Criticism of E. T. Hiller's *Social Relations & Structures*

(Harper & Brothers, N.Y. 1947)

My discussion of Hiller's new book begins with criticism, but the criticism does not apply, especially to this wok: it refers to a general. theoretic scheme used by most sociologists. Indeed, in so far as it is applicable to Hiller's book, it must be made with a definite reservation. For, if I am not mistaken, this book does not cover his entire sociological theory, only a section of it.

The main content of the book is a theory of social structures in the specific sense of structural order existing among the social relations within a society. Now, a theory of social structures is generally considered to be one of the two parts of sociology. The other part is a theory of what has been termed "social change" or "social process". This division goes back to Comte's distinction between "social statics" and "social dynamics." In Spencer's *Principles* we find a distinction between the theory of society as an organic system of human beings and institutions and his theory concerning the evolution of these systems. Even Sorokin (with his main interest in "dynamics") in his recent book explicitly accepts Comte's division and devotes one part of it to a theory of social structures and another, much larger, part to a theory of social processes. Hiller's book does contain some references to specific changes, to general changes of ethos, and to the main stages of societal evolution, but such references, though sufficient to make students aware of these changes, are obviously not intended to constitute a systematic theory. Therefore, I believe that such a theory is meant to follow later.

Now, why is a theory of "social statics," "social structures," or "institutional organization" considered by most productive sociologists to be the primary part of sociology - sometimes, indeed (as in Parson's recent outline of the conceptual framework of sociological theory) the only systematic foundation of sociology as a unified science?

Of course, if a separation of the two categories of problems is necessary, then obviously a theory of structures must be the basis of sociology as well as of every other science of culture. Otherwise, if sociology should begin with "social changes" or "social processes," it would become a chaos of separate, inconclusive, overlapping, systematically unconnected, humanistically meaningless studies of arbitrarily selected and statistically correlated mass phenomena - a chaos which not even Stuart Dodd (presumably the Einstein of social science) could put into order.

But is the division necessary? I have become increasingly doubtful during the last twenty years. There is, of course, some empirical foundation for it. The main sources of our knowledge about social and generally cultural order are standards of values and norms of conduct manifested in evaluative and normative judgments symbolically expressed. Many of these judgments have become integrated, especially since the invention of writing, in legal systems, systems of religious dogmas and ritualistic rules, ethical, hedonistic, economic ideologies, technological doctrines. Such evaluative and normative judgments and systems of judgements are ideational phenomena experienced by us as stable, if not timeless. We can identify and reconstruct them repeatedly and indefinitely. If and in so far as accepted by a number of people, they produce a certain uniformity in judgments symbolically expressed. They form the cultural patterns of attitudes, but attitudes are not actions. While it is indubitably true that an agent who accepts such a pattern tends to conform with it, in so far as in his opinion it is applicable to his actions, nonetheless *judging* values and actions, according to their conformity or nonconformity with certain standards and norms, and *performing* actions which tend to follow these standards and norms constitute two different categories of facts. And the main task of sociology is, I believe, to study not systems of ideas, but systems of actions.

To illustrate this difference, let us look at Part VI of Hiller's book, entitled "The Structure of Society. Statuses." But first, I should like to point out that his analysis of the axionormative order of a society into the phenomena which he terms "statuses" is a very important contribution to the solution of the old and persistent problem of relationships between society and the individual participant in its organization and culture. Fifteen years ago I made a somewhat similar, though not so inclusive, attempt, which was published in Polish under the title of *Men of the Present and Civilization of the Future*. The main difference between my approach and Hiller's is that my problem - a problem first suggested to me in 1931 by the Columbia University Committee on Education and Social Change - was to study individual participation in a continually and more and more rapidly *changing*, not a stable society. From this point of view, I conceived every individual both as a product of the past and a producer of the future. As basic concept in this study, I used the concept of social role, as axionormatively ordered, dynamic system of interdependent social actions occurring between a particular individual and a "circle," "set," or group of other individuals with whom he is connected by some common bond. I surveyed comparatively professional, economic, political, military roles as well as the roles of creative innovators, which do not fit into any of these classes.

Now, Hiller uses the term "status" to designate the same phenomena. This confused me at first. I was used to the old meaning of this term, denoting a gradation of the individual rights found in various kinds of class stratifications and, as such, I considered it one of the components of a social role, since rights are real only if granted and actively supported by a person's social circle. I discovered, however, that Hiller uses it in the sense of a general cultural pattern, including standardized classification and valuation of persons in relation to other persons and general norms regulating the respective rights and duties of those persons. This use was started in 1936 by an anthropologist, Linton (*The Study of Man*, Chap. VIII).

According to this usage, a role would be a particular case of an individual acting in accordance with the requirements of his status. Hiller's conception differs somewhat from Linton's. But the basic principle is the same, and according to it statuses as components of the static structure of a society have to be known before we can proceed to investigate any changes in this structure. Whereas, if we use instead the concept of role as a particular system of actions (of the individual himself and of the "circle," "set," or "group" of cooperating individuals within which he functions, not only at any particular time, but in its total course), we can include in our research both the axionormative order which these actions follow and all kinds of changes. Among the latter are changes in the valuation of the person as his role evolves, the range of permissible variations and innovations which every role allows, the processes of widening or narrowing the circle within which the role is performed, dynamic relationships between simultaneous and successive roles of the same individual and of a number of individuals, and finally creative emergence of new roles with new standards and norms.

There is no doubt, however, that the concept of status as used by Hiller does correspond to *social attitudes* of individual participants in a community or society. They have been used from childhood on to classify other individuals by certain cultural standards of definition and valuation and to associate the conception of each individual so classified with specific rights which he possesses and specific duties which he is supposed to performe "Status" in this sense appears to them as something well defined and highly meaningful. And when an individual reflects about the order of the society to which he belongs, usually - unless he is an innovating group leader - the most important aspect of this order from his point of view is the fact that he and everybody else apparently has at this particular time a definite position in this order, though he may eventually pass from one position to another, equally definite.

To know what a society is in the consciousness of its participants, it is necessary (though not suficient) to understand what this multiplicity, deversity, and gradation of individual "statuses" means to them.

And the key to this understanding is furnished by Hiller's theory of social relations. Through his relations with others, each individual becomes aware of the significance of the standards by which he and every other person is evaluated, learns the actual meaning of his duties and rights, and realizes the continuous interdependency which exists between everything that he is doing to others and that they are doing to him.

Moreover, by using this concept of social relation as the main instrument of his investigation, Hiller clarifies the fundamental, universal difference between valuations and actions bearing upon human persons and all those which deal with non-human objects - hedonistic, technical, linguistic, aesthetic, and so on. Too many sociologists neglect this difference and try to function simultaneously as sociologists, economists, linguists, theorists of literature, of religion, of art, of philosophy, of science, of material technique. There is only one man who combines all these functions with some degree of consistency: and any other sociologist who is not content to specialise, but intends to be a general theorist of culture, must aim to equal Sorokin in the scope of his knowledge and exceed him in exactness of method,

I may mention Sorokin again, since I have recently compared his theory of social structures with that of Hiller. I think that anybody who makes this comparison will certainly agree with me that Hiller's book gives the reader, particularly the student, an incomparably better understanding of the significance which a "social structure" has to participants in social life than the corresponding part of Sorokin's book. I consider it in this respect a master piece of what some Germans have termed "verstehende Soziologie" (understanding sociology).

Florian Znaniecki