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The Origin of Values: Sociology and Philosophy of Beliefs

By Raymond Boudon



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The Origin of Values: Sociology and Philosophy of Beliefs By Raymond Boudon

Values have always been a central topic in both philosophy and the social sciences. Statements about what is good or bad, fair or unfair, legitimate or illegitimate, express clear beliefs about human existence. The fact that values differ from culture to culture and century to century opens many questions. In *The Origin of Values*, Raymond Boudon offers empirical, data-based analysis of existing theories about values, while developing his own perspective as to why people accept or reject value statements.

Boudon classifies the main theories of value, including those based on firm belief, social or biological factors, and rational or utilitarian attitudes. He discusses the popular and widely influential Rational Choice Model and critiques the postmodernist approach. Boudon investigates why relativism has become so powerful and contrasts it with the naturalism represented by the work of James Q. Wilson on moral sensibility. He follows with a constructive attempt to develop a new theory, beginning with Weber's idea of non-instrumental rationality as the basis for a more complex idea of rationality.

Applying Boudon's own and existing theories of value to political issues and social ideas—the end of apartheid, the death penalty, multiculturalism, communitarianism—*The Origin of Values* is a significant work. Boudon fulfills a major task of social science: explanation of collective belief. His book will be of interest to sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, and political scientists.



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Editorial Review

Review

“[T]he book has much to offer . . . Written by an outstanding theorist in characteristically assertive fashion, *The Origin of Values* is likely to provoke heated debate across a number of social science subfields.”

—Pieter Vanhuysse, *Acta Sociologica*

“This book is a collection of Boudon’s essays. . . . [It] builds on ideas presented in his earlier work, *The Art of Self-Persuasion*, extending its analysis of positive beliefs to that of values, which are defined here as explicitly held normative beliefs. . . . His cognitivist model essentially expands the conventional one to encompass both noninstrumental and instrumental reasoning. . . . Boudon delves into an impressively wide range of sources, including many that are not typically considered.”

—Sun-Ki Chai, *Contemporary Sociology*

“Raymond Boudon is the most thoughtful sociologist in France, and his thoughts are always commanding. *The Origin of Values* is a masterly review of one of the crucial questions in social thought, and Boudon’s own theory will be a major statement on the issues of value and rationality.”

—Daniel Bell, Henry Ford II Professor of Social Sciences, Emeritus, Harvard University

About the Author

Raymond Boudon is professor at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. In addition, he is a member of the British Academy, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, International Academy of Human Sciences of St. Petersburg, and the Central European Academy of Arts and Sciences. His books include *The Art of Self-Persuasion*, *The Analysis of Ideology*, and *Theories of Social Change*.

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