of those authors. Therefore, the question I had to solve was: Did I really believe in the possibility of finding enough material in Boudon's scientific production that was still worthy to be presented to a new generation of students in sociology, or would I have to conclude that Boudon's works seemed to me too outdated by recent developments in contemporary sociology to include in such a course?

After recursively examining Boudon's earliest works and his latest writings, I convinced myself that a selection of them can still support the design of a thought-provoking syllabus for a Master's-level introductory course to

sociology that I believe worthy to be taught. In particular, the course would be composed of three sets of lectures, which I will call *modules* hereafter, and that could be respectively titled “Research puzzles”, “Research heuristics”, and “Research quality”. In the following three sections of this chapter, I briefly explain the goal and the content of each module; an overview of the corresponding potential syllabus is provided in Appendix 1.

352 As a final preliminary remark, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to a caveat. While I will justify the selection of Boudon’s writings assigned within each course’s module, I do not claim that the choices that I made are the only possible ones. In particular, based on the observation that many students today are reluctant to read extensively, I prioritized short over long reading assignments, thus selecting Boudon’s articles and book chapters rather than entire books. Moreover, given the space limitation, my imaginary setting allowed me to design only a single, two-semester course with specific goals. I have therefore excluded Boudon’s pieces of work on classics (for the possible teaching value of which, see Sanantonio and Miguel’s chapters in this book). Therefore, my only claim is that the proposed syllabus seems a reasonable and defensible starting point for the design of an introductory course to sociology that would still benefit a new generation of students. Variations and modifications of it are certainly possible and would be welcome.

RESEARCH PUZZLES

According to the first requirement of the imaginary setting I have described in the introduction, the course to be delivered had to equip students with the capacity to design sociological research. The module “Research puzzles” proposes to meet this requirement by explaining to students how Boudon replied to well-defined counterintuitive *why*-questions concerning specific substantive phenomena, i.e., what we may call “puzzles” (see Gambetta 1995). This module comes first because dissecting the details of specific pieces of empirically-oriented research that one regards as successful from both a substantive and methodological point of view seems to be an effective way to introduce students to sociology. In a posthumously published article, Boudon (2014, p. 43) appeared himself to share this pedagogic principle:

Every scientific puzzle is unique, so that it requires scientific imagination to solve it. A practical consequence of this is that the best way to teach the complexity of the micro-macro link problem is to expose sociology students to examples where the problem has been successfully solved. They will learn then that the question as to “What is context?” has actually no general answer,

but answers specifically adapted to the challenging macroscopic puzzles the sociologist wants to disentangle.

Among the number of *puzzles*, both at the micro- and macro-level, that populated Boudon's writings, the six *why*-questions that follow received answers characterized by a particular degree of systematicity and elaboration:

1. *Why* did the frequency of judges deciding to discontinue a case before them in court ("affaires classées sans suite") increase in France between 1831 and 1950 (Davidovitch and Boudon 1964)?
2. *Why* do actors with high social background tend to make more ambitious educational choices compared to actors with low social background, even when they have similar grades (Boudon 1973, ch. 4)?
3. *Why* might an increase in the number of highly-educated individuals not lead to a proportional increase in the rate of absolute intergenerational social mobility (Boudon 1973, ch. 8)?
4. *Why* may the fraction of unhappy actors initially increase, despite the fact that the number of available places that provide access to certain goods expands (Boudon 1977, ch. 5)?
5. *Why* were French students, compared to students in other countries, so massively in favor of protesting in May and June 1968 (Boudon 1971a)?
6. *Why* do highly-educated citizens tend to have markedly different levels of tolerance to moral and behavioral diversity compared to low-educated ones (Boudon 2002a)?

Students may benefit from being exposed to the machinery of how Boudon replied to these six research questions for three reasons. First, as suggested by the abundant secondary literature on questions 2 and 3 (see, for instance, Breen's chapter in this book), they raise the problem of whether or not the explanandum was properly established by Boudon, and, if so, whether or not the puzzling character Boudon assigned to a given explanandum is really or not. Therefore, in this respect, the heuristic value of the selected research examples is to make students think about what "establishing a phenomenon" (Merton 1987) means, and what a research question worthy of interest is (Martin 2017, ch. 2).

Second, the six research examples selected allow us to illustrate a variety of ways to test hypotheses. In particular, questions 1 to 3 refer to data-oriented and formalized explanations. The answers provided by Boudon rely on hypotheses formalized through mathematics or algorithms (for more details, see Sage's

chapter in this book), and these tools are then used to derive hypotheses' consequences and connect these consequences to specific datasets. In this sense, the proposed hypotheses were verified with a clear methodological apparatus that can be inspected (see Breen's and Birkelund's chapter in this book). The explanation for question 4 refers instead to stylized-fact-oriented but formalized explanations. The answer provided by Boudon still relies on hypotheses that are formalized through mathematics, namely game theory (see Raub's chapter in this book), so that checks and replications are still possible. However, the hypotheses are developed to account for a class of empirical patterns rather than a specific dataset. Boudon (1996, p. 63, 65) classifies his answer to question 4 as a "model", which he defined, with respect to this specific piece of work, as a theory explaining a set of "heteroclite", his own word, phenomena rather than one set of particular empirical observations. Finally, the answers Boudon provides to questions 5 and 6 refer to data-oriented, informal explanations: they have the ambition to connect hypotheses to specific data but the hypotheses are only formulated as qualitative narratives. In this sense, Boudon admits himself that these explanations are more "hypothetical causes" (Boudon 1971a, p. 148) or "conjectures" (Boudon 2002a, p. 43). As a consequence, the heuristic value of the selected research examples is to force students to reflect upon the status of a given explanation depending on how the connection between hypotheses and empirical data is implemented.

Finally, but related to the previous point, the third learning benefit that I see in dissecting the six selected research examples is that they allow one to raise the more general question of what a "good" explanation is. For instance, as the secondary literature on the answer Boudon provided to question 4 suggests (see Berger et al.'s chapter in this book), it can indeed be argued that these explanations need to be revised. At the same time, the need for revision suggests that there is *something* to revise. This *something* may well be a new mechanism nobody has thought about before. Again, this was the case for question 4 as Gambetta (1998, Table 5.1, and p. 117) correctly noted. In other words, the explanations at hand pinpoint something new. They had the capacity to lead the observer to see the social world otherwise, meaning by thinking about a possible social mechanism that we did not see before we considered the proposed explanation. The capacity to trigger an observer's curiosity, thus leading them to further investigate the proposed mechanism, seems to be a property of good explanations. The six selected research examples thus also have the pedagogical virtue of forcing students to reflect upon what makes an explanation worthy of its name.

RESEARCH HEURISTICS

Teaching by research examples means examining the details of how things are done in practice, rather than discussing the general principles behind the practice. However, at least at the earlier stages of a sociological training, and in particular given the number of philosophy-minded students that enter our Master's programs in sociology, providing a systematic discussion of general principles for designing sociological research also seems an important step in their training. Thus, while the course's first module on "Research puzzles" focuses on the substantive phenomena to be explained *and* on the substantive content of the explanations proposed by Boudon to questions 1 to 6 (see section 1 above), the "Research heuristics" module is about the *modus operandi* of the six pieces of research associated to these questions. Although to a different extent, these pieces indeed share a common set of working principles. I recognize five of them, plus a sixth insight whose heuristic value deserves special attention. The proposed syllabus (for an overview, see Appendix 1) suggests devoting a lecture to each of these ingredients; in addition, students are invited to "discussion" breaks where they can reflect upon some of the existing debates on the identified working principles.

GENERATIVE MODELS

The first, and most general, principle that is transversal to the six pieces of research discussed in the "Research puzzles" module poses that explaining requires building a *generative model*. According to Boudon, a generative model is a set of hypotheses that allows to understand a statistical structure as a consequence of those hypotheses – in his own words, "... a theory containing two logical core elements: first, a description of the logic postulated to regulate the actions of the individuals observed in a survey or some other kind of observation from which quantitative data are derived; and second, a description of the social constraints within which the logic of individual action develops" (Boudon 1979a, p. 52). The heuristic value of exposing students to this principle is to make them familiar with the idea that explaining an empirical observation requires being specific about the details of the mechanisms that are likely to be responsible for the observation (see also Hedström's and Stolz's chapters in this book). With respect to this first principle of thinking through generative models, the lecture's discussion break will provide a forum to raise the question whether Boudon really was at the origin of this notion, and, if not, from whom he may have borrowed it (see Manzo 2024).

The remaining four working principles are in fact principles that provide more specific instructions on how to design (principles 2, 3 and 4) and to study (principle 5) a generative model. They outline the building blocks of a generative model and provide guidance on how students can deduce logical consequences from their combination.

THE NOTION OF *RATIONALITY*

356 In particular, the second working principle concerns the micro-sociological moment of the model building process, i.e. the first element (the “actions”) of Boudon’s above-mentioned definition of a generative model. It is about what Boudon (2010, p. 18) lately called “cognitive equilibrium principle” stating that “people believe that *X* is true, acceptable, good, legitimate, etc. as soon as they have the feeling that *X* rests upon a set of acceptable reasons”. This is the basic principle behind what Boudon initially called “subjective” (Boudon 1989), then “cognitive” (Boudon 1996), and, ultimately, “ordinary” *rationality* (Boudon 2012a), a model of actors that he asserts is able to explain all types of beliefs behind actors’ choices, whether these beliefs are positive or normative (Boudon 2014). The pedagogic value of exposing students to this principle is to make them reflect upon the actual possibility of opening the black box of an actor’s mind as well as upon the conditions under which doing this is necessary to achieve explanatory depth (see Hedström’s and Esser’s chapters in this book). With respect to the notion of rationality, the lecture’s discussion break then raises the question of the extent to which Boudon’s specific model of actors is defensible (see Opp 2014; see, also Demeulenaere’s chapter in this book).

INTERDEPENDENCY STRUCTURES

The third working principle shifts the focus to the second element, i.e. the “social constraints”, of Boudon’s above-mentioned definition of a generative model. It emphasizes a particular type of constraint, namely the interdependency among social actions (see Boudon 1979b, ch. 4), which the early Boudon understood as a central driver of *reproductive* (Boudon 1979b, ch. 5), *cumulative* and *transformative* processes (Boudon 1979b, ch. 6). The pedagogic value of exposing students to this principle is to push them to think about society as “complex entanglements of systems of interaction”, in Boudon’s (1979b, p. 113 [Eng. trans.: 1981, p. 56]) own words, thus forcing them to the mental gym of considering the possibility that a given macroscopic pattern may arise as an unintended effect of how actors impinge on one another (on the notion of “perverse effect”, see Boudon 1977, pp. 5-15 [Eng. trans.: 1982,

pp. 1-10]). With respect to the principle of taking seriously interdependency structures, the lecture's discussion break then raises the question of the extent to which Boudon has progressively paid more attention to actors than to interdependency among them,¹ and, on the other hand, whether he actually always focused more on "parametric" forms of interdependency rather than on interdependency embedded in dyadic and higher-order interactions – a comparison with Granovetter (1978, 1983) is proposed here to students.²

THE MICRO-MACRO LINK

The fourth principle concerns the relationship between the elements (1), i.e., the actions, and (2), i.e., the "social constraints", of Boudon's above-mentioned definition of a generative model. The principle invites the modeler to do their best in connecting the micro- and the macro-levels of analysis recursively, which Boudon (1981, p. 46) nicely expressed with the formula $M=M\{m[S(P)]\}$. It states that a given phenomenon to be explained (M) can be seen as the outcome of actions (m), which are themselves the outcome of the social environment of the actors (S), which is itself the outcome of higher-level macro-sociological variables (P). One of the added values of exposing students to a discussion of this principle is to make them aware that the usual presentation of the methodological individualism according to which only individuals' actions matter to explain a given social phenomenon only partially corresponds to the way Boudon's defined this perspective (see also Bulle's chapter in this book). With respect to the micro-macro principle, the lecture's discussion break then

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- 1 On this point is telling to compare Boudon's (1979a, pp. 51-60; 1977 [Eng. trans.: 1982, chs. 4, 5]) earlier generative models where game theory is explicitly used to formalize how actors' actions depend on one another with later definitions of this notion where the "contextual" component conceived in terms of interdependency disappears (consider for instance how Boudon (2002a, p. 21, 22) explained his research strategy to approach a wide range of statistical distributions from 1990 and 1998 World Values Survey data: "[...] I have attempted to penetrate it [...] using the generative models method. Here, it consists in trying to impute to ideal-typical respondents a system of reasons that can explain, at a qualitative (ordinal) level, the characteristics of the observed distributions [...] with the aim of identifying the micro-sociological origin of the macro-sociological tendencies we detect, by applying the theory of rationality that I have defended, notably in Boudon (1998, 2001a)" (my own translation).
- 2 Boudon (2012a, p. 18) lately seemed to admit the distinction within a context however where he criticizes others for not doing what one may have expected him to do: "Incident remark: Networks are today a popular topic of sociological research. But they are often treated in a mere descriptive or mechanical fashion, while a connection with the theory of ordinary rationality would make network research more fruitful, as many classical and modern sociological works suggest."

invites students to consider who else defended this recursive understanding of the micro-macro link (see Raub and Voss 2017), and who criticized it (see Jepperson and Meyer 2011).

NUMERICAL SIMULATIONS

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The last working principle that is behind some of the six pieces of research discussed in the “Research puzzles” module (namely those addressing questions 1, 2, 3, and 4) is methodological rather than substantive. It concerns Boudon’s (1965) suggestion that algorithm-based computer simulation and numerical analysis of mathematical models (i.e., numerical simulations) can be used to verify the extent to which a given generative model can produce numerical structures that are in line with the empirical patterns to be explained. The pedagogic value of exposing students to this principle is to make them aware that statistical methods are not the only tool that sociologists can use for hypothesis testing. With respect to numerical simulations, the lecture’s discussion break then raises the question of the extent to which Boudon has progressively de-emphasized the use of formal tools to study generative models, and, in particular, possibly failed to appreciate the importance for their rigorous study of the most recent and advanced developments in the field of computational modeling (see Manzo 2012, pp. 50-57).

THE ROLE OF CHANCE

Although it cannot be regarded as a working principle transversal to Boudon’s pieces of research discussed in the “Research puzzles” module, I do believe that there is an additional ingredient of Boudon’s view of generative model building that would be very profitable to students. It is Boudon’s (1984, pp. 184-190) advice to give more attention to the role of *chance* in modeling social processes where *chance* is understood as the possible intersection of independent causal chains (Boudon 1984, p. 186, 189). This is a topic that Boudon only addressed explicitly once. Still, it seems sufficiently general to be brought to students’ attention: it may indeed help them to develop a reflection on how contingency may be measured. In this sense, thinking more about *chance* constitutes a warning for students against the temptation of over-emphasizing social determinism, for the simple reason that indicators supposedly capable of quantifying it are more easily accessible than indicators of the by-chance event (see Erikson’s chapter in this book).

The *modus operandi* followed by Boudon in his empirically-oriented pieces of research exposed in the module “Research puzzles” thus offers a clear set of

research guidelines to students. The six working principles briefly discussed can indeed easily be turned into simple research heuristics: “design generative models!” (principle 1); “Think about actors’ action’ logic!” (principle 2); “Do not forget interdependency structures!” (principle 3); “Connect recursively the micro- and macro-levels!” (principle 4); “Possibly put in motion the model through simulation!” (principle 5); and, “pay attention to chance!” (principle 6). That each of them still generates debates, as testified by each lecture’s “discussion” break, suggests that Boudon’s legacy for students is real and can have strong training value.

RESEARCH QUALITY

According to the requirements of the imaginary setting that I have described in the introduction, the introductory course to sociology based on Boudon’s works, had to provide not only practical guidelines on how to design sociological research but it also had to help students to appreciate the current state of sociology as a discipline. Meeting this second demand was relatively easy, as Boudon wrote extensively on this topic throughout his career. The selection of his writings that I suggest including in the course’s third module “Research quality” (see Appendix 1 for an overview) addresses more particularly what we may call the “quality” debate, in the sense that it concerns the criteria of demarcation between “good” and less good sociology (see Gunnar et al. 2024).

For pedagogic clarity, the “Research quality” module organizes Boudon’s contribution to the “quality” debate as responses to the following five questions:

1. Does sociology have a single identity?
2. What are the reasons of sociology’s heterogeneity?
3. How can we describe sociology’s heterogeneity?
4. What is a good theory?
5. What are the strategies to handle sociology’s heterogeneity?

The five lectures composing the module treats each question in turn by focusing on Boudon’s pieces of works, or portions of them, where the clearest answer to the question is provided. Here I briefly summarize these answers.

DOES SOCIOLOGY HAVE A SINGLE IDENTITY?

To this question, Boudon has replied consistently negatively over his entire career. Very early, in a collection of essays published in 1971 under the title *La Crise de la sociologie* (*The Crisis of Sociology*), Boudon (1971b, p. 16, 17, 27,

28, 35) speaks of “polymorphism” to qualify sociology’s heterogeneity.³ Later, he will suggest that the word sociology should actually be used in the plural rather than in the singular form because, he claims, there are only “sociological traditions” or “types of sociology” (Boudon 1996, p. 57).⁴ Even later, he uses the metaphor of a “house with many mansions” to describe sociology’s diversity (Boudon 2002b, p. 372). Toward the end of his life, Boudon (2012b, 1004) seems resigned to admit the “irreducible diversity of sociology”.

WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR SOCIOLOGY’S HETEROGENEITY?

360 Boudon’s reply to this question points to the following factors: a. an intrinsic difficulty to define the object of sociology (Boudon 1971b, p. 11); b. a hesitation among various definitions of what a theory is (Boudon 1971b, p. 16); c. a weak interaction between theory and empirics, with a tendency to give priority to description over explanation (Boudon 1971b, p. 17); d. a tendency to be attracted by the critique of the social order rather than by the explanation of social facts; e. the lack of extensive and appropriate sources of data (Boudon 1971b, p. 44); f. the diffusion of various intellectual movements – he speaks of “post-modernism”, “nihilism”, “constructivism”, “relativism” (see for instance Boudon 1996, pp. 57-58) – that tend to destroy, according to him, the difference between facts and values, thus favoring the belief that scientific knowledge is one among many other species of knowledge.

HOW CAN WE DESCRIBE SOCIOLOGY’S HETEROGENEITY?

To answer this question, Boudon progressively coined a *typology of sociology*, which contained the following types:

1. a form of “descriptive sociology”, which he actually valued, that can be either qualitative or quantitative, whose goal is to produce knowledge of facts otherwise difficult to see (Boudon 1992, p. 11)
2. a form of descriptive sociology, called “cameral”, which only generates data in response to specific demands from various political and social groups (Boudon 1992, p. 11; see also Boudon 1996, p. 73)

3 But this term appears even in later writings (see, for instance, Boudon 1996, p. 54, 74).

4 Here is the full quotation in French: “Ainsi, la sociologie au singulier n’existe pas. Il existe des traditions sociologiques, et des types de sociologie. Lesquels ? Quels sont les plus importants ? Pourquoi verse-t-on dans l’un plutôt que dans l’autre ? Je dirai dans la suite celui que je considère le plus important et pourquoi j’y ai versé, mais auparavant, il me faut revenir sur un point laissé en suspens.” (Boudon 1996, p. 57).

3. a "critical" sociology, which aims at denouncing various unbearable social situations (Boudon 1992, p. 12; see also Boudon 1996, p. 74)
4. a form of sociology whose goal is to explain well-defined phenomena ("circonscrire", in French, see Boudon 1996, p. 63;) with a puzzling character (Boudon 1992, p. 17; see also Boudon 1996, p. 59, 67).

Initially, this last type of sociology is simply named the "scientific" understanding of sociology (Boudon 1996, p. 58) or sociology with a scientific goal ("*sociologie à visée scientifique*") (Boudon 1996, p. 58). The label "scientific" or "cognitive" sociology will arrive later, namely in the article "Sociology that really matters" (see Boudon 2002b) (see Barbera's chapter in this book). With this, the nuance between the two forms of "descriptive" sociology previously distinguished (see types A and B above) disappears under the common label "cameral" sociology; on the other side, a new type appears, the so-called "aesthetic" or "expressive" sociology (Boudon 2002b, p. 372)⁵, which, in early writings, was simply referred as "essays" (Boudon 1971a, p. 16, 1971b, p. 44, 1996, p. 73) or "literature" (Boudon 1996, p. 73).

WHAT IS A GOOD THEORY?

Boudon offers his answer to this question while discussing research examples (often from the classics) of the type of sociology that he sees as "scientific". Within this context, a scientific theory is defined as a set of statements that explain a well-defined phenomenon. According to him, these statements belong to two classes: propositions that one can demonstrate being in line with the empirical observations; and propositions that cannot be testable empirically but can be considered as acceptable (Boudon 1996, p. 59, 60) – "acceptable", Boudon (1996, p. 61) claims, either because they are deduced from other "strong" theories or because they are used in many other theories. I believe it is important to emphasize that, to Boudon, these are features of good theories in general, meaning for whatever discipline one considers (see Boudon 1996, p. 59; 2002b, p. 374). Boudon did not claim for sociology a specific epistemology. This is an important message to be delivered to students. To be noted in passing: at this point, the lecture's discussion break will be opened to explain to students where the notion of middle-range theory – defended by

5 Expressive sociology is defined by Boudon (2002b, p.372) as a sociology that formulates "in an original and effective fashion feelings which many people experience in their everyday social lives, such as the feeling that they are manipulated by anonymous forces, or that hypocrisy is a dominant feature of social interaction."

Boudon (1991) – is located within the larger set of meanings sociologists have given the notion of theory (see Abend 2008).

WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES TO HANDLE SOCIOLOGY'S HETEROGENEITY?

If Boudon's perception of sociology's fragmentation (question 1), of its possible causes (question 2), as well as of its typification (questions 3 and 4) is relatively stable over the years, Boudon's reply to the question of how coping with this state-of-affairs evolves throughout his career. Three main attitudes can be identified, which I will call *laissez-faire*, *tolerant pluralism*, and *scientific activism*, respectively.

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An optimistic *laissez-faire* characterizes Boudon's (1971b, p. 11) early writings. There, he explicitly claimed that sociology's porosity to diffuse social factors as well as its attraction for critical sociology were the result of sociology's epistemological uncertainties ("incertitudes épistémologiques"). These uncertainties were seen by Boudon as a temporary state. Sociologists' reflexivity – what Boudon called "critical sociology" (thus using here the term "critical" in a positive, different sense from the "critical" sociology that he criticized in his typology of sociological styles, see point 3 above; see also Barbera's chapter in this book) – as well as the accumulation of richer sources of empirical data were expected to lead to the resorption of sociology's epistemological uncertainties. In the second chapter of *La Crise de la sociologie*, meaningfully titled the "Sociology in the year 2000" ("La sociologie de l'an 2000"), Boudon (1971b, p. 47) actually even made a specific prediction: toward 2000 ("probably", he added), we will observe a "formalization" of the language of sociology, both in terms of theory and tools, and, the sociology interested in actors' life experiences as well as sociology based on "rhetoric", "dialectic" and text exegesis will belong to the past or (more probably, he added) will have another name.⁶

6 Here is the full quotation in French: "Cette innovation [i.e. the increasing availability of data, my note], qui n'est qu'à ses débuts, aura sûrement une importance extrême pour la sociologie de l'an 2000 [...] De façon générale, les quatre tendances que nous avons brièvement décrites conduiront comme on peut s'en apercevoir dès maintenant, à une formalisation du langage sociologique, tant au niveau de la théorisation qu'à celui des instruments d'analyse. À long terme, l'image de la sociologie, comme la nature du travail sociologique et la formation du sociologue devraient s'en trouver profondément modifiées [...] Lorsqu'il existera – vers l'an 2000 probablement, s'il plaît à Dieu – il est probable que ce type de sociologie, encore bien vivant en France, qui comme la science aristotélicienne s'appuie sur la « rhétorique », la « dialectique » et la glose des nouveaux textes sacrés, appartiendra au passé ou – plus vraisemblablement – portera un autre nom."

Twenty years later, in particular in the introduction to his *Traité de sociologie*, Boudon (1992, p. 15) has already changed his mind. He asks whether we should “regret” sociology’s heterogeneity, and then explicitly replies that we should not. Boudon’s proposal at this stage was to accept sociology’s diversity without accepting nevertheless that “everything goes” (Boudon 1992, p. 16). Thus, he framed his *Traité* as an illustration of a form of scientific sociology, in particular the sociology of action, which he explicitly presented as *one of* the paradigms of sociology but he admitted that there are others (Boudon 1992, p. 19). A view that, as I said, I propose to label *tolerant pluralism*.

A few years later, Boudon was obliged to admit that his prediction for the year 2000 was wrong; he recognized that sociology’s polymorphism “has developed over the last years” (“s’est accentué ces dernières années”, Boudon 1996, p. 74), under the pressure of various social demands and the diffusion of relativism. The crisis of sociology that Boudon saw as temporary in the early seventies is now qualified as a “chronic” (Boudon 1996, p. 54) or “permanent” (Boudon 1996, p. 55) state of the discipline. It is reasonable to admit that it is in reaction to the perception of this trend that Boudon’s “tolerant pluralism” characterizing the *Traité* in the early nineties was progressively transformed in “scientific activism” – “Je me suis toujours reconnu dans une conception scientifique de la sociologie” (“I have always believed in a scientific approach to sociology”, my own translation, see Boudon 1996, p. 75) – leading him to more and more overt claims that the *sociology that really matters* (Boudon 2002b, p. 376) equates to the “cognitive” or “scientific” type, as also finally synthetically expressed in the title of Boudon’s (2010) late auto-biography *La Sociologie comme science* (2010).

Proposing to include a “Research quality” module in an introductory course to sociology for first-year Master’s students is probably not a common choice. I do believe, however, that making students aware as early as possible of sociology’s complex landscape is key to help them realize that sociology is a diverse discipline where various sociological styles co-exist, and that this leads to different types and “qualities” of knowledge. Being informed about these facts can help them to make more reasoned choices about the training and research paths they want to follow, or avoid. Part of Boudon’s legacy is to provide students with resources to navigate this debate.

In this respect, let me finally note that Boudon remained attached to the “quality” debate until the end. In 2012, he still had the energy to ask a long list of well-known colleagues of different confessions what they thought about the question of sociology’s identity. This generated a set of 24 short essays that Boudon (2012b) collected in a special issue of the French journal *Commentaire*. As shown by the syllabus overview in Appendix 1, this is a resource that, in spite

of its low visibility among sociologists, could constitute additional material on its own to organize a dedicated reading group where students could pursue the discussion of contemporary sociology's diversity.

CONCLUSION

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Boudon began the preface of *La Logique du social* (1979) with the following statement: "The book aims to be *an introduction to sociological analysis*" (italics added). This echoes the book's subtitle. Some paragraphs below, Boudon adds: "This book, therefore, deals with the principles, postulates, and objectives of sociological analysis rather than with the history or data of sociology". And, in the book's postscript, Boudon (1979, p. 295 [Eng. trans.: 1981, p. 169]) writes: "I have been concerned here, as the reader will have understood, with a description of the nature of sociological knowledge as it arises, not in an a priori classification of the sciences, but from the works of sociologists themselves". As explained in a long series of interviews only published in French, *The Logic of Social Action* originated from an invitation that Boudon received from the French historian François Furet around the mid-seventies to write a textbook introducing sociology to a "large audience" ("un public assez large", Boudon 2003, p. 59). The two quotations above thus suggest that Boudon decided to present sociology to that audience by combining research examples with the explanation of the research principles underlying them.

In this chapter, I endorsed a similar perspective, but in my case, the "large audience" I had in mind was made up of first-year Master's sociology students. In addition, while Boudon relied on a selection of materials drawn from sociology at large, having ultimately in mind the question of assessing Boudon's legacy, my exercise has rather consisted in restraining myself only to Boudon's work as a possible source for the to-be-designed introductory course to sociology. Given this goal and constraints, I ended up with a selection of Boudon's articles and book's chapters organized in three modules of six lectures each. The first module ("Research puzzles") follows the principle of teaching sociology by dissecting the machinery of specific pieces of research: it focuses on a selection of substantive phenomena studied by Boudon, and presents the substantive content of the explanations proposed by Boudon to a series of *why*-questions. The second module ("Research heuristics") discusses the *modus operandi* behind the pieces of research presented in the first module: it identifies six principles that can help student to design their own sociological projects by following a clear set of research heuristics. The last module ("Research quality") shifts the focus to the diversity of sociology and provides students with resources to appreciate the debates on the possibility of establishing

criteria to distinguish high- from low-quality academic research. An overview of the course is given in Appendix 1.

This exercise was intended to answer the question of Boudon's legacy. It was premised on the intuition that a good way to determine an author's impact is to decide if we want to transmit their work to the next generation, and, if so, which aspects of the work we want to transmit. My answer was that a variety of Boudon's writings still have training virtues. This is either because they proposed, or contributed to proposing, new ways of doing sociology, or because they touched upon fundamental problems that deserve to be further investigated. Within sociology's contemporary landscape, Boudon's style is distinctive, and students may benefit from understanding why, and in what sense, this is the case.

In this respect, an important open question raised by Boudon's continuous monitoring of the state of the discipline is the extent to which, by increasingly arguing in favor of what he saw as "scientific" sociology, he succeeded in making this type of sociology more visible and diffused. In a comment on the *Handbook of Sociological Science* edited in 2022 by Gërzhani, de Graaf and Raub, Jesper Sorensen (2024, pp. 249-250) wondered whether not "naming names", meaning not explicitly criticizing what one sees as "non-rigorous" sociology, is "the right strategy, if one truly believes that sociology is, or should be, a science". As explained in this chapter's last section, Boudon progressively moved to a more and more overt "naming names" attitude. But, was he successful in modifying the relative sizes of the various types of sociology populating the discipline? If not, why, and what other options do we have to cope with sociology's diversity? These are important questions that Boudon left to students and young scholars. It is our responsibility to continue to meditate on them.

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APPENDIX 1

Overview of the structure, of the topics and the associated assigned readings for a first-year, Masters-level introductory course to sociology based on a selection of Boudon's works		
Module 1: "Research puzzles"		
Short description: Dissect the machinery behind how Boudon replied to well-defined counter-intuitive why-questions concerning specific substantive macroscopic phenomena		
Class 1	Topic	Why does the frequency of justice decisions resulting in dropping the case ("affaires classées sans suite") increase in France between 1831 and 1950?
	Reading	Davidovitch A. and Boudon R., 1964, "Les mécanismes sociaux des abandons de poursuites : Analyse expérimentale par simulation," <i>L'Année Sociologique</i> , 15, pp. 111-244.
Class 2	Topic	Why do actors with high social background tend to make more ambitious educational choices compared to actors with low social background even when they have similar grades?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1973, <i>L'Inégalité des chances</i> , Paris, Armand Colin (Eng. trans.: <i>Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality. Changing Prospects in Western Society</i> , New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, ch. 4 "A dynamic IEO model").
Class 3	Topic	Why may an increase in the number of highly-educated individuals not lead to a proportional increase in the rate of absolute intergenerational social mobility?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1973, <i>L'Inégalité des chances</i> , Paris, Armand Colin (Eng. trans.: <i>Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality. Changing Prospects in Western Society</i> , New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1974, ch. 8 "Towards a formal theory of ISO").
Class 4	Topic	Why may the fraction of unhappy actors initially increase despite the fact that the number of existing places giving access to a certain goods expands?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1977, <i>Effets pervers et Ordre social</i> , Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (Eng. trans.: <i>The Unintended Consequences of Social Action</i> , New York, St. Martin's Press, 1982, ch. 5 "The Logic of Relative Frustration.")
Class 5	Topic	Why were French students, compared to students in other countries, so massively in favour of protesting in May and June 1968?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1971a, "Sources of Student Protest in France," <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> , 395, pp. 139-149, DOI: 10.1177/000271627139500113.

Class 6	Topic	Why do highly-educated citizens tend to have markedly different levels of tolerance to moral and behavioural diversity compared to low-educated ones?
	Reading	Boudon R., 2002a, <i>Déclin de la morale? Déclin des valeurs?</i> Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
Module 2: "Research heuristic"		
<i>Short description:</i> Explains the general principles defining the sociological style behind the six pieces of research discussed in module 1, and proposes "critical breaks" (discussion) to think about their history, limitations, and possible extensions.		
Class 1	Topic	"Design generative models!"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1979a, "Generating Models as A Research Strategy," in <i>Qualitative and Quantitative Social Research. Papers in Honor of Paul F. Lazarsfeld</i> , edited by R. K. Merton, J. S. Coleman, P. H. Rossi, New York, The Free Press, pp. 51-64.
	Discussion	<i>Was Boudon the inventor of this notion?</i> Reading: Manzo G., 2024, "Antecedents of generative thinking in analytical sociology: the contribution of Tom Fararo," <i>The Journal of Mathematical Sociology</i> , pp. 1-22, DOI: 10.1080/0022250X.2024.2423946.
Class 2	Topic	"Think about actors' action' logic!"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1989, "Subjective Rationality and the Explanation of Social Behavior," <i>Rationality and Society</i> , 1, 2, pp. 171-196, DOI: 10.1177/1043463189001002002; Boudon R., 1996b, "The cognitivist model. A generalized rational-choice model", <i>Rationality and Society</i> , 8, 2, pp. 123-150, DOI: 10.1177/104346396008002001; Boudon R., 2012a, "Analytical Sociology and the Explanation of Beliefs," <i>Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales</i> , 50, 2, pp. 7-34, DOI: 10.4000/ress.2165; Boudon R., 2014, "What is Context?" <i>Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie</i> , 66 (Suppl), pp. 17-45, DOI: 10.1007/s11577-014-0269-2.
	Discussion	<i>Is Boudon's theory of action defensible?</i> Reading: Opp K.-D., 2014, "The Explanation of Everything. A Critical Assessment of Raymond Boudon's Theory Explaining Descriptive and Normative Beliefs, Attitudes, Preferences and Behaviour," <i>Papers</i> , 99, 4, pp. 481-514, DOI: 10.5565/rev/papers.2076.
Class 3	Topic	"Do not forget interdependency structures!"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1979b, <i>La Logique du social</i> , Paris, Hachette (Eng. trans.: <i>The Logic of Social Action</i> , Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, chs. 4, 5 and 6).
	Discussion	<i>What form of actions' interdependency did Boudon really care of?</i> Readings: Granovetter M., 1973, "The Strength of Weak Ties," <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> , 78, pp. 1360-1380, DOI: 10.1086/225469; Granovetter M., 1983, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," <i>Sociological Theory</i> , 1, pp. 201-233, DOI: 10.2307/202051.
Class 4	Topic	"Connect recursively the micro- and macro-levels!"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1981, "The Individualist tradition in sociology," in <i>The Micro-Macro Link</i> , edited by R. K. Merton, J. S. Coleman and P. H. Rossi, New York, The Free Press, ch. 1, pp. 45-70.
	Discussion	<i>Who else defended Boudon's view of the micro-macro link, and who criticized it?</i> Readings: Raub W. and Voss T., 2017, "Micro-Macro Models in Sociology: Antecedents of Coleman's Diagram," in <i>Social Dilemmas, Institutions, and the Evolution of Cooperation</i> , edited by B. Jann and W. Przepiorka, Berlin, De Gruyter, pp. 11-36; Jepperson R. and Meyer J. W., 2011, "Multiple Levels of Analysis and the Limitations of Methodological Individualisms," <i>Sociological Theory</i> , 29, 1, pp. 54-73, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01387.x.

Class 5	Topic	"Possibly put in motion the model through simulation"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1965, "Réflexion sur la logique des modèles simulés," <i>Archives européennes de sociologie</i> , VI/1, pp. 3-20, DOI: 10.1017/S0003975600001119.
	Discussion	<i>How did Boudon see the latest developments of the field of computational methods?</i> Reading: Manzo G., 2012, "Reason-based explanations and analytical sociology. A rejoinder to Boudon," <i>Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales</i> , 50, 2, pp. 35-66, DOI: 10.4000/ress.2231.
Class 6	Topic	"Pay attention to chance"
	Reading	Boudon R., 1984, <i>La place du désordre</i> , Paris, Presses Universitaires de France (Eng. trans.: <i>Theories of Social Change: A Critical Appraisal</i> , Cambridge, Polity Press, 1986, ch. 6, pp. 184-190).
Module 3: "Research Quality"		
<i>Short description:</i> Provides tools to appreciate the current state of sociology by discussing Boudon's view on the "quality" debate, i.e. analyses of the criteria of demarcation between "good" and less good sociology.		
Class 1	Topic	Does sociology have a single identity?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1993, "European Sociology: The Identity Lost?" in <i>Sociology in Europe: In Search of Identity</i> , edited by B. Nedelmann and P. Sztompka, Berlin and New York, De Gruyter, 1993, pp. 27-44.
Class 2	Topic	What are the reasons of sociology's heterogeneity?
	Reading	Boudon, R., 1971b, <i>La Crise de la sociologie</i> , Genève, Droz (Eng. trans.: <i>The Crisis of Sociology</i> , New York, Columbia UP, 1980, ch. 1).
Class 3	Topic	How can we describe sociology's heterogeneity?
	Reading	Boudon R., 2002b, "Sociology That Really Matters: European Academy of Sociology, First Annual Lecture, 26 October 2001, Swedish Cultural Center," <i>European Sociological Review</i> , 18, 3, pp. 371-378, DOI: 10.1093/esr/18.3.371.
Class 4	Topic	What is a good theory?
	Reading	Boudon R., 1991, "What Middle-Range Theories Are," <i>Contemporary Sociology</i> , 20, 4, pp. 519-522, DOI: 10.2307/2071781.
	Discussion	<i>How does Boudon's understanding of theory stand within the larger set of definitions given to "theory" within contemporary sociology?</i> Reading: Abend G., 2008, "The Meaning of 'Theory,'" <i>Sociological Theory</i> , 26, 2, pp. 173-199, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00324.x.
Class 5	Topic	What are the strategies to handle sociology's heterogeneity?
	Reading	Boudon, R., 1971b, <i>La Crise de la sociologie</i> , Genève, Droz (Eng. trans.: <i>The Crisis of Sociology</i> , New York, Columbia UP, ch. 2 "La sociologie de l'an 2000"); Boudon R., 1996a, "Pourquoi devenir sociologue ? Réflexions et évocations," <i>Revue Française de Science Politique</i> , 46, 1, pp. 52-79., DOI: 10.3917/rfsp.461.52.
Reading group	Topic	24 points of view on sociology's diversity
	Reading	Boudon R., 2012b, "La sociologie: science ou discipline?" <i>Commentaire</i> , 136, pp. 1001-1093.

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Charles-Henry Cuin & Patrice Duran (eds.)

La Sociologie analytique de Talcott Parsons
François Chazel

*La Spirale des inégalités.
Choix scolaires en France et en Italie au XX^e siècle*
Gianluca Manzo

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,
Université Paris Cité