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CHICAGO JOURNALS

From Origin to Destination: Trends and Mechanisms in Social Stratification Research, edited by Stefani Scherer, Reinhard Pollak, Gunnar Otte, and Markus Gangl

From Origin to Destination: Trends and Mechanisms in Social Stratification Research by Stefani Scherer; Reinhard Pollak; Gunnar Otte; Markus Gangl

Review by: Wout Ultee

American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 115, No. 2 (September 2009), pp. 647-649

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/648656>

Accessed: 27/02/2012 04:28

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and juridical and state interventions into this “private sphere” necessary for protecting the rights of women and children (pp. 154–59), and his defense of universal human rights in a contemporary world situation in which many see no alternative to a resurgent Realpolitik (pp. 197–99).

Two lines of critical questioning directed against Honneth’s project are worthy of mention here. The first concerns reservations about whether the category of recognition, however finely differentiated, can bear the full burden of the theoretical weight that Honneth places upon it. Hints of Honneth’s response to such queries may be found in *Disrespect*, but the issues have been more fully explored in his extended dialogue with Nancy Fraser in *Redistribution or Recognition?* (Verso, 2003). In this debate, Honneth continues to defend a “normative monism” based upon the theory of recognition, while Fraser argues for a “perspectival dualism” capable of integrating the insights derived from a theory of distribution and a theory of recognition, each necessary but incapable of reduction to the other. A second line of critical interrogation derives from the concern that the attempt to anchor the theory of recognition in existing institutions and practices runs the risk of conceding too much to the existing social order, thus potentially lapsing into ideological justification of the status quo. Honneth has recently responded to this line of criticism, among others, in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (edited by Bert van den Brink and David Owen [Cambridge University Press, 2007]).

From Origin to Destination: Trends and Mechanisms in Social Stratification Research. Edited by Stefani Scherer, Reinhard Pollak, Gunnar Otte and Markus Gangl. Frankfurt: Campus, 2007. Pp. 323. \$34.00 (paper).

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From Origin to Destination, edited by Stefani Scherer, Reinhard Pollak, Gunnar Otte, and Markus Gangl, was presented to Walter Müller when he retired from the University of Mannheim, Germany. It contains, apart from a useful introduction, 11 papers written by 20 persons who cooperated with Müller during his long career in the field of social stratification. These include established scholars such as Robert Erikson, from Sweden, John Goldthorpe, from Britain, and Yossi Shavit, from Israel, as well as rising stars from Germany, and the papers attest to Müller’s profound influence. Each paper is worthy of publication in sociology’s major journals. However, the papers do not fully add up. They show that although normal science occurs in social stratification, this field does not driven by major puzzles. In addition, the book rehearses the by-now dated problem shift from questions about absolute mobility rates to questions involving relative mobility chances. It also understates the problem shift

that occurred in stratification research during the collaboration of Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Müller.

Contrary to the volume's subtitle, some papers do not present trends, and several papers are weak on mechanisms. Indeed, the goal of finding mechanisms behind trends does not seem well advised. Since Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg's 1998 *Social Mechanisms* (Cambridge University Press), the term *mechanism* has become a buzzword. Whereas a mechanized worldview explains the fall of an apple toward the earth, the path taken by the moon around the Earth, and the ellipse of the Earth around the sun by one and the same principle, mechanism sociologists do not attempt such unifying explanations.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with the long-established field of "educational inequality and social mobility," and the second takes on "special issues in current stratification research," to wit, self-employment, youth unemployment, second-generation migrants, occupational sex segregation, and educational homogamy. It is debatable whether these issues are that much out of the way. If in Europe, with its frequent double-digit unemployment rates, persons with a job worry whether they will keep it, and if school leavers fear never to find a job and those who have found one postpone marriage and pregnancy, the question of father-son class mobility should take the backseat.

I will comment on the three most interesting papers. In an exposé of the literature Goldthorpe kills off Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, as well as recent research that employs it. What is sound in Bourdieu's oeuvre is not new, and what is original in it is not sound. The latter applies to Bourdieu's thesis that the content of cultural capital is arbitrary. This may be doubted. It is a perennial problem of universities that curricula are outdated. And the art historian E. H. Gombrich has shown in *Ideals and Idols* (Phaidon, 1979) that the logic of vanity fair, with its over-the-top spiraling processes, is at work in matters of style and taste. In addition, perhaps because it does not fit nicely into the peculiar distinction between the wild and the domesticated Bourdieu, Goldthorpe misses out on Bourdieu's proposition that upon the opening up of secondary and tertiary education to students from lower classes by governmental financial measures, higher-class parents changed strategy. They offset the declining effects of their material resources by calling upon cultural resources. Because Bourdieu is not only about habitus, but also about strategies that higher-class parents pursue to counter unintended consequences of state policies that further upward mobility (downward mobility from the higher classes being one such effect), Bourdieu's theses are closer to the rational action models than Goldthorpe and his editors admit.

Richard Breen, from Britain, and Ruud Luijkx, from the Netherlands, ascertain a trend toward more father-son relative class mobility in Germany but not in Britain when comparing observations for three decades. They also show that the German trend is accounted for by cohort re-

placement. Data for the same cohort observed at different periods do not show a trend toward more mobility. Increasing relative mobility for cohorts, in turn, is explained by educational expansion. The puzzle then becomes why later cohorts in Britain, a country that also experienced educational expansion, did not show more mobility. This would be the case since in Germany the effect of origin on destination is lower at higher levels of education, whereas things are not like that in Britain. But Breen and Luijkx leave this puzzle as a matter for further research.

Karl Ulrich Mayer and Silke Aisenbrey's paper goes beyond that of Breen and Luijkx. Mayer is the German sociologist who recognized that questions of the type "How much father-son class mobility is there in the population of country x at time y ?" are rather poor, who popped the pertinent question, and who collected appropriate data. A question about mobility always should invoke two points in time, and the hidden point in the poor question stands for quite different points in time, since the observed people differ in age. Mayer set out in the early 1980s to collect occupational histories for cohorts born in 1920 and for later ones. Against this background, it is remarkable that Breen and Luijkx seem to code persons currently without a job after their last job. That decision forecloses the "special issue" of whether early retirement differs for cohorts. By comparing for various cohorts the origins of persons with their class at age 27 and at age 35, Mayer and Aisenbrey show that the trend toward more father-son and father-daughter relative class mobility reversed with the early 1960s cohort. They too leave this puzzle for further research. Mayer and Aisenbrey say that their chapter provides variations on the theme of mobility. This metaphor misleads. The theme of the generation of mobility sociologists to which Breen and Luijkx belong contains false notes, and readers should know.

Walden; or, Life in the Woods. By Henry David Thoreau. Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1854. Pp. 357.

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The emergence of a fully theorized environmental sociology after 2015 brought *Walden* briefly into sociological prominence. But its semiautobiographical framework and allusive density made it ill-suited to a discipline with one foot in the scientific study of society, even if the other foot was firmly placed in Thoreau's home turf—the normative understanding of social life. Worse yet, the endless riches of Thoreau's journals proved an inescapable temptation to discover "what *Walden* really

* Another review from 2048 to share with *AJS* readers.—*Ed.*