

# SOCIAL MOBILITY

BY

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PROFESSOR SOROKIN is already known to American readers as the author of two intensely interesting books describing the great Russian Revolution.

In this volume Professor Sorokin has made available to American readers the principles of Social Mobility first described in his earlier Russian volumes and for that reason inaccessible to most American social scientists. Although the following study introduces us to a point of view and an analysis of social relations which laid the basis for Professor Sorokin's reputation as a European sociologist, he has now gone beyond his earlier study and assembled new historical and quantitative data descriptive of a phase of the social process that has great scientific as well as practical interest.

Books on social organization hitherto written in English have done little more than state working hypotheses for future study and formulate empirical principles of relationships. In this book is assembled for the first time in accessible form a vast amount of factual evidence and quantitative data. To the author's inferences from these data we may not always agree, although he is careful to indicate the possibilities of alternative conclusions and to offer the reasons for his own inferences.

Present interest in the diffusion of culture has tended to withdraw attention from an equally important social process, namely, that of vertical social mobility. In this volume Professor Sorokin outlines with great clarity the principles that seem to cover the upward and downward circulation of individuals in the social system. He has shown the relation of this process to social stratification and social change. The book thus represents the first thoroughgoing attempt to describe social mobility in terms of social stratification and social distance. It is therefore a contribution of first importance to the study of social evolution.

F. STUART CHAPIN

## PREFACE

OUR society is a mobile society *par excellence*. An intensive shifting of individuals from position to position and a great circulation of social objects in horizontal and in vertical directions are probably the most important characteristics of contemporary Western society. To them is due its dynamic character. They are responsible for many of its traits, its virtues and shortcomings, and its political and social organization. Our psychology and behavior and hundreds of other important phenomena are considerably conditioned by the intensive social mobility of contemporary Western society. Without an attentive study of social mobility it is impossible to understand many fundamental social processes, many aspects of social organization, and the very essence of "social physiology."

This explains why the phenomena of social mobility should be studied most carefully by a sociologist; and why, during the last few years, my own attention has been given to an investigation of these phenomena. In *The Sociology of Revolution*<sup>1</sup> I have tried to study their abnormal forms. In this book I endeavor to give a general theory of vertical mobility of individuals and social objects. An investigation of this problem presupposes a preliminary study of social stratification and social organization in its vertical aspect. Hence, the character of the book, which is a treatise in social mobility, as well as in social organization.

I am quite aware of the defects of this book. Part of them, however, may be excused by the pioneer character of the study, since the path which I had to take is not much trodden.

Speculative sociology is passing over. An objective, factual, behavioristic, and quantitative sociology is successfully superseding it. This explains why I have tried to avoid basing my statements on the data of "speech reactions" only; why in the book there is not much of speculative psychologizing and philosophizing; why, wherever it has been possible to obtain reliable quantitative data,

<sup>1</sup> Published by J. B. Lippincott Company in 1925.

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I have preferred to use them instead of purely qualitative description. For the same reason I have tried to avoid an "illustrative" method, consisting in confirmation of a statement by one or two illustrative facts. Still used extensively in sociology this "method" has been responsible for many fallacious theories in the field of social sciences.<sup>1</sup> It is time to declare a real war on this "plague of sociology." Trying to avoid it I have endeavored to support each of my principal statements by at least a brief survey of the whole field of the pertinent facts and by indicating at least the minimum of literature where further factual corroboration may be found. When I have not been sure that a certain relationship is general or firmly established, I have stressed its local or hypothetical character.

Another "plague" of sociological theories has been their permeation with "preaching or evaluating judgments" of what is good and what is bad, what is "useful" and what is "harmful." Sociological literature is inundated with "preaching works," 90 per cent of which are nothing but mere speculation, often quite ignorant, given in the name of science. As the primary task of any science is to face the facts as they really exist; and as such "preaching" only compromises the science itself, it must be avoided by all who care for and understand what science means.<sup>2</sup> This explains why the book, with the exception of a very few casual remarks, is free from such "preaching."

Trying to face the facts I naturally do not care at all whether my statements are found to be "reactionary" or "radical," "optimistic" or "pessimistic." Are they true or not—this is the only thing that is important in science. If disfiguring the facts of sociology in the interests of the upper classes is a crime against science, no less a crime is disfiguring the reality in the interests of the lower classes. Either of these crimes should be fought by scientific sociology.

In conclusion it is my duty to express my deepest gratitude

<sup>1</sup> See its criticism in SOMLÓ, F., *Zur Grundung einer beschreibenden Soziologie*, Berlin, 1909; STEINMETZ, "Classification des types sociaux," *L'Année sociologique*, Vol. III, p. 55 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See the appropriate statements of GIDDINGS, FRANKLIN H., *The Scientific Study of Human Society*, Chap. III, 1924.

## PREFACE

to the people of the United States of America, where I found the most hospitable shelter, the possibility to work, and the most instructive social school. Among many institutions of this great country I am especially indebted to the University of Minnesota to whose faculty I have the honor now to belong. Among many persons who have generously helped me in various ways I am particularly indebted to the President, Dr. Lotus D. Coffman, to the Board of Regents, and to the administration of the University of Minnesota; the head of the department of sociology of the University of Minnesota, Professor F. Stuart Chapin; the President of Vassar College, Dr. Henry Noble MacCracken; Professor Edward Cary Hayes; Professor Edward A. Ross; the director of the Institute of International Education, Dr. Stephen Duggan; former Ambassador of Russia, Professor B. A. Bakhmetieff; Professors M. I. Rostovtzeff, Charles A. Ellwood, Charles H. Cooley, Franklin H. Giddings, Stewart Paton, Howard W. Odum, Emory S. Bogardus, Ernest W. Burgess, Ellsworth Faris, Robert E. Park, Samuel H. Harper, E. Woods, John L. Gillin, Francesco Cosentini, Leopold von Wiese, Gottfried Salomon, and many others. For a suggestive criticism of the manuscript I am indebted to Professor F. Stuart Chapin and Edward Cary Hayes. For a bibliographical help, to Professors Earl Hudelson, Donald G. Paterson, and Charles Bird. For an efficient service, to the staff of the Library of the University of Minnesota.

P. S.

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## INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER I  
SOCIAL SPACE, SOCIAL DISTANCE, AND  
SOCIAL POSITION

I. GEOMETRICAL AND SOCIAL SPACE

EXPRESSIONS like "upper and lower classes," "social promotion," "N. N. is a climber," "his social position is very high," "they are very near socially," "right and left party," "there is a great social distance," and so on, are quite commonly used in conversation, as well as in economic, political, and sociological works. All these expressions indicate that there is something which could be styled "social space." And yet there are very few attempts to define social space and to deal with corresponding conceptions systematically. As far as I know, after Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Leibnitz, E. Weigel and other great thinkers of the seventeenth century only F. Ratzel, G. Simmel, and recently E. Durkheim, Robert E. Park, Emory S. Bogardus, Leopold von Wiese, and the writer have tried to give greater attention to the problem of social space and to some others connected with it.<sup>1</sup>

As the subject of this book is social mobility—that is, the phenomenon of the shifting of individuals within social space—it is necessary to outline very concisely what I mean by social space and its derivatives. In the first place, *social space is something quite different from geometrical space*. Persons near each other in geometrical space—*e.g.*, a king and his servant, a master and his slave—are often separated by the greatest distance in social space. And, *vice versa*, persons who are very far from each other in geometrical space—*e.g.*, two brothers, or bishops of the same religion, or generals of the same rank in the same army, some staying in America, others being in China—may be very near each other in social space. Their social position is often identical, in spite of the great geometrical distance which separates them from each other. A man may cross thousands of miles of geometrical

space without changing his position in social space; and, *vice versa*, a man may stay at the same geometrical place, and yet, his social position may change enormously. President Harding's position in geometrical space was changed greatly when he went from Washington to Alaska; and yet, his social position remained the same as it was in Washington. Louis XVI and the Czar Nicholas II remained in the same geometrical space, in Versailles and in Czarskoie Selo, when their social positions were changed enormously.

These considerations show that social and geometrical space are quite different things. The same may be said of the derivatives from these conceptions, such as "geometrical and social distance," and "climbing in geometrical and in social space," "shifting from position to position in geometrical and in social space," and so on.<sup>2</sup>

In order to define social space positively, let us remind ourselves that geometrical space is usually thought of as a kind of "universe," in which physical phenomena are located. The location in this universe is obtained through definition of the position of a thing in relation to other things chosen as "the points of reference." As soon as such points are established (be it the sun, the moon, Greenwich, the axes of abscissas and ordinates) we can locate the spatial position of all physical phenomena with relation to them, and then through that, with relation to each other.

In a similar way we may say that *social space is a kind of universe composed of the human population of the earth*. As far as there are no human beings, or there is only one human creature, there is no human social space or universe. One man in the world cannot have any relation to other men; he may be only in geometrical but not in social space. Accordingly, *to find the position of a man or a social phenomenon in social space means to define his or its relations to other men or other social phenomena chosen as the "points of reference."* What are taken as the "points of reference" depends upon us. It is possible to take a man, or a group of men, or several groups. When we say that "Mr. N., Jr. is a son of Mr. N., Sr.," we take a step toward the location of Mr. N. in the human universe. It is clear, however, that such location is very indefinite and imperfect; it gives us only one of the coordinates of location (the family relation) in a complex social uni-

verse. It is as imperfect as a geometrical location which says: "The tree is two miles from the hill." If such a location is to be satisfactory, we must know whether the hill is in Europe or in some other continent of the earth, and in what part of the continent, and under what degree, and if the tree is two miles to the north or south, east or west, from the hill. In brief, more or less sufficient geometrical location demands an indication of the located thing to the whole system of spatial coordinates of the geometrical universe. The same is true in regard to the "social location" of an individual.

An indication of a man's relation to another man gives something, but very little. An indication of his relation to ten or to one hundred men gives somewhat more but cannot locate the man's position in the whole social universe. It is similar to the location of a thing in geometrical space through a detailed indication of the different things around it, without indication of the latitude and longitude of the things. On this planet there are more than one and a half billion of human beings. To indicate a man's relations to several dozens of men, especially when they are not prominent, may mean nothing. Besides, the method is very complex and wasteful. In place of it, social practice has already invented another method, which is more satisfactory and simple, and which reminds one somewhat of the system of coordinates used for the location of a thing in geometrical space. This method consists in: (1) *the indication of a man's relations to specific groups*, (2) *the relation of these groups to each other within a population*, and (3) *the relation of this population to other populations included in the human universe*.

In order to know a man's social position, his family status, the state of which he is a citizen, his nationality, his religious group, his occupational group, his political party, his economic status, his race, and so on must be known. Only when a man is located in all these respects is his social position definitely located. But even this is not all. As within the same group there are quite different positions, *e.g.*, that of the king and a common citizen within a State group, the man's position within each of the fundamental groups of a population must also be known. When, finally,

the position of the population itself, *e.g.*, the population of North America, is defined in the whole human universe (mankind), then the social position of an individual may be thought to be quite sufficiently defined. Paraphrasing the old proverb, one may say: "Tell me to what social groups you belong and what function you perform within each of those groups, and I will tell you what is your social position in the human universe, and who you are as a socius." When two people are introduced this method is usually applied: "Mr. A. (family group) is a German professor (occupational group), a staunch Democrat, a prominent Protestant, formerly he was an ambassador to," and so on. This and similar introductions are complete or incomplete indications of the groups with which a man has been affiliated. The biography of a man in its essence is largely a description of the groups to which the man has had a relation, and the man's place within each of them. Such a method may not always inform us whether the man is tall or not, whether blond or dark, "introvert or extrovert"; but all this, though it may have a great significance for a biologist or a psychologist, is of relatively small value for a sociologist. Such information does not have any direct importance in the defining of a man's social position.

To sum up: (1) *social space is the universe of the human population*; (2) *man's social position is the totality of his relations toward all groups of a population and, within each of them, toward its members*; (3) *location of a man's position in this social universe is obtained by ascertaining these relations*; (4) *the totality of such groups and the totality of the positions within each of them compose a system of social coordinates which permits us to define the social position of any man.*

From this it follows that human beings, who are members of the same social groups and who within each of these groups have the same function, are in an identical social position. Men who differ in these respects from each other have different social positions. The greater the resemblance of the positions of the different men, the nearer they are toward each other in social space. The greater and the more numerous are their differences in these respects, the greater is the social distance between them.<sup>3</sup>



2. THE HORIZONTAL AND THE VERTICAL DIMENSIONS  
OF SOCIAL SPACE

Euclid's geometrical space is space of the three dimensions. The social space is space of many dimensions because there are more than three different social groupings which do not coincide with each other (the groupings of the population into state groups, into those of religion, nationality, occupation, economic status, political party, race, sex and age groups, and so on). The lines of differentiation of a population among each of these groups are specific or *sui generis* and do not coincide with each other. Since relations of all these kinds are substantial components of the system of social coordinates, it is evident that the social space is a universe of many dimensions; and the more differentiated is the population, the more numerous are the dimensions. In order to locate an individual in the universe of the population of the United States, which is more differentiated than that of the natives of Australia, a more complex system of social coordinates must be used to indicate the more numerous groups with which one is connected.

For the sake of a simplification of the task it is possible, however, to reduce the plurality of the dimensions into two principal classes, provided that each is to be subdivided into several subclasses. *These two principal classes may be styled the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the social universe.* The reasons for this are as follows: several individuals who belong to the same social groups are easily found, *e.g.*, all may be Roman Catholics; Republicans; engaged in the automobile industry; Italians, according to native language; American citizens, according to citizenship; and so on. And yet, their social position may be quite different from the vertical standpoint. One of them may be a bishop, within the Roman Catholic group, while others may be only common parishioners; one of them may be a boss, within the Republican party, while others are only common voters; one may be the president of an automobile corporation, while others are only the common laborers; and so on. While their social position from the horizontal standpoint seems to be identical, from a vertical standpoint it is quite dif-