Book Reviews

Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure.
By Peter M. Blau. New York: Free Press, 1977. 307 pp. $13.95.

Reviewer: RANDALL COLLINS, *University of Virginia*

Peter Blau is perhaps our most productive American sociologist. He has a sharp sense for where the intellectual action is. In the 1950s, he turned out *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy* (1955), one of the classics of that golden age of organizational studies. At the turn of the 1960s, when March and Simon, Etzioni, Caplow, and others were pulling together the field of organizations into the most systematically explained area of empirically based sociology, Blau and Scott produced their comprehensive *Formal Organizations* (1962). When Homans' individual–reductionist social behaviorism began to make a surge, Blau leap-frogged it to a full-fledged non-reductionist exchange theory, with *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (1964). As empirical attention in the 1960s focused increasingly on social mobility surveys, Blau and Duncan came out with the most comprehensive and methodologically advanced of such studies (partly because it was based on the largest sample and the most extensive questionnaire schedule), *The American Occupational Structure* (1967). Since then, Blau has produced a mathematical theory of organizational structure (Blau and Schoenherr, *The Structure of Organizations,* 1971), the first really comprehensive comparative study of universities (*The Organization of Academic Work,* 1973), and another general theory of organizations (*On the Nature of Organizations,* 1974). Finally, after all these years of preparation, we have *Inequality and Heterogeneity,* Blau's most ambitious effort, a general theory of social structure.

Blau's work is very much within the camp that Nicholas Mullins, in *Theories and Theory Groups in American Sociology,* calls "Standard American Sociology" (*SAS*). It represents both the strengths and weaknesses of that school, and also its shifting moods. *SAS* at one time was a combination of positivism and functionalism, with a strong dose of Cold War liberalism setting its underlying concerns. Blau is still very positivist (indeed, more than ever), but he explicitly claims to leave behind the functionalism of his early works, at least for the purpose of this book. In fact, he repudiates functional, cultural, and psychological explanations alike, in favor of a macro–structuralism which he likens to that of Harrison White, Edward Laumann, and Bruce Mayhew. This shift bears out Mullins' view that the structuralist group is one of the strong contenders now superceding *SAS*. (Oddly enough, it also suggests that Blau has transferred his allegiance from Mullins' other new positivist leader, the path-coefficient group, even though his 1967 book with Duncan was its paradigm-setter.)

Even more of a sign of the times is Blau's new-found attitude toward Marxism. He does not go very deeply into this position, but formerly taboo terms like "capitalism" and "dialectical" are found here and there in his pages, and he

takes a decidedly pessimistic and critical view of many aspects of modern America that were once polemically defended: discerning a trend toward concentration of organizational power, giving a theoretical explanation for the coalescence of a power elite, suggesting that democracy only works well on issues people care little about, and calling for some way to increase participatory democracy in the organizations that surround us. It is a far cry from the panglossian functional interpretations of *SAS* in the anti-Communist 1950s. Much of Blau's new-found critical stance is on the surface, for the core of his theory is still very much in keeping with traditional American liberalism. But it is striking to see him claim that Marx, the old arch-bogeyman of American sociology, actually converges on a theoretical level with his own theory that capitalist democracy depends on the existence of cross-cutting status dimensions, and falls to revolutionary pressures when these dimensions converge.

The essence of Blau's theory is actually quite traditional. He is principally concerned with the determinants of social integration, which he considers to be a structural matter of personal associations linking people together, not a cultural matter of common values. Blau couches his argument in very general terms, dealing with social integration in Durkheim's sense; but what he often seems to have in mind is integration in the narrower and more topical sense—relations among blacks, whites, and other minorities in the U.S. Integration, in Blau's view, is determined by the sheer number of social categories into which the population is divided, and especially by cross-cutting dimensions. The first part of this argument is based on the inference that small groups must have relatively more outgroup associations than large groups; hence if larger groups are broken up into smaller groups (in Blau's terminology, as heterogeneity advances), they must necessarily have more outgroup contacts, and social integration will increase. The second part of the argument is the old pluralist theme, popular in the 1950s as a counter to radical criticisms that inequalities undermine democracy: inequalities, on the contrary, are good for social stability if their different dimensions intersect, preventing polarization. Blau avoids the term "pluralist" (I find it only once in the book, on the next to the last page), substituting a variety of neologisms ("intersecting parameters," or "multiform heterogeneity"). Whether this is a matter of disguising an unfashionable term, or simply the positivist style of writing as densely and abstractly as possible, I could not say.

The core of the theory, by Blau's own reckoning, is the point that segregation in space is far worse for social integration than inequalities within communities and work organizations. (I have translated this into my own terms; Blau's are a good deal more polysyllabic, and take a good deal longer to explain the point.) Blau claims that this is a startling paradox, and perhaps it is, from the abstract way he introduces the topic. More conventionally put, though, it is part of the traditional liberal belief that integrating neighborhoods, schools, and jobs will solve our problems. Blau goes on to talk about "penetrating differentiation," meaning that the real integrating effects go on only if people are brought together not just within the same city or organization, but right down to the block and workroom, and expresses some pessimism that much of this has come about yet.

What causes this cross-cutting pluralism? Blau appeals to an implicitly evolutionary scheme. The growth of population density and of the sheer size of

communities (i.e., urbanization) leads to more interpersonal contacts, and especially contacts between different groups. The sheer volume of contacts requires people to react to others differentially, hence intersecting dimensions of categorization are elaborated, by which individuals may be cross-classified and picked out for differentiated responses. As societies grow large, mere concentric categories (local group memberships nested within larger groups) decline, hence territorial and extended kinship categories decline.

Moreover, the division of labor advances to greater occupational specialization: the number of different occupations increases, and so does the dispersion of the population among them. Although at one point, in early industrialization, the division of labor produces increased *routine specialization*, the advanced division of labor involves a shift towards increasingly *expert specialization*. The division of labor, in turn, is determined by urbanization, population density, and industrialization; by a high degree of communications and associations; and by a high level of education of the labor force. Blau takes issue with Durkheim's theory that the advancing division of labor produces organic solidarity, social integration through a form of consciousness arising from exchanges among differentiated roles. Blau rejects this form of explanation of social integration by cultural or psychological factors.* More concretely, he also points out that with a high degree of occupational specialization, most exchanges are among organizations, not among the different specialists within them; hence most interpersonal exchanges in the economic realm are relatively superficial ones, between salesperson and customer, or boss and worker. Nevertheless, Durkheim's theory can be salvaged by a structural interpretation: a "high" division of labor—that is, much occupational diversity—is a form of heterogeneity of social categories, and hence results in a high level of intergroup contacts, especially if stratified dimensions cross-cut pluralistically with nominal categories. Thus the progress of the division of labor itself produces social integration.

Blau also states that social mobility is the cause of most social change. From his formalized structural perspective, changes must involve shifts in numbers of people among categories, or changes in the numbers of categories; and both of these involve movement of individuals, therefore social mobility. Again, pluralism is a crucial determining condition. Mobility is facilitated by contacts among groups, and hence is especially likely if people share common characteristics on other dimensions across class lines. Blau lists two other determinants of social change: differential fertility and immigration. But Blau thinks both of these are larger in the lower classes, and hence both tend to enlarge the lower strata and enhance inequality (although immigration into the very bottom pushes up the previous lower classes). Hence the whole weight of social change which diminishes inequality—i.e., of excess upward mobility—rests upon pluralism.

Blau does enter a pessimistic note at the end of this argument. Mobility is promoted by pluralism, but once mobility takes place, pluralism declines. Mobility

*Although not entirely consistently, Page 105 defines stratified dimensions as "differences in comparable social resources of *generally accepted validity* in social exchange" (italics mine), and Blau's exchange model, worked into his structural theory at least sketchily in Chapter 6, still makes use of the claim that exchange rests on normative obligations of reciprocity.

involves individuals who are like people in other social classes on some non-class dimensions: they move, thus making their class ranking match that of their co-religionists, ethnic brethren, or what have you; those who are already congruent on non-class dimensions with most of their class compatriots tend not to move. Hence classes become more homogeneous as mobility occurs. This in turn reduces the possibility of mobility. The general paradox, Blau argues, is that change destroys the very conditions that made it possible.

Blau is pessimistic in another respect as well. The advance of the division of labor involves increasingly larger organizations. These in turn result in a larger concentration of power, which Blau measures by the number of employees directly or indirectly under a person's control. Thus, irrespective of how one argues on the question of the separation of ownership and control, there *is* a small elite which has most of the organizational power. Furthermore, Blau thinks that this means the consolidation of the elites of power and wealth, and hence declining mobility and (by definition) declining social change. He warns that such blockages, if severe, presage a revolutionary situation, which he fears would destroy pluralist democracy.

In my view, Blau has not produced a truly "primitive" theory of social structure, at least not in the sense of having isolated the principles of greatest general applicability. Take his principal dependent variable, social integration. On the face of it, this seems to be a very fundamental category, the answer to the problem of order, the same issue that occupied Durkheim throughout his works. Blau argues that one should see social integration as a matter of concrete interpersonal interactions. This is empirically realistic. But Blau does not mean just *any* interactions: he means sociable, by-and-large friendly contacts of a personal nature. Okay, if that's what one wants to *define* social integration as. But it is only conceptual sleight of hand to assume that societies cannot exist without widespread "social integration" in this sense. In fact, there have been societies throughout history with all sorts of degrees and patterns of social ties and social barriers, highly stratified societies with near-perfect correlation of wealth, power, ethnicity, and all the rest, as well as many other forms, with and without intergroup friendships. *All* are equally societies, and in fact they represent the empirical range of structures that a truly general theory should account for. To say that some societies, according to Blau's criterion, are "fragmented" is a mere tautology, if it is not backed up by further indications that they are literally "falling apart" into separate economies, undergoing political secession, or the like. But Blau does not show this, or even seem to think it is necessary. He does think that a "fragmented" society will undergo a revolutionary crisis, which he doesn't like, but there is no reason not to call this a form of social interaction as well. In short, Blau's "social integration" and "fragmentation" are no more than value-judgments, conditions he regards as desirable and undesirable, respectively, in themselves. Blau is merely continuing the typical belief of mid-century liberal American sociologists that ethnic integration is a good thing, and that segregation is bad. It may well be so, but it doesn't add up to a general theory of social structure.

Blau's theory of social change is also within the traditional mold. The dependent variable does not give us the range of types of governments, forms of property, systems of stratification, or organizational structures that have existed in

world history. Instead, we get an evolutionary stage model, in which sheer population size, density, and urbanization are the principal determinants, and social differentiation, mainly indexed by the complexity of the division of labor, is the outcome. Change is assumed to move in a straight line (maybe with intermittent stops and explosions when too much social mobility undermines its own bases). The United States, as usual, is the example of an advanced society, and European societies lag behind in bucolic undifferentiatedness.

This is a pretty naïve picture of historical change, in its range both of causes and effects. Much of it may be due to the American sociological tradition of ethnocentrism, which sees little else in history than a shift towards what exists in the modern U.S. Blau's way of putting the traditional argument about the shift from ascription to achievement, for example, is that extended kinship must decline with increasing size and density of populations. But in fact (as Blumberg and Winch showed in a 1972 article in the *American Journal of Sociology*) kinship systems become *more* elaborate and extended for the considerable part of that continuum ranging from hunting-and-gathering societies through advanced horticultural societies, and only decline with increasing size thereafter, most notably in the shift from agrarian to industrial societies.

Blau's criterion for an "advanced" division of labor is an increase in occupational specializations to a very large number. This may be all right as a formal definition, but one ought not to bootleg in the implication that advanced division of labor in this sense means highly efficient economic production, or the idea that there is a necessary historical trend in this direction. That occupational heterogeneity and high productivity may be related in a particular case of recent history does not make a convincing argument that *the* trend of history is toward ever more "advanced" divisions of labor, or even that the natural-resource-rich U.S. is a typical industrial society. It is particularly dubious (although well within the evolutionary tradition) to see the most recent phase of industrialization as based on the specialized expert skills produced by mass education. This is the usual uncritical interpretation of rising educational levels, and of the correlation of education and occupational attainment. Yet detailed analyses of what actually goes on in schools and in job placement (Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, 1976; Collins, *Sociology of Education*, 1974) show virtually *no* relation between education and actual work output, and considerable evidence that education is implicated in the struggle for occupational position primarily as a device for control and an arbitrary (and inflatable) currency of cultural status. Blau buys the technocratic argument as part of the traditional explanatory package: he is working within a paradigm which, although it may now occasionally admit conflict and domination as outcomes of social processes, never sees them as causes.

Finally, I must say that I found Blau's arguments about social mobility to be relatively empty. He states that social mobility is the cause of social change, but one could just as well argue the other way around. Better yet, social mobility *is* social change; it is a different way of describing the same phenomena. As such, it is not an autonomous explanation of change. Nor does Blau give us any concrete theory of the causes of mobility rates. He does drag in a couple of the old standard statements about mobility, that it is affected by class differences in fertility and immigration. Even this is not highly convincing. Blau seems unaware of the fact that the *upper* classes in all non-industrial societies had the higher fertility, and

world history is full of examples of immigrants coming in at the top, especially as military conquerors. Reflection on such variations ought to be included in a truly general theory of mobility and social change. For such historical examples point up very clearly that the numbers of positions of different kinds change because certain people have the resources—the weapons, strong group solidarity, means of ritual impressiveness, wealth—to create forms of domination over others. We miss this by thinking only of powerless people coming in (or being born) at the bottom, fitting into positions that have been created and defined for them by someone else. A "position," after all, is only a metaphor; empirically, it unpacks into repetitive behaviors, established and given a social definition by those who have the power to do so. (Incidentally, Blau perpetuates another traditional error about upward mobility in America: there is no theoretical reason why there should be an automatic escalator effect by which people coming in at the bottom displace the previous lower class *upwards*. If the old lower class has no resources, it could just as well be displaced further down—e.g., into unemployment if a newer, cheaper form of labor were found.)

As a general theory, then, Blau's model does not come off. Social integration as a dependent variable does not mean anything empirically useful; pluralism as a cause of all things good strikes me as silly, and it is certainly not even the major cause of interpersonal associations, political tranquility, and social mobility; social mobility as a cause of change is really a tautology; the inevitable evolutionary advance of the division of labor can be established only by an empty definition, and the recent development of "expert specializations" needs a realistic explanation instead of a technocratic glossing.

The main contributions of this book, rather, are the thorough working out of some principles of some of the causes and consequences of interpersonal associations, and other structural phenomena of a relatively diffuse sort. The most striking contributions, in my opinion, are several technical points regarding inequality. Blau develops a quantitative measure of power, and presents us, for the first time, with some evidence on its distribution. Like all pioneering efforts, this measure has its flaws. I think Blau overstates the concentration of effective power; most detailed studies of what actually goes on in organizations (including Blau's own 1955 study) show that actual control over what policies are carried out, how much work gets done, how positions and definitions of organizational reality are shaped, are very considerably influenced by organizational participants who do not have formal line authority. Blau's index, based only on cumulative numbers of employees nominally under one's control, misses this, and he flatly denies that organizational decentralization affects the distribution of power by his calculations. Clearly, there are many complexities to be worked out here. But Blau has done us a service by giving us at least an initial measure that can now be used in interorganizational and intersocial comparisons.

Blau's other major contribution is the one of his paradoxes that I really did find striking. This is the "paradox of inequality": that increases in the concentration of some good (power, wealth, whatever), beyond a certain point, actually lead to decreases in overall inequality. As most of the wealth, say, comes into the hands of fewer and fewer people, differences among the mass of the population become less. Thus very great inequality turns out to approach equality. This does suggest why, at certain points in history, power can shift very rapidly. I'm not convinced

this is the usual cause of revolutions, which seem to have more to do with military and financial exhaustion of rulers, due to foreign affairs, but at least theoretically Blau has succeeded in resuscitating one of the connotations of another old conceptual scheme, the dialectic.

Blau's latest work shows that *SAS* is certainly not dead. Indeed, it is using many of the same old arguments, although in a much more technical form, and with a new terminology. Functionalism seems to be gone, although its underlying bias lingers on; structuralism, with its own biases, comes near to the center of the stage, and Marxism (which can be easily put in the structuralist camp as well) is making inroads that, however superficial, would not have been believable fifteen years ago. And in the midst of all this, some genuine advances occur here and there. Mainstream American sociology is creeping onwards.

A History of Sociological Analysis.
Edited by Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet. New York: Basic Books, 1978. 717 pp. $29.50.

Reviewer: CRAIG CALHOUN, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

It is curious that sociologists, of all members of the academy, should so resolutely see the growth of their discipline as a succession of contributions by individual men of genius. The discipline's historians write of theorists as if they existed in a pure world of the mind, totally abstracted from the societies in which they lived and from which they took their primary examples of the phenomenon "social life." Autobiography is given priority over social-structural context in assessing the development of sociological theories and modes of analysis. Students of Durkheim, for example, are apt to emphasize his childhood in Alsace-Lorraine and his friends in the French university system, and to neglect the fact he lived and wrote in a *fin de siècle* France adapting to mass industrial organization within and to newly unified Germany without. Similarly, discussions of the formation of Marx's thought are likely to concentrate on idealist details rather than the overwhelming importance of the industrial revolution itself.

A major reason for this problem is that the object of sociological analysis is taken almost entirely for granted. All sociological work is seen as an attempt to analyze some self-evident phenomena, "society" or "social life," but the societies in which sociologists live and work, and the available information about other societies, must shape their thought. Even as abstract a thinker as Talcott Parsons did not escape the constraints of limited knowledge and the biases of mid-twentieth-century America.

This is not another plea for sociologists to become less "ethnocentric." On the contrary, it is a suggestion that some such bias is inevitable, that sociologists' practical concerns and their fundamental desire to understand the world in which they live gives sociological analysis its most important motive force. Our sociology is always shaped, first, by our concrete experience of the world and, second, by our (socially shaped) hearsay knowledge of it.

This fundamental reality is not only neglected in writing the history of sociology, it is denied by the pervasive separation of theory and research, a denial which strikes at the core of sociology's vitality as an intellectual discipline. Research