

Puzzled Reflections on Huszár's Article¹

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Ákos Huszár's article left me perplexed. It is a strong and successful effort to build up a transparent and logical theoretical construct about social structure. Its end-results – the type of model it describes, the categories it uses – represent a reassuringly realistic variation of the well-known best models. This model is certainly more appropriate for understanding socio-occupational differentiation than (for instance) the model of categorization according to employment status and the main categories of occupation used in the CSO Microcensus 1995² that had no theoretical underpinning and did not explain the principles it followed. In fact, Huszár's paper represents an attempt to work out a transparent theoretical construction that could support a defensible social-occupational system of categories. Since I was several times involved in a similar exercise, I think I can understand the motivation.

I am puzzled, though, because the efforts to build up the theory to support a clear descriptive model seem to ignore the here-and-now reality that the model had to fit in some ways. In fact, the model is built on *normative* criteria. It should therefore be not astonishing if there is a striking distance between the normative model and the facts and trends which exist in the Hungarian (or the global) world. To spell out only one of the major concerns: in Hungary at least 10 per cent of the people who are able and willing to work are continuously moving, passing through the revolving door leading from unemployment to public work and back again. At one moment a person is employed and belongs to the occupational structure, the next s/he is out in the cold. But this ten per cent represent just the tip of an iceberg. The precariat which are emerging all over the globe (Hungary included) complicates the conceptualisation of recent processes of structuration. The precariat means, among other things, that "millions of people across the world are living and working in economic and social insecurity, many in casual or short-term, low-paid jobs, with contracts they worry about. Their incomes fluctuate unpredictably, they lack benefits that most people used to take for granted." (Standing 2012). The clear dividing line between employment statuses has become fluid. Who knows whether there are new

1 The editors asked for papers containing new insight into possible structural models and about structural continuation and change in Hungarian society. Since I have not changed my opinion much since I wrote my book about Social streams and individual actors (Ferge 2011) I preferred to add a note to Ákos Huszár's keynote article.

2 Mikrocensus 1995, volume III., figure 2.1.10.

social norms that consensually support the fatal exclusion of large segments of the population?

The avoidance of mundane concerns may be partly due to a misinterpretation of Parsons' ideas about social norms. Jeffrey C. Alexander, an important re-discoverer of Parsons analysed the impact of Parsons on German sociology. One of his observation concerns the German "penchant for philosophy" that leads "in many cases to an either/or approach to epistemological and ideological dilemmas... Although (Parsons) emphasized the normative aspects of society, he often demonstrated their interpenetration with the material world. What Parsons sought, in fact, was to overcome the either/or choices posed by the German tradition: He tried to transform the polar choices of modernism and romanticism, norms and interests, into interpenetrating positions on a single "continuum". (Alexander 1984: 398).

In what follows I attempt first to draw a rough sketch of the logic of the study as I understand it. Next I spell out in a cursory way my main scruples concerning the theory. At the end I deal in more detail with the author's interpretation of equality-inequality norms.

The logical steps seem to me to be the following:

1. Unlike other theories of occupational class structure, the starting point is that all societies institutionalise certain norms of equality and inequality. Institutionalisation is possible if we assume that all societies – and the functioning of their economies as well – are subject to certain value standards and norms that ensure their normative integration. Or, to put it alternatively, if it is assumed that the functioning of the economy is embedded in society.

2. The capitalist class structure has a horizontal dimension shaped by the categories of different employment statuses. "These categories denote those forms of employment that are created by modern capitalist societies and that are recognised as legitimate ways of acquiring the goods that are indispensable for the satisfaction of basic needs." The main categories are employers, employees, unemployed and pensioners. They have equally legitimate ways to acquire basic goods. "Everyone has an equal right to start an enterprise and to acquire profit. Similarly, every member of society is equally allowed to dispose freely of their workforce and to draw up contracts." Social rights assure legitimate redistributive income for some groups outside the occupational system such as pensioners or unemployed. Since all these statuses are rooted in institutionalised rights "their relationship to each other should be regarded as horizontal." The proposed model covers only the two groups in the occupational system.

3. Traditional versions of class theory describe the structural impact of the economy "according to different conflicts of interests, or according to market chances." Normative functionalism builds however on the embeddedness of the economy.

Therefore it asks which forms of inequality (and how much inequality) is underpinned by institutionalised norms which are then seen as justified and legitimate.

4. The most important reference point for justifying inequalities is the achievement principle. The meaning attached to achievement has historically changed. The principle states only that those who achieve more must occupy higher positions in the inequality system of society. There are also some secondary principles (like, for instance, level of education) that underpin how social inequalities are justified. These norms all contribute to shaping unequal “normative statuses.”

5. The norms thereby “prescribe which place must be occupied by different groups of individuals” in the system of unequal statuses. Classes are formed by those groups of individuals who occupy the same normative status according to the institutionalised norms of equality and inequality.

Two complementary theses refer to the empirical validation of the theoretical model. First, validation is important because the class model built on the institutionalised norms of equality and inequality would like to serve as a yardstick: *a yardstick that helps us to find out whether the inequalities that are produced by the capitalist economy are in accordance with socially accepted norms or the norms that are laid down in the normative documents of modern societies.* Second, “if empirical studies reveal that institutionalised norms and inequalities are in accordance with each other, then it suggests that the integrative function of stratification is not violated. However, if it is found that they contradict each other, then this may be identified as a source of social-political conflict.” The author proposes in the latter case “to elaborate appropriate indicators for investigating this relationship.”

Cursory Comments on the Theses

Ad 1. The norms of equality and inequality play a crucial role in the model. They therefore deserve more than a cursory glance, so I shall return to this issue in the next section. Here I raise some questions only in connection with the embeddedness of the economy. The model assumes that the economy is so strongly embedded into society that it follows (submits itself to) general social norms about legitimate inequalities.

Some norms certainly must be generalised in a society to prevent it from bursting (whatever this means). But norms change over time and it is an open question what generates these changes. Polányi (1944) describes the process of the emergence of capitalism. With capitalist development the various spheres of life acquired a certain relative autonomy. The economy itself which used to be embedded in (or perhaps enmeshed with) social life in general built up an increasingly autonomous, ultimately

self-regulating market with its own institutions, rules and values. This mechanism triggered economic development and simultaneously caused many new social troubles. Yet – and this seems to support Huszár's thesis – members of society (as well as the different spheres of life) slowly complied with the new rules and norms, including those about legitimate (in)equality. Thus – to give only some examples – competition squeezing out all the weaker participants, the “sanctity” of limitless ownership and the exclusion of many from access to basic needs have become self-evident, unquestionable components of social life. This has transformed the original, embedded character of the economy, leading (in the words of Lockwood or Habermas) to the separation of social integration from system-integration, or of the lifeworld from systems of instrumentality. The instrumental systems, particularly the rules of the market, started to dominate the norms and rules of most other spheres. The “excesses” of the self-regulating market, particularly the phenomenon of massive exclusion, conflicted with social values or norms about social justice (that were – at least in Europe – practically ubiquitous). The intervention of the state seemed to be inevitable. For some decades after World War II boundaries imposed by the state were effective at least in most European market economies. However, as shown by the neoliberal turn from the nineteen-eighties onwards, economies successfully rejected many state-enforced limits, thereby strengthening the socially dominant role of market norms. Thus, Polanyi's “great transformation” regained its full force and the embeddedness (not to say the submission) of society into the economy remained a growing feature of present-day global capitalism. As far as I know, the historical analysis of Polanyi does not seem to have been invalidated by competing analyses of other scholars (Parsons, Granovetter or Honneth) who espouse the thesis of the embedded economy. I think that this central building block of Huszár's theory needs more proof to support it.

Ad 2. The second thesis about the horizontal dimension of employment or economic statuses hypostatizes the normative equality of the groups that acquire their life-sustaining resources in different ways. It may not be a vital issue for the model whether this assumption is “right” or whether it is not. Still, there are (in my view at least) some unclear points that deserve perhaps to be elucidated. On the one hand I gladly concede that social rights which give access to resources are legal, are often anchored in the constitution (fundamental law) and their equal legality with other rights should not be questioned. Their legitimacy (i.e. the shared belief that the government's legislative power is used appropriately when creating social rights) seems, however, to be weaker than that of the two other employment statuses. In fact, the waning legitimacy of the welfare state leads in many countries to weakening social rights and the cutting back of many social benefits (the phenomenon is prominent in Hungary). It seems to me that legitimacy cannot be ignored when shared norms are explored. My other doubt concerns the assumption that the

relationship between employers and employees is characterised by normatively-accepted horizontal equality. Long-standing debates exist about this point. Their central question concerns (implicitly or explicitly) the formal and the substantive equality of the rights of contractors. While the legal position of contractors has been recognized by everybody as unquestionably equal, many have diagnosed (Max Weber included) the weaker bargaining power of the employee.

One of the main functions of labour law has been to restore this balance (e.g. by collective bargaining). The question from Huszár's perspective is whether the imbalance may be detected in the legal documents. I think that knowing this is impossible through analysing just a single act. It may become possible, though, by comparing various acts between or within countries. One may compare, for instance, the Hungarian Labour Law of 2012 (Act I) with its predecessors (adopted in 1992, modified in 2005). The new rules explicitly and intentionally serve to increase the flexibility of the labour force. Analysts agree that for this objective it strengthens the positions of employers and weakens the positions of employees. For instance, it declares that only employers should be compensated for their losses during a crisis by assuring them more freedom in defining the terms of contracts; or in order to increase labour flexibility it makes layoffs easier and weakens the role of collective bargaining. It may be assumed that the changes are due to changes in institutionalised norms so that weaker employees' rights have become the norm. This may or may not be the case. But when one studies a system of normatively accepted inequalities, such objective and factual changes should not be left unarticulated.

Ad 3. The third thesis attempts – in the Parsonsian spirit – to deprecate the role of interests and conflicts of interest in class formation. It proposes to discard traditional approaches to social structuring that take into account interests or market chances. “Normative functionalism that builds on the embeddedness of the economy asks *which forms of inequality are underpinned by institutionalised norms* which are then seen as justified and legitimate”. Whether a sociological theory may disregard interests and conflicts that are thoroughly interconnected with the dynamics of society may be a matter of ideological taste (since the issue is continuously an object of passionate debate this is not the place to look for new arguments). I raise here a much more technical problem. According to Huszár, the value standards and norms that form the basis of normative functionalism “appear in the legal documents of society and they are expressed in the attitudes, judgements and acts of individuals as well.” In other words, we are supposed to know what the institutionalised social standards and the shared norms about justified inequalities are. It is on this basis that the criteria of the various normative statuses are defined. This assumption, of crucial importance for the whole normative theory, does not seem to be verified in a satisfactory way. I shall voice my doubts regarding this point in some detail in the next section.

Ad 4. The most important reference point for justifying inequalities is the achievement principle. Huszár points out that there may be some uncertainties about the meaning attached to achievement, but mentions only historical change. He accepts that “the achievement principle claims only that that everyone must be evaluated equally on the grounds of his or her achievements” which implies that those “who achieve more must occupy higher positions in the inequality system of society.” The basis of achievement is different in the two employment categories. For entrepreneurs, achievement is measured by success; that is, by the profit they are able to generate. Hence a higher position is the legitimate due of a successful entrepreneur. Milton Friedman (1962) evaluates much more highly the role of property: “The ethical principle that would directly justify the distribution of income in a free market society is ‘To each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces.’” According to him, distribution according to the achievement or merit or work of the employees also reflects to a large extent “initial differences in endowment, both of human capacities and of property.” While Huszár does not seem to share this view, he is not too far from it. The achievements of employees (merit, work, products) is not defined by intrinsic or substantive characteristics but by the terms of the contract freely signed by both actors. Contractual agreements and remuneration in the first place are usually shaped by factors such as education or managerial position; i.e. mostly “initial differences in endowment.” Thus the two approaches are not too far apart.

I am not sure whether achievement is really synonymous with (monetary) success or with high social positions, or that in reality equal achievements are rewarded equally. The example of the unrewarded accomplishments of – for instance – brilliant poets or painters is well-known. A less demagogic empirical example is the difference in earnings in 2013 in Hungary between two persons doing exactly the same job, employed by the same local authority: one a street cleaner employed as public servant for a net 64000 forints (the minimum wage), the other a street cleaner employed as a public worker for a net 49000 forints, the public work wage. One may argue that their employment status is different. This is true, but the observation puts in doubt the thesis of horizontal employment statuses. Let me suggest another international example about the relationship between achievement and its recognition. MPs of various countries have, by and large, similar functions which are determined, together with their pay, by legislation. Empirical facts show that their earnings vary quite significantly. Only within Europe the pay of an MP fluctuates between £ 112 000 in Italy and £ 27 000 in Spain. It is £ 74 000 both in Germany and Ireland. The figures show that there is no relationship between the pay and the economic situation or the developmental success of the country. The ratio between MP's pay and GDP per capita (an indicator of the country's economic level) reinforces this statement. The ratio is 1.6 in Spain, around 3 in many Central

European countries and reaches a peak of 9.3 in Italy.³ Could these differences be explained by norms which vary by country but are consensual within countries?

Ad 5. Occupational achievement and some secondary (also normatively unequal) factors shape *normative statuses* that are unequal in terms of the institutionalised norms of economic-occupational equality and inequality. According to the model, social classes are formed by those groups of individuals who occupy the same normative status. This hierarchy is ranked on an ordinal scale: we assume we know the position of each group or individual in the social hierarchy. The number of classes we define in this hierarchy is not predetermined. It depends, as Huszár puts it, “on practical and technical factors”. Thus it may vary according to the size of the sample, the objective of the research, and so forth. This indeterminateness of classes regarding their number, their borders, their characteristics and so forth applies both to employers and employees.

In my view this indeterminate and pragmatic approach to defining groups is acceptable for the construction of all socio-economic categorizations of occupational groups, or of models of stratification. I am not sure, however, that “social class” is an appropriate name for these groups. This is not the place to discuss the various concepts of social class or the concept of a “class society”. I have always shied away from employing this concept, except for in my book about structure and action which I wrote in 2010 (Ferge 2011). I had then to reckon with the ongoing debate about whether Hungary approached a traditional class-society model or not, and also with the fact that the notion of social class or its social equivalents cropped up more and more frequently in everyday speech, in public discourses and in the social science literature. References to new and old elites, upper, middle and lower classes, the underclass, *grande bourgeoisie*, *petite bourgeoisie*, *proletariat* and *subproletariat* and a plethora of similar expressions proliferated. My former efforts were aimed at finding the differences in the structuring factors between the previous (“state-socialist”) and the new capitalist structure. I always thought that relationships anchored in the unequal distribution of resources such as property, knowledge and power were knitted together and appeared on the surface as the division of labour of (occupational) groups that acquired the resources for their subsistence in different ways. I saw the main difference between the two structures in the relative importance of the resources (or capitals). In the former system the dominant role of the power relations resulted in a stifled dictatorship which was hardly sustainable in the long run, while in the new system the overwhelming importance of property led to a liberal market-society with unleashed inequalities and increasing exclusion on all markets, first of all on the labour market. In my book I attempted, half ironically, half seriously, to relate the former nominal categories (ultimately socio-economic

3 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2013/jul/11/mps-pay-uk-foreign-comparedi>

groups) to the newly-appeared class concepts, taking into account the historical and symbolic contents of the various class labels and also the importance of the “subjective” self-positioning of people. This attempt was not very successful: the “message” about the complexity of social structure and the intricacies of the concept of class and the ubiquity of change and of conflicts over resources apparently did not come through.

Since the early 2000s there has been a revival of Bourdieu's approach to social classes. Numerous scholars have started to build up a synthesis about social class from the various concepts and insights dispersed in Bourdieu's whole oeuvre, starting from multiple capitals to symbolic violence or habitus. Wacquant (2013) recently published a study about the reframing of Bourdieu's approach to social classes and the social space. He emphasises the many-sided, synthetic character of the thinking of Bourdieu, and the important role he assigned to the symbolic dimension of group formation and to the symbolic power which shapes the ability to draw, enforce or contest social boundaries. I do not know whether this approach has already resulted in the emergence of a clear model. However, an empirical survey has already been carried out based on Bourdieu's multiple capital concept and many other insights – the BBC's 2011 Great British Class Survey. An international group of scholars worked with a huge sample of 161,400 web respondents, as well as a nationally representative sample survey. The questions were unusually detailed in many respects, particularly concerning social, cultural and economic capital. The new classes (obtained by latent class analysis) were defined as being:

- **Elite** - the most privileged group in the UK, distinct from the other six classes through its wealth. This group has the highest level of all three capitals
- **Established middle class** - the second wealthiest, scoring highly on all three capitals. The largest and most gregarious group, scoring second highest for cultural capital
- **Technical middle class** - a small, distinctive new class group which is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital. Distinguished by its social isolation and cultural apathy
- **New affluent workers** - a young class group which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of economic capital
- **Traditional working class** - scores low on all forms of capital, but is not completely deprived. Its members have reasonably high house values, explained by this group having the oldest average age at 66
- **Emergent service workers** - a new, young, urban group which is relatively poor but has high social and cultural capital
- **Precariat, or precarious proletariat** - the poorest, most deprived class, scoring low for social and cultural capital.

The researchers emphasize that the model reveals both social polarization in British society (the huge economic distance between the “elite” and the rest and the new visibility of the precariat) as well as class fragmentation or fuzziness in its middle layers. It is clearly a combination of the usual occupational categories and the traditional class concepts. Let me add that it is the first time I saw the word precariat incorporated into a “scientific” model (see Standing 2011). The BBC classification takes into account many aspects of social life, thus giving new insight into the situations of groups which occupy different social positions.

To sum up this excursus on classes, I think that the concept has to be used with more caution. It seems to me that “occupational class structure” and “social structure” are not necessarily synonyms. In any case, even if the concept of class was used in many models to designate clear-cut occupational groups, this practice must be reconsidered in the light of global trends and new findings.

An Exegesis on the Theme of Equality and Inequality

The first thesis of Huszár specifies that the starting point for the construction of the occupational class structure model is that all societies institutionalise certain norms of equality and inequality. These are assumed to be known. This is why they may define a system of “normative status positions” that serves as a yardstick to measure the distance between the material world and the normative model. While I am very glad that equality and inequality are considered to be of primary structural importance, lots of questions crop up.

I have already voiced my doubts about our knowledge of norms. How do we know what the accepted norm is with various inequalities (wealth, income, education and such like)? Do we really dispose of official documents and regulations that define the acceptable range of inequalities? Contrary to what is assumed in Huszár’s study, we have very few documents about what the shared norms about equality and inequality are. Minimum wages are often legislated, and so are (in a few cases) social minima. But since the decline of the power of trade unions no upper limits on earnings have been defined, and there has never been any attempt in a market society to limit wealth. Progressive taxation and its legitimacy in many countries points to some shared norms about excessive income inequality, but it is hard to measure this limit. With wealth it would seem anathema to try to set up a ceiling. We know even less about the norms which concern other forms of capital. In short, I think that we have no means to measure shared norms, officially defined or not.

There have been many attempts to define norms. For a present-day model it is irrelevant what the position of the Bible or Greek philosophers was about these matters. However, Plato’s insights still make one think: “In a state which is desirous of being saved from the greatest of all plagues ...there should exist among the citizens neither extreme poverty nor, again, excessive wealth, for both are productive of great

evil." Aristotle's theory of distributive justice still appears more or less regularly on the agenda of public issues. The dream of European societies at least had always been the creation of a "just society." Whatever this means, one of its main characteristics is a limit to inequality in the distribution of resources.

The norms of acceptable inequalities have always been contested and have changed. Statistics abound about variations in wealth and income inequalities since at least the early 1800s (some go much farther back). Baten and his colleagues gathered data from, or made estimates for, over 130 countries to calculate the Gini coefficients from 1820 to 2000 (Baten et al. 2009). Changes were not significant at the world level; Ginis moved between 40 and 48. The most notable decreases were seen after World War II. Due to the efforts of the welfare states in the west of Europe Ginis went down to 35. Political dictatorship in Eastern Europe pushed them even lower, down to 28 for some time. After the 1990 transition inequalities started to grow again. The Gini coefficient is, however, a sensitive but restrained indicator which shows a subdued reality. Table 1 shows (by taking Hungary as an example) that a relatively slight increase in the Gini may go together with very radical changes in other inequality indicators such as the distance between top and bottom incomes. In 1987 the richest ten per cent of the population had less than five times as much income as the poorest ten per cent. By 2012 this multiplier had gone up to 9 (Table 1).

Table 1. *Changes in income inequalities in Hungary 1987-2012. (Based on per capita income)*

	1987	1992	2003	2007	2009	2012
Gini-coefficient	0.24	0.27	0.32	0.29	0.29	0.31
Top/bottom decile, multiplier	4.6	6.0	8.1	6.8	7.2	9.0

Source: Szivós 2013: 24.

There is indeed some eastern exceptionalism: the stifling years of dictatorship produced unusually low inequalities. As soon as these times were over inequalities exploded and soon reached Western European levels. These waves are summarised in Table 2 which shows the types of change since 1950 (Table 2).

Table 2. Trends in inequality (as measured by Gini coefficient of income distribution) from the 1950s to around 2000, in 85 developed, developing and transition economies

Percentage distribution of population who live in countries experiencing different inequality trends			
	World	OECD	Transition economies
Rising inequality	76	62	98
<i>U-shaped increase</i>	66	55	43
<i>Linear increase</i>	10	6	55
No change	19	15	2
Falling inequality	5	23	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Cornia 2011:19.

The rapid post-1990 changes require closer scrutiny. New findings revealed that the richest members of society profited inordinately from the overall increase of incomes and inequalities. Studies started to focus on the top percentiles. The study by Atkinson et al. (2011) covers 16 countries, 9 of them in Europe, the others from all over the world. They measure (based on tax data) the share of income of the top 1 per cent and the top 0,1 per cent in two periods, between 1949 and the early eighties, and then between 1998 and 2005. The results are amazing. In the first period the share accruing to the top remained unchanged, or decreased – there was no single instance of increase. The scenario changed in a breath-taking way after 1998. With the exception of two countries (Germany and the Netherlands) the share of income accruing to both top groups increased significantly and in some cases very significantly. The USA is the leader in this league. Between 2002 and 2007, for instance, the top 1 per cent captured 65% of all income growth.

The question from the perspective of normative functionalism is how the norms adjusted to these changes. Nowhere were there major upheavals, except perhaps for the Occupy Wall Street movement, so one may assume that inequalities and the norms related to them moved in parallel. Atkinson argues “that the relation between skill and pay reflects social conventions, where adherence to the pay norm is endogenously determined... But the fact that the driving force is social in origin, rather than trade or technology, means that there is more scope for political leadership. The evolution of social norms is influenceable by policy decisions” (Atkinson 1999, p. 24). I would add that it is not only policy (government) decisions that impact on social norms, but many other actions and discourses (the media influences people’s beliefs and norms to the highest degree). The influences are never “neutral”: those whose interests are served by increasing inequalities produce also the means to influence people to accept them. However, the parallel movement of facts and norms is somewhat illusory.

Public opinion surveys inform us about the uniformity or diversity of some norms. We may indeed know about, for instance, how just people find the society

they live in. The ISSP (International Social Survey Program) has repeatedly asked people over the last two decades their judgement about income inequality in their countries, what changes or interventions would they find desirable, and so forth. Among other questions they asked to what extent people agreed or disagreed with the statement that differences in income in their country were too large. On a 5-point scale the percentage of those who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement was over 80 in 12 out of 16 countries both in 1999 and in 2009. Out of these, the proportion of those who “strongly agreed” was over 50 per cent in 10 countries. It stands out that Eastern countries have more egalitarian feelings than the West, but the difference is neither too large nor fully consistent. During the decade both proportions grew in more than half of the countries surveyed (*Table 3*).

Table 3. *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement that differences in income in your country are too large?*

	Strongly agree and Agree		Out of it: Strongly agree	
	1999	2009	1999	2009
Hungary	93	97	67	78
Slovenia	91	95	60	69
Portugal	96	95	82	62
Latvia	97	95	74	61
Bulgaria	97	94	50	58
Slovak Republic	94	92	57	58
Spain	89	91	84	57
France	87	91	47	53
Germany	82	90	60	53
Austria	86	89	29	52
Poland	89	88	40	48
Czech Republic	88	85	29	32
Great Britain	76	78	36	32
Sweden	71	73	25	29
Cyprus	66	67	12	26
Norway	72	61	22	12

Source: ISSP 1999 – 2009 (Thanks for help from Zsombor Farkas).

Note: Increasing values are in italics.

Opinions and existing income inequalities have always been to some extent correlated, but not very strongly. The same is true for changes in income inequality. Growing inequalities usually heighten the sense of injustice that people experience.

Some Conclusions

- I think Huszár's thesis should be reversed. It seems to me to be impossible to build up a structural model based on shared norms that could serve as a "yardstick" to check whether inequalities are too large or not. If we start from the existing situation, captured in terms of some socio-economic classification (be that Huszár's construction), we could ask questions like to what extent does this reality conform to society's desires, their expectations and consensual or divided norms in different spheres of life. This could well serve public policy.
- Parsons was an important thinker. Yet his best students and close friends, such as Robert Merton or Niklas Luhman (not critical theorists), added to his work many new insights. It is enough to mention Merton's theses about manifest and latent functions, dysfunctions and intended and unintended consequences which are now an organic part and parcel of sociology. All these developments in functionalist thinking lead to the conclusion that conflicts and dynamics cannot be left out of social thought.
- Social class is a difficult and overloaded term. It is obviously a matter of taste what concepts one uses and in what sense. Yet, in my view, the term "social class" is worth using if we want to express more than just the existence of nominal occupational groups. Because of the controversial interpretations of social class which exist and because of its importance in understanding the social world it seems worth being cautious with its use but also audacious in searching for its multifarious meanings.

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