



**Kenneth Ewart Boulding** (January 18, 1910 – March 18, 1993) was an economist, educator, peace activist, poet, religious mystic, devoted Quaker, systems scientist, and interdisciplinary philosopher. [\[ 1 \]](#) [\[ 1 \]](#) [\[ 2 \]](#) He was cofounder of General Systems Theory and founder of numerous ongoing intellectual projects in economics and social science. He was married to Elise M. Boulding.

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## Biography

Boulding was born in Liverpool, England in 1910. He graduated from Oxford University, and was granted United States citizenship in 1948. During the years 1949 to 1967, he was a faculty member of the University of Michigan. In 1967, he joined the faculty of the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he remained until his retirement.

Boulding was president of numerous scholarly societies including the American Economic Association, the Society for General Systems Research, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was not only a prolific writer and a creative integrator of knowledge, but an academician of world stature—indeed, a magisterial figure in the discipline of social science.<sup>[3]</sup> For Boulding, economics and sociology were not social sciences—rather, they were all aspects of a single social science devoted to the study of human persons and their relationships (organizations). Boulding spearheaded an evolutionary (instead of equilibrium) approach to economics. [\[ 4 \]](#)

Boulding, with his wife Elise, was an active member of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers. He took part in Quaker gatherings, served on committees, and spoke to and about the Friends. The two were members of meetings in Nashville, Tennessee, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Boulder, Colorado. Interestingly, although he stuttered, when he ministered in a Friends meeting, he spoke clearly. In March 1971, he even conducted a silent vigil at the headquarters of the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia to protest what he considered its distancing itself from Quakers. He penned the widely circulated "There is a Spirit," a series of sonnets he wrote in 1945 based on the last statement of the 17th century Quaker James Nayler.

Boulding emphasized that human economic and other behavior is embedded in a larger interconnected system. To understand the results of our behavior, economic or otherwise, we must first research and develop a scientific understanding of the ecodynamics of the general system, the global society in which we live, in all its dimensions spiritual and material. Boulding believed that in the absence of a committed effort to the right kind of social science research and understanding, the human species might well be doomed to extinction. But he died optimistic, believing our evolutionary journey had just begun.

## Work

In addition to economics, Boulding made important contributions to the fields of political science, sociology, philosophy, and social psychology. [\[ 1 1 \]](#)

## Economic Analysis

Boulding's major work in economics was his introductory textbook, *Economic Analysis*, which first appeared in 1941. [\[ 1 1 \]](#) The book sought "to be a contribution to the development and systematization of the body of economic analysis itself." [\[ 5 1 \]](#)

## Psychic capital

*Psychic capital* is a term first used by Boulding (1950). Capital is an accumulation of wealth, and with psychic capital, the accumulation is one of desirable mental states, which admittedly are highly transitory in nature. The mental states could be memories of pleasure, success, achievement, recognition, and the desire to add to psychic capital is likely to be a powerful motivating force. Exchanges involving increases or decreases of psychic capital are likely to occur at any time, either through decision or through the turn of events.

However, failure in a task could also lead to a depletion of psychic capital. An accumulation of negative memories of failures, disasters, atrocities, or perceived injustices and indignities (as either recipient or perpetrator) could be called negative psychic capital. Negative psychic capital can also be a powerful motivating factor, in the pursuit of satisfaction through revenge or a settling of scores. In either of its forms as positive or negative psychic capital, this package of collective memory is an essential link between collective memory and collective mental state.

The concept is somewhat more specific than social capital, which focuses on social networks rather than mental states.

## Evolutionary Economics

Boulding was the founder of the evolutionary economics movement. In his "Economic Development as an Evolutionary System," Boulding suggests a parallel between economic development and biological evolution.

“They, economics and evolution, are both examples of a larger process, which has been at work in this part of the universe for a very long time. This is the process of the development of structures of increasing complexity and improbability. The evolutionary process always operates through mutation and selection and has involved some distinction between the genotype which mutates and the phenotype which is selected. The process by which the genotype constructs the phenotype may be described as "organization". Economic development manifests itself largely in the production of commodities, that is, goods and services. It originates, however, in ideas, plans, and attitudes in the human mind. These are the genotypes in economic development. This whole process indeed can be described as a process in the growth of knowledge. What the economist calls "capital" is nothing more than human knowledge imposed on the material world. Knowledge and the growth of knowledge, therefore, is the essential key to economic development. Investment, financial systems and economic organizations and institutions are in a sense only the machinery by which a knowledge process is created and expressed.” -- Kenneth E. Boulding

## See also

- [Spaceship Earth](#)
- [Holism in science](#)
- [Loss of Strength Gradient](#)
- [Evolutionary economics](#)

## Publications

Boulding published some thirty books and hundreds of articles. [\[ 6 \]](#) Books, a selection:

1940s to 1960s

- 1941, *Economic Analysis*, Harper & Brothers.
- 1945, *The Economics of Peace*, Prentice Hall.
- 1945, *There is a Spirit: The Nayler Sonnets*, Fellowship Publications.
- 1950, *A Reconstruction of Economics*, J. Wiley.
- 1953, *The Organizational Revolution: A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization*, Harper & Brothers.
- 1956, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*, University of Michigan Press.
- 1958, *The Skills of the Economist*, Cleveland: Howard Allen.
- 1958, *Principles of Economic Policy*, Prentice-Hall, 1958.
- 1962, *Conflict and Defence: A General Theory*, Harper & Bros.
- 1964, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century: the Great Transition*, Harper & Row.
- 1966 *The Impact of the Social Sciences*, Rutgers University Press
- 1966, “The Economics of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Economics.” *American Economic Review*, 16 (May): 1-13
- 1968, *Beyond Economics: Essays on Society, Religion, and Ethics*, (University of Michigan Press

- 1969, "The Grants Economy," Michigan Academician (Winter) [\[ 7 1](#)

#### 1970s

- 1970, *Economics as a Science*, (McGraw-Hill, 1970).
- 1970, *A Primer on Social Dynamics: History as Dialectics and Development*, (Free Press, 1970).
- 1971, *Economics*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1971.
- 1973, *Political Economy*, Colorado Associated University Press, 1973.
- 1973, *The Economy of Love and Fear: A Preface to Grants Economics*, Wadsworth.
- 1974, *Toward a General Social Science*, Colorado Associated University Press.
- 1975, *International Systems: Peace, Conflict Resolution, and Politics*, Colorado Associated University Press.
- 1975, *Sonnets from the Interior Life, and Other Autobiographical Verse*, Colorado Associated University Press.
- 1978, *Stable Peace*, University of Texas Press.
- 1978, *Ecodynamics: A New Theory of Societal Evolution*, Sage.

#### 1980s to 1993

- 1980, *Beasts, Ballads, and Bouldingisms: A Collection of Writings*, Transaction Books.
- 1981, *Evolutionary Economics*, Sage
- 1981, A Preface to Grants Economics: The Economy of Love and Fear. New York: Praeger.
- 1985, *Toward the Twenty-First Century: Political Economy, Social Systems, and World Peace*, Colorado Associated University Press.
- 1985, *Human Betterment*, Sage.
- 1985, *The World as a Total System*, Sage.
- 1986, *Mending the World: Quaker Insights on the Social Order*, Pendle Hill Publications.
- 1989, *Three Faces of Power*, Sage.
- 1992, *Towards a New Economics: Critical Essays on Ecology, Distribution, and Other Themes*, Edward Elgar.
- 1993, *The Structure of a Modern Economy: the United States, 1929-89*, Macmillan.

## References

1. ^ [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) David Latzko. [Kenneth E. Boulding Comments](#) at personal.psu.edu. Accessed 24 April 2009.
2. [^](#) Nathan Keyfitz [KENNETH EWART BOULDING January 18, 1910–March 18, 1993](#) . Accessed 24 April 2009.
3. [^](#) Edwin Garrigues Boring (1991). *Contemporary Psychology* □ American Psychological Association, EBSCO Publishing (Firm). p.477
4. [^](#) See [Kenneth Boulding's Evolutionary Perspective](#) .

5. [^](#) Boulding, Kenneth E. (1966) *Economic Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row. 2 Volumes. vol. 1, p. xix
6. [^](#) [KENNETH BOULDING'S PUBLICATIONS](#) Overview 1932-1949 Pre Michigan, 1950-1967 Michigan Years, 1968-1991 Colorado Years. Accessed 24 April 2009.
7. [^](#) Reprinted in *Collected Papers of Kenneth Boulding: Vol. II: Economics*. Ed. Fred R. Glahe. Boulder, CO: Colorado Associated University Press, 1971: 177-85.

## Further reading

- Fontaine, Philippe. "Stabilizing American Society: Kenneth Boulding and the Integration of the Social Sciences, 1943-1980," *Science in Context*, June 2010, Vol. 23 Issue 2, pp 221–265
- Wright, Robert. *Three Scientists and Their Gods: Looking for Meaning in an Age of Information* HarperCollins, 1989. Lengthy profiles of Edward Fredkin, Edward O. Wilson, and Kenneth Boulding.
- Claus Bernet: [Kenneth E. Boulding](#) . In: [Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon](#) (BBKL).  
(German)

## External links

- [An overview of Boulding's major contributions by David Latzko](#)
- [Boulding's 1966 essay \*The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth\*](#)
- <http://www.colorado.edu/econ/Kenneth.Boulding>
- [Whole Terrain](#) link to Boulding's articles published in [Whole Terrain](#)
- [The Feather River Anthology \(1966\)](#)
- [The Common Sense of Kenneth Boulding](#)
- [Review of The Economy of Love and Fear by Raul Caruso](#)
- [The Boulding's 'Triangular Theory of Social Interactions' by Raul Caruso \(in Italia\)](#)
- [Kenneth Boulding: A Scholar and a Poet by S.S. Kutateladze \(in Russia\)](#)