

PE IGUIN MODERN SOCIOLOGY

THE **SOCIOLOGICAL** OF
EXPLANATION

RAYMOND BOUDON



Penguin Education

The Logic of Sociological Explanation

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Further Reading

- H. M. Blalock, *Causal Inference in Nonexperimental Research*, University of North Carolina Press, 1964.
- H. M. Blalock, *Causal Models in the Social Sciences*, Macmillan, 1972.
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- J. Coleman, *Introduction to Mathematical Sociology*, Free Press, 1964.
- L. A. Goodman, 'A general model for the analysis of surveys', *Amer. J. Soc.*, vol. 77, 1972, pp. 1035-86.
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- S. Wright, 'The method of path coefficients', *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, vol. 5, 1934, pp. 161-215.
- S. Wright, 'The interpretation of multivariate systems', in O. Kempthorne *et al.* (eds), *Statistics and Mathematics in Biology*, Iowa State University Press, 1954.

Penguin Modern Sociology Texts

Cognitive Sociology

Aaron Cicourel

Aaron Cicourel is one of the central figures in the development of sociology that has grown out of the rejection of the positivist tradition, the rediscovery of the relevance of modern philosophy to social thought, and Goffman's pioneering work on the interpretation of the rituals and conventions of ordinary social life.

His recent work reflects a deep preoccupation with the way in which everyday social interaction is assembled and represented. He argues that explanations of the way in which different representations of actuality are generated now require a much fuller understanding of the verbal exchanges on which we rely for our knowledge of the world. Professor Cicourel challenges the use of such concepts as 'role' and 'status', examines the relationship between problems of language and the acquisition of social structure, and clarifies the links between linguistic and philosophical views of language and non-verbal features of communication.

'So long as we continue to reify terms like "social structure", "culture" and "language",' says Professor Cicourel, 'we shall miss the contextual and cognitive significance of everyday social organization.'

Working for Ford

Huw Beynon

'It's got no interest. You couldn't take the job home. There's nothing to take. You just forget it. I don't want promotion at all. I've not got that approach to the job. I'm like a lot of people here. They're all working here but they're just really hanging around, waiting for something to turn up. . . . It's different for them in the office. They're *part* of Fords. We're not, we're numbers.'

Ford Worker

This book is about the men who make cars for one of the world's largest motor manufacturers. The vocabulary of labour relations and industrial sociology is derived from the lives these men lead – production schedules, assembly lines, strikes, sackings and lay-offs.

Huw Beynon's book describes just what it is like to work in a car factory, told very often in the words of the men themselves. But it also reveals in a vivid and direct way the processes by which large-scale industries seek to overcome industrial conflict and the way in which unions, shop-floor workers and the shop stewards express their political and economic aspirations. The car workers are a central group in the British working class, and this account of their lives shows how important a role they played in the radicalization of the union bureaucracy during the 1960s.

Working for Ford raises the issues that concern the men themselves and is one of the most important books on industrial relations published in recent years. The dynamism of the book derives from the actions of the men themselves, but the implications extend far beyond their specific context and constitute an important indicator for the development of industrial relations in the 1970s.

Penguin Modern Sociology Readings

Ethnomethodology

Edited by Roy Turner

Sociology's acceptance of the definition of its concerns offered by lay members of society has often made sociology an integral feature of the very order it seeks to describe. This conviction has prompted ethnomethodologists to turn their attention to the unexamined bases of social action. Their concern with the operations of practical reasoning does not produce 'findings' which resemble those of traditional sociology.

The Readings in this volume offer a practical demonstration that, through its focus on the accomplished nature of social phenomena, ethnomethodology has developed a style of research and argument responsive to its chosen subject matter.

These studies illuminate the work members of society do to sustain a social order in which there are 'suicides', 'ethnic groups', 'clear matters of fact' and the rest of the furniture of everyday life. By making problematic what social actors (and sociologists) have taken for granted, they reveal the rich complexity of such apparently mundane accomplishments as making a telephone call or walking down a crowded street. In so doing ethnomethodology opens up exciting possibilities for exploration and research into the intricacies of the everyday world of practical activities.

Rules and Meanings

Edited by Mary Douglas

The moral order and the knowledge that sustains it are created by social conventions. If their man-made origins were not hidden they would be stripped of much of their authority. The conventions themselves are therefore not merely tacit but often extremely inaccessible to investigation.

In this collection of Readings Professor Douglas has assembled a fascinating range of material in an attempt to confront a number of fundamental questions: how social reality and the moral order are constructed, maintained and reconstructed; how humanity reduces its physical environment to 'the natural order' by assigning arbitrary fragments to classes, by masticating it and putting it through cognitive sieves. Social life demands clarity and logical consistency, and these are produced by the working of an enormously complex but necessarily concealed cognitive apparatus.

Professor Douglas draws on the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and philosophy – particularly the contribution made by phenomenology. Throughout our attention is focused on how reality is given its moral bias and how the very processes by which natural and moral order are constructed lie buried beneath the explicit forms of our everyday life, our culture and even our ways of seeking understanding.

Raymond Boudon

**The Logic
of Sociological
Explanation**

Translated by Tom Burns

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Preface to the English Edition

This book is addressed principally to students of sociology. No previous knowledge of the appropriate mathematical techniques is presumed.

Looking more towards the need to inform rather than to instruct, we have chosen, in this introduction to formal thinking and its sociological uses, to explore in some depth a particular problem, albeit of major importance, rather than to give a general and rather sketchy review of the application of mathematics to sociology.

The problem is that of analysing the implicit relationships between attributes, or, more generally, between variables. Sociologists meet up with this as soon as they are confronted with a selection of standardized sociological data, whether the data concern individuals, groups, institutions, societies, or consist of documentary, tape recorded, or even filmed material. The problem is the same as the fundamental problem posed by Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method*: the problem of how to generalize the classical logic of John Stuart Mill (and consequently of Aristotle's, from which the former derives) to situations characteristic of all sciences governed by observation (rather than by experiment) and characteristic of sociology in particular.

The question concerns what happens to the customary rules of reasoning when the propositions derived from observations are presented typically as:

if A , then *more frequently* B ,

rather than in the form

if A , then B .

For example, 'Patrilocal societies are more often patrilineal than not' or 'Delinquents are found more frequently to come from disorganized social areas'.

If we have to base our reasoning on propositions of this kind, we must replace logic by what one could call a *theory of proportions* or a *theory of weak connectedness* (or *implication*), which relies on the calculation of proportions. Logic itself reappears as a special case when the proportions are confined to situations when they take the values of either 0 or 1.¹

In certain instances, the sociologist could equally well try to reconstitute the structure of proportions which characterize the data he is dealing with by using the quasi-experimental procedure usually designated by the term 'simulation', instead of analysing the structure of proportions. The final chapter of this work will show the sociologist's interest in this relatively recent procedure by using concrete examples.

The present book is the product of seminars on the logic of survey research which I gave at the University of Bordeaux in 1964-5 and at the Sorbonne in 1967-8. In these seminars, Lazarsfeld's work on multivariate analysis and the algebra of dichotomous systems, Simon's paper on spurious correlation, the extension of Simon's ideas by Blalock, Wright's path analysis and Coleman's theory of attributes were studied in a comparative perspective (see the list of readings at the end of the volume). The present book leans heavily on these works.

The main conclusion of these seminars, already presented in a more technical way in some of my earlier publications, was that these various methods are linked to one another by simple transformations and can consequently be considered as particular approaches to a common theory.

Although this theory is of crucial importance in sociological research in general and survey research in particular, it must be stressed that it is only a part of the *logic of sociological explanation*. A number of sociological problems cannot be dealt with in the language of variables upon which the present

1. By logic is meant classical Boolean logic, as against modal or intuitional logic.

book rests.² Many other examples can certainly be mentioned where the language of variables appears inadequate.

However, the logic of survey research certainly remains the best introduction to the logic of sociological explanation and a good basis for a training in formalization.

We have tried to proceed in a manner which will enable the book to be read in two ways. It can be read through fairly quickly, without seeking to go too deeply into any particular point, in a way which will allow of a summary review of the kind of instruments which sociology is nowadays able to bring to bear and of the kind of terminology which it can use. One can also 'work through' the book, making use of the simple 'control' exercises suggested at different points, usually at the end of the exposition of commonly used procedures.

2. I became convinced of the truth of this statement in the last few years when I started working on social mobility and proposed a formalized theory which, whatever its intrinsic value, cannot be expressed by a set of statements of the form 'the variable x exerts an influence on the variable y ' (see *L'Inégalité des chances*, Colin, Paris, 1973; *Education, Equality and Social Opportunity*, Wiley, 1974).

