

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11316-8 - Structures of Power and Constraint: Papers in Honor of Peter M. Blau
Edited by Craig Calhoun, Marshall W. Meyer and W. Richard Scott

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Are social structures products of human action, expressions of individual or group power? Or are they essentially external constraints on human action, necessarily analyzed at a different level? How are themes of power and constraint to be joined in a common analytic approach? These have long been central questions for sociologists. Since the collapse of functionalism as a unifying paradigm, however, they have often appeared as the basis for sharp divisions between competing analytic paradigms. The divide between structuralism and rational-choice theory has been one of the most prominent such splits. Yet each approach has undergone a revival in recent years.

In order to honor Peter Blau, one of the most influential sociologists of the contemporary era, the editors of this book brought together a wide range of distinguished sociologists who have taken positions on different sides of this issue. The importance of Blau's work to each of the competing approaches provided an occasion for attempting to bridge the overly sharp divide between them. This divide has been reinforced by the overlapping micro-macro division. Yet as network analysis suggests, structuralism need not always be limited to large-scale analysis. Similarly, the work of James Coleman and others on corporate actors demonstrates that rational-choice work may be macrosociological.

As articles in this book make clear, Blau himself has espoused differing views of this issue. His early classic, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, for example, stands in sharp contrast to his more purely structuralist work of the last twenty years. Similarly, the contributors to this volume take different stands on these questions as they explore the relationship of micro to macrosociology, the nature of change in complex organizations, the methods of network analysis, and the relationship of rational-action theory to structural sociology. Their chapters are not just programmatic statements, but empirically specific attempts to work out better analytic approaches. One of the book's important contributions is to bring these often distinct discussions into focus as parts of a common discourse on the place of social structure and concepts of strategic action in sociological explanation.

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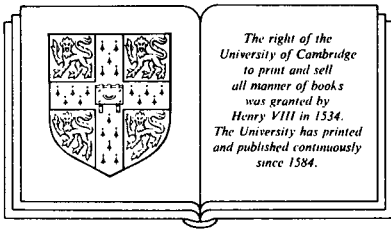
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Preface

Peter Blau is not only one of today's most influential sociologists, he is one of sociology's finest people. Each of the three editors of this book had the privilege of working with Peter while graduate students at either the University of Chicago or Columbia University. One still has the pleasure of having Peter as a colleague. We want this book to be testimony not only to a fine scholar, but to a revered teacher and a good friend.

Of course, each of us had teachers with better diction. But we never knew any of greater intellectual honesty, dedication to sociology, and personal integrity. As time goes on, we grow more impressed with how remarkable these qualities are. We have all known distinguished scholars who were selfish, inconsiderate people. It is all the more pleasure, therefore, to know Peter Blau because he reassures us that fame and academic distinction can go hand in hand with a sense of humor and care for other people. Each of us has been at various points the beneficiary of that care, as well as of pointed criticism and sociological instruction.

So in editing this book, we have tried to repay at least a little of some personal debts, as well as to express sociology's broader esteem for Peter Blau. We undertook this effort in 1985, not quite realizing the magnitude of the task. It has been worth it, though, both because Peter deserves it and because so many distinguished colleagues have contributed outstanding essays. We knew that Peter would only be honored by a book of the highest scholarly quality; a miscellaneous collection of essays by various students and acquaintances would not do. Accordingly, we chose a theme which is central to Peter's sociological interests, and asked the best possible scholars to write on it. It is a measure of Peter's centrality to sociology that so many have agreed. All of the authors in this volume have been influenced by Peter Blau, many of them personally as well as through his writings. Not all were his students, nor were all ever in the same department with Peter.

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The essays they have contributed are grouped into three sections, each with its own introduction. Each can stand on its own, though the essays are thematically linked in various ways. In addition, there is an introduction to the volume as a whole, and a memoir by one of Peter's own teachers, Robert K. Merton. It should be mentioned that we originally planned a separate section on social stratification, but the authors who were to contribute to it either had to withdraw from the project for personal reasons, or found themselves more inclined to write on other aspects of the book's theme.

As editors, we have incurred some new debts. Perhaps the greatest is to Judith Blau, a distinguished sociologist in her own right, who helped us plan this effort and above all proved marvellously adept at keeping it secret from Peter for three years. It was announced to him in a gathering at the 1988 ASA meeting in Atlanta, shortly before it went to press. We are particularly pleased that George Homans was able to attend and speak at this gathering, one of his last public forays in sociology.

We would also like to thank Cambridge University Press for undertaking the book with us, and our editors Susan Allen Mills and Emily Loose for their support. We would like to thank those authors who finished their essays on time for waiting patiently for those who did not. We are grateful also to Ruth Slavin for her excellent work in compiling the index. Lastly, we would like to thank the secretarial staff of the Department of Sociology and the Office of International Programs at the University of North Carolina for managing what seems an enormous volume of correspondence.

We thought it appropriate to the spirit of Peter's sociological work and personal commitments to donate the royalties from this book to the American Sociological Association's Minority Fellowship Program.

CJC
MWM
WRS

5 March 1990