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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to formulate and illustrate a generalized approach to the theory of social stratification. This field has, in spite of its central importance, been in a notably undeveloped state. The emergence of a highly generalized conceptual scheme in social theory which has elsewhere been traced by the author suggests the possibility of a more thorough theoretical approach than has hitherto been possible. Social stratification, here regarded as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as relatively superior or inferior, may be analyzed in terms of the following classification scheme: (1) membership in a kinship unit, (2) personal qualities, (3) achievements, (4) possessions, (5) authority, and (6) power.

Social stratification is regarded here as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects. Our first task is to discuss why such differential ranking is considered a really fundamental phenomenon of social systems and what are the respects in which such ranking is important. Ranking is one of many possible bases on which individuals may be differentiated.[1] It is only in so far as differences are

[1] Some writers (cf. P. A. Sorokin, *Social Mobility* [New York, 1927]) have distinguished what is here referred to as stratification as the "vertical" axis of differentiation of individuals from the "horizontal" axis. Correspondingly, when individuals change their status in the differentiated system, reference is made to vertical and horizontal mobility. This usage is dangerous. It states the analytical problem in terms of a two-dimensional spatial analogy. On the one hand, because stratification constitutes one important range of differentiation, it does not follow that all others can be satis-

treated as involving or related to particular kinds of social superiority and inferiority that they are relevant to the theory of stratification.

Central for the purposes of this discussion is the differential evaluation in the moral sense of individuals as units. Moral superiority is the object of a certain empirically specific attitude quality of "respect," while its antithesis is the object of a peculiar attitude of "disapproval" or even, in the more extreme case, of "indignation."[2]

In one sense, perhaps, the selection of moral evaluation as the central criterion of the ranking involved in stratification might be considered arbitrary. It is, however, no more and no less arbitrary than, for instance, the selection of distance as a basic category for describing the relations of bodies in a mechanical system. Its selection is determined by the place which moral evaluation holds in a generalized conceptual scheme, the "theory of action." The only necessary justification of such a selection at the outset is to show

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factorily treated as a single residual category. Thus sex differentiation, occupational differences apart from their relation to stratification, and differences of religious affiliation should not on a priori grounds be treated as if they all involved only values of a single variable with a common unit of variation, "horizontal distance." On the other hand, it is equally dangerous to assume a priori that stratification itself can be adequately described as variation on a single quantitative continuum, as the analogy of a dimension of rectilinear space suggests. There is a quantitative element involved in stratification as in most other social phenomena. This is inherent in its conception as a matter of ranking. But to assume that this exhausted the matter would be to assume that only the numbers and intervals of ranks were significant, which is by no means the case. As will appear below, there are also variations in the content of the criteria by which ranks are assigned which cannot, in the present state of knowledge, be reduced to points on a single quantitative continuum.

While of particular concern at present in relation to stratification, it may be pointed out that these considerations apply at the same time to any uncritical use of such concepts as "social space" and "social distance." The burden of proof in cases of their use should always be placed on their relevance to social facts and analytical schemes verified in the social field, not on the logic of deductions from analogies to physical space and distance.

[2] Perhaps Durkheim has done more than any other social theorist to make this phenomenon clear and to analyze its implications (see especially *L'Education morale* [Paris: F. Alcan, 1925], Part I, and *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* [Paris: F. Alcan, 1912; 2d ed., 1925], chap. iii). It is also involved in Max Weber's concept of legitimacy (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1925], chap. i, secs. 5, 6, 7). It is discussed and analyzed in Talcott Parsons, *Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1927), esp. chaps. x, xi, and xvii.

that the categories are applicable. In our ordinary treatment of social rank moral evaluations are in fact prominently involved. The normal reaction to a conspicuous error in ranking is at least in part one of moral indignation, either that a person thinks he is "unjustly" disparaged by being put on a level with those who are really his inferiors or that his real superiors feel "insulted" by having him, in the relevant respects, treated as their equal.[3]

Consideration of certain aspects of social systems described in terms of the theory of action shows readily why stratification is a fundamental phenomenon. In the first place, moral evaluation is a crucial aspect of action in social systems. It is a main aspect of the broader phenomenon of "normative orientation," since not all normative patterns which are relevant to action are the object of moral sentiments. The second crucial fact is the importance of the human individual as a unit of concrete social systems. If both human individuals as units and moral evaluation are essential to social systems, it follows that these individuals will be evaluated as units and not merely with respect to their particular qualities, acts, etc. Furthermore, this cannot merely be a matter of any given individual A's having moral attitudes toward any other given individual B, but it implies ranking. Unless there is to be a functionally impossible state of lack of integration of the social system, the evaluations by A and B of their associate C must come somewhere near agreeing; and their relative ranking of C and D must broadly agree where the necessity for comparison arises.[4] The theoretical possibility exists that not only any two individuals but all those in the system should be ranked as exact equals. This possibility, however, has never been very closely approached in any known large-scale social system. And, even if it were, that would not disprove the fundamental character of stratification, since it would not be a case of "lack" of

[3] An excellent recent example of this is found in the results, reported by F. J. Roethlisberger and W. A. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), Part III, chap. xv.

[4] The concept "integration" is a fundamental one in the theory of action. It is a mode of relation of the units of a system by virtue of which, on the one hand, they act so as collectively to avoid disrupting the system and making it impossible to maintain its stability, and, on the other hand, to "co-operate" to promote its functioning as a unity (cf. Parsons, *op. cit.*).

stratification but of a particular limiting type. Stratification, as here treated, is an aspect of the concept of the structure of a generalized social system.[5]

There is, in any given social system, an actual system of ranking in terms of moral evaluation. But this implies in some sense an integrated set of standards according to which the evaluations are, or are supposed to be, made. Since a set of standards constitutes a normative pattern, the actual system will not correspond exactly to the pattern. The actual system of effective superiority and inferiority relationships, as far as moral sanction is claimed for it, will hence be called the system of social stratification. The normative pattern, on the other hand, will be called the scale of stratification.

Since the scale of stratification is a pattern characterized by moral authority which is integrated in terms of common moral sentiments, it is normally part of the institutional pattern of the social system. Its general status and analysis falls into the theory of social institutions, and it is in these terms that it will be analyzed here.[6]

Before following out the problem of the structural differentiation of systems and scales of stratification, and some of the bases and functional consequences of such variations, it is well to discuss certain aspects of the relation of the individual actor to the scale of stratification. The main factual references will be to the type of system of stratification where, as in our own, there is a rather wide scope for, in Linton's term, the "achievement" of status.

From the point of view of the theory of action the actor is in part a "goal-directed" entity. One important aspect of this orientation is to be found in his sentiments as to the moral desirability of these goals, though they may, of course, at the same time have other sorts of significance. Not only are goals as such the objects of moral sentiments but this status is also occupied by persons and their attitudes to the actor, by things and their relations to the actor, and by social

[5] A generalized social system is a conceptual scheme, not an empirical phenomenon. It is a logically integrated system of generalized concepts of empirical reference in terms of which an indefinite number of concretely differing empirical systems can be described and analyzed (see L. J. Henderson, *Pareto's General Sociology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), chap. iv and n. 3).

[6] The concept of institutions, like that of stratification, is central to the theory of action but cannot be analyzed here (cf. Parsons, *op. cit.*, chaps. x and xvii).

relationships. Many of the most important goals cluster about these things.

Second, any or all of these may have other types of significance to the actor than the moral. They may be sources of hedonic satisfaction or objects of affectional attitudes. The normal actor is, to a significant degree, an "integrated" personality. In general, the things he values morally are also the things he "desires" as sources of hedonic satisfaction or objects of his affection. To be sure, there are, concretely, often serious conflicts in this respect, but they must be regarded mainly as instances of "deviation" from the integrated type.

Finally, the importance of moral sentiments in action, together with the fact that action is directed toward goals, generally implies that the normal actor has moral sentiments toward himself and his acts. He either has a rather high degree of "self-respect" or in some sense or other feels "guilt" or "shame."

But this actor does not stand alone. He is, to a greater or less degree, integrated with other actors in a social system. This means, on the one hand, that there is a tendency for the basic moral sentiments to be shared by the different actors in a system in the sense that they approve the same basic normative patterns of conduct, while, on the other, the other individuals become important to anyone; what they do, say, or even subjectively think and feel cannot be merely indifferent to him.

Through the differentiation of roles there is a differentiation in the specific goals which are morally approved for different individuals. But, so far as the society is morally and hence institutionally integrated, they are all governed by the same more generalized pattern. This common pattern is applied on the judgments of higher and lower as applied to individuals which thus form a convenient point of reference for systematizing the normative pattern itself. Self-respect, which, it may be said, is in the first instance a matter of living-up to the moral norms the individual himself approves, becomes secondarily a matter of attaining or maintaining a position in terms of the scale of stratification.

This connection is reinforced by the interplay, in an institutionally integrated situation, between moral patterns and the self-interested

elements of motivation. The actor has interests in the attainment of diverse goals, in hedonic satisfactions, in affectional response, and also in the recognition or respect of others. It is a simple corollary of the integration of moral sentiments that recognition, or moral respect on the part of others, is dependent on the actor on the whole living up to the moral expectations of these others. There is, furthermore, an important tendency for recognition and affectional response to go together. Loss of moral respect for a person makes it at least difficult to maintain a high level of affection for him. Loss of either or both tends also to entail withdrawal of sources of hedonic satisfaction as far as these are dependent on the actions of others. Failure to conform with institutionalized norms thus injures the individual's self-interest by leading to withdrawal of help and satisfactions; it can easily lead further into the "negative" reactions. Instead of merely refusing to be helpful, others may positively obstruct the attainment of one's goals. They may actively run down the individual's reputation, positively hate him, and seek to hurt him. All this is further accentuated by the fact that there is a need to "manifest sentiments by external acts,"[7] to pass over from hostile sentiments to overt action which is detrimental to the interests of the actors. Such overt action is all the more likely where the norms in question are solidly institutionalized. For, then, other actors have built up definite "expectations" of behavior on which they count; and, when these expectations are frustrated, they not merely "disapprove" but are directly "injured" and "let down."

Finally, there is much evidence that the more important moral patterns are not simply something which we rationally "accept." They have been inculcated from early childhood and are deeply "introjected" to form part of the basic structure of the personality itself. Violation of them brings with it the risk not only of external sanctions but of internal conflict which is often of a really disabling magnitude.

It is thus not a question of whether institutional behavior is or is not self-interested. Indeed, if any given individual can be said to seek his own "self-interest" in this sense, it follows that he can do so only by conforming in some degree to the institutionalized definition

[7] The title of Class III of Pareto's "residues."

of the situation. But this in turn means that he must to a large degree be oriented to the scale of stratification. Thus his motivation almost certainly becomes focused to a considerable extent on the attainment of "distinction" or recognition by comparison with his fellows. This becomes a most important symbol, both to himself and to others, of the success or lack of success of his efforts in living up to his own and others' expectations in his attempts to conform with value patterns. With particular reference to self-interest, distinction itself in this sense may and often does become an important direct goal of action. Thus stratification is one central focus of the structuralization of action in social systems.[8]

That action in a social system should, to a large extent, be oriented to a scale of stratification is inherent in the structure of social systems of action. But, though this fact is constant, the content of the scale, the specific standards and criteria by which individuals are ranked, is not uniform for all social systems but varies within a wide range. It follows from the definition of a scale of stratification adopted here that this variation will be a function of the more general variations of value orientation which can be shown empirically to exist as between widely differing social systems.[9] That there are wide variations in values is an established fact. In certain particular cases and respects it has also been established in what these variations consist. It can, however, scarcely be said that knowledge in this field is sufficiently far advanced for us to have available a generalized classification of possible value orientations which can simply be taken over and applied to the special features of the field of stratification. Starting with the implications of the fact of differential ranking of individuals in value terms, it is, however, possible to build up a classification of certain of the socially significant respects in which they are differentially valued. This classification in turn can be related to the classification of value systems in that the latter will

[8] In the degree of its generality, "success" or "distinction" is a goal which is comparable with that of wealth or of power.

[9] For an empirical demonstration of this range of variation of fundamental value orientations see especially Max Weber's comparative studies in the sociology of religion (*Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* [3 vols.]; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1934). A brief summary of certain aspects of these studies is given in Parsons, *op. cit.*, chaps. xiv and xv.

supply the justifications of why discrimination in each of the respects treated here (or lack of it) is considered legitimate. The following is a classification of bases of differential valuation which, though by no means final and exhaustive, has been found to be relatively concrete and useful.

1. *Membership in a kinship unit.*—There is an aspect of differential status which is shared with other members of whatever in the society in question is an effective kinship unit. Membership in the unit may be held by virtue of birth, but it may also be by other criteria, as in the case of marriage by personal choice in our own society.

2. *Personal qualities.*—Personal qualities are any of those features of an individual which differentiate him from another individual, and which may be referred to as a reason for "rating" him higher than the other: sex, age, personal beauty, intelligence, strength, etc. In so far as personal effort may have an influence on these qualities, as in the case of "attractiveness" of women, it tends to overlap the next category, "achievements." From the present point of view, a quality is what for the purposes in hand is best treated as an aspect of what a person "is," not a result of what he "does." Concrete qualities range all the way from certain basic things altogether beyond personal control, such as the facts of sex and age, to those which are mainly achievements.

3. *Achievements.*—Achievements are the valued results of the actions of individuals. They may or may not be embodied in material objects. It is that which can be ascribed to an individual's action or agency in a morally responsible sense. Just as at one point achievements shade over into personal qualities, so at another they shade into the fourth category.

4. *Possessions.*—Possessions are things, not necessarily material objects, "belonging" to an individual which are distinguished by the criterion of transferability. Qualities and achievements as such are not necessarily transferable, though sometimes, and to a certain extent, they may be. Of course, concrete possessions may be the results of one's own or other's achievements, and control over the qualities of persons may be a possession.

5. *Authority.*—Authority is an institutionally recognized right to

influence the actions of others, regardless of their immediate personal attitudes to the direction of influence. It is exercised by the incumbent of an office or other socially defined status such as that of parent, doctor, prophet. The kind and degree of authority exercised is clearly one of the most important bases of the differential valuation of individuals.

6. *Power.*—It is useful to consider a sixth residual category of "power." For this purpose a person possesses power only in so far as his ability to influence others and his ability to achieve or to secure possessions are not institutionally sanctioned. Persons who have power in this sense, however, often do in practice secure a certain kind of direct recognition. Furthermore, power may be, and generally is, used to acquire legitimized status and symbols of recognition.

The status of any given individual in the system of stratification in a society may be regarded as a resultant of the common valuations underlying the attribution of status to him in each of these six respects.[10] A classification of types of scales, or rather several of them, can then be derived by a consideration of the variation in the emphasis placed on each of these categories by a given value system, and also of variations in the particular content of each category. Attention here will be confined to a very few cases which have been of great historical importance.

One of the most general distinctions which can be easily applied to stratification in terms of this scheme is that employed by Linton between "achieved" and "ascribed" status.[11] The relation of this very important dichotomy to this scheme is not simple. In general the criteria of ascribed status must be birth or biologically hereditary qualities like sex and age. But, in the socially defined role which accompanies such a status, there may be very important elements of expected achievement and resulting possessions. Other possessions, of course, may be associated with an ascribed status through the in-

[10] It is clearly recognized that this proposition constitutes a statement of the problem, not a solution of it.

[11] R. Linton, *The Study of Man* (New York, 1936), chap vii. "Status" is a term referring to any institutionally defined position of an individual in the social structure. Position in a scale of stratification is only one aspect of status. There is a certain loose tendency to make them coterminous.

heritance of property and the perquisites of office if the latter is filled by ascription rather than by achievement. The same is true of authority which may, at times, be directly inherited or may be attached to an office.

There is, however, another general relation between the six elements of stratificatory status which partly overlaps with the distinction of ascribed and achieved status but partly cuts across it. That is, in every known society membership in a solidary kinship unit is one fundamental element of the place of an individual in a system of stratification. There are, however, great variations in the way in which this takes place and in the relation of kinship to the other elements. The basic elements of all kinship structure are birth and sexual union.[12] An individual becomes a member of a kinship group either by birth in one or by entering into a socially legitimized sexual union, a marriage.

The kinship groups centered about birth and sexual union are always to a certain extent "solidary" not only in the sense of mutual aid and support but also in the sense that they form units in the system of stratification of the society; their members are in certain respects treated as "equals" regardless of the fact that by definition they must differ in sex and age, and very generally do in other qualities, and in achievements, authority, and possessions. Even though for these latter reasons they are differently valued to a high degree, there is still an element of status which they share equally and in respect of which the only differentiation tolerated is that involved in the socially approved differences of the sex and age status. But as actually used, the term "social class" certainly covers a great deal of the ground involved in this basic phenomenon—the treatment of kinship groups as solidary units in the system of stratification. It is, therefore, proposed to define a social class here as consisting of the group of persons who are members of effective kinship units which, as units, are approximately equally valued. According to this definition, the class structure of social systems may differ both in the composition or structure of the effective kinship unit or units which are units of class structure and in the criteria by which such units are

[12] See Kingsley Davis and W. L. Warner, "Structural Analysis of Kinship," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2.

differentiated from one another. The class status of an individual is that rank in the system of stratification which can be ascribed to him by virtue of those of his kinship ties which bind him to a unit in the class structure. Kinship affiliation is thus always a basic aspect of the class status of an individual. It does not follow that his class status has always been determined by his kinship ties. Nor does it follow that the system of ranking of kinship units can be explained as derived from factors peculiarly associated with kinship.

There is a type of class structure in which class of birth is a sufficient criterion of an individual's rank in the scale of stratification throughout his life. Because of the close approach to its full realization in India, it is convenient to refer to this type as "caste." It is the case where the only relevant criterion of class status is birth and where the structure is one of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups, and no acquisition of authority, no qualities, achievements, or possessions can change an individual's rank. All hierarchical status is ascribed. From this type there is a gradual transition to an opposite pole—that in which birth is completely irrelevant to class status, the level being determined by some combination of the other elements.[13]

It is perhaps permissible to refer to this antithetical type as that of "equality of opportunity." But it should be noted how very formal this conception is. It says nothing whatever about either the combination of the other five elements of hierarchical status involved or the concrete content of any one. Groups of equals must, under a caste system, in the nature of the case be rigidly endogamous, for husband and wife are necessarily of the same class status. But in a system not resembling the caste type husband and wife need not be rigidly equal by birth, although they become so by marriage, and a married couple and their children, even though equals at birth, may change their class status during their lifetimes. Generally speaking, of course, the more effectively solidary the extended kinship groups, especially as between the generations, the more closely the total class system will approach the caste pole.

This approach to the analysis of social class may help to throw light on some aspects of the class structure of contemporary Ameri-

[13] This is the limiting type where "class" disappears.

can society. Broadly speaking there are two fundamental elements in the dominant American scale of stratification. We determine status very largely on the basis of achievement within an occupational system which is in turn organized primarily in term of universalistic criteria of performance and status within functionally specialized fields.[14] This dominant pattern of the occupational sphere requires at least a relatively high degree of "equality of opportunity" which in turn means that status cannot be determined primarily by birth or membership in kinship units.

But this occupational system with its crucial significance in the system of stratification coexists in our society with a strong institutional emphasis on the ties of kinship. The values associated with the family, notably the marriage bond and the parent-child relationship, are among the most strongly emphasized in our society.

Absolute equality of opportunity is, as Plato clearly saw, incompatible with any positive solidarity of the family. But such a relative equality of opportunity as we have is compatible not with all kinds of kinship systems but with certain kinds. There is much evidence that our kinship structure has developed in such a direction as to leave wide scope for the mobility which our occupational system requires while protecting the solidarity of the primary kinship unit.

The conjugal family with dependent children, which is the dominant unit in our society, is, of all types of kinship unit, the one which is probably the least exposed to strain and possible breaking-up by the dispersion of its members both geographically and with respect to stratification in the modern type of occupational hierarchy. Dependent children are not involved in competition for status in the occupational system, and hence their achievements or lack of them are not likely to be of primary importance to the status of the family group as a whole. This reduces the problem to that of possible competitive comparison of the two parents. If both were equally in competition for occupational status, there might indeed be a very serious strain on the solidarity of the family unit, for there is no general reason why they would be likely to come out very nearly equally,

[14] For an explanation of these terms in their application to the modern occupational system see Talcott Parsons, "The Professions and Social Structure," *Social Forces*, XVII (May, 1939), 457–67.

while, in their capacity of husband and wife, it is very important that they should be treated as equals.

One mechanism which can serve to prevent the kind of "invidious comparison" between husband and wife which might be disruptive of family solidarity is a clear separation of the sex roles such as to insure that they do not come into competition with each other. On the whole, this separation exists in our society, and perhaps the above considerations provide part of the explanation of why the feminist movement has had such difficulty in breaking it down.

The separation of the sex roles in our society is such as, for the most part, to remove women from the kind of occupational status which is important for the determination of the status of a family. Where married women are employed outside the home, it is, for the great majority, in occupations which are not in direct competition for status with those of men of their own class.

Women's interests, and the standards of judgment applied to them, run, in our society, far more in the direction of personal adornment and the related qualities of personal charm than is the case with men. Men's dress is practically a uniform, admitting of very slight play for differentiating taste, in marked contrast with that of women. This serves to concentrate the judgment and valuation of men on their occupational achievements, while the valuation of women is diverted into realms outside the occupationally relevant sphere. This difference appears particularly conspicuous in the urban middle classes where competition for class status is most severe. It is suggested that this phenomenon is functionally related to maintaining family solidarity in our class structure.

The probability of this hypothesis is increased by two sets of contrasting facts. On the one hand, in such a society as that of eighteenth-century France, where the tone was set by a hereditary aristocracy, both sexes were greatly concerned with personal adornment and charm. This may in part be due to the fact that, since status was mainly hereditary, neither was in severe competition for status in such fields as the modern occupations. On the other hand, in many rural and peasant societies neither sex seems to be oriented in this direction. This suggests that, in our urban society with its competitive atmosphere, the qualities and achievements of the feminine

role have come to be significant as symbols of the status of the family, as parts of its "standard of living" which reflect credit on it. The man's role, on the other hand, is primarily to determine the status of his family by "finding his level" in the occupational sphere.[15]

From the fact that kinship affiliation is the primary criterion of the class status of an individual it does not, however, follow that the class structure of a society is to be biologically explained. Rather, all the factors involved in social phenomena generally are prima facie important in the determination of concrete kinship structures. The same is true of class. In a caste system no individual can change his status of birth, but it does not follow that elements other than birth are not important in the maintenance of a concrete caste system, that any great change in any one or more would not result in a change of the system. When there is a more or less open class system, on the other hand, it is to some combination of these other elements that one must look for the factors which lead to change of the class status of kinship groups.

There is a very complex system of mutual symbolic references by virtue of which primary criteria of status are reinforced by secondary criteria and symbols in various ways.[16] For the primary criteria one must look to the general common value system of the society and its history. The secondary criteria or symbols are often much more adventitious, the result of associations formed in particular historical circumstances which have come to be traditionally upheld. The primary criteria are those things which in relation to the dominant value system are "status-determining" attributes of the individual and which are valued for their own sake. The secondary criteria are

[15] Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1899) called attention to some of the relevant features of the role of women but did not relate it in this way to the functional equilibrium of the social structure. Moreover, what Veblen meant by "conspicuous consumption" is only one aspect of the feminine role and one which is associated more with certain elements of malintegration than with the basic structure itself.

[16] The present distinction between primary and secondary criteria is a rough one. For many purposes it may be well necessary to refine the classification further. Besides their significance as criteria, many of the same elements may also have significance as causal factors in the distribution of individuals among statuses and in shifts in the system of stratification. It is impossible, within the limits of this paper, to enter into these complex problems.

those things which are regarded as normal accompaniments of the primary criteria or as normal effects of them.

Birth, of course, plays a prominent role among the primary criteria of class status in any system approaching the caste type. But birth is probably never alone adequate to define the social role, and hence the expected qualities, possessions, achievements, or authority of the occupant of a given hereditary status. There is, rather, a complex combination of these things ascribed to the occupant of such a status. An excellent example is the senatorial aristocracy of Republican Rome. Though not formally so, in effect this was a hereditary group, only members of the senatorial families being eligible for the kind of career which led to the higher magistracies and finally membership in the Senate. "New men," though not completely unknown, were very rare. But the young Roman of this class had to live up to a very rigorously defined pattern. He went through a career including military service and the holding of office. To be a good soldier, to run for office, to have the Roman aristocratic virtues, was compulsory for such a young man. Wealth was partly hereditary, partly an acquisition of office-holding. Far from being in a position simply to rest on the laurels of his birth the Roman aristocrat was subjected to a very severe discipline and was expected to live up to a high level of achievement. That none of the generals who led the earlier Roman conquests, first of Italy, then of Carthage, and in part of Greece and the East, was a professional soldier in our sense but an aristocratic amateur who was a soldier as part of his ascribed role as an aristocrat attests to the great power of such ascribed patterns. In certain respects the extraordinary discipline to which the Spartiates were subjected is an even more striking example. The essence of the matter is that a combination of elements other than birth becomes part of the ascribed pattern to which the incumbent of the status is socially expected to "live up."

Though birth is certainly in these circumstances a primary criterion of status, the basic "virtues" emphasized by the ascribed pattern are equally primary, and, once an individual is eligible by virtue of birth, these are the main points at which social pressure to maintain the pattern is applied. Wealth, however, is seldom a primary criterion. It may, however, play an important secondary

role in that a certain "style of living" comes to be expected of the members of an aristocracy. A minimum of wealth is a necessary means of keeping this up, while unusual wealth may be a source of extra prestige, by enabling its holder to excel in many symbolically important respects. Sometimes an economic system may change so as seriously to endanger the position of such an aristocracy, by enabling persons not qualified by birth to take on many of the symbols of aristocratic status and at the same time making it impossible for members of the aristocracy to maintain them. The steady process by which Spartiate families dropped out because of inability to make their contributions to the mess is an excellent example.

Where status is mainly achieved, the situation is quite different. Birth cannot be a primary criterion but only a practical advantage in securing a differential access to opportunities, though in this respect it is of fundamental significance in our society and one of the main mechanisms by which a relative stability of the system of stratification is maintained.

But in our own society, apart from hereditary groups at the top in certain sections of the country, the main criteria of class status are to be found in the occupational achievements of men, the normal case being the married man with immature children. Authority is significant partly as a necessary means of carrying on occupational functions, but in turn the authority exercised is one of the main criteria of the prestige of an occupational status. Authority, especially that of office,[17] is again important as a reward of past achievements, the general structure of the pattern being a progressive rise to greater achievements and greater rewards concomitantly. Being permitted to perform the "higher" functions and being given the authority to do so constitute recognition of past achievements and of the ability necessary for further ones. Thus authority and office become secondary, symbolic criteria of status, because of their traditional association with achievement. But, once they have gained this significance as criteria, the incumbent of an office can enjoy its prestige independently of whether he actually has the requisite achievements to his credit or not.

[17] Not only political office but, even more, offices held in business corporations and other "private" associations.

The case of wealth as a criterion of status in our society is somewhat more complex. In spite of much opinion to the contrary, it is not a primary criterion, seen in terms of the common value system. Like office, its primary significance is as a symbol of achievement. But it owes its special prominence in that respect to certain peculiar features of our social system. That is, with a basic ethic which emphasizes individual achievement as the primary criterion of stratification, we have developed an economic system which to a hitherto unprecedented degree rests on a "business" or "capitalistic" basis. Our society is very highly specialized occupationally. The measures of achievement are technical and specific for each particular field. Hence it is difficult to compare relative achievements in different fields with one another. To be sure, there is a very rough general scale of prestige of occupations which is at least relatively independent of income. Skilled labor ranks higher than unskilled labor; functions with an important intellectual component which require "higher education" rank high. In particular, authority over others, in proportion to its extent, ranks high.

But in a business economy the immediate end of business policy must, in the nature of the case, be to improve the financial status of the enterprise. Regardless of the technical content of its operations, the earnings of a business have become the principal criterion of its success. It is not surprising that the same has, to a relatively high degree, come to be true of individuals in business. Hence, within the broad framework of the direct differential valuation of occupations and achievements as managerial, professional, skilled, unskilled, etc., there is an income hierarchy which, on the whole, corresponds to that of direct valuation.[18] This income hierarchy forms a most convenient point of reference for the determination of the status of an individual or of a family. Furthermore, within any particular closely knit group, it is fairly adequate as a criterion, since the more highly valued jobs are also the best paid. But in such a complex system as our own its adequacy is much more dubious. In particular, it

[18] How this correspondence comes about is an interesting sociological problem. The one thing which can be said here with certainty is that an ordinary economic explanation, though true within certain limits, is quite inadequate to the general problem. The explanation is to a large extent institutional.

is complicated by the inheritance of property, by the availability of means of making money which are of doubtful legitimacy in terms of the value system, and by the many relatively adventitious opportunities for money-making opened up by the rapid changes and fluctuations of a business system in a society which is to a high degree emancipated from the rigidities of traditionalism. Hence the same thing happens as with the case of authority. Wealth, which owes its place as a criterion of status mainly to its being an effect of business achievement, gains a certain independence so that the possessor of wealth comes to claim a status and to have it recognized, regardless of whether or not he has the corresponding approved achievements to his credit. In our society this is further complicated by the fact that there is a tradition of respect for birth and inherited wealth which has never quite been extinguished, and where the status is ascribed and the wealth naturally never regarded as an effect of its possessors' achievements

There is a further respect in which wealth has a peculiar significance in an "individualistic" society. Where status is ascribed, there is usually a fairly well-defined standard to which people are expected to live up. For the group in question there is something like a "ceiling" of adequate achievement, even though there are naturally different degrees of attainment. With respect to achieved status, on the other hand, the situation is different. Achievement is in a different sense competitive. There is a more or less indefinite scale of degrees of excellence in any one line. Even though for a professional group, like the medical, there is a fairly well-defined minimum of competence, from this minimum upward there is a gradual transition through a widely dispersed pyramid to the "top" of the profession. The fact that money is an infinitely divisible, quantitative medium of measurement makes it a peculiarly convenient criterion to designate the various steps in such a graduated pyramidal structure, particularly where other common measures such as direct technical criteria or hierarchy of office in directly comparable organizations are not readily available. It is, in fact, quite common to speak of "$5,000 men" or "$25,000 men," although it is realized that this is not alone an adequate measure of their status.

As in the case of ascribed status the role of money as a criterion of

status is here strongly reinforced by the fact that its expenditure is largely for other symbols of status in turn. Though the "standard of living" of any group must cover their intrinsically significant needs, such as food, shelter, and the like, there can be no doubt that an exceedingly large component of standards of living everywhere is to be found in the symbolic significance of many of its items in relation to status. Indeed it may be said that there are two types of situations in which this is likely to be more important than otherwise—the case of an aristocracy the members of which maintain a conspicuously different style of life from that of the rest of the population and the case of a group who are involved in a highly competitive struggle for achieved status, where the status of a large proportion of them at any given time is either newly acquired or relatively insecure or both. Perhaps at no time in history have such a large proportion of a great population been "on the make" as in the United States of the early twentieth century.

One further important point is that the various items of a standard of living which are symbolic of status necessarily play their primary role in relation to class status, not to the other aspects of the status of the members of a family. This follows from the fact that income is allocated on a basis of the family as a unit. A very interesting point of view from which to conduct budget studies would be to determine the various different things which were thought necessary for each member of a family in order to maintain or to improve the class status of the family as a whole.

The difficulty of finding common measures of status when the primary criterion is occupational achievement has already been mentioned. To a certain extent we do, of course, have such common measures, above all the relatively vague scales of direct valuations and of income. But to a considerable extent this situation is met by a certain vagueness in the actual scale of stratification, so that it is only in a relatively rough and broad sense, not a precise and definite one, that a given individual or family is placed relative to others. There is a relatively broad range of the standard of living where anyone with a certain minimum of income can participate without having the question of his exact relative status raised. This is, for instance, true of many of the facilities open to the "public." In hotels,

restaurants, theaters, etc., a certain minimum of dress and manners is required beyond the mere fact of being able to pay the direct charges. But this minimum is, for a certain class of facilities, possessed by people belonging to a rather wide range of class status. This is really an instance of a broader class of phenomena, those involved in the fact that very many social contacts in our society are "partial" or "segmental" and cover only an area of interests and values which can, to a relative degree, be isolated from class status. Another instance is the relative lack of integration as between different structures within the broader society, each of which involves a pretty definite stratification within itself, such as occupational groups of persons in regular daily contact, and "communities" of people whose mutual relations are very precisely defined.

This indefiniteness, among other things, makes possible two very important things for the functioning of an individualistic social system. In the first place, when the relatively adventitious circumstances of the economic and social situation lead to discrepancies between income and occupational status as otherwise judged, within certain limits too great a strain is not placed on the system. For example, it would be generally agreed that the difference between the top range of incomes earned, on the one hand, in business and the law and, on the other, in university teaching and the ministry does not accurately measure the relative prestige of their incumbents. A world-famous scientist who is a university professor on a ten-thousand-dollar salary is not only at the top of his own profession but may be the full equal in status of a corporation lawyer whose income is ten times his own. But so long as the scientist is able to maintain a "respectable" standard of living, entertain his friends well, dress his family adequately, and educate his children well, the fact that he cannot afford the luxuries of a hundred-thousand-dollar income is a matter of relative indifference. He simply does not compete on the plane of "conspicuous consumption" which is open to the lawyer but closed to him.[19]

There is also another respect in which this vagueness is function-

[19] This is not to say that the discrepancy does not give rise to some strains which, however, are more likely to be felt by the scientist's wife and/or children than himself.

ally important in our system. If the institutional pattern which bases class status on the occupational achievements of a man is not to be severely discredited, there must be considerable room for class mobility. But this means that there will inevitably be a process of "dispersion" of the members of the same kinship groups in the class structure. In particular, there will be dispersion as between parents and children and as between siblings. A son, for instance, may rise well above his father's status, or two brothers may fare very unequally. To be sure, this is partly taken care of by the weakening of at least parts of the kinship structure itself, in that the primary unit of kinship has become the immediate family of parents and immature children. The ties of independent children to their parents and of independent siblings to one another are greatly weakened. Above all, these are not any longer normally the day-to-day "community" ties which are inevitable as between those who share the life of a common household. But, of course, this does not mean that such ties have become of negligible importance. It is difficult to see how such powerful sentiments as those developed between parents and children during the dependent period could be simply dropped at maturity without serious effects.

The fact is that they are not. The vagueness of our class structure provides a kind of cushioning mechanism. For the fact that mature children ordinarily live in independent households is associated with the further fact that they are usually, to a large extent, members of independent "communities." Their mutual relations becomes highly segmental. When one visits the other, he is, from the point of view of the latter's community relationships, an "outsider," a stranger. So long as the discrepancy is not too great, it is then unnecessary for there to be any very exact determination of relative class status, as there would have to be if both were permanent members of the same set of immediate community relationships, of the same "particular nexus." There will naturally be gossip which compares the relative status of the two, but this does not assume the same importance in the two cases. For instance, if two brothers are on the faculty of the same university, the question of their relative status is very acute. But if one is a physician in Boston and the

other is in business in Chicago, such questions hardly arise at all unless the discrepancy of their relative "success" is very marked. One may say, then, that the vagueness of our class structure over relatively wide areas serves to protect the important residue of the more extended kinship relations from disruption in a society where class mobility is of fundamental functional importance. It would be expected that, wherever, in any particular situation, technical criteria of achievement were of particular importance in an occupational hierarchy, this vagueness of class status would tend to be especially marked, with even cases of what, from another point of view, would appear to be strange inhibitions on intimacy of social contact.

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