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Sociology's Dostoyevski: Pitirim A. Sorokin

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s practitioners who seek to make sense of the major parameters of modern society, including linkages within and between societies, professional sociologists are committed to the objective, dispassionate search for valid knowledge. In a secular age, most sociologists would eschew that their scholarly pursuits have a religious dimension. Yet, in *A Sociology of Sociology* (1970) Robert W. Friedrichs proposed that a great deal of the sociological tradition, including para-

digms, theories and interpretations, embodies two complementary religious stances: the "prophetic" mode and the "priestly" mode. As the terms suggest, the former has a primary vision of a future vastly different from the present and seeks to prepare its audience for what is to come; the latter, on the other hand, helps accommodate its audience to present reality. The very beginnings of sociology stem from Henri Saint-Simon's (1760-1825) prophetic vision of an emerging new industrial social order. His was a highly utopian, optimistic vision of science, industry, and technology interacting to enable men to live harmoniously in a society whose laws could be understood as the science of "social physiology" (see Frank E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon*, 1956).

Nearly a hundred years ago, on January 21, 1889, another sociologist prophet was born—one with a starker vision of the future than Saint-Simon's, and whose prodigious breadth of knowledge and voluminous writ-

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ings made him a giant of twentieth-century social science. Like many of the great prophets of all ages, he was frequently "without honor in his own country." That dynamic person, who embodied so much of what many associate with the "Russian soul," was Pitirim Alexandrovitch Sorokin. (I had the privilege in my formative years as a sociologist to have Sorokin as a teacher and as a friend.)



As an introduction to Sorokin, it might be well to explain the title of this article. Some years ago Robert Nisbet, one of sociology's most literate citizens, published a seminal

work, *Sociology as an Art Form*, in which he cogently argued that "sociology and art are closely linked" (p. 4). He found an intriguing overlap in the themes and depictions of the social landscape between sociology, on the one hand, and literature, aesthetics, and the arts in general, on the other. Applying this insight, I think the great novelist Dostoyevski and the great sociologist Sorokin form a natural pair. The two Russians explored in depth the modern human condition, including the question of values and meaning in social existence. Like Dostoyevski, Sorokin faced death before the firing squad at the hands of the czarist regime (condemned for youthful political radicalism) and was also under a death threat while imprisoned by the new communist regime. Sorokin, of course, read in his youth and was deeply impressed with Dostoyevski.

Perhaps Dostoyevski's great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, provided

Sorokin with the insight that became the cornerstone of his "integral view of reality." Recall that the three brothers who are the central figures of the novel represent or accentuate three ways of relating to the world: through the body, through the spirit (or soul), and through the intellect. Sorokin's sociology, as it became fully developed in the 1920s and '30s, was grounded in the perspective that reality is an integral totality that has to be apprehended by empirical measurements (corresponding to the body), by logic (the intellect), and by intuition (the spiritual). Accordingly, Sorokin argued, sociology must use methods amenable to empirical, rational, and intuitive evidence.¹ Sorokin extended this even further. The main thrust of his sociological analysis was the comparative study of very large "sociocultural systems," that is, of civilizations. Sorokin saw civilizations as being grounded in values that stem from the central mode of apprehending reality that a given civilization follows for a long period. One central mode is the apprehension of reality via the senses: Reality is cognized through sense perception and observation. A second is the apprehension via ratiocination, cogitation, or, in general, the workings of the mind. Third is the mode of "suprational" intuition, a means of finding reality that is beyond the senses and beyond reason. Think of Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum*—"I believe (in Christ's divinity) because it is absurd."

Sorokin thought that the various institutions and parameters of a given civilization tend toward a certain consistency, in the sense that they will reflect the values of the dominant mode of apprehending and relating to

1. P.A. Sorokin, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 30R.

reality. He gave the names *sensate*, *ideational*, and *idealistic* to the three major types of civilization, and these names echo the triad of body-intellect-soul. I will elaborate on his analysis of Western civilization in a later section, but I did want at the beginning to indicate the interesting nexus of Sorokin with Dostoyevski. At the conclusion of this essay, I will also seek to link Sorokin with another great Russian figure of this century, one sharing with Sorokin the experience of imprisonment and exile.

I

A passionate man who led a passionate life,² Sorokin had a childhood that reads like pages out of Dickens. He came from a very humble agrarian background, leading a nomadic life as a result of a broken home. His formative years saw him oscillating between two driving interests. First, he had a great thirst for knowledge, read very widely in all fields, including the natural and the social sciences, and distinguished himself at the University of St. Petersburg. There, on the eve of World War I and still an undergraduate, he wrote articles for scientific journals and a book on criminology titled *Crime and Punishment*—yet another link with Dostoyevski. Graduating the year the Great War broke out, he had achieved academic distinction strictly by his own intellectual brilliance, without the financial means that other classmates enjoyed—a characteristic that would continue into later years.

The other allurements led to political activism, which is hardly surprising since late czarist Russia was in

2. Valuable details of his life are to be found in his autobiography, *A Long Journey* (New Haven: College and University Press). Professor Barry Johnston is preparing a major intellectual biography of Sorokin and has kindly shown me the chapters leading up to Sorokin's going to Harvard.

the throes of political upheaval stemming from various currents of nihilism, populism, and socialist radicalism (which several characters in Dostoyevski exemplify). The years before 1914 were, for Russian youth, what the 1960s were for American youth, and Russia's involvement with the war became as unpopular for young Russians as the Vietnam War did for young Americans fifty years later. Sorokin was not only an intellectual leader among his classmates at the university, he also was politically active, seeking justice and social (especially agrarian) reforms. For this he was imprisoned several times

Sorokin saw civilizations as being grounded in values that stem from the central mode of apprehending reality.

by the czarist regime, the last time in 1913. Prison gave him the opportunity to read his first major bit of Americana, Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

Unlike the 1960s, the 1910s did lead to revolutions and the toppling of various regimes and empires. Sorokin's public life underwent a roller coaster ride: from being the personal secretary of Alexander Kerensky, who headed Russia after the March overthrow of the czar, to being cast

in prison under a death sentence for his criticisms of the Bolsheviks after they seized power in the fall of 1917. Released on orders of Lenin under promise to forswear political activity, Sorokin and his new bride Elena saw firsthand a series of calamities that befell Russia. They witnessed not only a new ruthless totalitarian regime, but also the terrible sufferings of the great famine of 1919-1921 that shook Russia in the aftermath of the revolution.



he young sociologist, blocked from political activity, conducted large-scale empirical research in cities and in the countryside on the human consequences of starvation.

Combining his observations with documentation from many other settings, he wrote *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs*. It was seized by the communist censor and not until 1975 did it become readily available, seven years after Sorokin's death. That year one of his closest students, T. Lynn Smith, and Elena, his wife and lifelong companion, arranged for its posthumous translation into English. Its publication at the beginning of another wave of calamities in a large area of the world—the drought and famine in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia after the overthrow of Haile Selassie—made Sorokin's study very timely. What he had observed in his book was that calamities (plagues, wars, famines, and other disasters) facilitate harsh government control of the population, or what he termed "compulsory statism." If prosperity and the satiation of hunger lead to a

loosening of government control, conversely

the experiences of Russia and other countries . . . indicate just the opposite: namely nationalization, communization, and the development of statism leads to poverty, not to prosperity, and by no means do they improve the social conditions of the masses.³

Although on the political sidelines, Sorokin was viewed by the communist regime as a subversive intellectual and, like many, was forced into exile in 1922. Less fortunate, others who remained in the U.S.S.R. were imprisoned, sent to Siberia, or even shot. Sorokin left with but a few rubles—less than five dollars—in his pocket, never again to see Russia. Russia is known for its long winters, and perhaps it is just now that the spring thaw is beginning for intellectuals in the country that this year is celebrating a millennium of Christianity. Had he been alive in the Gorbachev era, Sorokin would undoubtedly have been pleased to revisit his native land to gauge firsthand the import of glasnost.

The ten or so years preceding his departure marked him for life and led to a reorientation in his sociological thinking. Instead of a rather optimistic view of human progress, stressing unilinear change for the general improvement of society, Sorokin's experience of political and social cataclysms led him to stress a more realistic view of human existence, one that sees fluctuations within periods of history, even within the same civilization. Such fluctuations are frequently attended by periods of crisis. Analyzing and documenting

3. *Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1975), 319.

what this entails led Sorokin into many sociological explorations for the next four or five decades. It also led him, after a brief stopover in Czechoslovakia at the invitation of President Masaryk (who was trained as a sociologist), to come to the United States in 1923. He gave his first lectures in English at Vassar College in November, then headed for the Midwest where he spent six fruitful, halcyon years at the University of Minnesota. The decade of the 1920s was a "return to normalcy" for both the United States and for Sorokin the scholar. New challenges and new crises awaited both in the next decade.

In the spring of 1929, the year of the great stock market crash, Sorokin was invited to lecture at Harvard. This was followed by President Lowell's invitation to join permanently the Harvard faculty and organize a new department of sociology. Sorokin accepted the invitation, became a U.S. citizen in 1930, and that fall began the last phase of his academic career, a new member of the Harvard community and its first professor of sociology. Among his first students was Robert K. Merton (whom Sorokin considered also his best), who today is undoubtedly the single most respected sociologist in the world. Sorokin was to chair the department for ten years, during which time it attracted outstanding talent and achieved overnight recognition as one of the top centers for training sociologists.

The years at Harvard (Sorokin and his family lived in Winchester, a town north of Cambridge; his house at 8 Cliff Street was an island of tranquility, and he took great pride in his flower garden, which won prizes that he esteemed more than scholastic honors) were very productive ones for him but not trouble-free. As a teacher

of graduate students Sorokin was not as effective as one of his younger departmental colleagues, Talcott Parsons. Sorokin inspired tremendous respect because of his erudition, but as a professor he was more the European Olympian deity figure than the less formal American type who invites students to share ideas and develop research in common. Then too, Sorokin was more steeped in the humanities, philosophy, and culture in general than in the more "scientific" or positivistic current of empirical sociology. When Conant (a natural scientist) succeeded Lowell (a humanist), Sorokin lost an important

He gave the names *sensate, ideational, and idealistic* to the three major types of civilization.

source of support within the university. But he had also lost effective intellectual leadership to Parsons, who became charged with reorganizing a new interdisciplinary department called Social Relations, which was officially launched in 1946. Sorokin was essentially estranged from graduate students, which led to great bitterness on his part toward Parsons, although as sociological theorists the two shared many points in common.

To indicate this state of affairs, when I arrived at Harvard as a graduate student in the early 1950s, Sorokin was a name one read about, but he did not teach graduate courses. And when in my second year the departmental secretary told me I had been awarded a teaching fellowship, she apologetically added that I was assigned that fall to Professor Sorokin, but not to worry, that I would get another teaching assignment for the spring! Well, by dint of being his assistant in his undergraduate course in the history of social theory, I got to know him as an exciting, impassioned lecturer, and more important, as a generous and warm human being who cared greatly about social relationships. From then until his death twenty years ago at age 79, we were in steady correspondence. I had the pleasure of seeing Sorokin vindicated on several fronts in his last years. First, in 1965 a group of his former graduate students at Harvard successfully organized a write-in campaign that saw him elected president of the American Sociological Association (ASA). Tributes to his writings appeared in several volumes,⁴ including one that I edited and which contains, among other first-rate pieces, an original essay by Talcott Parsons. Parsons graciously consented to be a contributor; I like to think that helped to heal the feud between them.

Perhaps the best tributes to Sorokin were posthumous. The year after his death, during the annual meetings of the ASA in San Francisco, the radical student caucus held an all-afternoon session outside the convention hotel devoted to the theme "Sorokin Lives!" This stemmed

from Sorokin's having become a symbol to a young generation of sociologists. Why Sorokin? Partly because they felt a certain tie with a person who had spoken out against the immorality of war in Vietnam (not because he supported the communist North but because he felt the world had suffered enough from wars in this century). Partly because, in his book *Power and Morality: Who Shall Guard the Guardians?* (1959), he had lashed out at the immorality of American public life and the nakedness of power, which had become certainly an important position of the SDS and the rebellious youth in the late 1960s. Partly, finally, because radical sociology students also identified with Sorokin as antiestablishment.

The second posthumous award came from the sociological establishment itself. The ASA, subsequent to his death, established the annual Sorokin Award in 1968 for the best book published in sociology. The name of the award was changed after 1979, but the ASA sponsors an annual Sorokin Lecture in recognition of distinguished scholarship.

Both of these recognitions—by a new generation of committed students and by the community of American scholars—may be taken as indicative that the "prophet of sociology" had earned the honor he cared for the most.

II

It is not my intention in this essay to give a concise summary and evaluation of Sorokin's writings. To do so would inevitably lead to oversimplification and distortion. I only hope that this piece might appeal as an invitation to read Sorokin for anyone who would like to come into contact with an important great mind of modern

times. One should want to read Sorokin like one should want to read Toynbee, Sartre, Freud, Jung, Berdyayev, Tillich, Foucault, Weber and other provocative analysts of modernity.

I have already drawn attention to certain aspects of his sociological writings, but this is an opportune place to bring out some further points that bear on the leitmotiv of Sorokin as a sociological prophet. First, if Sorokin engaged in "prophecies" (which in secular terminology are called *predictions* or *forecasts*), he did so in the light of what he considered strong empirical evidence. Although he lashed out at empiricism not grounded in theory, he was careful in all his works to use a wide array of empirical evidence. Second, Sorokin cannot be tagged as a doom-and-gloom prophet, for he also saw creative possibilities for the renewal of Western civilization. Although he might not have liked the materialistic metaphor, it might be said that Sorokin saw our civilization as being in a bear market but with possibilities for a bull market to emerge, with or without a "selling climax." Let me take up some of his more important and pregnant perspectives on the future.

In 1927 Sorokin published a pioneering study, *Social Mobility*, which has remained a major reference work on a vital area of sociological research: social stratification and social mobility. Sorokin began by noting that human beings locate themselves relative to each other in *social space*, which is quite different from geometric space. Individuals and groups experience differentiation in social space in terms of "social strata," or layers that are hierarchically arranged, with different access to power, honor, and other scarce resources. Individuals (and groups)

seek through their actions to move up the social pyramid, but there are also individuals (and groups) that experience—against their will, to be sure—a moving down from where their parents started. Sorokin considered the mechanisms that regulated the flow of persons up and down: social institutions that acted as channels and sieves of social circulation.⁵

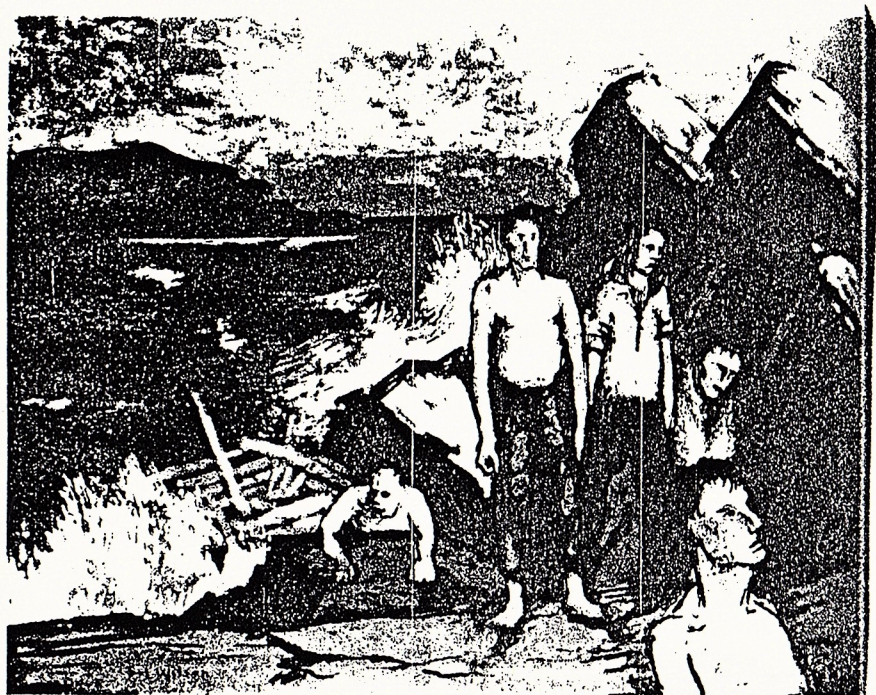
Sorokin did not feel that a high rate of mobility in itself assures the well-being of society. He argued that an important factor is the birthrate: "High birth rate seems to be an essential condition for the long existence of a society while a low birth rate is a

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satellite of decay," (*SM*, p. 502). When talented leaders at the apex of society fail to reproduce themselves, "waste and impoverishment" results, even if the upper stratum recruits from below, for the stratum is deprived of its

4. Among others, F.R. Cowell, *History, Civilization, and Culture: An Introduction to the Historical and Social Philosophy of P.A. Sorokin*; Philip J. Allen, ed., *Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review*; and E.A. Tiryakian, ed., *Sociological Theory, Values, and Sociocultural Change*.

5. In passing, let me note that his study was "rediscovered" forty years later by eminent sociologists Peter Blau and Otis D. Duncan and that their book on social mobility in the United States, appropriately enough, was the first recipient of the Sorokin award (in 1968). Sorokin's discussion of the inheritance of fathers' occupational status (chapter 17 of *Social Mobility*, cited hereafter as *SM*) anticipated much of the research literature spawned by Duncan and Blau concerning the "status attainment" model of mobility, very popular in sociology in the 1970s.



The Twelfth Day

natural leaders. Eventually, "a mobile society, however brilliant its civilization may be, is likely to come to decay and must give way to 'barbarians'" (SM p. 503). Sorokin drew from this demographic analysis of birth-rate differentials a conclusion that rings amazingly timely today:

On the one hand, many symptoms of social disorganization and decay within present Western societies are seen. On the other hand, the miraculous awakening of Japan and the Eastern peoples generally is noted. . . . Put into contact with the high European civilizations, they very quickly acquire its desir-

able traits. . . . In a short time, they may be able to become serious rivals; and, who knows, perhaps even the successors of the leading nations of the European societies (SM, pp. 503-4).

In the temper of today, a high birth rate is seen as a bane of civilization, so Sorokin's perspective as to what underlies the rise of East Asia may not find much appeal, yet it is remarkable that sixty years ago he did venture such a possible turn of events.

A second forecast of Sorokin is found in his most ambitious, elaborate study, *Social and Cultural*

*Dynamics*⁶ (which originally came out in four volumes, with an abridged and revised one-volume edition in 1957). It contains his theory of sociocultural systems, of the nature and changes of civilizations, of history being marked by large cycles and fluctuations, of how civilizations are internally integrated by "ontological principles" that are shared by the major institutions of that civilization, and so forth. His conclusion, written in 1941, is in the nature of a jeremiad and begins: "The present status of Western culture and society gives a tragic spectrum of the beginning of the disintegration of their Sensate supersystem" (SCD, p. 775).

This is followed by a delineation of trends that will come increasingly into the limelight as the modern sensate phase of Western civilization winds down, such as: increased relativization of values and blurring of differences between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, and so forth; stripping the religious or spiritual dimension of life and replacing this with a strictly empirical/materialistic definition of being human; force, fraud, and brutality becoming the predominant modes of dealing with others; disintegration of family ties, increase in divorces and separations "until the family becomes a mere incidental cohabitation of male and female while the home will become a mere overnight parking place mainly for sex-relationship" (SCD, p. 776). The list continues with predictions of increased suicide, mental disease, and crime. In addition, the population will be polarized into two types: the decadent "Sensate hedonists" living for the moment and setting the pace in public life and, in smaller numbers but of significance

in the coming transition, "ascetics and stoics indifferent and antagonistic to Sensate values" (SCD, p. 777). Sorokin foresaw a catharsis, the "*dies irae* of transition," which he expressed in very biblical language, reminiscent of the book of Revelation ("destruction rampant everywhere; cities and kingdoms erased, etc."). Beyond the turmoil, however, lie "charisma and resurrection" in the form of a new "Integralistic or Ideational" culture restoring "the creative mission of Western culture and society" (SCD, p. 779).

The 1957 edition of *Social and Cultural Dynamics* kept the concluding

It is the core values that provide the basis of our present Western civilization that are in a critical state

chapter but added a more nuanced perspective. The central tendency of our age, Sorokin remarked, contains equally the winding down of sensate culture and the emergence of "the first components of the new—ideational or idealistic—sociocultural order" (SCD, 1957, p. 703). Sorokin noted in passing new theories and conceptualizations in the various sciences replacing the more "mechanistic, materialistic, and deterministic" ones with newer ones more nota-

6. *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, abridged ed. (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1959); cited hereafter as SCD.

bly ideational or idealistic than their predecessors.⁷ His ultimate view was that transition into "a new magnificent era" of humanity might happen if we can avoid a new world war.



However bitter Sorokin was over his fall from influence at Harvard after World War II, he was too great a person to spend his time brooding and sulking. To enhance his understanding of the transition from a decadent sensate culture to a more vibrant ideational and idealistic one, he undertook research on altruism, a topic that deals with the highest qualities of mankind and which, Sorokin lamented, was of no interest to most sociologists, who instead prefer to study the seamy side of human nature. With a modest grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation, whose president greatly admired Sorokin and his emphasis on values, Sorokin set up a Research Center for Creative Altruism at Harvard. He organized research and published volumes on saints and altruists (including in the latter characteristics of persons who are "good neighbors") in the early 1950s. It is these kinds of persons, he felt, who will provide creative leadership for an ideational or idealistic culture.

Two points may be made in this context. One is that in today's mass

7. To venture an opinion, I believe that in the social sciences and humanities there has been a shift in the direction indicated by Sorokin thirty years ago. The currents of structuralism and poststructuralism, of phenomenology and ethnomethodology, among others, have been important in literary and sociological analysis. Yet, the picture is not one-sided, since world-system analysis and rational choice theory—at least in my own discipline of sociology—have also emerged since Sorokin's prediction, and these are more in the nature of materialistic interpretations.

culture, saints and altruists (such as Mother Teresa) receive far less public attention than do egoists, whether in soap operas such as *Dallas* or in real life by corporate raiders, jet-set entertainers, and the like. As commentators have noted, there is an acute shortage in today's popular culture of heroes and positive role models essential to provide young people with psychological measuring sticks. Sorokin's research on altruism thus deserves to be reevaluated as a timely corrective to the "culture of narcissism" that is a nonconstructive alternative to the social activism of the 1960s. The second point is that by an interesting coincidence, twenty years after Sorokin did, another Harvard professor, E.O. Wilson, won national recognition and critical acclaim for his work on sociobiology—a major focus of this new biological discipline being precisely the nature of altruistic behavior.⁸ The questions intersecting these two very different methods of investigating and accounting for altruism offer an interesting challenge, not yet undertaken, to my knowledge.

Sorokin also turned to prophecy about sociology. In his 1965 presidential address before the ASA, and the following year in his last major work, he examined the state and the future of sociology.⁹ He gave considerable attention to the all-important notion of "system" and noted that modern biophysical sciences take a holistic view of their phenomena, which is compatible with treating sociocultural systems as wholes, rather than as discrete elements. Instead of lawless, atomistic behav-

8. E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology, The New Synthesis* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1975).

9. "Sociology of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," *American Sociological Review*, 30 (Dec. 1965): 833-63; cited hereafter as SYTT, *Sociological Theories of Today* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

ior, genes no less than human beings are better viewed as highly integrated systems. Hence, biological organisms and sociocultural systems equally exhibit self-directing change:

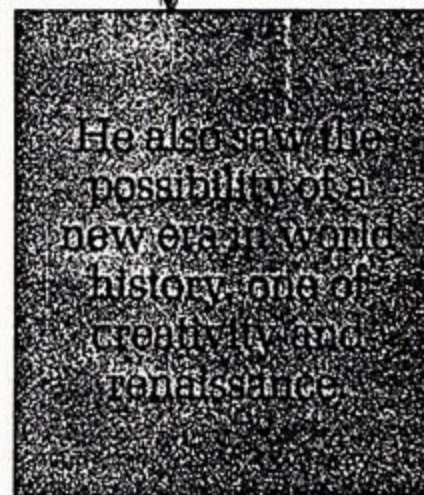
From the moment of their emergence they also bear in themselves the main phases of their life-career, and this life-career consists largely of an unfolding or realization of their potentialities (SYTT, p. 841).

Not only did Sorokin see a convergence between biophysical sciences and sociology, but he also indicated the fruitful convergence between different currents of sociological thought. In particular, he proposed that theories of "vast sociocultural systems and supersystems" complement the "microsociological studies of small groups and small cultural unities." Just as he foresaw a new integral and creative civilization arising from the debris of sensate culture, so also did he conclude his look at sociology by predicting that "sociology will choose the road of creative growth and . . . eventually enter its new period of great syntheses" (SYTT, p. 843).

III.

In the course of this essay, I have been suggesting that Pitirim Sorokin may well be regarded as a sociological prophet for our times. Prophets are not easy persons to take because their messages are intended to jar us from the complacency of everyday life. Sorokin's program, scattered in writings that range from studies of how individuals budget their time to essays on revolutions, is twofold: a diagnosis of the elements of crisis at

the heart of Western civilization and a prognosis of social reconstruction. It is the core values that provide the basis of our present Western civilization that are in a critical state. These values—such as individualism and an empirical this-worldly orientation—were, in an earlier phase of modernity, creative and conducive to great civilizational accomplishments. But now they have degenerated to a decadent phase of hedonism, materialism, and aggression by governments and individuals, uncurbed by a higher authority. It is in the twilight phase of a civilization's dominant set of values that destructive social be-



havior is likely to increase. Global wars were viewed by Sorokin as such tragic behavior.

In 1960 Sorokin published a lengthy essay in which he foresaw not a zero-sum conflict between Russia and America but rather their convergence to a new type of society.¹⁰ It might be remembered

10. "Mutual Convergence of the United States and the U.S.S.R. to the Mixed Sociocultural Type," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 1 (Sept. 1960): 143-176; cited hereafter as MC.

that relations between the two countries, led at the time by Eisenhower and Khrushchev, respectively, were badly strained over the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the U-2 incident, and so forth. Both sides were claiming the inevitable demise of the other's society and its system. What then led Sorokin to his rather startling outlook?



Sorokin began by viewing capitalism as a system in decay: The original free enterprise system has given way to the welfare state, to a separation of management and ownership of corporations, and so forth. On the other hand, a communist system of economy and government is unable to provide for the economic needs of its population; it depends on a totalitarian control that originates during catastrophic emergencies, such as a great famine, devastating epidemic, revolution, or global depression. When the emergency passes, there is a tendency for "totalitarian reconversion towards less regimented and more free ways of life," (*MC*, p. 147). Sorokin formulated thus a "social law" that governmental regimentation varies proportionally to dire emergencies facing the society. If, therefore, great lasting emergencies can be avoided in the future, communist and other varieties of totalitarian societies are going to decline (*MC*, p. 148)—and it seems that Sorokin anticipated precisely the winds of change in Russia and China today.

Sorokin went on to note that even if the political leaders of both coun-

tries engage in vituperative insults and denunciations, the underlying social factors have been "making both countries increasingly similar to each other" (*MC*, p. 149), even in their values. Russian scientists and philosophers have been distancing themselves from the original Marxist interpretations of history and society, while on the other hand, materialist philosophies and ideologies have seeped into public and private activities in American sociocultural life (*MC*, p. 157). Sorokin saw the convergence extending to spheres such as criminal law, education, sports and recreation, the fine arts, family and marriage, the economy, and even religion. Lest we think that convergence for Sorokin meant just a one-way stream of Russian society becoming like the American democracy, Sorokin also noted totalitarian tendencies in the United States: the buildup of military organizations and funding, curtailment and restrictions on the First and Fifth Amendments, and so forth. He castigated leaders of both countries for wasting precious natural resources, for moralistic preaching contradicted by the use of immoral means and disreputable allies, and so forth. And all this "at the cost of survival of the human race on this planet" (*MC*, p. 175). Ending on a positive note, he concluded that the convergence pointed to the emergence of a mixed type, "neither too criminal nor too saintly," which, if given the chance, might develop into "a magnificent Integral order in both countries as well as in the whole human universe." (*MC*, p. 175).

Pitirim Alexandrovitch Sorokin died in 1968, having spent much of his brilliant intellectual career as a prophet in the wilderness. It is appropriate in coming to the end of this

article to mention that ten years later—and now ten years ago—another Russian exile appeared at Harvard and gave a commencement address that analyzed the moral situation of Western civilization, an address that could have been uttered practically word for word by Sorokin. I refer to Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn. Just as Sorokin had experienced the brutality of Lenin's Russia, so had Solzhenitsyn experienced the brutality of Stalin's regime. People expected Solzhenitsyn to praise the American way and denounce the Russian system, but instead, he took a hard look first at their convergence and second at the moral situation of the West. He was skeptical of ever seeing an easy, calm transformation of the Soviet system, but equally critical of Western narcissism.

According to Solzhenitsyn, legalism has become so prevalent and widespread in the United States that the misuse of individual freedom is as much encouraged as discouraged by a one-sided stress on human rights at the neglect of human obligations. The press has become "the greatest power within the Western countries," but it is not accountable to its readership.¹¹ Solzhenitsyn confirmed Tocqueville's observation (in the latter's *Democracy in America*) that independent thinking is actually not given a forum in the mass media.

Solzhenitsyn told his Harvard audience—as Sorokin had told his Harvard audience years before—that the total emancipation in the West from the Christian moral heritage, the divorce of spiritual values from

public life, the rise of materialism and legalistic selfishness "has reached its peak and the world has found itself in a harsh spiritual crisis and a political impasse" (*AWSA*, p. 51).

Solzhenitsyn insisted that we must transcend "the calamity of an autonomous, irrelevant humanistic consciousness" (*AWSA*, p. 57). The life-course must become a journey to experience moral growth, and the need to reappraise the scale of the usual human values is urgent. We have reached a major watershed in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the



Renaissance," he concluded (*AWSA*, p. 61), and a spiritual blaze is demanded for a postmodern era. Solzhenitsyn's blunt message lacks the sociological dimension of Sorokin but nevertheless complements it. As contemporary prophets of our civilization, they not only share a common ancestry in Dostoyevski, but a lineage that goes back to the biblical roots of Western civilization. ■

11. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart* (New York: Harper & Row, p. 27, cited hereafter as *AWSA*).