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IN PURSUIT OF PURE MOBILITY

TREVOR NOBLE

Introduction

Of course social mobility is a derivative or, rather, a second order concept. One cannot describe individuals as being socially mobile without having first conceived of society as divided into classes or strata. At the same time where we are concerned not merely with social difference or even inequality but with their institutionalization and perpetuation, that division concurrently implies the possibility of the transfer or exchange of people across the dividing lines. Indeed, limitation upon such movement has been seen by many writers as central to the idea of stratification as a social institution.

There are, however, other implications to be considered. The inequalities which differentiate and order the relations between strata, the possession of economic resources, the enjoyment of deference or the exercise of political power, are themselves the primary obstacles to the movement of individuals from one to another. But when quantitative evidence came to be examined in the 1950s it became obvious at once that mobility rates could also be affected by other circumstances, for instance changes in the relative size of strata. It seemed at first sight obviously desirable to find some way of setting these aside so as to isolate the effects of the primary inequalities themselves. The consequent attempt to distinguish 'pure' or 'exchange' mobility from 'forced' or structurally determined mobility, however, appears to entail some interesting theoretical consequences which are seldom spelled out and which may often remain unappreciated. In the following discussion I have tried to examine some of these and, without abandoning the notion of social mobility altogether, to draw attention to the value of a conceptually more parsimonious approach to the topic.

Social Mobility and Stratification Theory

Perhaps taking an undeveloped hint from Weber's reference to life-chances in his familiar account of class situation,¹ several writers have pointed out the centrality of mobility in the conceptualization of the division of society into strata.

In the broadest terms M. G. Smith has defined stratification as 'the restriction of access to positions of varying advantage'² while Kurt Mayer and Walter Buckley, to take a well-known discussion, argue that

... whenever a society displays a graded series of ranked groupings of people more or less permanently matched over the generations to a graded hierarchy of social positions we say that the society is stratified.³

The frequency and extent of mobility between strata, Mayer and Buckley contend, are the most important considerations in distinguishing between one type of stratification system and another.⁴ Lopreato and Lewis have stressed the importance of the transmission of class privileges through the family,⁵ while Littlejohn regards the question of mobility as central in determining the extent to which one can regard a society as stratified at all.⁶

In one of the more stimulating contributions to the debate on Davis and Moore's functional theory of stratification, Dennis Wrong summarized their position:

Davis and Moore see stratification as a sorting mechanism allocating the more talented and ambitious individuals to the more socially important and demanding roles by means of differential rewards which serve as incentives.⁷

From a different point of view but in the end, on this question at least, coming to much the same position, Bottomore has argued that in capitalist society the class system is maintained by the limitations it imposes on mobility.⁸ This would appear to be at least part of what Giddens intends too, when he comments:

The mediate structuration of class relationships is governed above all by the distribution of mobility chances which pertain within a given society.⁹

That is to say, class relationships themselves are the exploitative, or at least competitive relations of production between those with different market capacities but the extent to which these relationships are salient within the structure of society is a matter of the extent to which class membership is rigidly segregated on the one hand or the amount of interchange of membership on the other. With almost complete segregation class relationships become a prominent structural feature while, with easy and frequent interchange, class relationships appear more blurred and apparently less dominating features of the social order.

The implication of all this is that we must acknowledge that changes in the pattern of mobility must somehow be related to change in the relation between strata.

A reduction in the amount of social interchange between social classes, most sociologists will agree, would usually indicate a change towards a more rigidly divided class structure. While material inequalities need not noticeably increase, such a situation would at least imply an intensification of status differentiation. Similarly, an increase in mobility between strata would indicate some reduction of other inequalities. The handicaps which held back the members of the lower strata, the advantages of the formerly privileged, would count far less; differences in prestige would be liable to decay somewhat and the economics of the labour market suggest that, other things being equal, material differentials would be likely to decline.¹⁰

The significance of Apparent Change

The problem arises for some sociologists however as to what would constitute a real increase or decrease in interclass mobility. Apparent change contrary to their theoretical expectations naturally has exacerbated this problem. (Needless to say this observation is not intended to suggest the problem is thereby any the less important. Appearances can be misleading.) Many, particularly amongst those who have been concerned with international comparisons or with the persistence of stratification systems over time have attempted to isolate a proportion of total social mobility which is attributable to changes in the occupational structure, some of them including demographically determined mobility too.¹¹ 'What is left', writes Porter, 'constitutes true social mobility or interchange between classes'.¹²

Thus it is held that the total mobility rates up and down between social strata or classes partly reflect movement made necessary by changes in occupational demand or in the supply of suitable occupational recruits, and partly the pure circulation of membership which reflects the relative openness or permeability of class boundaries. Thus it may appear that structurally determined mobility may increase or decrease as a result of exogenous factors quite independently of any change in inter-class relationships manifested in the rate of exchange or 'pure mobility'. 'Pure' mobility is seen as frequent in a relatively open society or rarer in a more sharply differentiated one. It will always in the end be a zero-sum exchange, upward and downward movements exactly matching.¹³

We can discern three theoretical consequences which follow from this which are worth mentioning now before considering some of the more technical problems which arise from the distinction.

Fairly obviously there is an equilibrium model of class structure latent or semi-latent behind the observable contingencies of historical developments. This entails that demographic and occupation structure changes are of merely secondary importance and can be not only statistically but also theoretically discounted. Thus some social mobility can be disregarded in considering questions of change in the relations between social classes or strata. Mobility between strata which is the result of structural changes in the demand for or supply of particular types of people is not a matter of class relationships. Thirdly then, it implies that class relations are not the product of structural changes in the distribution of occupations but vary – if at all – independently of such distributions.

I do not believe that these views can be reconciled with the importance of social mobility in the structure of stratification as argued at the beginning of this paper. However, the isolation of pure mobility from the less significant, merely structural mobility is technically impossible and is in practical or behavioural terms without consequence. Furthermore it is theoretically inconsistent with any kind of sociological explanation of social structural change.

The Independence of Forced and Pure Mobility

At the level of individual experience, Erikson points out that for the mobile individual the consequences of structurally determined and of pure mobility are indistinguishable. Furthermore, when comparing the consequences for the whole society in terms of 'the heterogeneity of social classes, the number of people with experiences of social mobility and the career expectations of youth', he points out, '– the degree of total mobility will be of greater importance than the rate of "exchange" mobility'.¹⁴ But while the distinction between 'forced' and exchange mobility may have few *practical* consequences it retains some possible persuasiveness as an historical characterization of the social order.

The questions which then arise, to begin with, are whether and how these components of the gross mobility rates can be distinguished and calculated. There are conceptual difficulties in fixing one component as a point of theoretical reference. At this level the distinction has already received considerable, though not always well-founded criticisms. These have as it were been launched from contradictory directions and have therefore served to restore the edifice which each has sought to overthrow.

Duncan first cast doubt upon the validity of making inferences about structural change from social mobility matrices since the pseudo-sample of fathers does not represent the occupational distribution of men at any single point in time which can be compared with the population actually sampled.¹⁵ Indeed, not only are some of the fathers likely to be still in the occupied population themselves but altogether their occupational distribution is an artefact of the sample of their sons.¹⁶

Following on from this critique of the interpretation of mobility tables of Duncan's, Randall Collins has also criticized the notion of 'forced mobility'. Pointing out the compatibility of occupational structure change with a wide range of mobility rates, he argues that even large scale change in the occupational structure could be accommodated by population redistribution without forcing occupational mobility on anyone. The fact that sons usually join fathers in the labour force rather than replacing them, he concludes, indicates that occupational shifts can be seen as the *result* of mobility and not necessarily *causes* of it.¹⁷ With reference to the interpretation of mobility data he makes the point that

The occupational distribution is the result of the mobility in the lives of the men in any given survey, not the cause of their mobility.¹⁸

Collins rejects the structural determinism of studies of mobility rates. But while he correctly identifies the source of the marginal distributions in a mobility table as the mobility experience of the men represented there, it does not follow that what can be said of a statistical table applies with equal plausibility as a statement about the world. Collins appears to believe that it is so: that the structural consequences attributed to the changing occupational structure are a figment, an unwarrantable reification of a mere summary description falsely given a non-existent causal efficacy of its own. As he writes

... These images operate as the ground for theory construction, directing our attention to causal agencies that do not exist: to hypostatized abstractions rather than to the behaviour of real people.¹⁹

It is important we should not be misled by our own metaphors. It is equally important to recognize the inescapable need to employ metaphor in discussing the social. Sometimes our imagery is less figurative, sometimes more. Collectivities act as agents and enter into relationships with one another as corporate individuals. Gruner, however, has cast doubt on how far this can be said with literal intent of classes or non-corporate collectivities and to that extent sustains Collins' position. Gruner writes

... even if it were true and could be shown to be true that people act in the social realm by virtue of their membership in social classes of a certain kind and no other, it would and could not entail that these classes act. For the logical status possessed by concepts of classes and by concepts of actions would still remain unaffected.²⁰

Now this I believe resolves the difficulty that Collins finds in rooting structural phenomena in the observable actions of individuals. As Gruner makes clear, it is impossible coherently to attribute *action* to a class in the sense of deliberate and conscious behaviour directed towards an identifiable end. However it is not necessary to do so if one can show that individuals act by virtue of their membership of a class or of the relationships which are summarized by referring to their class position. This is all that is required of structural explanations of behaviour in general and accommodates the case of occupational careers constrained by a changing distribution of employment opportunities as a result of changes in demand for different kinds of labour. Thus Collins is led too far in the direction of nominalism when on the basis of a technical criticism of mobility tables he rejects the possibility of structural constraint.

Collins has argued that

In place of an (immanent) development of the occupational structure that has been mistakenly read into mobility tables, we come to look for the conditions that allow groups to change the occupational structure or prevent changes in it.²¹

There is an important insight here but its achievement should not be at the cost of sacrificing the perception that men will also respond to opportunities they do not themselves create. Here lies an important social inequality: The power to create or restrict opportunity and the power to exploit extraneous opportunity as against the lack of even that power.

Thus while after a little thought one might agree 'that social change and social mobility are substantially the same phenomena' and more readily that 'Our explanation of social mobility ultimately rests upon the same factors that explain men's behaviour in organizations, professions, politics and status communities',²² it is necessary to recognize that what Collins refers to as 'opportunity structures' do have some independent viability *vis a vis* the careers of individual job seekers though not necessarily *vis a vis* the policy of groups able

to influence the overall direction of the economy, whether a class of capitalists, a political élite or central planners within a corporate state.

Recognition of the importance of opportunity structures has in fact been the basis of the complementary attack on the other half of the distinction – on pure or exchange mobility or as it is sometimes called, fluidity by Tully, Jackson and Curtis and by Harrison White. Following the earlier discussions of R. M. Marsh²³ and Beshers and Laumann²⁴, Tully and his colleagues have argued that any one job move may initiate a chain of vacancies which have to be filled by further mobility. These indirect repercussions of possibly structurally determined mobility cannot however be statistically distinguished from exchange mobility or circulation though they are the consequences of changes in demand.²⁵ Harrison White however rejects the distinction between 'structural' and 'exchange' mobility altogether on the grounds that all occupational moves depend upon the existence of a vacancy to move into.²⁶ White focussed upon mobility within organizations and pointed out that a job vacancy filled from lower down the organizational hierarchy created a vacancy chain as subordinate incumbents moved up to fill superordinate positions. This highlights the implausibility of arguments that immigration creates upward mobility for the indigenous population as has been suggested particularly with reference to the USA.²⁷ Upward mobility on the contrary is only likely to occur if the opportunities exist.

There are however obvious problems which arise if we generalize this model from the formal organizations with a clearly defined structure of predetermined positions – such as the church ministries with which White was concerned – to unbounded social systems. A formally unbounded social system like a whole society does not have a predetermined number of social positions which become vacant when their incumbents move on to another. In an unbounded system positions are created or abolished with the increase or decrease in the number of personnel so that the total number of positions is not fixed but must vary with the number of incumbents. Whether the withdrawal/death/transfer of an incumbent creates a vacancy to be filled by another depends on the conventional structure of the society or group. It may occur for some positions but not others. The emigration of unemployed workers and their families creates no corresponding vacancy which needs to be filled. Posts may be frozen or abolished or simply considered insufficiently important to be worth the trouble of filling. The arrival of a new workforce of specially gifted or skilled refugees, the emergence of married women into the job market, the advent of a numerically greater generation at the end of their education and the beginning of their productive careers may lead to the creation of new posts, new occupational opportunities, the development of neglected technologies or marketing opportunities so that a range of vacancies arises to provide for the increased supply of candidates.²⁸ These adaptations of the opportunity structure may, but of course do not necessarily, entail social mobility.

Thus we have criticism from the point of view of social action theory which rejects structurally determined mobility on the one hand and on the other a species of structuralist argument which suggests that all mobility is necessarily structurally determined. The first is unsatisfactory because we cannot account for changes in the amount of mobility without taking structural change into account, the second because we cannot ignore the component of social action which adapts to and/or changes the structural framework within which mobility occurs.

It is not simply that 'pure' mobility is a residual category and can only be measured after structurally determined mobility has been accounted for.²⁹ The supposed level of structural demand is the product of occupational change and differential class fertility among other factors. But while jobs may be created or left unfilled, fertility can be influenced by parents' beliefs about opportunities for their children. Both may be affected by the openness of class boundaries. Apparently structurally determined mobility, particularly if we take the wider

range of factors suggested by Lockwood into account,³⁰ and 'pure' mobility or fluidity are the outcome of factors which do not operate independently and cannot be disentangled by the statistical manipulation of marginals in a social mobility table.

Goldthorpe, Payne and Llewellyn agree that structurally determined mobility and exchange mobility or 'social fluidity' are not different types of mobility to which different individuals might be subject but are two aspects of mobility which are properties of societies as wholes. Referring to the calculations of indices of fluidity they point out that 'what is being attempted is to use the straightforward partitioning of recorded instances of individual mobility as a means of expressing a distinction which can have meaning only at a supra-individual or "macro-sociological" level'.³¹ Their attempt to maintain the distinction even at this level may however be questioned both at the technical level of the validity of the measures used and in more general terms with reference to what sort of meaning the distinction between structurally determined mobility and social fluidity can have.

The Disparity Ratios which they calculate in estimating how equally spread have been the changes in overall mobility opportunities are vulnerable to some of the criticisms made of the familiar Index of Association by Yasuda and by Boudon.³² These are in broad terms that the index values are constrained by proportionate cell size within the matrix of original and sampled occupational status positions.

In the four cohorts from the 1972 Oxford Mobility Survey compared by Goldthorpe *et al.* the size of what they describe as the service class increases from 22 per cent to almost 30 per cent among respondents and from 12 per cent to 17 per cent amongst their fathers as we proceed from the oldest cohort born 1908-17 to the youngest born 1938-47. Meanwhile the manual group defined in their classification declines across the same four cohorts from 46 per cent to 44 per cent among respondents and from 58 per cent to 52 per cent amongst their fathers. Just as the maximum value of the Index of Association increases and the minimum value decreases as a result of this reduction in cell size so will the disparity ratio which contrasts self-recruitment first in a growing class with a declining one i.e. the chances of service class sons of a 1972 service class occupation compared with manual origin respondents' chances of a 1972 service class occupation, and secondly, the chances of a 1972 position in the declining manual category of manual origin men compared with those originating in the growing service class. Change of category of destination size together with origin category changing in inverse proportion naturally compounds the problem. Goldthorpe, Payne and Llewellyn's calculation that the chance of manual class sons finding themselves in manual class jobs has been decreasing more slowly than that of service class sons is to some extent an artefact of this doubtful ratio. Except for the youngest cohort, a simple percentaging to produce an 'inflow' table for the manual category shows a declining proportion from service class origins and a growing proportion of self recruitment which can be set against decreasing outflows into the manual group from service class origins and again except for the youngest cohort declining manual to manual.³³ In so far as these simpler calculations present a different picture it is not clear to me that it is any less valid.

Indeed the aim to present a more summary index which rescues the 'macro sociological' notion of 'pure' mobility by means of disparity ratios [and *a fortiori* the 'Odds Ratio' which Goldthorpe *et al.* use as the basis for a more complex trend analysis] raises more serious doubts about the implicit theorizing which locate this account of occupational mobility within the context of class structure.

Implicit Theoretical Presuppositions

The distinction between structurally determined and 'exchange' or 'pure' mobility assumes a theoretical dualism of the structural and cultural characteristics of society which is

seldom made explicit and which is incompatible with other aspects of some of the social theory in which it has been invoked.

From a simple postivist or materialist point of view, it would be apparent that if we consider what are the hindrances to social mobility, then *any* move in the direction of perfect mobility implies some reduction in these hindrances somewhere. The social strata are ranged hierarchically in their command over material and political resources and differentiated in their cultural adaptations to their structural situation. An increase in interchange of membership between strata has not merely some reduction in this differentiation as a consequence but depends upon a reduction in inequality of resources as a necessary precondition. Thus a reduction in differentiation requires a change in structural relations and the distinction between pure and structurally determined mobility is a difficult one to reconcile with this kind of perspective.

In the 'idealist' account, represented in stratification theory mainly by the familiar functionalist theories, such structural events as changes in mobility rates would be the outcome of changes in culture, so that structural changes as well as cultural changes proper have to be accounted for in terms of changes in the organizing principles of society, ultimately in terms of changes in human values and beliefs.

More radical versions of this approach have appeared in the 1960s and 1970s in the discussion of stratification in what are more or less phenomenological terms. I. C. Jarvie and Thomas Laswell have both argued that social mobility depends upon a clear-cut definition of social class which in fact does not and cannot exist. For Laswell the class structure is a social construct which differs for people with different social perspectives and cannot be said to exist objectively.³⁴ Thus social mobility can be said to occur or not depending upon the perspective from which the origin and destination positions are defined.³⁵ This projection of the methodological problems of the sociologist as real properties of the social world he is trying to understand creates a number of difficulties.³⁶ The critical problem here, the logical contradiction involved in referring to divergent perspectives while denying the existence of the co-ordinates within which they occur, is evaded by Jarvie. He argues that the myths of stratification 'create and sustain the imagined divisions'³⁷ and that the experience of social mobility is simply a misinterpretation of decreasing social differences.³⁸ But while offering a phenomenology of class these writers shed no light on why the phenomena arise in the first place, or why they persist and change in the day-to-day experience of the members of society who sustain them.³⁹ In these versions the distinction between forced and exchange or structurally determined and pure mobility are irrelevant because social mobility is no more than a misunderstanding of something or other. What is being misunderstood or why it should be so frequently misunderstood in *this* way is not made clear. Further conceptual distinctions between types of mobility, however, would only compound the misunderstanding and do not serve to rescue the phenomena from the phenomenological approach.

The distinction in fact makes sense only within a dualist theory which would suggest that structural and cultural change occur either in parallel or independently but do not determine one another. Thus not only would occupational and demographic change occur autonomously at least in relation to the relationship between classes but the latter as indicated in the exchange of members can be at most contingently related and certainly not necessarily determined by the occupational structure or demographic factors. In this case changes in the occurrence of structural mobility might or might not be reflected in pure mobility or fluidity but changes in either must be accounted for independently.

Seen even as a property of the social structure as a whole then pure mobility is not merely a matter of excessively elaborate calculation but of a kind of dualist theorizing where it is difficult to find room for any kind of explanation recognizably sociological. The

explanation for its attraction and persistence therefore is to be sought within the sociology of knowledge rather than in terms of its immediate heuristic value and, happily, lies beyond the scope of this discussion, though it is hard to resist speculating as to why its effect should consistently be to explain away apparent change.

Some Limitations of Summary Measures

Forsaking then the distillation of pure mobility, for all practical and theoretical purposes we are left with the interpretation of gross mobility flows and whatever changes they may from time to time be subject to. However the problems which beset the attempt to isolate pure mobility have their analogue in the problems of summary measures of total mobility. We must be wary of making the same mistakes and consider once again whether the components of such a measure are in fact meaningfully aggregative. Here I think lies much of the importance of historical stratification theory for the development of mobility theory. As the preceding example is intended to illustrate, it may be possible to devise measures in the context of a model for mobility analysis which are not consistent with at least some ways of understanding what social stratification is about. There is a real risk of obliquely generating a misleading implicit theory through the manipulation of our data processing models. Models cannot be theory neutral, however many hypotheses they may accommodate; the range will be limited by the assumptions made. I am not, of course, arguing for a purely qualitative approach to social mobility. A non-quantitative analysis of the relationships between social mobility and social change is inconceivable. But while the spatial imagery of horizontal and vertical mobility, inflows and outflows is hard to resist we should not therefore assume that they are to be best described in the terms of third-form geometry. The logic of social relationships is not necessarily depicted in Euclidean terms any more than tradition is best thought of as a stochastic process.⁴⁰ A simple causal model can accommodate some of these reservations. Boudon has shown us both how far such a model can take us toward understanding in structural terms the pattern of change in mobility rates and the way that pattern may appear to those involved in its unfolding, and also some of the hazards which lie in the very persuasiveness of neat summary measures.⁴¹ The question of the role of educational change in social mobility to which Boudon addresses himself is one which after his negative conclusions⁴² can be left on one side. Some aspects of the position he has developed are more directly relevant to my argument here and I shall conclude these remarks with some comments on those.

Within the terms of the substantive or hypothetical data he considers, Boudon's Inequality of Social Opportunity (ISO) model works with compellingly persuasive effect. It is basically an additive exercise which works with total mobility rates pursuing the consequences of a number of factors through a series of stages in the mobility process. His conclusions, however, are flawed by some mistaken empirical assumptions⁴³ which it is worth pointing out firstly since, as he says, his aim is substantive rather than methodological⁴⁴ and because it is important that the factually mistaken conclusions he reaches should not be attributed to the operation of the model itself.

Firstly, of course, his assumption that upward mobility had not increased since the war is mistaken. Since the 1950's upward mobility in Britain has probably been increasing both intragenerationally and intergenerationally and this broadly seems also to have been true elsewhere. Secondly, as the pattern of intragenerational mobility suggests, we should question the probability that educational change in the post-war period has in fact been proceeding faster than the change in the distribution of occupations. Reinforced by change in the technical demands within occupations,⁴⁵ a faster rate of change in occupational distribution would transform the opportunity structure without requiring any modification

to the conclusion that educationally attained qualifications were of declining importance and would help account for the poor correlation between educational attainment and social mobility noted earlier by Anderson.⁴⁶

Boudon argues that, with the exception of changes in the farming sector, 'steady and definite changes in the structure of mobility are the exception rather than the rule'⁴⁷ and referring to a wide range of evidence 'what mobility surveys show, in so far as they are able to provide valuable over-time information, is that no general trend appears, either toward a steady increase or toward a steady decrease of social mobility'.⁴⁸ Most of the evidence he quotes, however, predates the existence of good over-time comparisons and some that he cites as most important is specifically of a kind he has singled out as capable of leading to false conclusions.⁴⁹ The exceptional findings of Svalastoga, as well as those consistent with invariant mobility rates, all attempt to correlate fathers' and sons' occupational status in one way or another. The resulting co-efficients thus obliterate structural changes which have differential effects on upward and downward mobility. Boudon fails to substantiate his conclusion that 'a tremendous over-time technological, economic and educational change is not incompatible with a very limited change in the structure of mobility'⁵⁰ since he does not in practice make use of the assumption that there has been any massive change in opportunity structure as a result of economic and technological change. He has in fact considered only changes in educational opportunity and applied these to parameters derived from relatively static occupational structures in the working out of his model. It still does *not* follow, though, that

. . . As soon as the (pyramidal) social structure moves slowly upward, any small increase in the probability of lower-class people moving up is necessarily complemented by a *larger* increase in the probability of higher-class people moving down.⁵¹

This would only occur where the changes referred to were of short duration and followed one another in succession. If the change in social or occupational structure were to continue, the increasing prospects of the lower class would continue to grow while the 'opportunity' for downward mobility shrank for the growing higher class. But this doubtful inference is the product of Boudon's concern to explain a fictitious equilibrium. In fact the model works with the data provided for it; it is simply that the data is either outdated or mistaken.

The basic position from which Boudon argues is the obverse of the argument I have been developing here and it is the implications of that transformation that I wish to explore. Thus Boudon argues that when factors such as the level of inequality of educational opportunity, the development of education, occupational structure etc. are treated as a system they neutralize each other so that the structure of social mobility remains unchanged. Other things being equal the only factor capable of reducing ISO is the rigidity of the stratification system.

. . . one factor does have an effect of its own which is not neutralized as just described: other things being equal, if the stratification system is less rigid, hence if dominance effects are weaker, ISO will decrease or alternatively, mobility will increase.⁵²

Now upward mobility, at least, has increased. That should mean in terms of Boudon's model that the stratification system has become less rigid in that direction at least and 'dominance effects' weaker. It is questionable whether Boudon establishes the independence of the social heritage or dominance factor from ISO, inequality of social opportunity, so that there is a question of tautology here. I have been proposing that this can be resolved by accepting from the beginning inequality of social opportunity as part of our definition of social stratification and that it is indeed precisely what transforms a pattern of inequality into a system of social stratification.

Conclusion

If we no longer seek to discount evident increases or decreases in the relative size, recruitment and composition of the various classes the exploration of the changing pattern of social mobility assumes greater significance for our understanding of social structure rather than less. But if we accept that inequality of access to privileged positions is what transforms social inequality into social stratification, then we must also accept that structural circumstances such as changes in the relative sizes of the classes will operate as at least important intervening variables in determining the rigidity of the class structure itself. In other words, changes in the shape of the occupational structure will necessarily have consequences for the kind of relationships that exist between the different occupational strata.

The measurement of the permeability of class or stratum boundaries independently of structural change is a tempting prospect. It would offer an important macro-sociological index of social inequality unobscured by circumstantial factors. Unfortunately, despite the most sophisticated statistical manipulation of data, no satisfactory way of doing this has been found. The failure is unlikely to be remedied for it is more than a mere technical difficulty. The pursuit of pure mobility is a quest for a sociological philosopher's stone. It has inspired a good deal of ingenious and sometimes valuable work but, although the concept appears to offer an attractively direct means to a desirable end, when we carefully examine the presuppositions it logically entails it is evident that it requires a theoretical perspective which would render sociological explanation at least extraordinarily cumbersome and very likely completely impossible.

Notes

1. Max Weber: see Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *Essays in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948, p. 181; W. G. Runciman (ed.), *Weber: Selections in Translation*, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 44; and R. Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*, Heinemann, 1960, p. 105.
2. M. G. Smith 'Pre-industrial stratification' in W. Smelser and S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Social Structure and Social Mobility in Economic Development*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 162
3. Kurt B. Mayer and Walter Buckley, *Class and Society*, Random House, 3rd edn., 1970, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
5. Joseph Lopreato and Lionel S. Lewis, *Social Stratification: A Reader*, Harper and Row, 1972, p. 462.
6. James Littlejohn, *Social Stratification*, Allen and Unwin, 1972, p. 45.
7. Dennis Wrong, 'The Functional Theory of Stratification: Some Neglected Considerations', *American Sociological Review*, 1959, 24, p. 776. 'All that the Davis-Moore theory actually asserts', he points out earlier, 'is that if the more important, highly skilled, and physically and psychologically demanding positions in a complex division of labour are to be filled both from the standpoint of numbers and of minimally efficient performance, then there must be some unequal rewards favouring these positions over others', *ibid.*, p. 773. These need not necessarily be material rewards, he emphasises. In describing stratification as a sorting mechanism, however, Wrong contradicts his criticism of Buckley earlier in the same paper where he argues that Davis and Moore were concerned with hierarchy *per se*, not with how individuals are recruited to the unequally rewarded positions which comprise it. This distinction, earlier made by Davis

in his reply to Buckley, would in fact require a quite separate theory of hierarchy which Davis and Moore do not provide. (Contrast e.g. Louis Dumont *Homo Hierarchicus*, Paladin 1972 and the discussion in Michael Hammond, 'Durkheim's Reality Construction Model and the Emergence of Social Stratification', *Sociological Review*, 1978, 26, 4, pp. 713-28). They simply assume the existence of hierarchy as a structural possibility which offers a solution to the problem of recruitment to functionally necessary roles.

8. T. B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society*, Allen and Unwin, 1965, p. 16.
9. Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, Hutchinson, 1973, p. 107.
10. John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler, *Class in a Capitalist Society*, Heinemann, 1975, however, despite devoting the better part of three chapters to social mobility and inequalities of opportunity, argue that this is of only secondary importance (p. 280). 'Capitalism, as we have argued, sets up pressures to ease mobility as well as limit it', they write (p. 318). This is an example of the contradictions of the system seen as a source of strength rather than a weakness. Certainly the argument itself is irrefutable since no conceivable observation could undermine it, any increase or decrease in mobility rates being interpreted only as indicating the power of capitalism either to exploit labour resources more effectively or alternatively to more narrowly restrict access to privileged positions.
11. Among them one notes: Nathalie Rogoff, *Recent Trends in Occupational Mobility*, Free Press, 1953; Elton F. Jackson and Harry J. Crockett, 'Occupational Mobility in the United States', *American Sociological Review*, 1964, 29, pp. 5-15; Saburo Yasuda, 'A Methodological Inquiry into Mobility', *American Sociological Review*, 1964, 29, pp. 16-23; Kaare Svalastoga and Tom Rishøj, 'Social Mobility: the Western European Model', *Acta Sociologica*, 1965, 9, pp. 175-82; John Porter *op. cit.*, 1968: Phillips Cutwright, 'Occupational Inheritance: A Cross-national Analysis', *American Journal of Sociology*, 1968, 73, pp. 400-16; Raymond Boudon, *Mathematical Structures of Social Mobility*, Elsevier, 1973; Lawrence E. Hazelrigg, 'Cross-National Comparisons of Father-to-Son Occupational Mobility' in Lopreato and Lewis (eds.), *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 469-93; A. H. Halsey, 'Education and Social Mobility in Britain since World War II', *Seminar on Education, Inequality and Life Chances*, OECD, 1975.
12. John Porter, 'The Future of Upward Mobility' in Gerald W. Thielbar and Saul D. Feldman, *Issues in Social Inequality*, Little, Brown, 1972, p. 685, originally in *American Sociological Review*, 1968, 33, pp. 5-19; See also Cutwright *op. cit.*, 1968, p. 401. Other factors influencing 'demand' may include changes in recruitment criteria, a change or increasing emphasis on technical skills as against general 'character' traits, changes in the distribution of innate ability within the population or in the distribution of motivation between classes may also be involved; see David Lockwood, 'Social Mobility', in A. T. Welford *et al.*, (eds.), *Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, pp. 509-20; Porter *op. cit.*, 1968, and Robert Perucci, 'The Significance of Intra-occupational Mobility: Some Methodological and Theoretical Notes, together with a case study of Engineers' in Lopreato and Lewis *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 494-502 originally in *American Sociological Review*, 1961, 26, pp. 874-83.
13. For instance, Westergaard and Resler argue, 'shifts in occupational structure over time and class differences in rates of natural replacement, may generate a larger upward than downward flow between generations. That apart, however, there must be as many people coming down the ladder as there are people going up it, from one generation to the next . . .', *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 306.
14. Robert Erikson, 'Patterns of Social Mobility' in Richard Scase (ed.), *Readings in Swedish Class Structure*, Pergamon, 1976, p. 198.

15. O. D. Duncan, 'Methodological Issues in the Analysis of Social Mobility' in Smelser and Lipset (eds.) *op. cit.*, 1966, pp. 62-3, but see the important criticism of Raymond Boudon, *Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality*, Wiley, 1974, pp. 137-8.
16. See Trevor Noble, 'Social Mobility and Class Relations in Britain', *British Journal of Sociology*, 1972, xxiii, pp. 427-30.
17. Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Towards an Explanatory Science*, Academic Press, 1975, p. 432.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
20. Rolf Gruner, 'On the Action of Social Groups', *Inquiry*, 1976, 19, p. 453.
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 435.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
23. Robert M. Marsh, 'Values, Demand and Social Mobility', *American Sociological Review*, 1963, 28, pp. 565-75.
24. J. M. Beshers and E. O. Laumann, 'Social Distance: a Network Approach', *American Sociological Review*, 1967, 32, pp. 225-36.
25. J. C. Tully, E. F. Jackson and R. F. Curtis, 'Trends in Occupational Mobility in Indianapolis', *Social Forces*, 1970, 49, pp. 186-200.
26. Harrison White, *Chains of Opportunity*, Harvard, University Press, 1970.
27. J. A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure*, Holt Rinehard and Winston, 1957, pp. 253-4, 259.
28. See e.g., Boudon *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 37. He also alludes to a 1955 paper by Lewis which is not cited in his bibliography.
29. See Erikson *op. cit.*; Tully *et al.*, *op. cit.*
30. *Loc. cit.*
31. John H. Goldthorpe, Clive Payne and Catriona Llewellyn, 'Trends in Class Mobility', *Sociology*, 1978, 12, 3, p. 448.
32. The Index of Association was developed to compare rates of self-recruitment against a notional chance frequency across the social hierarchy described in terms of the seven categories of the Hall-Jones Scale in the 1949 survey of intergenerational social mobility in England and Wales, see: D. V. Glass and J. R. Hall 'Social Mobility in Great Britain: A Study of Intergeneration Changes in Status' in D. V. Glass (ed.), *Social Mobility in Britain*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954, pp. 177-201. A searching critique of the data base in this study will be found in G. Payne, G. Ford and C. Robertson, 'A Reappraisal of Social Mobility in Britain', *Sociology*, 1977, 11, 2, pp. 289-310. For critical discussions of the Index of Association as a measure see: S. Yasuda, *op. cit.*, 1964, and Raymond Boudon, *Mathematical Structures of Social Mobility*, Elsevier, 1973, pp. 14-17.
33. Calculated from Goldthorpe *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 1978, Table 1. A more general account of this 1972 Nuffield College survey of occupational mobility amongst men aged 20-64, in England and Wales will be found in A. H. Halsey, *Change in British Society*, O.U.P., 1978, chap. 6, pp. 111 ff.

Curiously, Halsey also adopts a measure which understates the amount of upward mobility apparent in 1972. He presents estimates of inter-generational mobility based on a comparison of men's social origins with their jobs ten years after entering the labour market (pp. 113-14). This however cannot be regarded as a point of 'occupational maturity', particularly in times of rapid structural change. Yet approximately 23% of the men in the Nuffield College survey were born before 1918 (see Goldthorpe, *et al.*, *loc. cit.*) and therefore had already been at work ten years well before the major post-war change in the occupational structure Halsey earlier describes (*loc. cit.* Table 2.1, p. 26). If we consider men born before 1918 into what Halsey describes as the working class after

- ten years of working life 5.0% had 'middle class' and 19.3% 'lower middle class' occupations. Another 25 years or so later in 1972, 14.1% were in the 'middle class' and 23.0% in the 'lower middle class' (see Goldthorpe *et al.*, *loc. cit.*). Standardizing the length of time in the labour market makes obvious sense when making comparisons between cohorts. I can see no justification however, for excluding the later career mobility which is evident in these figures when offering an account of the total amount of mobility in the experience of the population at a particular point in time.
34. Thomas E. Lasswell, *Class and Stratum*, Houghton Mifflin, 1965, p. 13.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
 36. A good example of this will be found in Paul Filmer, 'Sociology and Social Stratification: Issues of Reflexivity and Tradition' in Barry Sandywell *et al.*, *Problems of Reflexivity and Dialectics in Sociological Inquiry*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, chap. 5. Filmer argues that sociologists studying other people's practices are also practising stratification (a) by differentiating themselves from their objects of study and (b) by contrasting their own views with those of others. Filmer, in other words, confuses stratification with differentiation and reduces class to bickering among sociologists; *loc. cit.*, pp. 152-3.
 37. I. C. Jarvie, *Concepts and Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 126.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. See Trevor Noble, 'Social Mobility and Theories of Stratification', *Sociological Analysis and Theory*, 1974, iv, pp. 86-7.
 40. See Boudon, *op. cit.*, 1973, p. 5.
 41. Boudon *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 16-17, 122, 137-8, 153, cf. J. M. Ridge, *Mobility in Britain Reconsidered*, Oxford, 1974, p. 7.
 42. See also Halsey *op. cit.*, 1975.
 43. *Ref. op. cit.*, 1974, pp. xiii, and also 154, 160, 162, 170, 182 f. and 186.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
 45. See e.g., Perucci, *op. cit.*; B. C. Roberts *et al.*, *Reluctant Militants*, Heinemann, 1972, and A. Harris and R. Clausen, *Labour Mobility in Britain, 1953-1963*.
 46. C. Arnold Anderson, 'A Skeptical Note on Education and Mobility' in A. H. Halsey, J. Floud and C. A. Anderson (eds.), *Education, Economy and Society*, Free Press, 1961, and cf. Boudon *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 37. For evidence on this question from the 1972 Nuffield College survey see also Halsey *op. cit.*, 1978, pp. 127-30.
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 170, cf. *ibid.*, p. 138 and also p. 203, n. 5. Using hypothetical data, Boudon reaches his misleading conclusions relying on path coefficients or regression coefficients of sons' on fathers' occupational status and ignoring the evidence of comparisons of marginal distributions. A similar contrast underlies the divergent findings of Noble and Hope juxtaposed in Michael Rutter and Nicola Madge, *Cycles of Disadvantage*, Heinemann, 1976, p. 147.
 50. *Op. cit.*, p. 196.
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 162; see also p. 195.