

**SOCIOLOGY 929**  
**Reading Interrogations, session 6**  
**October 10, 2006**  
**The Weberian Tradition II: Goldthorpe**

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### **1. Rudolfo**

Many controversial issues about Goldthorpe's class analysis are raised in the Ahrne-Marshall debate that we have read this week. Among them, I would like to discuss in class Ahrne's statement that Goldthorpe's class schema is a *well-made commonsensical classification of occupations*. Even if Goldthorpe says that he classifies occupations according to their conditions of employment and relation with authority and control in the production process, Ahrne states that his empirical classification of occupations has nothing to do with this theoretical classification and that, in fact, many occupations with similar market and work situations are located in different groups. According to Ahrne this confusion stems from Goldthorpe's empiricist approach and lack of coherent theorization. On the other hand, Marshall believes that this is an old and unimportant critique. This author states that Goldthorpe's class schema has proven to be the best in explaining class mobility among non-employers in capitalist societies (which are in fact the 95% of population). Taking into account this discussion, I would like to discuss the pros and cons of taking the person's occupation as the only measure of class situation. Is there any other possible way of measuring class situation in a weberian framework that takes into account employment relations and situation with authority and control in the production process? **[I guess there are two separate issues here: 1) Given easily available data, is there any alternative to occupation-based categorization schemes? 2) Is there a way of gathering other data in a practical matter that would be closer to the theoretical ideas of the framework, and if so, what would the data look like?]**

Another issue that I would like to raise refers to the universal character of any class model and Goldthorpe's in particular. As Ahrne points out, it is quite problematic to deal Swedish waiters as service class and postal workers as working class, as the latest have much better and stable employment contracts. This issue is also related to the problems of studying different societies' class structures with the same class schema, which is inspired in the empirical analysis of the British class structure. The question would be: Can this model be applied to the class analysis of any contemporary capitalist society? What additional problems would appear if we want to apply this class schema to the analysis of the class structure of Latin American societies (or any society from the contemporary capitalist periphery)? **[This is obviously a very important question for anyone interested in doing comparative work. But of course, this is not peculiar to this specific schema or problem. Whenever we make statements of the form: the Argentinean working class is more militant than the American working class we are assuming that the concept "working class" means the "same thing" in the two countries. There are a number of different stances one can take on this methodological problem: 1) you can argue for the same concept across countries, but the need for different indicators because of different ways in which this concept is concretely organized; 2) you can argue for multiple theoretical indicators of the same underlying phenomenon which will appear with different**

weights in different countries; 3) you can argue for a two step process: a) identifying the kind of class relations present in a given place, and b) deploying the relevant criteria for locating individuals within that specific kind of relation. This implies a double typology – a typology of types of capitalist class relations and a typology of locations within those relations.]

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## 2. Ann Pikus

Breen writes that the principal aim of Weberian class analysis is to examine the relationship between class position and life chances (p. 34). Yet while Goldthorpe develops a class schema that assigns class position according to one's employment relationship, he does not explain *how* the employment relationship affects life chances. [This of course will depend in part on just what you mean by "life chances". If life chances include things like chances for higher income, or chances for secure jobs, then Goldthorpe's employment relations approach does try to provide some mechanisms for this. His Figure 10.1 lays out what he calls "sources of contractual hazard" which are mechanisms that lead to different kinds of career-structures and payment mechanisms which are closely connected to life chances.]

Goldthorpe's analysis seems more relevant to explaining how employment relations are exploitative, yet he rejects exploitation as an explanation for class conflict or other outcomes. Instead, Goldthorpe embraces more of a rational actor approach, arguing that employers will act rationally to maximize the success of their organization but that there is no **fundamental conflict** of interest between employer and employee (p. 210). [But note: he also says that interests of employers and employees are not "fundamentally" in harmony: basically he is saying that the extent to which they exist in zero-sum or positive-sum relations is contingent, not intrinsic. Do you think his contrast between zero-sum and positive-sum provides a convincing argument that conflicts are not "fundamentally" conflictual?] To focus extensively on employment relations in a Marxist framework makes sense to me due to the explanatory power given to exploitation but because Goldthorpe's work lacks that theoretical component linking employment relationship to life chances, to me, it reads more as industrial sociology than class analysis.

This week's readings also raise two interesting issues about the unit of analysis. First, should class position be assessed based on individuals or families? Does the question we're asking matter? Second, should women's work roles be considered independently, only when dominant for the household, or conventionally (not at all)? Do we agree that Goldthorpe's underlying assumption (as portrayed by Marshall on p. 60) – that women's class identities are functions of men's occupational standing – even if true historically, holds true today?

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## 3. Sarbani Chakrobarty

I found Goldthorpe's argument extremely interesting and feel that his work needs to be extended for class-analysis, for if work is intrinsically related to class, then dimensions of employment have to be explored in greater detail. As with all exposition, Goldthorpe's theory does seem to exclude 'work' within households by different members, because the employer-employee relationship is not there, as understood in an

organisational framework. **[Why do you think he rules out relations within the family as “class” relations? He argues that class divisions run between families, not within them. Why do you think he insists on this?]** Nevertheless, focus on employment-relations provides a different perspective on class. Class-schema, according to Goldthorpe arises from a) difference from employment relations b) relations that derive from different employment contracts. The author seems to focus on the aspects of employment, when the agreement of employment has already been reached, i.e. post-employment. Two questions can be asked, a) what if class positions themselves shape/influence employment seeking behaviour and agreement to enter into an employment contract and thereby into a particular relationship? **[This question would need some clarification in order to make sense within Goldthorpe’s account. It is easy for this discussion to get confusing since the word class can be used in so many different ways. One meaning of your statement that class positions shape employment seeking behavior, is that the behavior of a person who is in employment relation X influences that person’s behavior in seeking new employment. Or are you suggesting that class defined in some other way than Goldthorpe’s can influence how people get into class positions in his sense?]** b) how does class is formed outside that of the employment situation, i.e. the work-place? Is there an assumption that the relations and types of contract within work-places influence class positions and formations outside of them?

Goldthorpe’s argument seems to be made with reference to employment relationships in conventional sense. His ideas can be extended to understand the employment contracts and relations when the principal and agent are that of the State and the some particular occupational group. My reference point here is the teachers employed in government sponsored programmes or government schools. Then the class schema seems to get a little a more complex when understood through the author’s own explanation.

Goldthorpe mentions, “[...] for individuals of employee status, occupation can [...] serve as an adequate proxy for those features of their employment relations that the schema takes as distinguishing class positions” (Chapter 10, p.207). He then includes variables like perks, forms of payment, control of working time etc. However, occupation-status through these within-organization variables seems to provide an incomplete explanation. This is so because relationships among employees and between employers and employees, in order to be explained especially in terms of class, have to take into account the already existing differentiations, e.g., rural-urban divide, gender divide etc. **[I am not sure why it is a problem that the full complexity of relations between employers and employees cannot be explained only by class-as-employment-relations, but must also include things like gender, rural/urban location, etc. One could also say, for example, that gender relations, to be fully explained, must include a discussion of urban/rural differences, but this does not imply that the concept of gender relations must itself, as a concept, incorporate urban/rural differences.]** For example, if we take teaching as an example of occupation, there may or may not be similarities in the variables. The variation may happen due to geographical differences, but then once that is teased apart, another problem arises that of valuation attached to the type of teaching and the teachers. The respective geographical divide may be conflated to understand them as class dimensions. **[I am not quite clear on your point here: are you saying that the people actually in these situations conflate such divisions with class, or are you saying that class divisions may become subjectively obscured by this kind of nonclass factor,**

**or are you saying that theoretically we can no longer really define class as such without these geographical elements? or what?]**

Goldthorpe's **explanation** of service-class thus needs to be refined. **[Do you mean his “explanation” of the service class, or his “definition”? His explanation is in terms of the difficulty in monitoring the actions of people in certain kinds of jobs and the problem of the “high asset specificity” of their skills (see his Figure 10.1). I am not sure how the considerations you are presenting would affect that explanation.]** This need is claimed due to the creation of occupations, with the word ‘para’ attached to them, e.g. para-teachers – the teachers who are employed to maintain the efficiency of the systems, through strict cost-benefit analysis. Their status is always ‘partial’. Instead of long-term contract, they have short-term renewed contract with no security. Many have skills and assets that not valued, and yet assume some form of valuation when cost-cutting and education for particular sub-groups of children (read class) are concerned.

Goldthorpe monitoring of work provides important insight in the field of education. He talks about incentive structures that employer creates for an alignment of interest between employers and employees. He does not mention about punishment structures. NCLB is a case in point. There are more punishments than rewards for schools or teachers. But the divide and rule policy is evident where teachers are proposed to compete with each other for higher pay. The teaching profession, in all over the world it seems, is one profession, where it is both output and input based. Output, assessed indirectly through children's test scores. Input based through standardization and model-based curriculum. Teachers are also on the other hand ‘multi-task’ agents whose monitoring of work is difficult. But their ‘decision parameters’ are not based on performance appraisal of on a long-term basis, but on very short term of one year, where they teach different kinds of student groups each year.

It needs to be understood how differences and similarities among employees of a particular occupation form or decompose the notion of class structure and formations.

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#### 4. Joe Ferrare

If an empirical analysis reaches the point at which validity and reliability have been achieved, one must question the theoretical foundations upon which the analysis is based. Statistics are agnostic to the coherence of the theories they examine, part of why it is so easy to misinterpret them. So when Goldthorpe demonstrates that his class schema passes empirical muster, it only follows that class analysts will look to his theoretical foundations to assess exactly what explanatory power his schema possesses. Since Goldthorpe spends relatively little time laying out his theoretical conception of his class schema, instead spending more time detailing its operationalization, this critique is generally aimed at raising theoretical questions.

Whether or not we should ascribe Goldthorpe with the label of “Weberian” seems of little consequence. This helps only to the extent that it gives the reader a sense of the origin of his theoretical underpinnings, but it does not take long to derive this from his writings. In this sense, he clearly draws heavily on Weber, but there is a hint of Marx's ideas as well (although he clearly rejects the notion that workers will become increasingly proletarianized leading to revolt against capital's structure). The hint of Marxism comes from the fact that Goldthorpe initially distinguishes classes by those who own the means of production and those who do not (Breen, 2005). **[Weber, of course, does this as well. The property-dimension is central to Weber's notion of**

**market-based life chances.]** However, beyond this initial distinction the concept of **production relations** seems to fall silent, and Goldthorpe's Weberian influences come to the fore. **[Why isn't G's notion of "employment relations" a kind of analysis of production relations. These are relations formed within work and they are closely connected to specific aspects of the labor process, technology, etc. These might be relations in production rather than relations of production, but they are certainly – I think—an aspect of "production relations."]** It is at this point where his class schema focuses "on the market as the source of inequalities in life chances," (Breen, 2005:33). As noted by Breen (2005), there is no assumption that the success of one class comes at the expense of another, which tells the reader that exploitation does not play a role in his class schema. Instead, his schema focuses on the relationship between authority (difficulty in monitoring) and skills (specificity of human assets) and how this relationship results in either labor contracts or service relationships (or a mixture of the two).

For Goldthorpe, then, the class situation is primarily a market situation. **[G makes a point of talking about market situation & work situation. Here you seem to be folding the latter into the former.]** Like Ahrne, however, I must ask, "What are the essences of a market situation?" What specific social relations result in the "inequality of life chances?" Nowhere in Goldthorpe's class schema does he give attention to the source of these inequalities, particularly how these inequalities are **rooted in class relations.** **[G certainly thinks this is just what he is doing: showing how inequalities in life chances are rooted in the way people are located within work situations and market situations. These are "specific social relations" that result in "inequality in life chances." I am not sure why you think he doesn't do this. Of course you might have criticisms of the specific mechanisms he sees as generating these effects, but you are making a stronger claim: that he does not even have an argument about the ways in which market & work situations generate inequalities. Or, perhaps I am misunderstanding your point here: are you mainly pointing to the fact that G does not see inequality in life chances as linked to relations of exploitation? ]** While I reject the notion that the success of one class always comes at the direct expense of another, it is the case that such a notion holds true in certain class relations, and all Weberian conceptions of class relations seem to diminish this importance. When confronted with the question of the source of these inequalities, how have Weberian-influenced class analysts responded? **[They respond by saying that inequalities in life chances are generated by market power/capacity and by the difficulty in inducing people to work effectively [because of monitoring problems] and thus the need to use prospective rewards within work. Why isn't this an answer to the question you pose?]** Even if Goldthorpe believes there is a valid reason for excluding exploitation from his class schema, he fails to give a theoretical reason for doing so. I am willing to consider why it might be the case that exploitation should be excluded from class analysis, but without a concise theoretical proposition to consider I am only left guessing. **[Basically he feels that the idea of "exploitation" adds no content to the analysis, only moral judgment. He does not deny that there are sometimes zero-sum conflicts – one classes gains are at the expense of another – but he prefers to talk about these as zero-sum conflicts, not "exploitation."]**

Another important critique of Goldthorpe's work is one brought up by Marshall (1989?). Marshall takes issue with Goldthorpe's male-based class schema. Goldthorpe argues that the unit of analysis in class analysis should be the family, and that since men empirically tend to have a more continuous engagement with the market they should be the source of a family's class location. Marshall introduces data that shows how the

distribution of class positions in the Goldthorpe schema significantly changes when the individual becomes the unit of analysis (which includes women). I am more sympathetic to this approach, but it also has difficulties. If Goldthorpe is correct that men display empirically greater continuity in the market, then using the individual as the unit of analysis will result in greater variability in the class structure across time. Studies of class would be more of a “snapshot” of one particular point in time. However, I would rather have a snapshot of a variable class structure than a schema that systematically excludes half of the population (of whom a significant amount works for a living). **[He does not exclude married women; he merely argues that their class position is defined by the class location of the family, not their own jobs. This includes them in the analysis, but makes an argument about how their class-generated life chances are in fact determined – namely by their husband’s class via the family.]**

My stance here should not be mistaken for arguing that the notion of class should be extended to include dimensions of gender. To the contrary, I think of gender as a non-class issue (albeit a crucial one), and the task at hand is to examine how gender (and race) and class intersect with one another in different fields of power. I am not arguing that gender or race do not have an impact on class relations. Indeed, an analysis of class that does not consider variations across different status groups would be weakened. My argument is that Goldthorpe’s schema is weakened in its exclusion of women, but that gender itself is a non-class phenomenon that, along with race, should be analyzed from the perspective of how they intersect with one another and complexify class relations.

If Goldthorpe changed his unit of analysis to include individuals rather than the family (using men as the determinant of class location), and at least addressed the issue of exploitation and the source of market inequalities, I think his analysis would be greatly strengthened. Of course, it is possible that these introductions into his schema could result in the whole thing collapsing, but I’m not convinced this would be the case.

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## 5. Adrienne Pagac

It seems to me that Goldthorpe’s class schema and research should be commended because it successfully couples theory with empirical research (and this fact is duly noted in his articles). However, I do not know whether I am overwhelmed by his claim that his approach to class analysis explains/illustrates class mobility. It is my understanding that Goldthorpe posits that an individual’s life chances are influenced by one’s class position (classic Weber it seems, though Goldthorpe denies it). For Goldthorpe, class position can be defined in terms of an individual’s employment relations (one’s occupation) that in turn (initially) could be distinguished by a market situation and a work situation. Goldthorpe’s later schema chose to conceptualize class position in relation to employment/occupation (again), but to operationalize it by distinctions between a) those who do and do not own the means of production and b) of those who do not own them, what kind of relationship exists between the employer and employee, i.e., whether the relation is governed by a labor contract or a service relationship (the nature of the contract addressing the asset specificity and monitoring problems).

While I think the construction of the schema impressive given the support it receives from the empirical data, that it ‘shows’ that individuals in the same class might

have the same opinions about voting and health care, does it really show *mobility* or the *likelihood of mobility*? To me, Goldthorpe's model is able to study the status quo (as conditions are at present)—it did not show/prove that if one is in a particular class position, governed by a service relationship, one will move up (or does move up); of course, the possibility exists, as the jobs with service relationships often involve career ladders, pay incentives, etc. **[G is not making the claim that his categories “show” mobility. What he is saying is that these are the appropriate categories in terms of which one should evaluate the degree of mobility and immobility in a society. Any approach to mobility must first define the locations or statuses among which people can potentially move. These could be anything: occupation-types, educational-levels, wealth categories, whatever. Defining the categories is the starting point. What G then does is study the extent to which people move among these locations, both intra- and inter-generationally.]** Moreover, if we approach his theory/schema as neo-Weberian (though he does not believe it so), would not participation in status groups and parties also influence life-chances? Perhaps Goldthorpe addresses these elsewhere—at least I would hope so, as I do not understand where/what he locates as the source(s) for an individual's skills which are then ‘sold’ in the market. **[G argues that there is a significant intergenerational transmission of the assets – especially education these days – that influence where in the class structure a person ends up. He would certainly agree that other things affect how people acquire these assets – like status divisions or school quality or political power.]**

Even more problematic/confusing is the failure to account for those either not fully employed by the labor market or not present in the labor market at all. Granted, Goldthorpe claims to account for the latter category by suggesting that they (spouses who do not work or children for example) are incorporated into the class position held by an individual associated with them who is currently in the labor market. In so doing though, would there not be a substantial difference between an individual who might be classed as II (because of his/her job), but whose prospects for class mobility are retarded because of the additional individuals he/she has to support? I would imagine the class mobility for two individuals in the same class with and without dependents would be different. If that is so, how would Goldthorpe's model of mobility tease that out? **[This is an interesting research question: to what extent are mobility chances affected by family size – either for the children or for the adults. In the case of adults this would be a question about intra-generational mobility. But I don't see how this in any way would fundamentally alter the logic of the analysis. You are proposing that family situation be added to the work situation and market situation analysis. But are you proposing that family-situation be treated as another dimension of class as such, or that it simply be another of the many factors which might empirically affect life chances for people within a given class? If it is the latter suggestion, then it is consistent with G's framework and doesn't imply any real changes. If you are saying the former – that family situation should be incorporated directly into the class scheme itself – then this would be a criticism, but I am not sure what would be gained by doing so.]**

And, if Goldthorpe himself admits in “Social Class and the Differentiation of Employment Contracts” that “the analysis carries no particular implications for the actual *degree* of inequality in rewards from work...that will be found among the members of members of different classes” (228-9), then how can his analysis really explain anything? One could say inequality exists, but if you cannot determine the degree/magnitude of the difference, then could you not ascribe the difference to another

causal factor entirely? **[G is not saying that the degree of inequality is unexplainable, but just that it cannot be determined just by the class structure. This seems a reasonable claim – after all, even Marxists don't argue that the degree of inequality between workers and capitalists is simply given by the class relations – state policy and unionization, for example, can affect that quite significantly.]**

Can you please provide the definition of what Goldthorpe means by geography of social structure? **[Off hand I am not sure what specifically he is trying to convey by the metaphor. You'd have to show me the context.]**

## 6. Jorge Sola

I find the Goldthorpe works interesting, especially insofar as he pays a great deal of attention to the employer's problems in ensuring that employees are going to act in the interests of the firm. In this regard, his work offers an interesting link between workplace and labor market relationships –which apparently contradicts the well-known idea of that Weberian approaches are interested only in market relations: of course Goldthorpe is most interested in employment relations, but insofar as they may produce solutions to problems concerning workplace relations. At first sight, however, Goldthorpe's theory (or the theoretical ideas which shape his empirical research) has a lot of problems. Since most of them have been pointed out by both his devotees (Breen and Marshall) and his critics (Ahrne), it doesn't make sense repeat them here. Nevertheless, my two interrogations are related to some of these criticisms.

1. The problems of agency which employment relationship resolve, or at least try to resolve, seem a particular case of what Bowles and Gintis call "contested exchange" between bosses and workers. Even although the worker's tasks are manual and easily controllable, such exchanges will be contested to the extent to which these sorts of contracts are regulated by "endogenous claim enforcement". The capitalists have to deploy different incentives (a safer employment, a professional career, etc.) and threats (basically, firing) to get the maximum labor effort from workers. **[Bowles and Gintis see these mechanisms as only generating an "efficiency wage" – or what they call an employment rent—not the full array of institutional devices like career ladders and prospective rewards that Goldthorpe discusses. I think they are indeed talking about related problems, but but G's focus is not just on the costs of monitoring, which is what Bowles and Gintis focus on, but on the possibility of monitoring for these especially complex work demands.]** I agree that this problem might be more important with regard to the jobs Goldthorpe includes in the class service, but the line which excludes other jobs is very fine. Of course, any theoretical framework may and has to make distinctions which are not so clear in reality, but in Goldthorpe's case that circumstance is made worse for two reasons: 1) service relationships and labor contracts are shaped not just by the nature of tasks in the workplace (and their features in terms of human assets and monitoring), but also by the way in which the State regulates industrial relations (in this case, especially, the kind of employment norm prevalent) as well as the strength of different social actors; and 2) these circumstances vary historically and geographically as a consequences of these exogenous factors. **[Your point about the political and cultural conditions that shape employment relations is interesting, and I am not sure how G would respond. Would he say that in Japan in the era of lifetime contracts, all industrial manual workers were in the service class?]** In sum, despite Goldthorpe's recognition of some of these criticisms by



claiming that they don't invalidate the core of his theory, I believe such problems make it weaker.

2. Although I am using the word "theory", I have some doubts about whether or not Goldthorpe produces a theory as such. Actually, in principle the absence of a theory of class does not have to be a problem, if the researchers goals don't require such a theory. This could be the case for some of the studies of social mobility: surely the results will be poorer and less interesting, but the absence of a general theory won't invalidate that. The problem is that, after reading these texts, I am not sure about the intellectual ambitions of Goldthorpe's project. For instance, in his chapter he tries to explain "the association between different occupational groupings of employees and the form of regulation of their employment that can be empirically demonstrated" (p. 213), but he says nothing about the consequences of different types of regulation of employment in the interests and collective action of different workers, a topic which, however, he faced in previous papers (like "On the service class: its formation and future", 1982). To the degree that his intellectual goals are bigger, the absence of a clear and solvent theoretical framework will be crucial. **[His theoretical framework comes close to a kind of modified rational choice framework, I think: this is what generates the strategies which result in particular institutional arrangements. But he does not deploy this to produce general predictions as in game theory or the like. In this regard, however, I think he is very much like most sociologists: you have a set of concepts linked to claims about mechanisms, and your explanations of specific cases are generated through an empirical investigation how how these mechanisms come together in particular contexts.]**

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## 7. You-Geon Lee

Goldthorpe insists that "class positions can be understood...as positions defined by employment relations (Goldthorpe, 2000: 206)." In distinguishing class positions, Goldthorpe notes, "occupation can ... for the most part serve as an adequate proxy for those features of their employment relations... (Goldthorpe, 2002: 207)." This class schema as distinguishing occupations is based on 'market situations' as 'conditions of employment' and 'work situations' as 'authority and control in the production process.' Within these employment relations, he makes an important dichotomy between "positions that are regulated under a labor contract, and those that are regulated by a 'service relationship with the employer (Breen, 2005: 37)." This distinction between 'labor contract' versus 'service relationship' seems to be one of the most important features in his class schema. Even though he makes distinctions among 'labor contract', 'service relationship', and 'mixed forms' with types of work which are 'specificity of human assets' and 'difficulty of monitoring', it seems to me that these dimensions can be reduced to the relations of authority and control in the employment relations between employers and employees. For example, why did Goldthorpe merge class IIIa (routine nonmanual employees: higher grade) and V (lower-grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers) - which have opposite positions in his class schema in terms of specificity of human assets and difficulty of monitoring - into the same intermediate class in his four-class version? **[These two categories are both "mixed" combinations of degree of specificity and difficulty of monitoring: Class V is High+Low and class IIIa is Low + high, so I don't think a single criterion about authority would capture them. Look at Figure 10.2. They are both, in my terms,**

**contradictory locations.]** This seems to be because both are in similar positions in terms of the relations of authority and control in their market and work situations. Then, what is an advantage of distinguishing them in terms of specificity of human assets and difficulty of monitoring? What can the concept (or categorization) of ‘service relationship’ (or this dichotomy between ‘labor contract’ and ‘service relationship’) explain beyond the relations of authority and control in their employment relationship? Furthermore, what can Goldthorpe explain more about class relations than Wright does?

## 8. Charity Schmidt

\*\*\*The important dichotomy set up in Goldthorpe's theory of a class schema is the positions of labor contract, in which workers are paid for a discrete amount of work, and service relationship, characterized by efforts to secure a long-term labor relationship (Breen p. 37-38). Where in this schema do members of labor unions belong, since they may be paid for discrete work, yet gain concessions to establish and secure long-term incentives? There is almost no discussion of labor unions within this week's readings, with the exception of Breen's mention of Goldthorpe's omission of issues of power between employers and employees (and a brief mention by Goldthorpe on the last page of his piece that cases, such as Sweden, would be advanced by the consideration of nation-specific features, one of which is trade unionism (p. 229). Breen suggests that this omission doesn't recognize workers who may have bargaining power to earn efficiency benefits (in the form of a rent)(p. 39). How then would Goldthorpe account for the intermediary role of labor unions? **[I suppose there are two solutions here: one is that the collective power of unions actually transforms the class structure – making manual laborers a distinctive element of the service class since unionized workers have job security and prospective rewards. Another solution is to see the class relations as basically the same, but that Unions are an exogenous mechanism which forces employers to treat manual workers more like service class employees.]**

\*\*\*Since Goldthorpe avoids issues of power and exploitation among employees and employers and amongst workers themselves, this reinforces his omission of women within his class schema, focusing only on males in the labor market. It is overly simplistic to treat the household as the unit of class analysis. Not only does this characterize women as non-agents in labor, political and social analysis, it follows his theoretical course **by ignoring issues of power and politics within the household itself**, the dynamic of which is important in ‘placing’ individuals in a class position. **[This is not quite correct: It is precisely because of male dominance in the home that the careers of married women are generally subordinated to those of their husbands. G's view of the family is not that it is an arena within which power is absent, but that patriarchy means that the class fate of the family is overwhelming determined by the husband's class, not the wife's. But this reflects power, rather than the absence of power.]** What is the value of a class schema that leaves out not only power relations, but half of the potential workforce (a question addressed by Marshall)?

This leads me to ask, what are some of the contemporary theories that set out to represent the workforce as a whole and how would those constructions fit or contradict Goldthorpe's class structure? Furthermore, what are some of the contemporary theories that analyze class according to points of entry other than position in the labor market? How can we account for individuals who do not fit into the schema based on

employment per se (I am thinking, for example, the inclusion of prisoners and perhaps even military forces)? **[I review this literature in a chapter in Class Counts on class within families. You might find that useful.]**

\*\*\*Since Goldthorpe's neo-Weberian approach does not allow for class as a basis of collective identity (Breen, p. 50), there is no space for social organization based on collective interests. **[This is a bit too strong, I think. Class is not a necessary basis for solidarity and identity, but it is a potential basis for this, and for solidarity].** Does this mean that Goldthorpe doesn't see class solidarity as a potential force for reforming/transforming the class structure? Would he say that class solidarity based on positions of labor contract or service relationships is impossible or improbable? **[I think he would see solidarity across the service/labor divide as unstable and improbable, but not solidarities within these categories.]**

\*\*\*A clarification question: Goldthorpe describes the Rational Action Theory, which advances classical sociological theories by including social constraints on information and knowledge beyond the tradition psychological and cognitive constraints. Does this inherently include the material and economic constraints on individuals and families? **[RAT always includes some account of the resources actors have – their capacities to act – which would constitute a way of talking about economic and material constraints.]** I would assume it does, since the theory itself is based on economic position, however, this description makes it seem as though RAT is based upon one's subjective reality more so than their objective constraints.

\*\*\*Ahrne's piece is a valuable critique of Goldthorpe's work, yet isn't the use of Sweden as a comparative example problematic, since it is probably not explanatory of most industrialized societies? **[But Sweden is good as a comparative foil precisely because it's differences help reveal the way other countries work. I have often done US/Sweden comparisons for this purpose.]**

\*\*\*Are we witnessing a decline of the service relationship in the U.S. (thinking of examples of corporate down sizing and declines in labor union activity)? **[There is certainly a metamorphosis of the service relationship, especially in high tech firms where hotshot employees move around a lot and function more like job-entrepreneurs than loyal company employees.]**

## 9. Adam Slez

Gordon Marshall's (1990) brief intellectual biography of John Goldthorpe depicts an intellectual whose motivation is thoroughly empirical. Tellingly, unlike many of his colleagues who turned to Marxian class analysis as an alternative to the 'logic of industrialism' model of socioeconomic development, Goldthorpe rejected both models on the grounds that neither set of theories could adequately explain the observable complexities resulting from changes in the contemporary class structure. It would clearly be wrong to say that Goldthorpe's approach is entirely atheoretical (see Goldthorpe 2003; Breen 2005); that being said, it is worth asking whether Goldthorpe actually develops a class-based model.

In discussing his approach to class analysis, Goldthorpe contends that "class positions can be understood...as positions defined by *employment relations*"

(Goldthorpe 2003: 206). Defining class in terms of employment relations provides a modicum of conceptual narrowing at best. **[But note: this is the definition of class relations among the broad category of “employees”. G recognizes the owner/employee divide as a distinct class division even if he focuses on class divisions among nonowners.]** Consequently, Goldthorpe (2003) is still forced to spend a significant amount of energy theoretically justifying his decision to operationalize employment relations in terms of occupational classifications. Goldthorpe explicitly notes that his 2003 essay is “directed to the question of just why it should be that different occupations do tend to be associated with differences in the employment relations of those engaged in them—of the kind that I would turn to see as implying different class positions” (Goldthorpe 2003: 207). In other words, Goldthorpe’s empirical focus on questions of occupational mobility is, in a sense, two degrees removed from the problem of class. **[Isn’t this really just “one degree” removed from class. That is, the class/employment relations is one of identity: employment relations are not one degree removed from class; they are class. So occupational classifications are just one step beyond this.]** If we think about the structure of Goldthorpe’s argument (see Figure 1), the implications of his empirical findings for theories of class depend on the assumption that class can actually be defined in terms of employment relations. As Goldthorpe notes, there is a relationship between occupational classification and the terms of the employment contract, but I think that it is problematic to assume that variation in employment contracts can necessarily be equated with class position.



D = defined in terms of...; O = operationalized in terms of...

**Figure 1**

In his discussion of changes in Goldthorpe’s class schema, Breen notes that Goldthorpe moved away from his initial focus on both market and work situations as determinants of class position. It would seem that Goldthorpe’s new model of class focuses solely on work situations, insofar as class positions are derived from variations in the nature of employment contracts. Arguably, insofar as they are influenced by the asset specificity of labor, employment contracts inevitably capture some of the influence of market situations. **[I think this is correct since the asset specificity problem is so closely tied to skills.]** Do work situations actually collapse into market situations in the manner potentially implied by Goldthorpe? **[What do you mean by “collapse into”? A market situation helps explain how people end up in different kinds of work situations, but this doesn’t mean that the two are fused into a single concept.]** Also, is it legitimate to define class positions in terms of employment relations? **[It is certainly “legitimate” in the sense of coherent or justified within a given theoretical framework. What do you mean by “legitimate.” What makes a concept “illegitimate”?]** Finally, given Goldthorpe’s empirical focus, is it necessary to make an argument about class? Why not limit the argument solely to a discussion about the relationship between employment contracts and occupational classification? What does a discussion of class add to Goldthorpe’s analysis? **[Occupations as you point out give**

**the operational access to data, but the conceptual foundation for the argument is employment relations. What class adds is the conceptual categories of the employment relations. One could have just called them “employment relations”, but since these categories are so closely linked to the categories generally treated as class categories in sociology, I think he was justified in using this as the term for the classification scheme.]**

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## 10. Fabian Pfeffer

In his revised formulation of class locations as being defined by types of employment relationships, Goldthorpe claims to take the golden middle way between efficiency arguments as found in (neo)-classical economics and considerations of power as in Marxist theory (2000: 210). My argument in this week’s interrogation rejects this claim and instead tries to show that Goldthorpe ended up far more on the efficiency side than a sensible sociological treatment of class would allow (Breen 2005: 39 also shortly alludes to this possible line of critique). Let me summarize and reformulate the core of his arguments to make my judgment evident.

According to Goldthorpe, employment contracts are tailored to solve problems posed by skill-specificity and monitoring difficulties. Persuasion of employees to invest in specific skills is accomplished by long-term contracts. The principal-agent problematic is resolved by - and this is the central point of my critique - purely monetary means, i.e. income benefits. **[There is a little bit more than this, since career ladders of responsibility, status and hierarchy are also included as part of the service relation.]** Efficiency wages (Akerlof) are one part of this; deferred payments in form of steadily rising pay (especially in the frame of promotions) and pension benefits are the other. Goldthorpe does not mention other forms of possible inducements that employers might apply and therefore ends up in the pitfall of the p/a rhetoric which famously neglects (or even reverses) power relations. This is not necessarily a Marxist critique (which Goldthorpe wouldn’t let count as a matter of principle). The *empirical reality of authority redistribution* as a means of employee control is not even mentioned in his new framework of understanding class locations. **[You are right that in G’s exposition managers get lumped together with professionals and the monitoring problem is treated as more or less the same across these kinds of occupations. Still, I think the issue of power is included in his “difficulty of monitoring” problem, since this is not just because of skill complexity but also because of the problem of monitoring the decisionmaking activity of power-holders in systems of authority.]** Where did the “work situation” that formed part of his prior work and that is described as an “occupation’s location within systems of *authority* and control” go? Or was ‘work situation’ always only meant to distinguish between employers, self-employed, and employees (as described in Marshall: 55)? Goldthorpe’s neglect of power is of course also reflected in his decision - however pragmatic it may be - to merge proper capitalists with service class employees in his class scheme (cf. Ahrne: 69).

Breen notes that “the absence of any precise explanation of what mechanisms link the type of employment relationship to variations in life chances is a notable weakness of the schema” (Breen: 47). Based on my elaborations above, one would need to conclude that income or life-time income is the primary if not only resource that establishes a certain degree of life-chances. That surely does not square well with Goldthorpe’s emphasis on the multidimensionality and complexity of class structure.

Why, then, the neglect of power structures? Is Goldthorpe afraid that incorporating authority into his framework would increase the commonality of his class scheme with that of a Neo-Marxian provenience. Is he just struggling very hard for the Marxist to stay hidden?

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## 11. Hsing-Mei Pan

John Goldthorpe focuses on “employment relationship (employment contract)” to present his notion of class. According to difficulty of monitoring and specificity of human assets, he divides occupations in modern society into different categories, which constitutes his class schema. If the concept of class should be established based on exploring the production activities of human beings, It seems that John Goldthorpe’s social class schema appears **somewhat limited** since he mainly focuses on employment relationship and ignores other elements involved in production activities and some preconditions that make the production activities possible. **[It could be an advantage not a weakness, to give the concept of class the kind of focus G does. In order to defend the claim that he loses something by not including other aspects of production activities in his class concept you would need to show that his analyses would be made more powerful by including some other dimension within the concept of class itself, not simply within the empirical analysis of particular problems.]** In fact, after looking at John Goldthorpe social class schema, one question coming into my mind was that how the employment relationship described by him can represents a social class picture. In fact, his class schema does not present the aspects of **social interaction among different employees in a production unit** or among different class categories. **[What exactly would it mean to include this in the definition of class itself? As we will see this is sort of what David Grusky proposes – that easy and frequent interaction be itself part of the definition of a “class” category.]** So it seems that his class schema looks like a typology.

On the other hand, I think it is necessary to define “difficulty of monitoring” and “specificity of human asset” in a more detailed way before using the two dimensions to categorize existing occupations.

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## 12. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field

I think my main disagreement with Goldthorpe’s theory stems from the question he’s asking, rather than the answer he gives to it. This became clearest to me when considering Goldthorpe’s statement of the two dimensions of “contractual hazard” employers set up employment relations to circumvent: difficulty in monitoring output, and the risk of losing the value of specific assets that employees possess through their leaving work.

It seems to me that the second of these is really just one type of a more general issue: the difficulty of worker replacement. **[But it is a special type of this general problem since it has to do with the extent to which the employee has come to embody a specific kind of skill-asset that is especially valuable to an employer – all of the knowledge and know-how that is specific to the particular workplace, technologies, routines, problems, etc. of that specific firm and work setting. The fact that it takes time for employees to develop such knowledge/skill means that the employers own means of production lose value when such employees leave – i.e.**

**they will not be able to be used as productively by a replacement. This is not true for all employees, just those in jobs in which organization-specific learning is important for productivity. So this is not just generic “human capital”.]** The human capital of the individual worker is only one component of this; others include the level of unemployment in the society, and the question of what workers are willing to work for – which, in turn, is affected by the level of welfare provisions in the society and the level of worker organization/struggle to obtain better conditions.

However, there is an important difference between human capital and these other factors, which is the type of constraint they put on the employer. In the case of human capital that is unusually difficult or expensive to replace, the employer’s goal is to retain that specific worker; therefore, they may be given employment incentives. But in the case of the other factors affecting difficulty/ease of worker replacement, the solution for the employer is not to provide incentives to individual highly skilled workers to stay (reducing their need to replace such workers), but to make it easier for insufficiently productive workers to be replaced (reducing their costs of replacing workers). **[Very nice formulation].** This suggests a view more like the one Goldthorpe criticizes, in which a minority of employees with unusual skills are ‘bought off’ through incentives but the majority have genuinely antagonistic interests to their employers. **[Of course, even for these workers the other issue – ease and costs of monitoring of labor effort – can play an important role, leading to efficiency wages, employment rents, etc.]**

I think, though, that factors like the level of unionization or the level of social welfare benefits (allowing workers to refuse work more easily, thus making them more expensive to replace/retain) **needn’t affect** the type of labor contract. **[But it could, right? Unionization can impose constraints on firing for example, and create job ladders.]** Thus, Goldthorpe’s schema might be a perfectly adequate answer to his question of why there is this association he observes between occupations and employment regulation types. But that suggests that this narrower question may be divorced from his broader goal of understanding the relationship between what happens in production and what life chances people end up with. **[But isn’t it true for all concepts of class that the factors you site – unionization of level of social welfare benefits – can significantly affect life chances? So long as these sorts of factors have their effects via their interaction with the employment relations processes, then I don’t think this undermines their claim to be a “class” concept.]** Even on a broadly Weberian construal of class, then, I’m not convinced that the employment regulation variations that Goldthorpe is looking at can answer sufficiently interesting questions to be something we’d want to call “class.”

### 13. Assaf Meshulam

Wright’s “three models of class analysis” (Wright 2005:26) shows the contrast between the Marxist and Weberian frameworks of class analysis as lying in the “theoretical elaboration and specification of the implications” of the same basic operational criteria. While the Marxist model traces two causal paths—market exchanges and the process of production itself—the Weberian model goes along only the one trajectory—the market. Goldthorpe’s “class schema” seems to follow Marx’s two causal paths, in structuring his analysis around two dimensions that can be paralleled to Marx’s: “specificity of human assets,” analogous to market exchanges, and “difficulty of monitoring,” analogous to the process of production. While Goldthorpe

claims that he is neither Weberian nor Marxist, in fact each of his dimensions can be linked to the two different traditions, with certain modification: human assets as an adaptation of Weber's notion of life chances and monitoring as an adaptation of Marx's notion of exploitation. The question is how considerable the mutations of the original concepts are and whether they are too distanced from the original traditions. **[Nice formulation here -- I think you are probably right on this: the monitoring problem as a class problem really is very close to the labor effort extraction problem regardless of how Goldthorpe likes to see this as having nothing to do with exploitation.]**

Goldthorpe's scheme applies "specifically to the employment relation of *employees*" (208), that is, he is concerned only with those who do not own means of production. (One question that can be raised with regard to the other category, those who do own the means of production, is where the self-employed and small proprietors and employers (whom Goldthorpe acknowledges in his class table) fit in his two-dimensional scheme). Goldthorpe conceives the relationship between employers and employees as conflictual or "contested" relations, and since employees "will always have some non-negligible amount of discretion" (Goldthorpe 212), they should be monitored. However, Goldthorpe intentionally refrains from using the term exploitation given his assumption that there is a "central tendency" for employers to act "as rationally as they are able towards the goal of maintaining the viability and success of their organization," and therefore he sees "no reason to treat the interest of employers and employees as being 'fundamentally' either in harmony or in conflict" (211). But cannot the employment relationship between employers and employees be seen as a modification of exploitation?

To measure human assets, Goldthorpe uses a distinction between two types of contracts, the labor contract and the service relationship. **[This is not quite the right way to put this, I think. These labor contracts are not just the result of variations in human assets; they are also a function of the specific technical conditions of the labor process which may make monitoring difficult. It is the intersection of human assets and work conditions within employment that generate the dilemmas that have to be solved with a service contract].** Each of these employment contracts is composed of a diversity of components (salary increments, assurance of security, career opportunity) that are linked to human assets. The question here is whether Goldthorpe's human assets and Weber's definition of life chances do not overlap. Although Goldthorpe doesn't see himself as a Weberian nor as a Marxist, it seems that he is in fact a mixture of the two of them.

#### 14. Johannes Glaeser

In the texts Goldthorpe's approach was criticised for giving too much weight on efficiency arguments, while the balance of power between employer and employees does not get enough consideration. It is true that Goldthorpe does not talk about power. But I think power can easily be connected to his approach.

According to Goldthorpe the service relationship (contract) helps to maximise efficiency for a company, when monitoring is difficult and when a job requires high skills.

In Frankfurt I was working as a petrol pump attendant for airplanes at the Airport and joined the corresponding work life. The employees of the jet-service-company have a job position, in which they are highly monitored for every work-step they are doing and



no special skills are required for the job. According to Goldthorpe's schema I would allocate them to class position VII with a labour contract.

But on the other hand they enjoyed comparatively high wages and secure jobs. The high wages were possible because of the risk of strikes, which might block the business of the whole airport. Therefore the employees enjoyed a high bargaining strength and therefore power (As far as I now they never made use of this power). **[How do you think this bargaining power through disruptive impact of strikes affects their class position? Would these workers still be in class VII, or does this kind of power affect the actual character of the class position? Is the concept of "employment relations" about the secure job contract, or about the underlying mechanisms that generate such contracts? (i.e. If they have secure jobs for reasons other than asset specificity and monitoring problems, does this count as a basis for being in a service relation?)]**

I think one can argue that the power and efficiency arguments are connected in this case. For the employer it is efficient to pay the employees so that they do not make use of their power and act in the employers interest. Power is not necessary excluded from the efficiency argument.

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## 15. Rahul Mahajan

I like Goldthorpe's basic framework for looking at class in terms of the kind of employment contract you have, based on his two criteria of ease of monitoring work/production and the degree of "specificity" of skills and expertise. Although it has its origins firmly in the "labor market" approach to class (thus Weberian in the Wrightian typology), it seems to show that perhaps a "labor market" and a "conditions of production" approach lead to pretty much the same result. Although he talks about employment contracts, he bases the type of employment contract very firmly on the anticipated conditions of production and the considerations they necessitate.

In the end, his typology doesn't look so different from Wright's (modulo Goldthorpe's difficulty with classifying capitalists, which I think is minor and easily correctible). It's hard to think of anything in particular to say or ask. The key, I suppose, is to look at the actual data and analysis of the data to see if they differ in any meaningful way, but there wasn't much in the reading.

One thing I'd like to understand better is to understand either Wright's or Goldthorpe's approach to class under the lens of Przeworski's analysis of the voter base and political strategies of European social-democratic parties. Without much benefit of W or G, I think, Przeworski reached the conclusion that European SD parties had the basic problem that the "working class" never reached a majority of the population (and, related to that, that the parties then adopted strategies which meant they couldn't even count on all of the working class supporting them). It wasn't quite clear to me how Przeworski was defining working class, but Wright, Goldthorpe, and Przeworski all end up with the same basically important point that the working class is a large chunk of the population, but not quite a majority (or if a majority in some First World countries, only by a slight amount). This is, of course, remarkably similar to what an economic stratification-based gradational rather than relational approach would conclude as well. They all seem, however, to clash strongly with a sort of vernacular Marxist/leftist

approach to class. I think they are right and the latter approach wrong; that overarching result seems a lot more important than specific differences in how exactly class is looked at or defined.

I guess the question is, politically or in terms of political choices, what is the upshot of the fact that the working class is 40% of the population rather than 80? **[In Przeworski's analysis the issue is the extent to which parties had to pursue a class alliance/coalition strategy to win elections, and to do this they had to moderate their class ideologies. The issue here does not actually hinge so much on precisely how one defines "the working class". If socialist parties had defined "the" working class as all wage earners, for example, the size of the category would have been closer to 80% than 40%, but it would still have been the case that in order to forge a party agenda that would meld the interests of this encompassingly defined working class into a solidaristic unity, those interests would have had to straddle the differences between high and low wage earners, secure and insecure job holders, powerful and vulnerable employees. As you have pointed out a number of times in class discussions, in the end the nominal question isn't so important – is the working class big or small; the *real* question is whether the material interests within capitalism of this party's base is sufficiently homogeneous that they will all have their interests advanced by the same policies. This becomes especially problematic when we are talking about interests *within* capitalism.]**

The other question perhaps is how Goldthorpe can be so deliberately clueless about the class-structuring effects of gender. I do get a strong sense from the Brits we've read on class that Britain is a world apart and that many of their basic methods and insights (also regarding working-class identification, for example) do not transfer well to too many other places. **[On the gender theme Goldthorpe has been very sharply criticized by many British sociologists, so I don't think this is some peculiar British thing. Goldthorpe would not deny, by the way, that gender relations in a society could have a causal impact on the nature of class relations. Indeed, his whole argument about class positions being defined by male breawinners is itself derived from claims about the effects of patriarchy on male priority within family strategies which effectively subordinates any class-specific interests of married women to the family strategy determined by the husband's class. So it is not quite right that he ignores class-structuring effects of gender; he just has a particular way of formulating the problem.]**

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## 16. Michael Callaghan Pisapia

Goldthorpe's class analysis addresses the question of "What determines the life chances of individuals in a market society (as opposed to a status society)?" The question is Weberian rather than Marxist because it focuses primarily on life chances. In addition to being concerned about individual life chances, Marxist class analysts are also concerned with the formal exploitative quality of labor market relations. Furthermore, Goldthorpe's answer to that question, **"Resources that people bring with them to the market,"** is Weberian rather than Marxist (it would be odd for a Marxist to state that capital investment and the provision of jobs are resources that capitalists bring to market, wouldn't it?), in that he is not also concerned, as Marxists are, with explaining how the power relations which lead to the differential in those 'resources' flows directly

from the class structure (defined by the mode of production) in a capitalist society. **[This is not exactly G's answer: he places quite a lot of weight on how people get actually inserted into the organizational processes of work – his employment relations – not just the assets they bring to the market.]** [Breen points out that a Weberian analysis may also try to account for how individuals are differentially situated with respect to what they have to offer the market. But, he argues, this power differential may flow from ideological determinants rather than economic ones, as it does in Weber's argument pushed in the *Protestant Ethic*.]

How does Goldthorpe address this fact about differential resources people have on the market? For Goldthorpe, the position of employers is a given: he does not investigate the set of exploitative relations that lead some individuals to be able to offer jobs while others are forced (in a sense) to take them. What he does focus on is the initiative employers take to design employment contracts that help maximize firm profits and goals. The types of work that employers offer are multiple: different jobs call for workers with different types of skills and the ease with which an employer may monitor or measure how good a job a worker is doing varies. Jobs that require little skill (in the sense that most people with little training can quickly learn to do the job well) and which are easy to monitor for good performance are offered under the terms of a labor contract. Jobs that require "asset-specific" skills, and which are difficult to monitor for good performance (such as teachers) are categorized as service relationships. **[Asset-specificity of skills is not just a matter of how much education a person has, but rather how much the actual ability to use those skills productively on the job depends upon learning within the job – learning how to deploy the skills under the special conditions and routines of a given work place. If this is the case, then the employer cannot easily replace an employee with high asset specificity since it takes considerable time on the job for the skills to be developed. Often this is a characteristic of highly educated work, since the responsibilities of the employee are complex and involve lots of subtle practices that can only be acquired through learning-by-doing. But this can also sometimes be the case for less skilled employees.]** What line of work a person gets into (manual labor versus clerical) leads to different sets of benefits that flow from different types of employment contract. All of this suggests that people's life chances are determined by the kind of education they get and the types of skills they have to offer the job market. **[AND: the leverage they gain by acquiring difficult to replace competences after they have worked at the job for an extended period.]** So, education matters; but, again, what accounts for the fact that some individuals are positioned as employers in the market, and that others are positioned to enter into labor contracts rather than service relationships? Does the focus on demographic circulation (to use Scott's phrase) and social mobility across classes address this question? People have, at least in part, the resources they have because of the family they grew up in; so, perhaps family reveals more about the resources a person has to offer the market (such as having learned the importance of being a 'creative person' rather than a disciplined rule follower) than one's particular position in the class structure (as Marxists define it)? **[You are shifting the problem from the nature of class positions to the mechanisms of transmission of class positions. G would completely agree with you that the family is a pivotal site for such transmission.]**

Finally, I thought it would be good to address Goldthorpe's stated aim of avoiding the "the self-indulgence of Marxists who assume that in some future world the abolition of

capitalist institutions will make possible the production of 'new' men and women with preferences, orientations to work, and so on, such that present-world problems of efficiency will be entirely transcended." (Goldthorpe 211).