

THE SOROKIAN REVIVAL-BOOKS AND MEANING

by

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1963 was a sociological year of great importance in the sense that it witnessed a spontaneous revival of interest in the works of P.A. Sorokin. Since he stands as a symbol for the emphasis upon a study of the dynamic or change aspects of sociology this revival probably means a general shift in interest in American and European scientific attention away from static and infertile approaches towards ideas of greater utility and more reality. Sorokin's 4 volume master work, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, published 1936-40, has been reissued. New works particularly his autobiography, *A Long Journey* have appeared, and a theory volume, *Basic Trends of Our Time* is due February 1964. *Twentieth Century Sociological Theories* will appear shortly afterwards. The number of translations and reprints of the works of this "most translated sociologist" continues to grow. Two important works have been published about him during the year. A revolution occurred in the American Sociological Association and by a write — in vote Sorokin was elected forthcoming president of the society for 1965, an honor long overdue.

1) The 4 Volume *Social And Cultural Dynamics* is by the Bedminster Press, Vreeland Avenue, Totowa, New Jersey and is under the editorship of Hans Zetterberg, Columbia niversity, NY. \$ 40 a set, \$11 single volumes. Vol. I gives the orientation and material on the **Fluctuation of Forms of Art**. II, concerns **systems of Truth, Ethics, Law**. III, **Social Relationships. Wars and Revolutions**. IV, **Basic Problems, Principles and Methods**. *A Long Journey* (autobiographical) is a low cost book and *Basic Trends of our Time* will be medium priced. First is published by the College and University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. A tribute volume called **Essays in Honor of Pitirim Sorokin** was edited by E.A. Tiryakian of Princeton, and is published by Glencoe Free Press, now a subsidiary of Macmillan Book Co., of New York. An analysis volume called **Pitirim Sorokin in Review** edited by Philip J. Allen, is published by Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina. A new work Calles **Twentieth Century Sociological Theories** will be brought out shortly by Harper and Row, New York. Carle C. Zimmerman and N.Ş. Kösemihal of the University of Istanbul plan a turkish translation of the one volume edition of **Social and Cultural Dynamics** previously published by Beacon Press, Boston, Mass.

Sorokin's Life

For the benefit of the new generation in Sociology, a few remarks about Pitirim Alexanderovich Sorokin will introduce him.

He was born January 21, 1889, in Yarensky County of Volgoda Province in Russia — an extremely northern place near the Arctic Circle. His native people were called Komi or Syrian and they belong to the Ugro-Finnish branches of the family of man. They speak one of those types of languages coming out of Asia to which Turkish, Hungarian and Finnish belong so that, as Sorokin relates himself, Russian was for him a second language. He became an orphan at an early age and made his living by traveling with a brother mainly as a decorator of churches and religious objects, such as Russian Ikons.

He studied largely by himself and, according to his own words, went on to advanced secondary school rather because of an accidental opportunity than a plan. At the age of 14 he started his upper education at a Teacher's College or Seminary under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. There he became not only a leading student but a liberal revolutionary agitator against the Czarist government. For his political activities he was imprisoned first in 1906. He was paroled in 1907 but to complete his education he had to go away from Komi since he was expelled from college there. He went to St. Petersburg (Leningrad) where he secured work as a tutor and supported himself for two years while he prepared for his university entrance examinations.

During the year 1909-10 he matriculated in the Psycho-Neurological Institute, a private university in St. Petersburg. No sociology at that time was taught in the University of St. Petersburg, but Maxim Kovalevsky and E. de Roberty gave such courses in the Institute. Further, as he says in his autobiography, "The student body of the Institute unlike that of the University, for the most part impressed me as being more alive, revolutionay, and like myself, recruited from the lower peasent classes" (*Long Journey* p. 67).

At the end of the year 1910, Sorokin transferred to the University of St. Peterburg for the completion of his undergraduate work. The reason he himself gives for the change was to avoid being drafted into the armed services since state university students were exempt (*Ibid*, 72). Here he continued his social science studies to prepare himself as a sociologist specializing in the sociology of law under Leon Petrajitzky. Graduating in

1914 he was left at the university with a financial grant or scholarship aid to prepare himself for a teacher. During this time he kept up his revolutionary activity and was arrested once or twice. At one time he had to flee from Russia and hide in Southwestern Europe to escape arrest and imprisonment.

From 1914-1916 he was doing graduate work in St. Petersburg and this takes his career up to the revolution of 1917. The holocaust of Revolution and killing of 1917 put Sorokin on the other side. His previous arrests were by Czarist agents; now it was the revolutionary forces which considered him an enemy. At last he was arrested January 2, 1918, and put into prison by the Bolshevik government. After 57 days a release was made and he removed to Moscow where the government became then located. For some time he had been associated with Kerensky, the premier, as secretary to the moderate constitutional government. But communism finally triumphed and Sorokin was imprisoned again. He was again released Dec. 31, 1918 and returned to the University of St. Petersburg as a professor of sociology.

Here it was that finally the situation became impossible. After the famine of 1921, in which American food gifts saved a number of millions of lives — at least 10 million according to Sorokin (p. 190) he embarked upon a study of the sociology of hunger and famine. The communist government had killed the landowners and tried to collectivize the peasants. As a result of this agricultural production declined to disastrously low levels. A former grain exporting country could no longer feed itself. A drought in 1920 and 1921 resulted in wholesale starvation. Millions died of famine. Sorokin's book about this was too much for the communists. His manuscript was destroyed and he accepted banishment Sept. 23, 1922 to save his life.

The remainder of the story may be summarized briefly. A year in Prague, Czechoslovakia, enabled him to recover his health and then in October 1923 he came to the United States. After a year of acclimatization to English in America, he came to the Sociology Department at the University of Minnesota at the city of Minneapolis for the beginning of the summer term of 1924. From that time he taught at the University of Minnesota for 6 years until 1930 when he was invited to Harvard University. Since 1930 until his retirement he continued his work at Harvard. Since then he has lived in a nearby place, 8 Cliff Street, Winchester, Massachusetts, and continued his writing and lecturing. Undoubtedly he is today the world's most famous sociologist.

The Writings of Sorokin

In the field of Sociology starting with a study of *Crime and Punishment* (in Russian) (1913) Sorokin has written about 35 "titles" with two more *Twentieth Century Sociological Theories* and *Basic Trends of Our Time* in process for early 1964. A single title can consist of one small volume or four large volumes such as *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, New York, American Book Company, 1937-41; reprinted in entirety by Bedminster Press as noted. In addition a title may have only one issue but generally a number of reprints, abridgements, and translations. There have been 12 or more translations of *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, New York 1928, and it will be the basis of some of *Twentieth Century Sociological Theories*, now under preparation. This is not a revision of the work *Contemporary Sociological Theories* as much as it is a supplement to that work giving the general details of most of the important sociological theories appearing in the forty years since the first work. These are bound volumes and do not include about 500 essays published in various scholarly journals and scientific publications.

A 1963 work *Pitirim Sorokin in Review*, Edited by Allen, is a book analyzing Sorokin's writings. It is most valuable for a consideration of the theories of Sorokin because it contains, among other items, a most definitive bibliography of the books, translations and other writings by Sorokin, a critique of his main theories of history by Arnold Toynbee, a lengthy reply of 125 printed pages by Sorokin to all his critics and a self analysis of Sorokin by Sorokin, called *Sociology of My Mental Life*.

Thus there is now available to those institutions wishing a minimum of the best of Sorokin for the future teaching in sociology seven or eight volumes of his best writing, his autobiography and two important works about him by students and admirers. In addition, copies of a previous semi-autobiography called *Leaves from a Russian Diary* (revised edition) are probably to be found.

The reduction of *Social and Cultural Dynamics* to a one volume edition was achieved largely by elimination of footnotes and tables of interest mostly only to specialists and not the general sociological public.

Nineteenth Century Sociology and Sorokin

Sorokin was born January 21, 1889. The sociology of his early years called the 19th Century Type differed from the characteristic social

thinking prior to the French Revolution of 1789 in several aspects. It was "positive", moral based upon linear evolution, "christian" and scientific. By "positive" is meant that the sociologists accepted a doctrine of the desirability of leading attempts to correct bad social situations. This was a "moral" duty of the sociologist which was inherent in his position, his greater knowledge and his obligation as a "guardian" of the community. It believed that man had slowly advanced throughout the ages toward some goal or state of earthly perfection and that this should continue. This is known as the theory and doctrine of linear evolution which fitted in well with the doctrine of physical evolution enunciated by Darwin and others during that same century.

Being a "Christian" meant that the sociology accepted all the major philosophical postulates about the nature of man enunciated by the higher religions like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. That is all men are sons of God, hence holy creatures, and equal in the eyes of God. Animals are not to be equated with men or men with animals. Inherent human dignity was a sacred and unchangeable right.

Being "scientific" meant that 19th Century Sociology accepted the idea that all knowledge not inherent in the first four postulates (positivism, morality, linearity, and christian conception of homo-sapiens) was to be achieved or proved more or less by the major use of empirical means or the methods of inductive logic.

Morality as used above is a word summarizing what may be called the ten commandment virtues, as concerning honesty in economics and restraint in sex and family relations etc. This code, or at least large parts of it concerning sex, comes from the fourth, or *Novella* part of the *Corpus Juris Civilis* law drawn up by Justinian and Theodora in Constantinople in the years 530 to 550 AD. Prior to that time sex relations in the civilized Western World (Hittite, Sumer, Greek, Roman, Byzantine) had been regulated only by the large family clans. In economics the old doctrine of *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware) was to be replaced by a new emphasis upon guaranteed satisfaction in which both buyer and seller profited equally from each transaction.

Sorokin was a typical 19th century sociologist and social philosopher. He mentions this several times in his autobiography. Men of that century differed materially from the past in their belief in the possibility for the continuous improvement in the condition of man and in their

emphasis upon the use of "scientific positivism". All of this came after a western background of the dark age (6th to 10 centuries); the renaissance (11-13th centuries); the reformation (14th through 16th centuries); the scientific revolution of the 17th century and the age of rationalism in the 18th.

Each of these periods differed from the other somewhat but each was an approach toward the basic ideas of 19th century sociology.

Pause in Sociology in the Twentieth Century

However after this 19th century of optimism and concentration upon social change, during the 20th century sociology came to a pause. Intellectual decay began in the early years and sociology is just now reviving from this slump. Legitimate reasons for the stopping in sociological thinking are to be found in the breaking up of the old order and the creation of a new. During this period there were several world wars; several inflations; several dictatorships; the breaking of several empires like the Ottoman and the British; one major world economic depression; and at least two challenging philosophies like communism and fascism. These together are sufficient legitimate reasons for a decline in constructive thinking. There were others.

The pause in sociological thinking was marked by varied symptoms in different countries.

In some countries sociology did not develop at all, or if it appeared, its body was but a translated version of European sociology largely unfitted to the situation in hand. In certain countries, such as Russia and Germany during their ideological dictatorships, sociologists were eliminated or forbidden to practice and, in substitute, such ideologies as those of Marxianism or Hitlerism were substituted. In certain countries like England and others people just seem to have forgotten the subject. After the famous many volume sociological work by Booth *Life and Labor of the People of London*, sociology in England seemed to take more or less of an extended vacation for about 2 generations. Only recently has French sociology began to attract attention when in the times of the heights of Durkheim (1858-1917) and Le Play (1806-1882) much of the world considered French Sociology, *the only sociology*. Thus at a time when sociology was seemingly most needed it was least available. In the United States sociology still preserved itself in name but it suffered from two or three aberrations which harmed much of

its usefulness. It became marked by an intense preoccupation with static sociology, to the neglect of dynamic; a feeling that the only scientific models worth cultivating were in natural sciences which, led to a slavish imitation of certain forms unfitted to sociology; an unhealthy and useless preoccupation with complex methods; with renaming old things and ideas with new words; and the use of statistical methods of a tedious character to "prove" things readably intelligible to the human mind without such devious time-consuming methods .

Every sociologist has used some concepts to describe the structural aspects of society simply because a social statics as well as a social dynamics exists. The social body today has a form and moves. In moving it changes from also. The ideal sociology handles both aspects. This has to be true in particular in disturbed periods during which things change rapidly. But among the leading sociologist in the United States the last one of importance to make social change of major importance was E.A. Ross, 1866-1951, and his peak of constructive intellectual development was reached before 1910. A few others there were but none known like Ross.

The Main Ideas of Static Sociology

Around that time there have been a number of others of great intellectual importance such as W.I. Thomas; Robert E. Park; Charles A. Ellwood; C.H. Cooley and G.H. Mead but each of these has leaned more on the structural side than on the dynamic. The last native born American sociologist to achieve a very great number of disciples and large influence based upon a system almost totally static is Talcott Parsons who is still active. His system is not only 100 percent concerned with the structural aspects of society but in some of his major works he has denied that it is possible to make any systematic theories about social change. All the structural systems were a great deal alike so that after the first one or two nothing new is gained by studying them. At first the main "social forces" guiding men's relations with others were called instincts; then desires; then wishes; then attitudes; und so on. Examination of all of them shows a basic common underlying similarity. F.H. Ciddings (1855-1931) who was essentially a 19th century evolutionist, had a classification of structural concepts which he called four types of "consciousness of kind". From the classification by Giddings to the last of the systems of the structuralists, the same ideas reappear

under different words. The only grave scientific harm in the procedure is the almost complete neglect of dynamic sociology which came about, seemingly inherent in the process of the worship of static structural systems¹.

The main shibboleths of Parson's sociological system are :

1. Men's social activities arise from their consciousnesses of themselves (as subjects) and of others and the external situations (as objects).
2. As subjects, men act to achieve their (subjective) intentions, purposes, aims, ends, objectives, or goals.
3. They use appropriate means, techniques, procedures, methods and instruments.
4. Their courses of action are limited by unmodifiable conditions or circumstances.
5. Exercising will or judgement, they choose, assess, and evaluate what will do, are doing, and have done.
6. Standards, rules, or moral principles are invoked in arriving at decisions.
7. Any study of social relationships requires the researcher to use subjective investigative techniques such as "verstehen", imaginative or sympathetic reconstruction, or vicarious experiences.

These are written exactly from Hinkle's summary where he finds antecedents and similar statements in most other recent sociology, not only from 20 th Century American but for late 19 th Century Europe. Our reaction is that such observations as these by Parsons are fairly obvious and not particularly of world shaking importance. But when a sociology has its main theoretical reference in such commonplace observations, the question arises as to what great value for men is found in the discipline.

1) For the documentation of some of this repetition in sociology see Roscoe C. Hinkle, "Antecedents of the Action Orientation in American Sociology before 1935", *American Sociological Review*, October, 1963, pp. 705-715.

The Rise of Neo-Dynamic Positivism

The change from a dynamic to a static emphasis in sociology is relatively easy. Inaction achieves the same purposes as negative action. Any large break in the course of a tradition for one generation makes its aims and goals faint indeed. An immigrant people are foreign to their new environment until the grandchildren forget the language. Then they become foreign to the mother country of their grand-parents. But a renovation of a tradition, such as the movement from a static to a dynamic conception of sociology, is an exceedingly difficult achievement like becoming facile in a second language. It cannot be done by neglect but must be the results of long applied positive action.

That is the painful job facing sociology as the destruction of dynamic sociology in the first half of the 20th Century, fades into the past. In a large degree the leaders in this new movement have been Sorokin and Toynbee, of which two, Sorokin as a professional sociologist, carries most authority in the field. Both of them were shocked by the Spenglerian thesis of sure death of this culture as of all others before it. Both of them were capable and had the wish and the financial aid to study the situation and attempt a reappraisal.

Both Sorokin and Arnold Toynbee (born the same year) brought into the 20th century enough of the old to see the radicality of change in the 20th. But both still being young when they felt the change, and being geniuses, instead of being bowled over the 20th Century, strove to find out why and wherein 19th Century basic postulates failed.

Both continued to be revolutionary in the 20th Century as they had been in the 19th. Consequently both of them abstracted themselves from the current despair of the 20th, its avoidance of issues, its *anomie*, its useless philosophies and looked for more fundamental answers. Their answer may be summed up in the words *Neo-Dynamic Positive Sociology*.

This neo-dynamic positivism of the twentieth century has certain accepted postulates of its own. First of all it insists that *change is inherent in all social systems* so that a sociologist does not have to ask *why there is change* or will there be change but rather *what kinds of change and when*. While neo-dynamic sociology recognizes custom as an attempt to slow down and resist change nevertheless change is always possible, probable, necessary, nearby and inherent in the nature of so-

cial things. As a result, neo-dynamic sociology, at first, discards systems of sociology which starts with social statics. It holds that it would be better to have no sociological thinking than mere static hypotheses since these invalid approaches, by their simplicity and seeming plausibility, distract social thinkers from fruitful approaches.

A second aspect of neo-dynamic positivism is *the continued emphasis of the school of thought upon a study of history or observational empiricism of change*. Sorokin is like a nineteenth century sociologist in that he studies the historical facts. The earlier school took these facts and rearranged them or selected them to bear out their own accepted version of linear evolution or purposive movement of man. Sorokin examines them to see *what* happened.

For instance Hegel and Comte, the evolutionists ~~of~~ excellence of the nineteenth century, refer to Oriental and Roman history as frequently as does Sorokin. The difference is that the writers of the neo-dynamic school use history differently. The school-in-between, the Static-Structuralists, simply forget history and the actual events.

The third important aspect lies in the conclusions suggested by the works in neo-dynamic sociology. Here we do not concern ourselves with what conclusions each man *thinks* he may have reached in his work. That is, Sorokin has an hypothesis of a continuous cyclical movement of a grand culture between two polar types, one of which he calls *sensate* and the other *ideational*. Since, from his investigations he has concluded that Western societies are now well advanced in a general form of sensate behavior, the next movement will be to make a gradual change toward the ideational. This over-all view may or may not be true or valid. But the validity of their grand conclusions is seemingly not the major lesson to be gathered from the results of the combined studies of Sorokin and Toynbee or either separately.

The *real result* of their studies from the point of view of this writer is *indeterminateness* in human events. When the real story of history begins the actions and decisions of man are what makes the ultimate course and final results of history. In other words if man, collectively, wants to make a fool of himself and to destroy civilization, he can now do so very easily. And, on the other hand, if he wants to be creative and to build up a world of hope and promise, he can do so. Further, if he wants such a new world, and gets it, it will be because leaders have designed and led, and the masses have believed and followed.

Obviously in the numerous volumes written on these subjects one can find numerous places which seem to contradict any point of view. Sorokin's works have seemingly endless passages dealing with "immanent causation" which can be interpreted as the opposite of the indeterminateness theory ascribed above as the major contribution of the total studies. The subject is like free-will. One can prove that there is no such thing as free-will. Then one can turn around and prove equally soundly that causal sequences are so numerous and so overlapping that free-will is the only reasonable hypothesis to explain the course of events at any given time.

Insofar as the reviewer is concerned human history is indeterminate. This, he believes, is proved by Sorokin, and by Toynbee as well:

How do they prove it? They try sincerely to prove the opposite and by failing prove that life is still a matter of choice and guidance by man. This does not mean that immanent causation has left us or that the movements of history are not powerful like the almost omnipotent forward creeping of a glacier. But it does prove that courage and foresight can *eventually* change the major courses.

Society is man's work. By Carbon 14 and other exact dating we know that civilized man has risen by pulling at his own bootstraps in the past 10,000 years since the last ice age has largely receded. What man has made he can remake, refashion, remodel and rebuild. It is not easy, that is for sure. However it is not very comfortable to expire in a mess of vanishing culture. Further, no one is going to do the job for man.

Conclusions

There is a great deal more in Sorokin and any attempt to summarize it here would be preposterous. In the physical sciences nowadays, where many phases are new, it is quite common to bring forth summaries of existing information. Every week our scientific magazines report on some work which brings everything up-to-date in a specific field. An illustration is a work entitled *The Sumerians* by S. N. Kramer, Chicago, 1963 reviewed in *Science* 16 August, 1963. This work by the leading specialist in the reading of Sumerian seeks to consolidate all previous reliable information on the culture. Some phases of present science are now so new that each newly printed article gives footnote references to all others published on the subject.

In the sciences such as sociology these definitive summaries are more difficult because men began to write about other humans when they began to write at all. But the works of Sorokin, give the impression that here is it. Here is a definitive summary of all important truths so far known in the field of social change. This evaluation may not be 100 % true it is certainly at least 90 % correct.

We can think of civilized man in three stages — his first or primarily rural one from about 100 centuries ago to 60 centuries ago when first big empire and urban civilizations took root. The second includes the urban dominated high civilization to the present time. The third is yet to come. What it will be and how it will affect us are as yet uncertain matters. An approach to its study from the standpoint of dynamic sociology cannot but help us to meet and partly understand it.

The purposes of this article are to call attention to these works by Sorokin and their availability. Not everyone can be a cultural historian or a historical sociologist and very few should try to do so. But the hypotheses or propositions of social dynamics set forth in these works should either be refuted or blended into use in the neo-dynamic school of sociology which is now beginning to develop.

The current fad for static "social systems" must be ended. What man needs most now is a reliable sociology of change and dynamics.