Differentiation among people: Blau’s revised view of sociology

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Abstract

Reversing his own former position, Blau calls for a reorientation of sociology towards the macrosociological analysis of social structure. To this end, he suggests a new framework for such an analysis. Upon closer inspection, the framework and the hypotheses it generated are very weak. Why is this so? It is suggested that Blau bases his framework on three typical elements of present-day sociological ‘approaches’: first, a selective revival of classical traditions under neglect of what has been done in sociology since. Second, a conception of macrosociology that denies the relevance of individualistic propositions. Third, a spurious claim that the small set of independent variables considered suffices to explain virtually every important social phenomenon. All three elements are bound to weaken Blau’s framework to the point where he even becomes unable to relate a simple message: that it is important to study differentiation among people.

1. Introduction

In its present position, sociology cannot afford to let new suggestions for a reorientation of the field simply be absorbed in the saturated sponge of ‘pluralism’. Otherwise, the danger is great that new critical suggestions are simply labeled and filed away under the heading of one or another ‘approach’, their critical potential left unexamined and their examination left to be uncritical. This examination is all the more important if the new suggestion is endowed with the dual authority of fame and high office of its author. In the following, I will analyze Peter Blau’s ASA presidential
address in 1974, in which a reorientation of sociology as a discipline is asked.

2. Reconstruction of Blau's argument

According to Blau, sociologists have been much concerned with characteristics and behavior of persons, and little with the problems around the differentiation among people. As thesis of his address, Blau states that 'the study of the various forms of differentiation among people, their interrelations, the conditions producing them, and their implications is the distinctive task of sociology' (Blau, 1974: 616). This task is evidently the call for a reorientation of sociology, given Blau's claim that sociologists have hitherto neglected the study of differentiation among people. The theoretical aim of this reorientation 'is to explain the forms and degrees of social differentiation and their implications for social integration and social change' (p. 620). While this aim is said to be in the tradition of Simmel, Durkheim, and Marx, it is explicitly said to be discontinuous with the aims of Parsons and Homans: Parsons tries to explain global characteristics (such as cultural tradition, social institutions, or dominant values); Homans tries to explain variations in the behavior of individuals. In contrast to Blau's earlier contributions to the study of social structure, in which Homans' and Parsons' work played an important role and were seen to be compatible with Simmel's study of social structure (Blau, 1964), Blau's present view is that sociology can do without explanations of individual behavior and without the study of global characteristics insofar as the latter are not eo ipso reflected in social differentiation and its consequences. As a name for the new task of sociology, Blau suggests 'structural analysis' by which he means the macrosociological analysis of social structure in empirical and theoretical terms, and his address is meant to 'suggest a framework for such structural analysis'.

Framework for structural analysis

Social structure (differentiation among people) is to be studied with the help of 'parameters'. There are two kinds of such parameters: first, nominal parameters which divide a population into subgroups with explicit boundaries; second, graduated parameters which differentiate people in terms of status rank orders. Nominal parameters (such as sex, religion, racial identification, occupation) produce heterogeneity to various degrees.
Graduated parameters (such as education, age, income, prestige, power) produce inequality to various degrees.  

2.1. The hypothesis

On the basis of above conventions (or ‘framework’), Blau establishes some hypotheses in order to show the usefulness of the framework. Before formulating the hypotheses themselves, he presents an orienting statement: integration in small groups is brought about by face-to-face interaction, but integration in large groups (macrosocial integration) is paradoxically brought about by differentiation. The subsequent hypotheses elaborate this orienting statement separately for the two kinds of differentiation: heterogeneity and inequality.

2.1.1. Heterogeneity (nominal parameters)
Blau’s first hypothesis can be rephrased as follows:

\[ H1. \text{Heterogeneity creates barriers to social intercourse between groups, but much heterogeneity weakens these barriers.} \]

Reasoning: people have a fixed preference ordering for social interaction of the following kind: (first) ingroup, (second) outgroup, (third) no interaction. Nominal parameters create ingroups, and if the number of categories of a nominal parameter is small or moderate, it will divide the population only into few or moderately few subgroups, each one big enough to allow most people the first preference for social intercourse (ingroup). If, however, the parameter has many categories, the number of subgroups will be large and each group will be small enough to force people frequently to choose between outgroup and no social intercourse. According to the preference ordering, people will choose the second preference (outgroup), thereby weakening the group barriers established by nominal parameters.

In large societies, the subgroups will remain large enough for ingroup interaction even if a nominal parameter has many categories. For this reason, Blau introduces another hypothesis:

\[ H2. \text{In large societies, the integrating effect of much heterogeneity only occurs if numerous nominal parameters intersect ('multiform heterogeneity').} \]

Reasoning: parameters intersect the more, the less they are correlated.
Given that they are completely orthogonal, the number of homogeneous subgroups is equal to the product of the parameters' categories. This means that the number of subgroups increases rapidly with each new (orthogonal) parameter, increasing the likelihood that homogeneous subgroups become very small even in large societies. Being very small, they will activate the choice between outgroup interaction and no interaction, creating social ties between groups and thus integrating the society.

2.1.2. Inequality (graduated parameters)
While nominal parameters create (by definition) horizontal differentiation (heterogeneity), graduated parameters create (by definition) vertical differentiation (inequality). Blau's first hypothesis on the relation between inequality and integration is as follows:

11. Status differences inhibit social intercourse among people whose status differs, but much status diversity promotes social intercourse between people whose status differs.

Reasoning: The greater the status difference between people, the less likely they will interact socially. If there are few status distinctions, the distance between adjacent status categories is larger than when there are many status distinctions. Much status diversity means fine gradations of status distinctions and thus the distance between strata (classes of people of equal status) becomes smaller with increasing status diversity. The smaller the status difference between people, the more likely they will have social intercourse with one another. Therefore, much status diversity increases the likelihood of social intercourse between people of different strata, fostering social integration.3

Considering more than one graduated parameter, Blau adds the following hypothesis:

12. Status differences inhibit social intercourse among people whose status differs, but weakly correlated graduated parameters ('multiform status diversity') lead to social intercourse among people whose statuses, though alike on some parameters, differ on other parameters.

Reasoning: Blau does not use the size argument here (see, by contrast, hypothesis H2 above) and he offers no further rationale for 12. One can guess that he means to imply that sociability occurs under neglect of some status dimension, as when college students socialize regardless of their various differing income statuses.
2.1.3. Consolidation

A considerable part of the paper is concerned with the social consequences of nominal and graduated parameters in case they are consolidated (highly correlated). Brought into a nutshell, Blau's various remarks on this matter can be summarized as follows:

C1. Consolidated parameters block social mobility, make the social structure more rigid, and inhibit gradual social change.

Reasoning: when parameters are consolidated, differences reinforce each other so that barriers to social intercourse between groups harden and inhibit social mobility at the same time that they encourage ingroup interaction. This increases hostility between groups barring gradual social change through adjustments and compromises.

3. Evaluation

A new way of doing sociology should be judged, among other things, by its demonstrated potential for generating powerful (i.e. informative and true) hypotheses. How do Blau's hypotheses fare in this regard?

3.1. The heterogeneity hypotheses

The argument for hypothesis H1 can be split into two parts. The first part states that as heterogeneity increases, the size of groups decreases. The second part states that as the size of groups decreases, the probability of social outgroup interaction increases, and an increase in social outgroup interaction is by definition an increase in integration. Both parts sound plausible, but are they powerful hypotheses? Let us look at them in turn.

The heterogeneity-size hypothesis is, first of all, ambiguous. Are all groups expected to decrease in size as heterogeneity increases, or most groups, or only some groups? Even if we grant that Blau assumes population size to be constant when his hypothesis applies (an assumption he does not state), it would be highly unlikely that he thinks all, or even most, groups decrease in size as heterogeneity increases. He mentions for instance religion as a nominal parameter. If we have four denominations and one religious group splits into two, then heterogeneity is increased, but the majority of groups (three) remain the same size. As long as Blau could be sure that other groups stay constant in size, while some are reduced in size, his hypothesis would still make sense. But he cannot be
sure of that. It is entirely possible that most groups increase in size as heterogeneity increases. Take a highly simplified example: a population partitioned into four groups, three of size five and one of size eighty-five. The population regroups and we get, say, five groups of size twenty each. Heterogeneity greatly increased, but so did the modal group size.

This is not a completely unrealistic counterexample. Imagine an organization, made up of three groups of size five, recruits from a homogeneous labor market (a group of eighty-five) and differentiates internally into four groups of size twenty. While the members of the size-five groups may have been prompted to interact socially with members from the other groups of size five and the members of the group of size eighty-five, the members of the size-twenty groups may each keep to their own group and overall social integration is reduced. Blau has analyzed this kind of process himself (cf. Blau and Schoenherr, 1971). He observed that 'increasing size generates structural differentiation in organizations along various dimensions at decelerating rates' (Blau and Schoenherr, 1971: 301). From this he concludes that 'the larger an organization is, the larger is the average size of its structural components of all kinds' (ibid., p. 305), which has 'the paradoxical result that large offices and headquarter divisions constitute at the same time a more homogeneous and a more heterogeneous occupational environment for most employees than small ones' (ibid., pp. 305 f). For this reason social interaction is more confined to the ingroup than in less heterogeneous organizational environments, despite the fact that opportunities for outgroup contacts are better in the more heterogeneous (larger) organizations.

In short, increase in heterogeneity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a reduction in modal group size. What about the second part of the argument, stating that as the size of groups decreases, the probability of social outgroup interaction increases? Blau's own confidence in this hypothesis is not very great. In his own opinion, it oversimplifies the situation, and he furnishes a cogent counterexample: 'persistent strong normative disapproval of intergroup contacts often inhibits them despite enhanced heterogeneity. Intensified ethnocentrism when a community becomes ethnically mixed is an example' (Blau, 1974: 623). In other words, smaller group size will only increase the probability of social outgroup interaction if the groups do not develop norms against this contact. Since we are not told under what circumstances these norms develop or fail to develop, the hypothesis is not very informative. This, however, means that the entire hypothesis H1 turned out to be weak.

Hypothesis H2 is auxiliary for hypothesis H1, that is, it specifies a
condition under which group size will become small enough for increased social outgroup interaction in a large society. The condition is ‘multiform heterogeneity’, the heterogeneity that is produced through numerous intersecting nominal parameters. It is reasonable to assume that many parameters with few categories each are more likely than one parameter with many categories. For instance, ten parameters with four categories each create more possible subgroups than one parameter with one million categories. And assuming that a nominal parameter with one million categories is highly unlikely, Blau is perfectly right in pointing to the importance of many nominal parameters for larger societies. Yet, Blau is less interested in the number of parameters than in their ‘intersection’. He suggests that in order for multiform heterogeneity to occur, parameters must ‘intersect’, that is, they must be independent or only weakly associated. If parameters are highly associated, no multiform heterogeneity occurs and group differences reinforce each other, making individuals prone to restrict their social interaction to the ingroup. Only intersecting parameters ‘reduce the size of homogeneous subgroups to the vanishing point and thereby reinstate the structural constraint to participate in intergroup relations that society’s large size would otherwise nullify’ (Blau, 1974: 622). As plausible as this may sound, it is not a very forceful argument. While the few largest groups are likely to become smaller as the degree of association becomes smaller, the many small groups are likely to become larger as the degree of association declines, the more so, the more equal the marginal distribution over the various categories or the higher the initial degree of association. Thus, the modal group size is likely to increase as degree of association of parameters decreases. Take for example two nominal parameters of three categories each; a population of one hundred and eighty; and an equal marginal distribution of sixty per category. This gives us nine possible subgroups. If association is perfect, the modal group size is zero and as association decreases, the modal group size increases, reaching its maximum (twenty) when the two parameters are completely independent (see Figure 1).

If Blau’s hypothesis, that small group size makes intergroup social interaction more likely, is moderately correct, then his argument about multiform heterogeneity, degree of association, and outgroup interaction is applicable to small populations. In small populations, decreasing association between parameters means that the few large groups become small enough to be in need of outgroup interaction while the many small groups, though growing, do not become large enough to satisfy social interaction needs internally. As a result, all groups are engaged in outgroup inter-
Figure 1. Relation between modal group size and degree of association for hypothetical example

* Association was measured using Tschuprow's T (see Blalock, 1960: 229). It should also be mentioned that the Gibbs-Martin index of heterogeneity (see note 5) increases with modal group size from .667 to .890.

action. But Blau's argument about multiform heterogeneity was expressly made for large populations, and there an increase in modal group size could indeed imply that many groups become large enough to satisfy social interaction needs internally, so that social integration would decline with decreasing association between parameters.9

There is yet another aspect of 'intersection' of parameters, viz. its spread. One subgroup may differentiate internally on the basis of parameters that are not applied by any other group. In this case, the 'new' parameters do not intersect those parameters that partition the population as a whole.10 In this sense, two parameters can intersect to various degrees and they intersect fully if and only if each of the categories of the one can be meaningfully cross-classified with each of the categories of the other. These different degrees of intersection have nothing to do with degrees of association except that full intersection is a necessary condition for making the measure of association meaningful. If this is what Blau actually meant by 'intersecting' then he was not only very unclear about this point but also failed to tell us first why he thinks that in a large (or
society parameters should fully intersect, and second, how intersection is related to modal group size.

There are indications that Blau did not take modal group size too seriously himself, as far as multiform heterogeneity is concerned. Without warning, he shifts his argumentation for multiform heterogeneity to something quite different from size. All of a sudden, multiform heterogeneity really means that people of different groups also hold group memberships in common. But if it is not the small size of the ingroup that makes them engage in social outgroup interaction, what is it? It is the sheer fact of common group membership. Blau illustrates this with two examples: 'The common interest of automobile workers constrains blacks and whites to join in a union \textit{and engage in social interaction}, and the common interest of blacks constrains unskilled workers and professionals to join in common endeavors \textit{and associate with each other}' (Blau, 1974: 622, emphasis mine). While it is by no means evident that a common interest should lead to common membership in an instrumental group (see Olson, 1965), it is even less evident that it should lead to social interaction. Why should blacks and whites be prompted to interact socially because they are both members of a union? Why should black unskilled workers and black professionals socially interact because they both support the same interest group? Blau has many difficulties with the size hypothesis, but once he drops it, he has nothing left to replace it.

3.2. The inequality hypotheses

This lack of a hypothesis on social interaction other than the group-size-hypothesis also becomes apparent in Blau's hypotheses about inequality. In hypothesis 12, in which he relates multiform status diversity to social integration, he also simply assumes without further argument that people similar in some status dimension but different in others will interact socially simply \textit{because} they have a status dimension in common. Take for example a simple case of multiform status diversity: high, medium, and low income and high, medium, and low education. Cross-classified, this yields nine groups, each one having either educational or income status in common with four other groups. Why should each group socially interact with these four other groups (given we do not consider the size argument)? The only answer offered by Blau that looks like a hypothesis is the assumption that social intercourse is inversely related to status distance between persons. Assuming that the status distance is smaller between two persons if they share a status dimension, it follows that
persons are more likely to have social intercourse with persons with whom they share a status dimension than with persons with whom they share no status dimension. Unfortunately, Blau has defined graduated parameters in such a way that this becomes true by definition. He says: ‘In the case of graduated parameters, sociable intercourse is expected to be inversely related to the status distance between persons. Unless these expectations are met, the investigator must abandon his initial assumption that a factor is a structural parameter’ (Blau, 1974: 617, emphasis mine). Thus, if it turns out that our nine hypothetical groups only socialize internally, then Blau’s hypothesis I2 is not wrong, rather, we have to abandon the initial assumption that education and income are graduated parameters. Hypothesis I2 simply cannot be falsified and is therefore not informative.13

The same must be said about hypothesis I1 which states that with decreasing distance between statuses, people of different status are more likely to interact socially. Should it turn out that this is not so, then the hypothesis remains intact, only we have to look for another graduated parameter and keep looking until we find one for which the hypothesis holds.

Since hypothesis C1 about consolidated parameters is based on the hypotheses on multiform heterogeneity and multiform inequality, it is subject to the same criticism. Because one can agree with Blau’s value premises that the few should not have everything while the many have nothing and that ‘the challenge of the century (is) to find ways to curb the power of organizations in the face of their powerful opposition, without destroying in the process the organizations or democracy itself’ (Blau, 1974: 633 f), one is doubly disappointed by how little one learns from Blau’s analysis about the structural causes for entrenched elites and powerful organizations. Consolidated parameters are not a description of the causes, and they are not even a description of the noxious phenomena. Little follows from Blau’s hypotheses about the power of organizations, and consolidated parameters are certainly not sufficient to describe substantial and rigidified inequalities.

In sum, all of Blau’s hypotheses turned out to be weak. Is there a fault in the framework he suggested that it did not produce one powerful hypothesis?

4. Criticism

Blau’s framework is built on a typical formula for present day ‘approaches’
in sociology. First its newness is based on a selective revival of classical traditions under neglect of what has been done in sociology in the meantime. Second, its aim is decidedly macrosociological in the specific sense of denying the relevance of individualistic explanations. Third, its scope is intentionally inclusive although it considers only a small number of independent variables. Let us look at these allegations in more detail.

4.1. Newness à la mode

According to Blau, his new approach is in the tradition of Simmel, Durkheim and Marx (Blau, 1974: 620). Yet, his reception of these traditions is highly selective. With regard to Simmel, Blau disregards especially effects of relative size, effects of absolute size for the formation of institutionalized means of integration, the effects of differential bases of group-formation for group structure and intergroup integration. With regard to Durkheim, Blau disregards especially the effects of differentiation on anomie, the effects of institutionalized integration, the relation between density and differentiation. With regard to Marx, Blau disregards especially the triple relation between legal structure, technology, and differentiation.

The point is not that Blau is expected to agree with these classical authors on all these issues. Rather, the point is that Blau does not tell us why he thinks these issues are irrelevant for the study of differentiation, or, if he thinks they are relevant (as can be seen for some issues in his 'illustration' analysis of division of labor), he does not tell us, how they relate to his hypotheses.

Still more importantly, Blau does not consider more recent work for his framework. For instance, Blau does not consider issues, findings and controversies in the ecological and nonecological literature on urban studies, although much of this literature deals with the relation between differentiation and integration. From many of these studies, it can be seen that an explicit consideration of size, density and institutional framework seems to be essential for an explanation of the relationship between differentiation and integration. As independent variable. Blau considers size only in the roughest way possible, namely in the distinction between small and primitive societies and large and industrialized societies. Density and institutional frameworks play no role in his hypotheses.

Furthermore, Blau does not even consider studies that explicitly deal with elaborations of ideas he took from Simmel (such as Coleman, 1964: 479 ff) or studies that explicitly deal with hypotheses similar to his own
(such as Davis, 1966). Davis established explicit hypotheses on the relationship between differentiation (number of dimensions and degree of association of dimensions) and social integration. These hypotheses are derived from individualistic propositions and varying initial conditions, and are much more detailed than Blau's hypotheses and are informative. Had Blau considered these hypotheses (and the many other hypotheses surrounding them), he could have attempted to improve on Davis' work rather than remain below the level achieved by Davis.\textsuperscript{16}

In sum, Blau's approach of structural analysis is 'new' in the sense that many approaches claim newness these days. Classical authors are selectively received and one claims to continue in the tradition of classical authors, disregarding many aspects of the classical traditions and most of the work that has been done since then.

4.2. Macrosociological approach à la mode

It has almost become a tradition to define a macrosociological endeavor as alternative to a microsociological endeavor, or, more generally, as alternative to the consideration of individualistic propositions on human behavior, motivation and cognition. Blau had resisted this trend for quite some time,\textsuperscript{17} but he finally succumbed to it (cf. Blau, 1974: 620).

As frequently shown in the past,\textsuperscript{18} there is a big difference between not wanting to consider individualistic propositions and actually not using individualistic propositions. In most cases, individualistic propositions are introduced anyway, in an implicit and ad hoc manner. Blau is no exception to this rule. The disadvantage to this charade is that the individualistic assumptions cannot openly be introduced and discussed\textsuperscript{19} and that in many cases they are considerably camouflaged and therefore difficult to detect and improve. Both for Blau's hypotheses and for his entire framework, this seemingly anti-individualistic strategy asks a heavy price.

The most explicitly introduced individualistic assumption is a sort of preference ordering for social interaction: 'first, people tend to prefer ingroup to outgroup associates, and second, people tend to prefer associating with outgroup members to not associating with anybody and remaining isolated' (Blau, 1974: 621). Blau uses this assumption to establish an inverse relationship between group size and social outgroup interaction. As we saw above, Blau's own confidence in this individualistic assumption is quite low, although the assumption plays a central role in all his hypotheses. Since Blau cannot admit to the importance of individualistic propositions, he has to pretend that the weakness of his as-
sumption does not really matter. Yet, as was shown in the evaluation, this weakness matters a great deal. Why is the assumption so weak?

Blau’s assumption is a rule of thumb that works in very simple situations where one has a clear choice between social outgroup interaction and no social interaction. Yet, this simple situation rarely occurs. If I have to walk five miles in order to reach somebody of my ingroup while I have to walk only ten steps to reach somebody of an outgroup, am I then before a choice between no interaction and outgroup interaction? What Blau fails to consider are the rewards and costs attached to social interaction. In the literature, one factor has come to the fore as the most important determinant of reward of social interaction between two individuals in non-competitive situations: the degree of similarity (the more similar the two individuals, the more rewarding the social interaction for each of them). One of the most prominent determinants of cost of social interaction is the degree of availability (the more effort it takes to reach somebody, the more costly the social interaction with him). The behavioral principles relating rewards and costs can be stated quite differently and be endowed with differing degrees of complexity, but even the simplest formulation, neglecting all sorts of problems of cognitive comparison and saturation, is superior to Blau’s assumption. This simple formulation is as follows: individuals will choose action alternative A over action alternative B if the positive difference between rewards and costs for A is higher than for B. With the help of this behavioral principle and the well confirmed assumptions about rewards and costs in social interactions, Blau’s self-assigned task can be reformulated succinctly: In which ways do social parameters affect similarity and availability? If he can answer this question, he can also answer the question how social differentiation (kind, number, degree of association of social parameters) is related to social integration (intergroup social interaction). In particular, Blau would have to ask at least the following subquestions.

First, which nominal or graduated characteristics are social parameters, i.e. which of them create similarity and dissimilarity, and what are their conditions of salience? Second, how do criss-crossing social parameters affect similarity/dissimilarity? Third, how does the number of categories of social parameters affect availability? Fourth, how does the association between social parameters affect availability? Fifth, what boundary conditions have to be specified for any of the answers to questions 1-4?

In answering these questions, a clear distinction can be made between the parts of the argument that link parameters to initial conditions for the
behavioral principle(s), the parts of the argument establishing massive individual effects on the basis of the initial conditions and the behavioral principle(s), and the parts linking the individual effects to the collective effect (social integration). The link between the parameters and their characteristics (such as number, criss-crossing, degree of association etc.) and the initial conditions (such as similarity and availability) has been called 'correspondence'. The parts establishing individual effects have been called ‘individualistic explanation’, and the parts linking individual effects to the collective effect(s) have been called ‘transformation’.  

Correspondence and transformation may involve purely mathematical elements and partial definitions, bracketing the explanatory core (the individualistic explanation) from both sides.

Since Blau has to hide the individualistic assumptions, he cannot distinguish these different parts of his argument. The mathematical parts remain wholly implicit and therefore Blau did not see that they are wrong (such as Blau’s assumption about degree of association and modal group size). Worse, Blau combines individualistic assumptions with partial definitions. According to his stipulation, we can speak only of a nominal parameter if it divides the population into groups such that ‘sociable intercourse (is) more prevalent within groups than between groups’ (Blau, 1974: 617). He thereby excludes per definition the consideration of rewards and costs and the question of salience, forcing himself to introduce that simplistic assumption about outgroup versus no interaction. Also, according to his stipulation, we can speak of a graduated parameter only if it differentiates people in terms of a status rank order such that ‘sociable intercourse (is) inversely related to the status distance between persons’ (ibid.). Not only does he render some of his hypotheses untestable by this combination of an individualistic proposition and a partial definition (see evaluation above), he also becomes unable to see that the two individualistic propositions which are hidden in the partial definitions can be derived from the same behavioral principle. The reason why people are more likely to interact socially with members of their group is that by and large members of their own group are both more similar and more available than members of outgroups. The reason why two people are the less likely to interact socially the greater the status distance between them is that by and large similarity and availability decrease with status distance. While it may be useful to distinguish nominal and graduated parameters for some problems, they link up with the same individualistic propositions. Introducing individualistic propositions explicitly rather than hiding them in partial definitions would have made Blau’s hypotheses both
more powerful and more economical.

But not only his hypotheses, also his entire framework suffers from his anti-individualistic bias.

Blau’s framework for structural analysis is, of course, based on some view of what social structure is. Yet, in this point Blau does not follow Nadel’s (1957) example of a careful exposition of what he means by social structure. Instead, he covers himself in all directions. We read: ‘by social structure I refer to population distributions among social positions...’ A little later we read: ‘the social positions... define the social structure’. And again a little later: ‘social structure is defined by the distinctions people make, explicitly or implicitly, in their role relations’. We also hear that a parameter ‘generates’ positions (all quotes from Blau, 1964: 616, emphases mine). In this fashion, Blau suggests to the reader that actually all important aspects of what may be considered as ‘social structure’ have been covered: (1) population distributions, (2) social positions, (3) distinctions made by people. In fact, he leaves the reader in a cloud of dust with regard to the essential question: how are these three things related to each other? This is a strategy already exposed by Levinson (1959) for role theoreticians who want to dodge the issue of individualistic assumptions.

The distinction between population distribution and categories (positions) is treated in a cavalier fashion by Blau. He suggests to use the Gibbs-Martin index of heterogeneity because it simultaneously takes account of categories and population distribution. This makes it impossible for Blau to consider number of categories and population distribution as separate variables, leading to wrong assumptions about the relationship between social differentiation and modal group size. One reason why he has chosen not to distinguish between population distribution and categories may be the fact that he also wanted to include ‘distinctions people make’ without using or explicating any individualistic assumptions. The distinctions made by people are not related to population distribution in any straightforward manner, and so he treated ‘position’ (category) ambiguously, as if it could simultaneously refer to population distribution and to distinctions people make. The result is that he does not only neglect to consider population distribution separately, but also that the distinctions made by people are virtually ignored. We know, for instance, that people differ in their view of social strata, and there is good evidence that people who are placed in researcher’s categories from, say, upper-upper to lower-lower strata have per category quite different views of the stratification structure: the lower the category,
the fewer distinctions are made. On what, then, is a graduated parameter based? If the parameter is meant to represent 'distinctions people make' (subjective categories) relevant for social interaction, then Blau needs several parameters for the same dimension (such as wealth) because these distinctions, as just outlined, are different for people from objectively different strata. This also means that status diversity, i.e. the number of distinctions made by people, is always higher for higher strata, at least in large societies where dramatized and therefore consensual strata divisions cannot be expected. Yet, Blau has only one parameter per dimension. If this parameter is thus not based on distinctions people make but on an objective dimension, then Blau needs individualistic propositions linking objective categories to subjective categories relevant for social interaction. Or he has to show that subjective categories can safely be neglected. He does neither.

In sum, the charade of hiding individualistic assumptions or defining away their relevance only weakens Blau's macrosociological approach rather than strengthen it. Introducing individualistic propositions explicitly allows one to isolate three different problem areas: correspondence (linking macrosociological phenomena to initial conditions for individualistic propositions), individualistic explanation (establishing individual effects on the basis of initial conditions and propositions), and transformation (linking individual effects to collective effects). Should the entire explanation turn out to be wrong, then the errors can be located in one of these problem areas. If this distinction is not made, the entire framework has to be reanalyzed and changed, producing another 'approach' rather than an improved theory.

4.3. Inclusive scope à la mode

The third typical ingredient of a present day approach is the claim that it can virtually explain all relevant phenomena although it deals only with a few independent variables. In Blau's case, the only independent variables are the parameters and their characteristics. With these, he wants to explain social integration, the dynamics of the division of labor, social change, social mobility, the power of organizations etc. A theory that can explain a great variety of phenomena on the basis of a few independent variables is a powerful theory indeed, and according to Popper we should all try for such theories. Mostly, however, the explanatory feat turns out to be a sham, and Blau's attempt is no exception.

We have seen above that Blau's hypotheses are very weak, they do not
explain integration. Yet, Blau's claim is much wider than just the explanation of social integration (or the lack of social integration). He wants to show 'how the actual combinations of the analytically distinguished forms of differentiation affect the dynamics of social life' (Blau, 1974: 620, emphasis mine). In order to do this, he introduces a host of new hypotheses in the guise of interpreting the old ones. In this fashion he claims a wide explanatory range for his framework and he can neglect to check on the consistency of his auxiliary hypotheses. For instance, when talking about masses and elites, he claims that the masses are very integrated because the big distance between elite and lower strata diminishes the distance between the lower strata and because the probability of social encounter among the lower strata is great (Blau, 1974: 624 f); and he claims that the lower strata have a common interest in improving their status. Later, when talking about multiform differentiation as being at the roots of the dynamics of social change, he claims that members of integrated groups do not want to leave their groups (Blau, 1974: 631). None of these assumptions follow from his hypotheses and if they are taken together, it follows that when there is elite consolidation, members of lower strata want to improve their status but do not want to leave their group. This sounds like an interesting (?) hypothesis on the preconditions for collective action for group mobility, but instead we hear that emergent value orientations precipitate moves of people from one group to another (ibid.). All of a sudden, emergent value orientations are listed as a cause for social mobility, although Blau had vowed to consider value orientations only insofar as they are reflected in social differentiation and in salience of parameters (Blau, 1974: 620).³²

Blau's inconsistency is not as important as the fact that he fattens his analysis with a host of hypotheses that have nothing to do with his framework and nonetheless are accredited to it. This only leads to another charade: the auxiliary hypotheses are camouflaged and remain unexamined (by Blau). Worse, many important factors that are difficult to camouflage are simply left out. Most prominent among them are institutional arrangements. For integration, Blau considers only whether there is a denomination, not whether there is a church organization,³³ whether there is a new category of jobs, nor whether there is a union. For social mobility, he considers whether there is intergroup social interaction, not whether there are certain institutional characteristics of labor markets,³⁴ etc. For social change, Blau considers whether there is social mobility, not whether there are certain political institutions making the production of public goods responsive to changing preferences, etc. It is of course
legitimate to try to explain as much as possible without consideration of institutional arrangements, but Blau's spurious scope of explanation does not allow us to conclude that institutional arrangements may be ignored.

5. Conclusion

Blau has established his new framework for macrosociological analysis of social structure on the basis of three typical elements of present-day sociological approaches. He claimed to continue a classical tradition that had been forgotten, ignoring important aspects of this classical tradition as well as most of the sociological work that has been done since. He claimed to engage in macrosociological analysis in the sense that individualistic propositions play no important role in his framework; yet, he introduced individualistic assumptions through the backdoor, thereby leaving them unexamined and weakening all his hypotheses. He claimed an inclusive scope of explanation for his framework; yet, he introduced a host of unacknowledged hypotheses that are unrelated to his framework. The result of these three strategies is meager.

Unfortunately, Blau drew attention away from a rather simple but important point he could have made: that we could use a lot more rigorous analysis of such factors as population distribution, grouping and ordering social characteristics ('social parameters'), the degree of association of social parameters, and size, preferably considered simultaneously. Had he tried to make this point, his strategy would have been diametrically opposed to the one he used. He would have analyzed what studies there are on these factors and where they are lacking. As it is, this analysis still remains to be done.

Notes

1. This reconstruction is not meant to be a substitute for reading Blau's article. Its sole purpose is to make the subsequent evaluation and critique more intelligible to the reader. Also, further details are given in the evaluation and critique sections below.

2. Blau distinguishes two forms of inequality: status diversity (fine gradations) and elite concentration (small elite versus large masses without strata in the middle). In his hypotheses, status diversity plays the important role, while elite concentration is indirectly considered in his hypothesis on consolidated parameters (see below). While a graduated parameter is in principle continuous, Blau uses it mostly
as a covert combination of a nominal and a graduated parameter (or what he calls 'ordinal' parameter), since he distinguishes between status groups.

3. Elite concentration creates integration among the large masses but blocks integration between elite and masses, according to Blau. For this reason he does not really consider elite concentration as a highly integrated situation.

4. It would still make sense, considering its purpose: as feeder hypothesis for the hypothesis on group size and outgroup interaction.

5. Blau suggests the Gibbs-Martin index of heterogeneity as a good measure of the kind of heterogeneity he considers (the measure is $H = 1 - \frac{\Sigma X^2}{(\Sigma X)^2}$). On this measure, heterogeneity in our example increases from .27 to .80, a great increase.

6. Blau speaks of 'correlation' but considering that he is dealing with nominal and ordinal scales in most cases, it is better to speak of 'association'.

7. According to the Gibbs-Martin index of heterogeneity suggested by Blau, heterogeneity increases if the marginal distribution becomes more equal. For this reason we may assume that if heterogeneity greatly increases, the condition of equal marginal distribution is not inadequate for Blau's hypothesis. In addition, the same effect is achieved if the degree of association declines from a very high level, which is another condition consistent with Blau's hypothesis.

8. For simplicity's sake, modal group size is here operationalized as the identical size of the non-diagonal groups. Normally one would have to group ranges of sizes (such as 1-5 = 5) in order to neglect small variations between different subgroups.

9. The occurrence of many subcultures in large urban areas could be related to this phenomenon (cf. Fischer, 1975).

0. For example, changes in the Catholic hierarchy will in all likelihood create new categories that cannot be cross-classified with Protestant clergics.

1. Interestingly enough, 'large' and 'industrial' are used interchangeably by Blau.

2. The question is also how many parameters people can consider before cognitive overload occurs. If that number is not very high (say, in the neighborhood of seven) then we would expect many local combinations of parameters, few of which (if any) fully intersect national parameters (cf. also Mayer, 1966).

3. The same holds for a hypothesis about salience. Blau states that 'the more salient a parameter, the firmer are the group boundaries, and the greater is the tendency to confine sociable interaction within groups' (Blau, 1974: 621). Yet this sensibly looking hypothesis is true by definition because he defined salience of a parameter by the strength of its association with sociable intercourse (Blau, 1974: 617).

4. Imagine, for example, that power, wealth, prestige, and education are perfectly 'consolidated' and that each parameter is cut into three categories (high, middle, and low). Then we would have only three status groups. But if the distribution of people is such that only one per cent of the population is in the top group and only one per cent in the bottom group, while ninety-eight per cent is in the middle group, then we would hardly speak of substantial and rigidified inequalities. Why a distribution such as this is unlikely, we do not learn from Blau's kind of analysis, and what we learn does not help us to alleviate existing inequalities.

15. There is quite a lot of relevant literature for this question, of which I mention...

16. For instance, Davis considers size of the population and its marginal distribution only as boundary conditions for the hypotheses on differentiation and association between dimensions. For this reason, he also assumes that with a high degree of differentiation and a low degree of association, there will be many small subgroups in which individuals will be prompted to interact also with outgroups (for a criticism of this view, see above). Davis also does not deal with questions of density and institutional arrangements and their effect on structure.

17. In *Exchange and power* (1964: 2), Blau still maintained that 'the foundation required for a systematic theory of social structure is a thorough knowledge of the processes of social association, from the simplest that characterize the interpersonal relations between individuals to the most complex that pertain to the relations in and among large collectivities.'


19. For an example see Lindenberg, 1976: 13.

20. There are behavioristic learning-theoretical elaborations (Homans, 1974; Opp, 1972; Kunkel and Nagasawa, 1973), balance theoretical elaborations (Davis, 1966) and social learning-theoretical elaborations (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Rotter, 1972).

21. One could also consider the well confirmed influence of social interaction on similarity, especially for situations where ingroup availability is low and outgroup availability is high. In this process, new parameter categories are created.

22. If this question is answered then one can state that, given high availability, individuals of the same category of a social parameter are likely to have collectively more social interaction with one another than with individuals from different categories.

23. For instance, one can state that an increase in number of criss-crossing parameters means that individuals share increasingly more categories, which increases similarity and therefore the likelihood of social interaction across categories, if availability does not decline at the same time.

24. For instance, one can state that if the population remains constant and the number of categories increases, the number of groups that decrease in size will increase the closer the number of categories approaches N (the size of the population).

25. For instance, one can state that the higher the degree of association or the more equal the marginal distribution, the more likely that a reduction in the degree of association will decrease the largest categories and increase the smallest categories. This means that in these cases, the availability within the formerly largest groups will decline and it will increase in the formerly smallest groups.

26. Examples of such boundary conditions are: constancy of population; non-competitive situation within the ingroup; holding constant institutional factors affecting rewards and costs.

27. For discussions on correspondence, individualistic explanation, and trans-
formation, see Lindenberg, 1976 and 1977b.

28. There is an additional inconsistency. Blau defines a structural parameter as a criterion ‘implicit in the social distinctions people make in their social interaction... assuming that such differences actually affect people’s role relations’ (Blau, 1974: 616, emphasis mine). Nowhere does Blau actually analyze people’s role relations.

29. See note 5 above.

30. For the same reason, Blau’s definition of status diversity is careless. Actually, what he means by status diversity is a combination of fine status gradations (parameter categories) and a fairly equal distribution of people over these status gradations. The structural parameter alone is not enough to describe this combination. Thus, when he introduces his framework, Blau speaks of ‘fine status gradations’ (p. 618), but when he really uses status diversity for his hypotheses, he adds an assumption about the distribution of people (‘status diversity, which means that few people are roughly equal in status...’, p. 624). A similar point can be made about ‘elite concentration’ which means few strata (status categories) and a highly skewed distribution.


32. Blau vowed this because he wanted to set his approach off against that of Parsons.


34. For the mobility of women, for example, it may be much more important to know the characteristics of the labor market than whether they socially interact with men.

35. Blau himself had instigated a very interesting series of studies on size and heterogeneity (see Blau, 1970; Holdaway and Blowers, 1971; Meyer, 1972; Mayhew et al., 1972; Mayhew, 1973; Specht, 1973; Kasarda, 1974).

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