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A REPLY TO PENN

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THE CLASS SCHEMA OF 'SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CLASS STRUCTURE IN MODERN BRITAIN': A REPLY TO PENN

JOHN H. GOLDTHORPE

The main purpose of Penn's critical remarks is to show that the class schema presented in *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* (subsequently *SMCS*) is inadequately related to the actual structure of class relations prevailing in modern Britain, and that it could in various ways be improved upon.¹ In this reply, my main purpose is to show that Penn's criticisms are, almost entirely, ones which

- (i) disregard the requirements and problems inevitably involved in translating concepts into research instruments
- (ii) derive from questionable suppositions or simple errors on his part
- (iii) are inconsequential for the way in which the class schema has actually been used
- or (iv) imply changes in the schema which would *reduce* its value.

Those of his remarks that fall under (i) will be dealt with first; then those falling under (ii) and (iii) will be considered together, as relating to more detailed features of the schema. Finally, it will be shown that an alternative class schema, reflecting those of Penn's remarks placed under (iv), fails to meet his expectation that it would reveal greater social rigidity.

Penn's criticism is flawed throughout by his failure to recognize that the development and application of any kind of classificatory device is not only a conceptual, but also an intensely *practical* task. In turn, then, he also fails to see first, that such a device, like any other research instrument, can only be validly judged in relation to particular research objectives; and second, that since empirical inquiry is always undertaken under constraints imposed by limited resources and facilities, criticism which ignores these constraints is of little relevance or merit.

For example, Penn asks why the class schema of *SMCS* bears so little relation to the Hope-Goldthorpe scale derived from the 1974 occupational grading study – and what then was the point of this investigation.² Rather obviously, one must reply that different substantive interests call for the use of different research instruments. In *SMCS* the focus of interest is on the analysis of *class* mobility: it would then have been scarcely appropriate to operate with a scale designed to measure the 'general desirability' of occupations. On the other hand, where the data of the 1972 national mobility inquiry have been drawn on to investigate processes of occupational attainment, the H-G scale has been used to good effect.³

Again, Penn objects that the class schema does not enable the 'capitalist class', in the sense, it appears, of a property-owning and entrepreneurial élite, to be distinguished. But it is made quite clear in *SMCS* (pp. 45-6) that the concern of the analysis is not with 'élite' mobility of any kind, since the sample of the 1972 inquiry could not afford adequate data in this respect. Penn airily remarks: 'One might ask why their sampling frame was not designed to include more capitalists'. But to ask this is in fact either to be disingenuous or to display an unfortunate ignorance of the practicalities of survey research. Would Penn like to tell us what sampling frame *could* be obtained which would enable one to stratify a national sample so that members of his 'capitalist class' could be represented in sufficient numbers to permit reliable analysis? Furthermore, and quite contrary to what Penn suggests, there were in any event no strong grounds for concentrating our research attention – and hence resources – on élite mobility. For this has been a topic rather frequently studied in Britain in the recent past, with particular

reference to 'top wealth-holders', financial and industrial leaders etc., and with considerable, if not total, agreement on results.⁴ It is thus difficult to know what Penn refers to when he talks of the 'hallowed tradition' of 'selecting out' (*sc.* ignoring) the capitalist class.

The one other major respect in which Penn seriously ignores practical problems is in regard to the basing of the class schema – via the *categories* of the H-G scale – on elements derived from OPCS 'occupational unit groups' and 'employment status' codes. Those of Penn's detailed criticisms that are valid in the sense that they do not result from his own doubtful assumptions or errors are in fact largely ones that pick up weaknesses that follow from this reliance on the OPCS system: e.g. the bracketing of farm managers and Forestry Commission officers with self-employed farmers, market gardeners etc. In developing the categories of the H-G scale, these weaknesses were not in fact overlooked – nor indeed various other disadvantages that would be incurred by our use of the OPCS system. However, there were at the same time advantages in the procedure adopted which carried clearly greater weight. First, it is made possible, where comparisons with official statistics are required, to aggregate categories of the H-G scale into all superordinate OPCS classifications (Social Classes, Socio-economic Groups and Socio-economic Classes); and second, the OPCS occupational index can be straightforwardly used in the coding of occupational information to H-G categories.⁵

This last point merits special emphasis, since problems of coding are ones of which Penn appears quite oblivious. In particular, he seems unaware of the importance, from the point of view of the reliability of data, of being able to employ 'index' coding, rather than having to resort to merely 'category' coding in the way which is necessary with, for example, the Hall-Jones scale.⁶ Thus, Penn asks why we did not attempt to develop a class schema independently of the OPCS (or CODOT) system. The answer is obvious: only the OPCS (or CODOT) system is linked to a detailed occupational index. Penn also asks for more information on the problems encountered by the coders of the occupational data for the 1972 inquiry. But he neglects the most relevant information that is already given: namely, the measures of coding reliability which indicate that our coders were to a rather satisfactory extent agreeing with each other (and with themselves over time) in their coding decisions.⁷ It should in fact become standard practice for such measures to be reported for all major coding operations of the kind in question; and I look forward to seeing those reported by Penn in connection with his own work – especially if he relies on 'category' coding methods. In sum, then, the point Penn entirely overlooks is that little is gained by having a conceptually immaculate schema if this does not allow acceptably reliable coding procedures to be followed.

Turning now to Penn's more detailed criticisms, it will be convenient to take these *seriatim*, as follows.

Classes I and II

(i) It is quite mistaken for Penn to claim that 'most of the capitalist class is ignored since the model includes only working proprietors'. Members of the 'capitalist class', as Penn wishes to define them, will be included in Class I in proportion, approximately, to their numbers in the population sampled. This means, however, that in any straightforward national sample there will be too few for analysis, and the issue thus transposes into that already treated above.⁸

(ii) Penn argues that the employers, proprietors and self-employed professionals found in Classes I and II should, if too small in number to be analyzed separately, have been placed in Class IV, since they will be involved in entrepreneurial rather than bureaucratic relationships. This is, however, very doubtful. As is pointed out in *SMCS* (p. 40), and as was evident from detailed occupational descriptions, employment status in many of the cases in question tends to be rather ambiguous, and to turn on administrative or national insurance and tax considerations, rather than corresponding closely with actual market and work situations. In

other words, these cases are often highly borderline ones, and in this respect the smallness of the numbers involved (6.8% of all men in Classes I and II and only 1.7% of all in the sample) is *not* irrelevant, as Penn tries to make out. On the contrary, since any classificatory scheme *must* have borderline cases, it should be a matter for satisfaction where these prove to be quantitatively rather insignificant.

(iii) Penn objects to the inclusion of laboratory technicians and draughtsmen within Class II, chiefly on the grounds of the nature of their jobs and 'their low relative wages'. But the first point is unelucidated, and on the second Penn is simply wrong. From information on occupational income obtained from respondents to the 1972 inquiry, it is evident that the groupings in question have average levels of pay which would in fact put them not far from the middle of the range for all groupings comprised by Class II.

Class III

(i) Penn's argument to the effect that occupations such as 'Youth Employment Officer' or 'clerk of works' can arrive in Class III or in some other class 'depending on whether the OPCS method of categorization or the representative prestige inquiry is used' is all a dreadful muddle. The monograph on the H-G scale leaves no doubt that (for reasons earlier indicated) the coding of occupational data to categories of the scale is *only and always* to be undertaken via the OPCS system. Hence, only in this way are occupations allocated within the class schema. The 'prestige inquiry' is in no way involved, and there is no reason at all for Penn to have supposed otherwise. It is, however, important to note that, as the monograph on the scale also emphasizes, the effective use of the OPCS system requires high-quality occupational data: not merely job titles but descriptions of job content plus information relevant to employment status. Thus, in coding the occupational data of the 1972 inquiry, which were generally of a detailed kind, distinctions could be made, as the OPCS system in fact requires, between 'Youth Employment Officers' of different grades. The majority, as it happens, were likely to fall into Class II; but it would be possible for some to go to Class I and some to Class III, depending chiefly on the extent to which they were, or were not, involved in managerial functions. (On 'clerks of works' see further below.) That the OPCS system is capable of such differentiation when applied to high quality data must surely be reckoned as one of its strengths rather than as a weakness.⁹

(ii) Penn's 'main' criticism of Class III is that 'it is unclear why the clerical and salesworkers included are seen as part of an intermediate class rather than as the quintessence of the lower-middle class'. And later, it may be added, in his remarks on Class IV, Penn inveighs against any use of 'the terms "intermediate" or "intermediary"'. If Penn's objections here are purely terminological ones – and there seems little else to them – then they are quite inconsequential in regard to the extent to which the class schema adequately reflects class structure. If Penn is simply saying that he dislikes the label given to Class III, then he is at full liberty, so far as I am concerned, to change it how he will. It should, however, be noted that the sense in which I would wish to understand 'intermediate' is explained in *SMCS* (pp. 40-1, 140-1), and that adequate evidence is presented to show that mobility patterns associated with classes thus described have certain important features in common.

Class IV

(i) Penn regrets that this class 'loses its identity by being collapsed into the intermediate class'. I find it difficult to know what is the point of this remark. Presumably Penn is referring to those analyses of mobility patterns in chaps. 2-5 of *SMCS* in which the class schema is reduced from a sevenfold to a threefold one. But this occurs only in more complex analyses (involving, for example, a birth cohort division) in order to maintain cell values of a reliable

size: in all other cases Class IV is distinguished. I quite fail to see why such collapsing, when necessitated by practical limits on sample size, should provide any basis for criticism of the class schema itself.

Class V

(i) Penn's objections here are again in some part merely terminological – i.e. directed against the idea that this class might be described as 'a latter-day aristocracy of labour'. But this phrase is actually used, so far as I can see, only twice in *SMCS* and then, clearly enough, *only as a label* and without any commitment, explicit or implicit, to any of the theories of the aristocracy of labour to which Penn refers. Again, if Penn does not like the label, he is welcome to change it. In fact, I myself more often use the alternative suggestion, 'blue-collar élite'.

(ii) More substantively, Penn wishes to dismember Class V, assigning foremen to the service class and technicians to a 'routine nonmanual white-collar class' (while also reallocating some occupational groupings from the technician category to the skilled working class). I would disagree on the grounds of the available evidence on differences in market and work situations. But what is more important is that Penn's proposed changes would of course make it impossible to observe the various rather distinctive mobility patterns associated with Class V – both inter- and intragenerational – which emerge clearly from the analyses reported in *SMCS*.

Classes VI and VII

(i) Again, Penn is in the same muddle as he was in connection with Class III over – entirely non-existent – 'discrepancies' between the prestige inquiry and the coding of occupations to H-G categories and hence to the class schema. And once more what is, apparently, at the source of his difficulty is his failure to appreciate that under the OPCS system the same job *title* may receive different codings depending on more detailed information on actual job content and on employment status. Thus, a man with the title of 'clerk of works' who evidently was, as Penn puts it, 'a junior functionary in the graded control system of manual labour' would end up, appropriately enough, in Class II. But a man who also had this title while, however, being no more than a skilled building craftsman performing some minor supervisory or administrative chores would be so coded as to arrive in Class VI. Moreover, Penn's inadequate grasp of the procedures he seeks to criticise also vitiates his remarks about 'lathe operators'. Workers who might be so described, or as 'lathe operators and setters', could in fact be coded to any one of half-a-dozen or more OPCS units, depending on type of lathe, type of work, industry etc., and hence could go via several different H-G categories to Class VI or Class VII. In each of these respects, then, the 'errors' which Penn attributes to the class schema prove rather to be ones of his own making.

As is indicated in the foregoing, Penn advances a number of proposals for an alternative class schema to that used in *SMCS*, and ends by observing that it would be of 'considerable interest' to discover whether the interpretation of developments in the British class structure provided in that book could be sustained if his 'more accurate' model were used. His expectation is that 'far more rigidity would be discerned'. Since the data of the 1972 inquiry are now in the public domain, I find it surprising that Penn did not take the trouble to put his ideas to the test before embarking on his criticism of the original schema. And certainly the onus of doing the work necessary to show that his criticisms are consequential in the way he suggests must fall on him rather than on me. However, by using the 36 × 36 mobility table based on the categories of the collapsed version of the H-G scale, it is possible, with relatively little effort, to form a new aggregation that comes rather close to the schema proposed by

Penn.¹⁰ Obviously, it is still the case that no *haute bourgeoisie* can be distinguished in numbers sufficient to permit analysis – but there is in any case no disagreement between Penn and myself that this class would display a high degree of closure;¹¹ and neither is it possible to change the dividing line between the skilled and non-skilled sections of the working class in all the ways Penn would prefer – although, as I have shown, the main defects that he attributes to the original schema in this respect are not in fact present. Otherwise, however, Penn's proposals can be largely implemented, and certainly to an extent which should be sufficient, if his expectations are correct, to produce *some* shift towards greater rigidity in observed mobility patterns.

The alternative schema is as follows.

Bourgeoisie: H-G categories 1, 7, 9, 11, 13, 19, 24, 29 and 36 – i.e. large proprietors and self-employed professionals – 'the capitalist class' – combined with petty-bourgeois categories, as proposed by Penn.

Service class: H-G categories 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17 and 20 – i.e. excluding all self-employed groupings and also category 6, in which draughtsmen and laboratory technicians are heavily represented, and including the two foremen categories.

Routine white-collar workers: H-G categories 6, 15, 21, 25 and 28 – i.e. including the two technicians categories and excluding (as nonskilled manual) category 34 in which hotel porters and various kinds of attendant (plus caretakers etc.) are heavily represented.

Skilled manual workers:¹² H-G categories 18, 22, 23, 27 and 30.

Nonskilled manual workers: H-G categories 26, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35.

In Table 1 are shown the results of organizing the intergenerational mobility data of the 1972 inquiry on the basis of the alternative class schema; and in Table 2 are given, as perhaps the best comparison that is possible, the results obtained when the original schema is used, but with Classes I and II collapsed. It should be noted that Penn's schema still has one class fewer than this version of the original schema, and should therefore – other things being equal – display greater immobility for this reason alone. What is then striking is the very slight extent to which it does so, whether an inflow or an outflow perspective is adopted.

Thus, Penn's bourgeois class is little more self-recruiting than is the original petty-bourgeois one (38.0% against 36.5%), and little more stable intergenerationally (26.6% against 24.4%). And while Penn's service class also shows slightly more self-recruitment than my original one (32.5% against 30.8%), it proves to be *substantially less stable* (45.4% against 58.8%). Overall, in fact, it may be calculated that of the 9434 cases in the total sample, Penn's 5-class schema places 3194 or 33.9% in cells on the main diagonal of the mobility table, while the 6-class version of the original places 2971 or 31.5% in these cells. In other words, the latter schema is able to include one class more, thus creating ten additional cells representing possible types of mobility, while showing a fall of only 2.4 percentage points in the total amount of immobility. Furthermore, it can also be seen that Penn's schema significantly enlarges the amount of what could be reckoned as upward mobility from both skilled and nonskilled manual origins. There is in fact somewhat greater outflow from such origins to his bourgeois class than to the petty-bourgeois one of the original schema (7.1% against 6.6% in total), and clearly more to his service class than to mine (21.4% against 15.5%). Finally, it may be added that if we think in terms of *relative* mobility rates, as expressed via odds ratios, Penn's schema quite fails to produce ones of the magnitude of those resulting from the original: that is to say, it creates the general impression of *greater* social fluidity in the sense of a greater equality of mobility chances. For example, with the original schema, it may be calculated that the odds of a man of service-class origins being himself found in a service-class position rather than a nonskilled manual one are around 19 times greater than these odds in the

TABLE I
Intergenerational mobility rates (men aged 20-64, England and Wales 1972)
 based on 'alternative' class schema: outflow % upper-right entry, inflow % lower-left entry

	Respondent's class, 1972					% of total
	I	II	III	IV	V	
I Bourgeoisie	26.6	29.2	10.8	13.3	20.1	15.8
	38.0	16.1	12.0	9.9	12.9	
II Service class	10.4	45.4	16.2	14.2	13.8	20.6
	19.3	32.5	23.5	13.8	11.4	
III Routine white-collar workers	9.9	35.4	23.6	15.0	16.1	8.1
	7.3	10.0	13.5	5.8	5.3	
IV Skilled manual workers	7.2	22.1	13.1	30.4	27.1	27.5
	17.9	21.2	25.5	39.4	30.0	
V Non skilled manual workers	7.0	20.7	12.9	23.6	35.8	28.0
	17.6	20.1	25.4	31.2	40.4	
% of total	11.1	28.7	14.2	21.2	24.8	N=9434

*Father's class
 (at respondent's age 14)*

TABLE 2
Intergenerational mobility rates (men aged 20-64, England and Wales 1972) based on 'original' class schema with classes I and II collapsed: outflow % upper-right entry, inflow % lower-left entry

	Respondent's class, 1972							% of total
	I + II	III	IV	V	VI	VII		
I + II Service class	58.8	11.7	7.4	6.9	7.7	7.5	13.2	
	30.8	16.7	10.4	7.9	4.8	4.2		
III Routine nonmanual employees	34.1	12.8	7.8	12.8	15.6	16.9	7.4	
	10.0	10.2	6.1	8.2	5.4	5.3		
IV Petty bourgeoisie	23.9	8.0	24.4	8.7	14.4	20.5	14.1	
	13.4	12.2	36.5	10.6	9.6	12.3		
V Blue-collar élite	27.8	10.1	7.7	15.7	21.2	17.6	11.5	
	12.7	12.5	9.4	15.6	11.5	8.6		
VI Skilled manual workers	16.6	8.3	6.6	12.3	30.4	25.9	27.5	
	18.1	24.8	19.2	29.2	39.4	30.3		
VII Nonskilled manual workers	14.3	8.2	6.6	12.5	23.5	34.9	26.4	
	15.0	23.6	18.5	28.5	29.4	39.3		
% of total	25.1	9.2	9.4	11.6	21.2	23.5	N=9434	

*Father's class
 (at respondent's age 14)*

case of a man of nonskilled manual origins; but with Penn's schema the difference is reduced to less than 6 times greater. And likewise, substituting skilled manual for nonskilled in this calculation, one finds that the original schema gives an odds ratio of just under 14 as compared with one of a little over 4 in the case of Penn's schema.

In sum, then, whatever conceivable meaning is given to the idea of 'rigidity', the foregoing results are disastrous for Penn's position. A class schema incorporating a large part of the changes Penn would favour not only fails to reveal a greater degree of rigidity but obscures much of the structuring of mobility, and immobility, that the original schema displays.

Notes

1. Penn refers to 'the Nuffield class categorization' – a term of his own choosing which is in fact misleading. The class schema used in *SMCS* was initially developed by Catriona Llewellyn and myself in a paper ('Class Mobility in Britain: Three Theses Examined') which appeared in *Sociology* vol. 11, 1977. The schema used by A. H. Halsey *et al.* in their book *Origins and Destinations* is a modified version of that of *SMCS* – a fact which Penn fails to note.
2. The reference is to Goldthorpe and K. Hope, *The Social Grading of Occupations: a New Approach and Scale*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974 (subsequently *SGO*).
3. See e.g. A. H. Halsey, 'Towards Meritocracy? The Case of Britain' in Halsey and J. Karabel (eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Further work in this respect is still being pursued on the basis of the 1972 inquiry by A. F. Heath and J. M. Ridge. Cf. also the use of the H-G scale in G. Psacharopoulos, 'Family Background, Education and Achievement', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 28, 1977.
4. At the time of our research we knew of several studies currently being undertaken in this area. Early results from some of those relating to the mobility or immobility of Penn's 'capitalist class' are reported in the papers by Stanworth and Giddens, Harbury and McMahon, and Rubinstein in P. Stanworth and A. Giddens (eds.), *Élites and Power in British Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1974. These same authors have all since published further reports on their work.
5. Both of these points are in fact treated in *SGO*. See pp. 18–19, 26 and 72–4.
6. Cf. Kenneth Macdonald, 'The Hall-Jones Scale: a Note on the Interpretation of the Main British Prestige Coding' in J. M. Ridge (ed.), *Mobility in Britain Reconsidered*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
7. *SGO*, p. 74
8. Penn's observation that the 1972 inquiry produced more large proprietors etc. than were recorded in the 1971 1% Sample Census should be judged in relation to the remarks made in *SGO*, p. 95, especially those on the Census method of assessing the size of establishments.
9. Where Penn misleads himself is by using the list of 860 representative occupation titles selected for the occupational grading inquiry, as if this could provide a *detailed* guide to the component elements of the H-G scale categories and, hence, of the classes of the schema. It cannot in fact be so used; and no warrant exists for supposing that it can. For the reasons indicated in the text, an occupation title *per se*, and without an associated employment status, has no determinate coding within the OPCS system. Thus the same *title* could, quite properly, serve to represent more than one category in the grading exercise, although this does not actually occur. For the purpose of this inquiry, we found it impractical to work with more than occupation titles (though sometimes ones incorporating employment status information); but, as explained in *SGO* (p. 46), we were at pains to choose titles which would cover the full range of heterogeneity within each category. Hence, a

representative title for a category might well be one which would in fact occur only very rarely in that category as, for example, when associated with, for it, a rather unusual employment status.

10. After seeing a previous version of his 'critical remarks', I made a copy of this table available to Penn.
11. See *SMCS*, pp. 45-6 and also evidence presented by Catriona Llewellyn and myself to the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, Report No. 3, *Higher Incomes from Employment* Cmnd. 6838, London HMSO, 1976, Appendix J.
12. I have maintained a division of the working class by skill, although it seems that, in the end, Penn does not wish to do so. However, the effect of collapsing the skilled and nonskilled divisions, in both the original schema and in Penn's, can be determined from the data of Tables 1 and 2 without great difficulty.