
Critic of the Sensate Culture: Rediscovering the Genius of Pitirim Sorokin

Leaves from a Russian Diary—and Thirty Years After by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Beacon Press: Boston, 1950; originally published in 1924) [LDR]

Contemporary Sociological Theories by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Harper and Row: New York, 1928, 1958) [CST]

Social and Cultural Dynamics by Pitirim A. Sorokin (revised and abridged in one volume by the author, Transaction Books: New Brunswick, 1957, 1985; originally published in four volumes, I-III, 1937; IV, 1941) [SCD]

The Crisis of Our Age: The Social and Cultural Outlook by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1942) [COA]

Society, Culture, and Personality: Their Structure and Dynamics by Pitirim A. Sorokin (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947) [SCP]

The Reconstruction of Humanity by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948) [RH]

Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950) [SAC]

Altruistic Love: A Study of American “Good Neighbors” and Christian Saints by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950) [AL]

The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954) [WPL]

Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology by Pitirim A. Sorokin
(Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956) [FFM]

The American Sex Revolution by Pitirim A. Sorokin (Boston:
Porter Sargent, 1956) [ASR]

Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review edited by Philip J. Allen (Durham:
Duke University Press, 1963) [PSR]

Sociological Theories of Today by Pitirim A. Sorokin (New York:
Harper and Row, 1966) [STT]

The organism of the Western society and culture seems to be undergoing one of the deepest and most significant crises of its life. We are seemingly between two epochs: the dying Sensate culture of our magnificent yesterday, and the coming Ideational or Idealistic culture of the creative tomorrow. We are living, thinking, acting at the end of a brilliant six-hundred-year-long Sensate day. The oblique rays of the sun still illumine the glory of the passing epoch. But the light is fading, and in the deepening shadows it becomes more and more difficult to see clearly and to orient ourselves safely in the confusions of the twilight. The night of the transitory period begins to loom before us and the coming generations—perhaps with their nightmares, frightening shadows, and heart-rending horrors. Beyond it, however, the dawn of a new great Ideational or Idealistic culture is probably waiting to greet the men of the future.

Pitirim Sorokin (1937)

The American Sex Revolution

In the mid-1950s the Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorokin published a provocative little book on *The American Sex Revolution* that would prove uncanny in its prescience. Indeed, Sorokin's book makes for most engaging reading today as it may be the only work of social criticism written during the middle years of the 20th century that so accurately gauged the direction

in which America and Europe were headed that its analysis is even more relevant to the social situation that exists at the present time than the one that existed when it was first written. A full half century after its appearance, hardly a page of *The American Sex Revolution* is dated, and readers today will look repeatedly at the publication date for reassurance that the book was actually written during the supposedly tranquil years of the Ozzie and Harriet era.

The harmful trends that Sorokin described in his book, many of which were cause for only moderate concern in their own time, would become much more extreme in subsequent decades, and today are generally acknowledged as a major source of social and cultural decline in what is not inaccurately described as a “post-Christian” West. These include declining birth rates and diminished parental commitment to the welfare of children; vastly increased erotic content in movies, plays, novels, magazines, television shows, radio programs, song lyrics, and commercial advertising; increased divorce, promiscuity, premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, spousal abandonment, and out-of-wedlock births; and related to these developments, a growing increase in juvenile delinquency, psychological depression, and mental disorders of every description. So extreme have some of these trends become, particularly since the late 1960s, that many today can look back nostalgically upon the 1950s when Sorokin issued his warnings as a period of great social stability, “family values,” and dedication to traditional Christian understandings of sex, marriage, and child rearing.

The American Sex Revolution begins with stark acknowledgment that a radical change in sexual mores and sexual practices has come about in America in the 20th century whose effects permeate all aspects of American life. “American society has become obsessed with sex,” Sorokin declares: “During the last two centuries, and particularly the last few decades,” he writes,

every phase of our culture has been invaded by sex. Our civilization has become so preoccupied with sex that it now oozes

from all pores of American life.... Whatever aspect of our culture is considered, each is packed with sex obsession. Its vast totality bombards us continuously, from cradle to grave, from all points of our living space, at almost every step of our activity, feeling, and thinking.... We are completely surrounded by the rising tide of sex which is flooding every compartment of our culture [and] every section of our social life.

While we may not think of a sexual revolution the way we do a political, economic, or social-class revolution, the effects of the American sex revolution may be just as momentous as those of the more familiar kinds of social upheavals. “In spite of its odd characteristics,” Sorokin writes, “this sex revolution is as important as the most dramatic political or economic upheaval. It is changing the lives of men and women more radically than any other revolution of our time.” (ASR 19, 54, 3)

Sorokin devotes much of the earlier sections of *The American Sex Revolution* to documenting the claim that 20th century American culture is “sex-centered and sex-preoccupied.” In literature, Sorokin writes, almost all eminent American authors have had to pay their homage to sex, either by making it the central theme of their work or by devoting to it a good deal of attention even in books focused on entirely different topics. What is most significant is that many of these authors—including serious writers like Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O’Neil, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck—portray sexual excesses and sexual misconduct as if they were perfectly normal and acceptable adult behavior. This is a dramatic change from the practice of the great novelists of the 19th century like Tolstoy and Flaubert, Sorokin explains, who “depicted illicit passion as a tragedy for which hero and heroine alike paid with their lives or by long suffering.” By contrast, “most of the adulteries and other sins treated in contemporary literature are considered by the authors enjoyable adventures in the monotonous existence of modern men and women.” (ASR 23) Such depictions cannot fail to weaken commitment to marital fidelity and tend to demoralize

rather than integrate the many conflicting passions, sexual and otherwise, that exist within the human soul. Sex obsession in what Sorokin calls the “pulp” or “sham” literature—i.e. the junk novels and mass market literature—is even more pronounced and more degrading than that in the more serious literature.

In addition to the trends in literature, *The American Sex Revolution* offers trenchant sketches of the trends towards greater sexualization in several other areas of American arts and media including painting, sculpture, music, films, plays, television shows, radio broadcasts, commercial advertising, and the popular press. Other developments in American culture richly documented in the book include (a) trends in law making divorce much easier to obtain; (b) trends in social science in which “sex-obsessed ethnologists produce fables about primitive peoples which extol promiscuity, recommend premarital and extramarital relations, and throw into the ashcan all arguments for our existing institutions of monogamous marriage and family as obsolete and scientifically indefensible” [Margaret Mead is the unnamed target here]; and, (c) trends in ethics and moral philosophy whereby “new beatitudes have been successfully spread throughout our nation” such that divorce and spousal desertion are no longer punished by public obloquy, while “continence, chastity, and faithfulness are increasingly viewed as oddities”—“ossified survivals of a prehistoric age.” These trends, Sorokin writes, do not bode well for the future health of American society or the American family. Much of the rest of *The American Sex Revolution* is devoted to spelling out in very concrete terms the harmful effects of these multiple developments upon the well-being of individuals, families, and society at large. (ASR 40, 43, 44, 55)

One such harm is a general decline in culture’s creative élan. Contrary to what is sometimes said about the greater creativity of bohemian intellectuals and other sexual profligates, history, Sorokin says, shows unmistakably that any society given over to sex obsession, such as ancient Greece and Rome in their later stages, loses the self-discipline, sensitivity, sense of purpose, and dedication to a demanding task that is necessary for any kind of

great creative achievement. Thomas Edison's remark that his inventions were 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration reflects a truth about any kind of successful creative endeavor Sorokin says, and individuals and nations given over to a sex obsession he believes are incapable of the sustained effort needed for truly creative and inventive work.

Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and others are sometimes held up as examples of great creative artists who led sexually dissolute lives. This shows, some say, that sexual dissoluteness either has little effect upon creative output or may even enhance it. But such claims, Sorokin says, are refuted by the historical record. The illicit liaisons of Mozart and Chopin had a clearly depressive influence upon their artistic lives he points out, and poor Schubert was led to an early grave by the venereal disease he contacted through his sexual adventures. Most of the greatest achievements in Western philosophy and fine arts were the product of creative personalities who, in their personal lives, were anything but sexual adventurers. Sorokin offers a long list: Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Archytes, Aristotle, Euclid, Plotinus, Archimedes, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Phidias, Varro, Copernicus, Newton, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Palestrina, Victoria, Bach, Beethoven, Dante, Kant. These, and many of the other great creators of Western culture "were in their sex life either normal from the standpoint of the prevailing standards of their society and period, or were more continent than their contemporaries." (ASR 70-71)

When a sex obsession grips an entire society, according to Sorokin, it not only loses its artistic creativity, but it also becomes devitalized in many other areas of life, including eventually the economic realm. He draws heavily in support of this contention from the extensive research of the British anthropologist J.D. Unwin whose *Sex and Culture*¹ presents a richly documented theory of cultural flourishing and decline in which the social control of sexuality plays a key role. Unwin illustrates his views with innumerable examples taken from both literate and preliterate cultures. Summarizing both his own and Unwin's findings, Sorokin

writes that “there is no example [in history] of a community which has retained its high position on the cultural scale after less rigorous sexual customs have replaced more restricting ones.” (ASR 110-111) Loosening sexual morals in the late stages of Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, Mongol, Greek, Roman, and Ptolemaic-Egyptian civilizations were all associated, Sorokin says, with the decline of these civilizations in creative vigor of all kinds.

In their early phases, Sorokin explains, each of these cultures observed great modesty in their visual arts in the way they depicted the human body, but in their later phases their art became increasingly preoccupied with eroticism and sexualized display. What is known about sexual behavior in these cultures suggests that this change in the subject matter of art paralleled a general loosening of the sexual morals of the society, a decline in family stability, increasing domestic unhappiness, and a general loss in the culture’s creativity and *élan*. A tendency in this direction could also be seen in Italy during the late Renaissance and early modern period, Sorokin says, but the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the ascetical strains in early Protestantism temporarily turned back this trend. By the early 20th century, however, Western society rapidly abandoned its older religious restraints and moral values regarding sex and plunged headlong into a sexual revolution whose harmful consequences for the overall health and well-being of society can hardly be overstated. This revolution in sexual mores occurred in Europe shortly before it occurred in the United States, but by the middle of the 20th century Americans were rapidly catching up to their European counterparts and in some respects even surpassing them.

There is a time-lag element to change in sexual mores, however, Unwin’s and Sorokin’s scholarship suggest, as the effects of a loosening in sexual morals may not be immediate for the society beginning to undergo the change. This is because those brought up in the period before the sex revolution often retain much of their older ways of discipline and restraint, and even their children have solid parental role models to look back upon as a

partial restraining influence. According to Unwin's extensive studies, the greatest effect of a sexual revolution comes in the third and subsequent generations, when an entire generational cohort is brought up in a society whose elders were also the product of sexual liberation and has lost all capacity to focus its libidinal energies in a controlled and productive manner. Such a society is marked by advanced dissipation, diminished creativity, antisocial behavior, and general economic and cultural decline.

The judgment of history is unmistakable: "The regime," Sorokin writes, "that permits chronically excessive, illicit, and disorderly sex activities contributes to the decline of cultural creativity, [while] the regime that confines sexual life within socially sanctioned marriage...provides an environment more favorable for creative growth of the society than does the regime of free or disorderly sex relationships which neither morally disapproves nor legally prohibits premarital and extramarital liaisons." (ASR 106-107) An extreme confirmation of this historical law, says Sorokin, was provided by developments in Russia during the 1920s, when the new Soviet regime, reflecting the Leninist view that traditional Christian marriage was a harmful "bourgeois" convention, deliberately tried to destroy traditional marriage and family ties. Sorokin describes this policy as follows:

During the first stage of the Revolution, its leaders deliberately attempted to destroy marriage and the family. Free love was glorified by the official "glass of water" theory: if a person is thirsty, so went the Party line, it is immaterial what glass he uses when satisfying his thirst; it is equally unimportant how he satisfies his sex hunger. The legal distinction between marriage and casual sexual intercourse was abolished. The Communist law spoke only of "contracts" between males and females for the satisfaction of their desires either for an indefinite or a definite period—a year, a month, a week, or even for a single night. One could marry and divorce as many times as desired.... Bigamy and

even polygamy were permissible under the new provisions. Abortion was facilitated in state institutions. Premarital relations were praised and extramarital relations were considered normal. (ASR 113-114)

In very short order, however, it became apparent that a disaster was rapidly descending upon Russia—one whose severe effects didn't have to wait two or three generations to be obvious to all. Within a few years juvenile delinquency rose in Russia; hordes of wild, undisciplined, parentless children became a menace to the stability of the new regime; lives were wrecked; divorces, abortions, mental illness, and domestic conflicts of all kinds skyrocketed; and work in the nationalized factories began to suffer. Recognizing their mistake, the totalitarian leaders of the Soviet Union made a complete about-face at the end of the 1920s, Sorokin explains, and essentially reestablished the *status quo ante*. The “glass of water theory” was declared to be counterrevolutionary, abortion was prohibited, the freedom to divorce was radically curtailed, and both premarital chastity and the sanctity of marriage were officially glorified by the Soviet state. The result was that by the middle of the century Soviet society displayed “a more monogamic, stable, and Victorian family and marriage life” than that found in most non-communist countries of the West. (ASR 115)

One of the most interesting discussions in *The American Sex Revolution* is about the effect of loose sexual mores on the ability of a population to reproduce and sustain itself. One might think that a culture that encourages early sexual experimentation, premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, casual sex, multiple lifetime partners, women who say “yes” rather than “no,” and many other features of a sex-liberated society would produce more babies and have a higher birth rate than a sexually more restrained or sexually “repressed” society. But the very opposite is the case, Sorokin shows, and historically societies that are in the grip of a sexual revolution, he says, will, within a generation or two, begin to start declining in population. In explaining this fact,

Sorokin says that communities whose members become preoccupied with the hunt for sexual excitement and sexual pleasure usually do not want to be burdened by the obligations of raising children whose care presents great obstacles to the realization of these goals. Whether through abortion, infanticide, contraception, or the involuntary sterility that sometimes results from venereal disease, the birth rate in such societies will dramatically decline.

On a small scale this fact is easily seen, Sorokin says, in the history of many European aristocratic families in both medieval and modern times. European aristocrats were notorious for their sexual libertinism, and the attitudes and behavior patterns engendered by such class-based sex obsessions, Sorokin says, were so unfriendly to the demands of raising substantial numbers of children that it is not surprising that these aristocratic families often failed to produce enough children to continue their family lines. Within a single century, Sorokin's statistics show, many of the aristocratic families of medieval and modern Europe simply died out with few lasting beyond three-hundred years. This trend can be seen, he says, among aristocratic families in England, France, Germany, Sweden, Russia and many other places as well. He offers many examples. In medieval Nuremberg, for instance, there were 118 patrician families in existence at the end of the 14th century, but a century later there was barely half this amount. Similarly, in England between 1611 and 1819, there were 1,527 baronetcies created, only 43% of which survived to the beginning of the 20th century.

What is true of aristocratic families can become true of whole cultures, Sorokin says, with the result being severe depopulation. Men and women in sex-obsessed societies may or may not marry, but if they do marry their marriages are frequently childless, or produce only one or two offspring—which is not enough to sustain the existing size of the group. As a consequence, Sorokin explains, the population first becomes stationary and then begins to decline. If low birth rates are combined with increased longevity—that is, if fewer people die before maturity—the age distribu-

tion of the population begins to shift radically upward. There are then fewer and fewer young people in the society and a preponderance of middle-aged and older people. This kind of situation, Sorokin says, has a disastrous effect upon the economic, technological, artistic, and military vitality of the society involved, and the society rapidly declines. “Whatever may be the virtues of age,” Sorokin writes, “they cannot compensate for the vitality, vigor, courage, daring, elasticity, and creativity of the young. A nation largely composed of middle-aged or elderly people enfeebles itself physically, mentally, and socially, and moves toward the end of its creative mission and leadership.” (ASR 82)²

Besides devitalizing whole cultures and family lines, a sexual revolution, Sorokin says, upsets the delicate psychic equilibrium of the countless individuals who succumb to its allure. Contrary to the image created by much of modern literature, psychology, and film, the inner world of the sexually liberated is one of inner turmoil and tension. The sexual adventurer, he explains, is dominated by his lusts and sexual desires, and is perpetually bombarded by external stimuli that challenge his weak internal control mechanism. He is a house divided against itself. The hunt for new sexual thrills is inseparable from the sex-obsession itself, and this inevitably leads to conflicts between the sexual libertine and the many persons and groups whose norms and interests he has transgressed. In such a situation, says Sorokin, the libertine cannot achieve real peace of mind. He is subject to alienation, depression and a variety of mental disturbances—not to speak of the danger of venereal disease, unwanted pregnancies, and the possibility of being maimed or murdered by an aggrieved party. And he usually must lie or dissimulate about what he is doing. (The contemporary reader inevitably conjures up thoughts about some of our past presidents). Sexual liberation, Sorokin contends, is really not what it is cracked up to be in so much of our modern art, literature, movies, and songs.

By contrast, Sorokin says, the more integrated personalities that reject the allurements of sexual liberation and seek to bring their animal or “lower self” into harmony with the “higher self” of

their moral and spiritual values are more likely to lead an orderly life that is free from the kinds of conflicts experienced by the more profligate. Such a person can follow a clear-cut path of action determined by his highest values—which most frequently involve a loving marriage and dedication to spouse and children. And he will attain a moral integrity and inner peace of mind beyond the comprehension of the sexually dissolute and disorderly. Such an integration of personality is always difficult to achieve, but it is much more difficult, Sorokin says, in a sex-saturated culture such as our own. It is nevertheless a goal well worth struggling for.

In the penultimate chapter of *The American Sex Revolution* Sorokin comments on “America at the Crossroads” in words with such contemporary resonance that it is hard to believe they were written almost two generations ago:

[The] preceding chapters have shown a rapid increase of divorce, desertion, and separation, and of premarital, and extra-marital relations, with the boundary between lawful marriage and illicit liaisons tending to become more and more tenuous....As a consequence, in spite of our still developing economic prosperity, and our outstanding progress in science and technology, in education, in medical care; notwithstanding our democratic regime and way of life, and our modern methods of social service; in brief, in spite of the innumerable and highly effective techniques and agencies for social improvement, there has been no decrease in adult criminality, juvenile delinquency, and mental disease, no lessening of the sense of insecurity and of frustration. If anything, these have been on the increase, and already have become the major problems of our nation. What this means is that the poisonous fruits of our sex-marriage-family relationships are contaminating our social life and our cultural and personal well-being... Our trend toward sex anarchy has not yet produced catastrophic consequences. Nevertheless, the first syndromes of grave disease have already appeared. The new sex freedom, of course is only one factor....

However, the sex factors and the accompanying disorganization of the family are among the most important contribution to these pathological phenomena. (ASR 132-133)

Sorokin ends *The American Sex Revolution* on a note of optimism. Periods of great social disorder and calamity, he says, open opportunities for both degradation and ennoblement. In what he calls “the law of polarization”—which he has written about extensively in other works—troubled times are seen as ones in which the majority of the people in a society usually respond to disorder by becoming more disorganized, self-centered, and immoral. At the same time, however, a minority of the population responds to social stress—be it from war, famine, plague, revolution, genocides, or whatever—by reintegrating their personality upon a higher moral center and becoming more decent, loving, and holy. Sorokin puts sexual revolutions in the same category as other social disturbances and believes they present an opportunity for the more morally determined to detach themselves from the surrounding corruption of their society and devote themselves to a higher and nobler calling than the pursuit of bodily pleasure. For young people, in particular, Sorokin says, this is one of the great challenges of our time and a critical step in the movement away from a dying narcissistic culture to the beginning of a new, spiritually revitalized creative culture.

Who Was Pitirim Sorokin?

Pitirim Sorokin was one of the giants of 20th century social thought. The founding chairman of Harvard’s sociology department, Sorokin authored over thirty books in his lifetime, many of them weighty tomes of five- and six-hundred pages or more displaying encyclopedic knowledge of specialized scholarship in no less than six European languages. In terms of the scope and focus of his interests he is most readily compared to Comte, Tocqueville, and Weber, though in terms of the sheer breadth and weightiness of his literary output he even overshadows these.

Yet in his own lifetime Sorokin received little of the recogni-

tion commensurate with the true greatness of his achievement, and in recent years he has all but been forgotten. This is a sad development since Sorokin is one of the few social theorists writing in the early and middle years of the 20th century whose thought in many ways is even more relevant and more illuminating to developments that have occurred in America in the last third of the previous century than in the period in which his ideas were first formulated. Sorokin, however, was a man writing for the ages, and the fact that neither his own age nor the current generation has shown sufficient respect for his genius may tell us more about the shortcomings of our times than it does about Sorokin. A true intellectual giant, Sorokin's achievement endures even if not yet fully appreciated.

Pitirim Sorokin was born in 1889 in a region of northern Russia populated by the Komi people, a tight-knit ethnic group closely related racially and linguistically to the Finns. His mother, a Komi peasant woman, died while he was still an infant. From the age of three until the age of ten he and an older brother were cared for mostly by their father, Alexander P. Sorokin, an itinerant craftsman of Russian descent, who earned his living specializing in the repair of gilding and icon work on local Orthodox Christian churches. Pitirim and his older brother spent many years of their childhood following their father around from village to village in search of work (another brother was taken in by relatives after the mother's death). Although material conditions were harsh, and the three Sorokin's spent many a night sleeping in the forests on the way from one local job to the next, Pitirim in his later years would look back upon his early years among the Komi people with great fondness born of the realization that Komi peasant society, while terribly poor by the standards of more economically developed cultures, reflected a well-integrated and wholesome form of community life that was morally and spiritually richer than that offered by most technologically advanced urban societies. The impact of Komi living would leave an indelible imprint upon Sorokin's personality and beliefs.

The Komi society of his youth seems to have been an early

model for what in Sorokin's later philosophy would be described as a balanced Integral or Idealistic culture in which the material and the spiritual, the this-worldly and the other-worldly, are harmoniously blended in a mutually enriching partnership. "The morality and mores of the Komi peasant communities," he would explain in a late autobiographical sketch,

were well integrated around the precepts similar to those of the Ten Commandments and of mutual help. The houses of the peasants did not have any locks because there were no thieves. Serious crimes occurred very rarely, if at all; even misdemeanors were negligible. People largely practiced the moral precepts they preached. Mutual aid likewise was a sort of daily routine permeating the whole life of the community. Moral norms themselves were regarded as God-given, unconditionally binding and obligatory for all.... Living in this sort of a moral community I naturally absorbed its moral norms as well as its mores. (PSR 15)

Although Sorokin had many fond memories of his father ("he was a wonderful man, loving and helping his sons in any way he could"), the elder Sorokin was prone to bouts of alcoholic binges in which he would become delirious and sometimes violent. In one such episode a drunken Alexander attacked Pitirim and his older brother with a hammer, after which the boys decided that they had to leave their father's custody and strike out on their own. Pitirim at the time was only 10 years old, his brother 14. A year after the violent hammer incident Alexander P. Sorokin died. Pitirim and his brother took up their father's gilding trade and found work painting cathedrals and silvering and gilding church icons in both Komi- and Russian-speaking regions of Russia.

From an early age Pitirim Sorokin seems to have possessed a deep spiritual sense, one which was awakened and cultivated by his frequent contact with priests, churches, religious hymns, prayers, Orthodox rituals, and icons. As a boy he took an active part in church choral singing and nourished his soul on the tales

of Christian martyrs and saints. “In my boyhood years,” he would later write,

this religious climate was one of the main atmospheres in which I lived, worked, and formed my early beliefs, rituals, moral standards, and other values.... A large portion of our time we spent in, around, or on church buildings, painting them, and making, silvering, and gilding their cult objects. In this work we naturally met, talked, and interacted with the village clergy.... Learning by heart all the prayers and psalms of religious services and the main religious beliefs [of the Orthodox Church], I became a good preacher-teacher at the neighborly gatherings of peasants during the long winter evenings. The splendor of religious ritual, the beautiful landscape of the countryside viewed from the top of church buildings, especially on clear, sunny days, these and hundreds of other situations enriched my mental life—emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically, and morally.... [These religious influences were] so strong that, after reading several old volumes on the *Lives of the Saints*, I tried to become an ascetic-hermit and many times retired for fasting and praying into the solitude of the nearby forest. (PSR 12)

Barry Johnston, Sorokin’s biographer, sees these early Orthodox experiences as permanently shaping Sorokin’s later belief system and a key to understanding some of his mature ideas on philosophy, religion, politics, and art. Although Sorokin would downplay, abandon, or ignore some of these early religious beliefs during his years as an anti-Tsarist revolutionary, he would later return to them in the disillusionment that followed the Bolshevik revolution, during the period in which he developed his mature philosophy. From the late 1920s until his death in the 1960s, his boyhood-formed religious beliefs would remain a constant in the structure of Sorokin’s *Weltanschauung*. It was during his boyhood years, Johnston writes, that “the drama of the Mass, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Redemption disciplined his spirit.” “These mysteries, along with the Sermon on the Mount and the

Christian Beatitudes, were moral guides for the rest of his life.”³

Sorokin’s formal education in these early years was sporadic at best as the need to move from place to place seeking new work, together with the help he had to render to his father and older brother, made regular school attendance impossible. But somehow Sorokin managed to acquire as a young boy the rudiments of written Russian, and he became a voracious reader, largely self-motivated and self-taught. His early reading included a number of the great Russian literary classics, including works by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Pushkin. A major change in the course of his education came when at the age of 12 he won a scholarship—including room and board in a student dormitory—to study at an advanced elementary school in the village of Gam. He had taken the entrance exam to the school largely on a lark, but did extraordinarily well on it and later impressed his teachers with the brilliance of his youthful intellect.

After three years at the Gam school Sorokin won another scholarship to study at a teacher’s training school run by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was during his time spent at this school that Sorokin first became interested in questions of contemporary politics. Like many of the young men of his day, he became absorbed in the struggle against what they believed to be the gross injustice of the Tsarist regime, and Sorokin would later become an organizer for the anti-monarchist Social Revolutionary Party. Despite the seeming radicalism of its title, the Social Revolutionary Party was actually among the more moderate factions opposing Tsarist rule in Russia as it sought to combine a vague notion of redistributive justice (“socialism”) with pluralistic democracy and respect for human rights. From the earliest period of his political awakening Sorokin seems to have been a critic of Marxism, which he believed to be too narrowly class-bound in its focus on the urban industrial proletariat, and insufficiently appreciative of the important role of non-economic factors—including moral forces—in bringing about desirable social change. The Bolshevik form of Marxism was particularly repulsive to Sorokin, as its ends-justify-the-means philosophy

seemed to him to reduce its practitioners to the level of clever beasts and criminals.

While at the teacher's college Sorokin became increasingly interested in many of the "modern" thinkers so influential among the left-leaning intelligentsia of his day. These included Darwin, Spencer, Comte, Hegel, Lenin, Marx, Plekhanov, and many others. From these thinkers Sorokin began to acquire a more "progressive" view of history, one which saw human development driven by the progress of science and "enlightenment," and history as moving in an upward direction towards ever greater levels of freedom, prosperity, and human solidarity. He would retain these "progressive" ideas for a number of years until the bitter experiences of the First World War and of Russia under Communist rule convinced him of their utter fatuousness.

In December of 1906, Sorokin, then only 17 years of age, was arrested by the Tsarist police for his subversive activities on behalf of the Social Revolutionary Party (he would subsequently be arrested twice more by the Tsarist regime and three times by the Communists). Sorokin on this occasion would spend five months in a Tsarist prison, months in which he read a great deal more revolutionary literature and had the opportunity to converse at length with many other political revolutionaries of varying ideological persuasions. He also had intimate contact during these and subsequent imprisonments with many thieves, burglars, murderers, rapists, and other common criminals, an experience which was later responsible for his decision to study penology and write his first book on the topic of crime and punishment.

Sorokin would later explain his attraction to the Russian revolutionary movement as proceeding from the insights he had gained by experiencing Russian society from the bottom and by his visceral intolerance of all corrupt and incompetent ruling classes. While he would later abandon many of the more naïve ideas he had held during his years as a revolutionary activist, his contempt for corrupt and incompetent ruling classes was one he retained throughout his life. "Since I came out of the lowest

peasant-labor stratum and had a full share of hardships and disenfranchisement common to such strata,” he writes in his autobiographical sketch,

I naturally identified myself with these classes and eventually became disrespectful toward *the incapable* privileged, rich, and ruling groups. This attitude engendered my opposition to their arrogant domination and to many injustices perpetrated by such persons and groups. This opposition, in its turn, led me to several collisions with the Tsarist government, and to ensuing imprisonments and other penalties imposed upon me. These circumstances are tangibly responsible for my “revolutionism” and eventually for my political position of a “conservative, Christian anarchist” (in Henry Adams’ term). (PSR 34)

Sorokin’s allusion to Henry Adams is significant. The American medievalist’s contempt for the rising plutocratic governance of America during the Robber Baron era of the late 19th century closely paralleled Sorokin’s own feelings about Tsarist Russia.

In the fall of 1907, not long after his release from the Tsarist prison, Sorokin moved to St. Petersburg, where he supported himself as a clerk, factory worker, janitor’s helper, and tutor to middle-class boys. He was not advanced enough in his education at this time to enroll at a university, so for two years he attended a night school that enabled him to progress sufficiently to pass the difficult “examination of maturity,” which was necessary to gain entrance to a Russian university. In 1909 he enrolled at the recently opened Psycho-Neurological Institute, and a year later he transferred to the University of St. Petersburg, from which he would eventually go on to acquire the equivalents of the bachelors, master’s, and Ph.D. degrees. Studying at first under the Faculty of Law and Economics, Sorokin’s brilliance was even more on display at the university level than it had been at earlier stages in his educational development. During his four years as a St. Petersburg undergraduate he managed to publish no fewer than ten articles in learned Russian journals in addition to the

book *Crime and Punishment, Service and Reward* (1913). Topics of interest in these early years included law, sociology, and penal reform. In 1914 Sorokin graduated from St. Petersburg with highest honors and stayed on to acquire a master's degree and eventually a doctorate in the newly established field of sociology.

Sorokin's revolutionary activism continued unabated during his university years and resulted in two further imprisonments by the Tsarist regime and later clashes with the Communist government that almost cost him his life. In the intellectual milieu of pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg he came to know many of the leading anti-tsarist intellectuals and activists of his day, including many Social Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks, Anarchists, Populists, and others. His intellectual and speaking skills came to the attention of another student of law at St. Petersburg, Alexander Kerensky, who would make Sorokin his official cabinet secretary when he became prime minister of the provisional government following the overthrow of the Tsar in 1917.

From the beginning of the Revolution in the closing years of World War I, Sorokin threw himself wholeheartedly into the revolutionary cause. He became an editor of two Social Revolutionary Party newspapers and helped to organize the all-Russian Peasant Soviet. Sorokin made innumerable speeches on behalf of his party's program at this time and was elected to a seat in the newly formed constituent assembly. Sorokin's enthusiasm for the Revolution was quickly tempered, however, by the widespread outbreak of uncontrolled homicidal violence from many quarters which followed the collapse of Tsarist rule. The ruthlessness, fanaticism, and calculated cruelty displayed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks were particularly unsettling to Sorokin since, like a tornado, it seemed to sweep up everything in its course. By the end of 1917, less than a year after the overthrow of the Tsar, Sorokin had clearly become disillusioned with political revolution and expressed this disillusionment in a particularly poignant entry in his diary:

This is the last day of 1917. I look back on the year with feelings of bitterness and disillusionment. The year 1917 gave us the Revolution, but what has Revolution brought to my country but ruin and disgrace? Has it brought us freedom? Has it bettered the condition of the people? No, the face of revolution unveiled is the face of a beast, of a vicious and wicked prostitute, not that of the pure goddess which has been painted by historians of other revolutions. I could pray that these historians themselves might live through a real revolution. (LRD 112)

His active opposition to the Bolsheviks led to his imprisonment in early 1918, though with the help of his wife Elena and a sympathetic benefactor he was released from jail after a two-month stay. Soon after his release, however, he resumed his opposition to Bolshevism and took part in an abortive attempt to liberate northern Russia from Bolshevik rule. He was later hunted down and finally surrendered to the pursuing Communist Cheka, whereupon he was thrown into a Bolshevik prison for the second time and informed that he would soon be executed. This confrontation with death had a lasting impression upon him and seems to be partially responsible for the later rekindling of his earlier Christian spirituality and his later emphasis on the central need in human affairs for the healing and reconciling power of *agapic* love. Sorokin was saved from the firing squad only by virtue of the intercession of two of his former university friends—both Communists who had gone on to assume important positions in Lenin's cabinet. Lenin himself issued the order to spare Sorokin, though only after having written an article in *Pravda* that held Sorokin up as a model of the futility of any kind of centrist position between the Communists and the pro-tsarist reactionaries. (Sorokin's two brothers, however, were not so fortunate—both of them eventually perished in clashes with the Bolshevik regime.)

Sorokin had correctly perceived the nature of Bolshevism from the very beginning, and unlike many Western intellectuals who had to await the revelations of Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret

Speech” or Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*, he harbored no illusions that ruthless men in power would bring about a socialist utopia. Writing thirty years after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Sorokin captured the stark reality of Russian Communism in unminced words. “The Revolution,” he wrote,

promised to abolish political autocracy, despotic government, capital punishment and other forms of coercive penalties; and it guaranteed the maximum of freedom of all sorts to the population. Instead it created as despotic a government as is known in the entire course of human history—certainly incomparably more tyrannical than the incapable, impotent, mild, and very human constitutional government of the old regime.... During the thirty years of the Revolution, its government has executed at least from 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 of its citizens directly; murdered many more millions indirectly; arrested, imprisoned, or banished them; coercively transferred from one area to another several million [human beings].... The whole Soviet paradise is, indeed, one gigantic prison in which the Communist warden automatically rules over some 200 million of the inmates. As in any prison, all main resources of this vast house of detention are communized and nationalized; severe discipline is coercively imposed upon the inmates; pitiless hard labor is demanded from them; their remuneration and wages are insignificant; and infraction of any rule of the warden is brutally punished. At the slightest provocation the inmates are executed. This is the picture of the “freedom” that the government has built after thirty years of labor. One can hardly imagine a more tragic bankruptcy! (LRD 333-334)

After promising that he would no longer engage in active politics, Sorokin was permitted to return to his studies in St. Petersburg, where he completed his Ph.D. and became chairman of the university’s newly formed sociology department. However, continuing harassment and surveillance by the Communist regime made his life in post-revolutionary Russia untenable, and his

unwillingness to become a lackey of the regime threatened his life. Somehow he managed to write and publish five books on law and sociology during his brief three-year tenure as St. Petersburg's sociology chairman, but in 1922 he was arrested for a third time by the Communists and forced into exile. He fled first to Czechoslovakia, then, in November of 1923, to the United States, where he would go on to become a professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota (1924-1930), and subsequently a professor at Harvard (1930-1959).

The progressivist view of history and the optimistic view of human nature that Sorokin had absorbed from his readings of Comte, Spencer, Hegel and others had been shaken by the years of revolutionary turmoil in Russia, and over the decade of the 1920s he would synthesize a new world-view that was in many ways a return to his peasant roots among the God-fearing Komi people. "World War I," he would later write, had already

started to make some fissures in my optimistic *Weltanschauung* and in my conception of the historical process as progress. The revolution of 1917 enormously enlarged these fissures and eventually broke this world outlook, with its system of values and its "progressive," rational-positivistic sociology. Instead of the increasingly enlightened and morally ennobled humanity, these historical events unchained in man "the worst of the beasts" and displayed on the historical stage, side by side with the noble and wise minority, the gigantic masses of irrational human animals blindly murdering each other, indiscriminately destroying all cherished values and, led by shortsighted and cynical "leaders," overthrowing creative achievements of human genius. This unexpected world-wide explosion of the forces of ignorance, inhumanity, and death in the supposedly civilized and enlightened humanity of the twentieth century, forced me, as it did many others, to reexamine sternly my "sweet and cheerful" views of man, society, culture, and values, all moving, according to these views, harmoniously from ignorance to wisdom and science, from barbarism to magnificent civilization, from the "theo-

logical” to the “positive” stage, from tyranny to freedom, from poverty to unlimited prosperity, from ugliness to ever-finer beauty, from animality to noblest humanity and morality.... There was too much hate, hypocrisy, blindness, sadistic destruction, and mass-murder to leave my “cheerfully progressive” views intact. These “existential conditions” and the trying, personal experiences of these years started a re-examination of my *Weltanschauung* and a reappraisal of my values. (PSR 28-29)

Although almost fully developed by the late 1920s, Sorokin’s mature philosophy would first be presented to the world in systematic form in his *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, the first three volumes of which were published in 1937. Subsequent works which elaborated on many of the themes presented in these volumes include *Crisis of Our Age* (1941); *Man and Society in Calamity* (1942); *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (1942); *Society, Culture and Personality* (1947); *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* (1950); *The Ways and Power of Love* (1954); and many others.

One can look upon Sorokin’s life as one of the truly great odysseys of the 20th century, one which was ultimately a journey to find meaning and purpose in a world in which the great socialist utopia could no longer inspire. Like the parallel quests of Arthur Koestler and Whittaker Chambers, it was a journey in search of a substitute for The God that had failed. And it was a journey that finally ended where it had all began—with the values of the pious Komi people, the Sermon on the Mount, and a vision of human life *sub specie aeternitatis*. Of truly Homeric proportions, Sorokin’s odyssey is a saving tale of paradigmatic importance to the modern Western predicament. It is summed up best in his own words:

In a span of seventy-three years I have passed through several cultural atmospheres: pastoral-hunter’s culture of the Komi; first the agricultural, then the urban culture of Russia and Europe; and, finally, the megalopolitan, technological culture of the

United States. Starting my life as a son of a poor itinerant artisan and peasant mother, I have subsequently been a farmhand, itinerant artisan, factory worker, clerk, teacher, conductor of a choir, revolutionary, political prisoner, journalist, student, editor of a metropolitan paper, member of Kerensky's cabinet, an exile, professor at Russian, Czech, and American universities, and a scholar of international reputation.... Besides joys and sorrows, successes and failures of normal human life, I have lived through six imprisonments; and I have had the unforgettable experience of being condemned to death and, daily during six weeks, expecting execution by a Communist firing squad. I know what it means to be damned; to be banished, and to lose one's brothers and friends to a political struggle; but also, in a modest degree, I have experienced the blissful grace of creative work. These life-experiences have taught me more than the innumerable books I have read and the lectures to which I have listened. (PSR 7)

Two Mentalities, Two Types of Cultures

Sorokin's mature philosophy was focused on the recurrent cultural patterns which he believed worked themselves out over long stretches of time in the development of the major civilizations of history. Most of the great civilizations of the past, Sorokin believed, evinced a dominant pattern of meaning that drew together into a coherent whole disparate elements that could only be properly understood when one had grasped the overarching mentality that constituted the civilization's basic value-system or way of life. While not all civilizations have been well-integrated, and even the most well-integrated have contained discordant elements that do not fit into the civilization's dominant cultural pattern, most of the great civilizations of the past, Sorokin says, have displayed a high level of internal coherence and unity that often lasts for centuries. The art, architecture, literature, sculpture, religion, philosophy, economics, science, education, and political theory of any given civilization and epoch typically form a single-textured unity, Sorokin believed, with each

element forming a subsystem in a more encompassing whole.

While these wholes often persist over very long periods of time, when change does occur—and in the fullness of time change is inevitable—the elements in these wholes usually change in unison with one another as the civilization moves from one dominant cultural ethos to another. Since human beings have a degree of freedom in determining the ultimate fate of their cultures, there can be no absolutely fixed laws of cultural change. Nevertheless, when civilizations do change their overriding ethos and value system, they usually do so, Sorokin says, according to a recurring pattern that has been exemplified in many different cultural orbits. It was a major goal of Sorokin's later philosophy to explain these long-term patterns of cultural transition and cultural change.

Sorokin's contention about the inner coherence of civilizations can be well-illustrated by his analysis of Western medieval society. A list of some of the salient cultural features and products of that society might include all of the following: the Gregorian chant, the Rules of St. Benedict and St. Francis of Assisi, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Canterbury Tales*, Gothic cathedrals, laws against usury, the *Summa Theologica*, paintings of the Madonna, theocratic kingship, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the University of Paris, the trivium and quadrivium, interdict, monasticism, vows of poverty-chastity-obedience, the Catholic mass, the confessional, the sacraments of the Church, neo-Augustinianism, Christian Aristotelianism, Scotus Erigena, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, relics, indissoluble sacramental marriage, trial by ordeal, and many, many more. Such cultural creations, Sorokin says, are not disconnected "congeries" that have merely come into existence in the same geographic location at the same period of time, but are all related to each other "meaningfully and causally" as the well-integrated products of a single cultural framework—a framework which reflected the highly spiritualized world-view of Catholic Christianity and the Bible.

One cannot fully grasp any of the elements in a well-integrated culture, Sorokin contends, without grasping the overarching

cultural mentality that both sustains and creates the culture's many diverse products. Western medieval society, at least in its earlier phase, can be seen as displaying a single value-system or world-view, which stands in the sharpest contrast to the value-system and world-view of the late Roman civilization out of which it grew, and of the Italian Renaissance and early modern culture which succeeded it. It was the product of a radically different mental landscape, Sorokin stresses, than either its predecessor or successor society, both of which, in their own time, displayed their own very different internal cultural coherence.

Sorokin's understanding of cultural coherence can also be illustrated by a look at contemporary European and American society. If we view late 20th century Euro-American society through a Sorokinian lens we see a radically different set of cultural artifacts and cultural products compared to those which flourished in the Western middle ages, though most are just as well-integrated—and just as much the outcrop of a single coherent world-view and value system—as the elements of medieval Christian culture. Consider for instance the following extended list: suburban shopping malls, consumer advertising, growth-oriented economic policies, the New York and London stock exchanges, MIT, the Harvard Business School, *Smart Money*, *Consumer Reports*, an individual-rights based political system, empty European churches, divorce-on-demand, abortion-on-demand, gay marriage, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, give-away quiz shows, erotic films and romance novels, action movies, Club Med, Caribbean cruises, professionalized spectator sports, *Cosmopolitan*, *People*, *Maxim*, *Sports Illustrated*, Las Vegas, Indian-reservation gambling, "Dynasty," "Baywatch," "Wheel of Fortune," "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," Donald Trump, Hollywood, Woody Allen, Hugh Hefner, 500-channel home entertainment, rock music, hip-hop, the Rolling Stones, the Grateful Dead, Washington lobbyists, fast food restaurants, logical positivism, pragmatism, ordinary language philosophy, functional architecture, the "naked public square"—these, along with innumerable other products of modern Euro-

American culture, the Sorokinian would argue, exemplify a single overarching cultural value-system or what Sorokin calls a cultural “supersystem.”

Just as the medieval supersystem was largely the product of Catholic Christianity and the Bible, so the supersystem of Europe and America in the late 20th century, a Sorokinian would claim, is largely the product of an economically and technologically progressive consumer society. That society is characterized by a distinctly this-worldly orientation to life—one which places great emphasis on individual freedom, career advancement, upward socio-economic mobility, self-expressive individualism, material security, and the many diverse ways of “pursuing happiness” through consumption, “relationships,” entertainment, recreation, and sex. While there are many elements in both medieval and late 20th century Western culture that cannot be subsumed under the dominant cultural supersystem of the era—and which may, in fact, constitute a discordant or countervailing element at odds with the supersystem (consider, for instance, the medieval brothel, or the Trappist monastery in contemporary America)—nevertheless, most elements in each period are internally related to each other as creations and reflections of the era’s dominant mentality and way of life. Both cultural systems reflect what Sorokin would call a high level of structural integration.

The cultural supersystems that have existed in the past, according to Sorokin, are few in number. Indeed, there are only two pure types, he says, though there are many mixed types that contain elements of each of the two pure types. The two pure types of supersystems Sorokin calls Ideational culture and Sensate culture, and an understanding of their characteristics is central to understanding Sorokin’s basic theory of cultural dynamics and cultural change.

Ideational cultures have been well-represented in the past, Sorokin says, by Brahmanic India, Taoist China, Lamaist Tibet, Ancient Greece in the period from the 8th through the 5th centuries B.C., and medieval Western culture from the 5th through the 12th centuries. Sensate cultures are well-represented by the late Greek

civilization of Hellenistic times, by the Roman empire, and by modern Western civilization in the period from the 16th through the 20th centuries. One of the best descriptions of these two differing types of cultural supersystems is given by Sorokin in his *Social and Cultural Dynamics*:

We can begin by distinguishing two profoundly different types of the integrated culture. Each has its own mentality, its own system of truth and knowledge, its own philosophy and *Weltanschauung*; its own type of religion and standards of "holiness"; its own system of right and wrong; its own forms of art and literature; its own mores, laws, code of conduct; its own predominant forms of social relationships; its own economic and political organization; and, finally, its own type of *human personality*, with a peculiar mentality and conduct.... Of these two systems one may be termed *Ideational* culture, the other *Sensate*. And as these names characterize the cultures as a whole, so do they indicate the nature of each of the component parts.... The values which correspond to one another throughout these cultures are irreconcilably at variance in their nature; but within each culture all the values fit closely together, belong to one another logically, often functionally.... Neither the Ideational nor Sensate type has ever existed in its pure form [as] all integrated cultures have in fact been composed of diverse combinations of these two pure logico-meaningful forms. In some the first type predominated; in others the second.... Accordingly, some cultures have been nearer to the Ideational, others to the Sensate type; and some have contained a balanced synthesis of both pure types. (SCD 24-25)

[For the sensate mind] reality is that which can be perceived by the organs of sense; it does not see anything beyond the sensate being of the milieu. Those who possess this sort of mentality try to adapt themselves to those conditions which appear to the sense organs, or more exactly to the exterior receptors of the nervous system. [At the other extreme are persons of the ideational outlook] who perceive and apprehend

the same sensate phenomena in a very different way. For them they are mere appearance, a dream, or an illusion. True reality is not to be found here; it is something beyond, hidden by the appearance, different from this material and sensate veil which conceals it. Such persons do not try to adapt themselves to what now seems superficial, illusory, unreal. They strive to adapt themselves to the true reality which is beyond appearances. Whether it be styled God, Nirvana, Brahma, Om, Self, Tao, Eternal Spirit, *l' élan vital*, Unnamed, the City of God, Ultimate Reality, *Ding an und fuer sich*, etc., is of little importance. What is important is that such [ideational mentality] exists; that here the ultimate or true reality is usually considered supersensate, immaterial, spiritual. (SCD 25-26)

The mentality of every person is a microcosm that reflects the cultural macrocosm of his social surroundings....The scientific, philosophical, religious, aesthetic, moral, juridical, and other opinions, theories, beliefs, tastes, and convictions—in brief, the whole *Weltanschauung*—of human beings in an Ideational society are shaped to the Ideational pattern, while those of the persons living under the dominance of a Sensate culture are formed by the Sensate mold. (SCD 606)

Ideational and sensate cultures, Sorokin explains, not only operate under two very different reality principles, but each prioritizes two very different modes of apprehending truth that correspond to these differing reality principles. For the ideational mind truth is manifested in its highest form through transcendental meditation and prayer, religious faith, mystic and prophetic experience, sacred scripture, divine revelation, ecstasy, divine illumination, yogic states of consciousness, religious trance, and other kinds of what Sorokin calls “supraconscious” intuition. Those who see most deeply into the nature of ultimate reality are believed to be the prophets, messiahs, mystics, shamans, sages, saints, founders of world religions, “illuminated wise ones,” and the like, as well as the greatest poets, composers, sculptors, and other creators of inspired art.

For the sensate mind, which is relatively indifferent to ideational reality—and may not even believe that ideational reality exists—what is most real and most important in human life is that which can be apprehended through the human sensory apparatus. Together with the human capacity for conceptual thinking and logical-mathematical operations directed at the objects of the sensory order, the sensory apparatus is seen as the primary means of apprehending truth. In the sensate scheme of things, sensory observation comes to replace supraconscious intuition as the path to what is ultimately real, ultimately important, and ultimately true in human life. Reality and truth, in fact, come to be defined by the sensate mind in terms of sensory reality and sensory truth, while supraconscious reality and supraconscious truth are relegated to the dustbin of “false consciousness,” superstition, fantasy, or subjective musings.

Sorokin divides both ideational and sensate cultures into three distinct subtypes (though he stresses that any given culture will contain a mixture of these subtypes). Sensate culture can be “active,” in which case there is a dominant tendency for the carriers of the culture to attempt to transform the external environment through energetic activity directed at fulfilling the needs and desires of sensate man. The great creators of business empires, innovators in technology, political organizers, pioneers in the wilderness, military conquerors, and the like all exemplify the sensate mentality in this active form.

The “passive” sensate mentality, by contrast, is focused on enjoyment and self-gratification rather than any kind of energetic transformation of the external world. “Life is short,” “*carpe diem*,” “wine, women, and song,” “eat, drink, and be merry”—these, says Sorokin, are the kinds of attitudes and slogans which dominate the sensate way of life when it passes into the “passive” phase. The third type of sensate culture Sorokin calls “cynical” and involves the sensate mentality in an advanced state of nihilistic decadence, where the sensate ethos itself undermines its own claims to truth, and produces insincere hedonists and social climbers without conviction or redeeming merit.

Sorokin divides ideational cultures into “ascetical,” “active,” and “fideistic” subtypes. When the “ascetical” phase is dominant, he says, the carriers of the culture place a great emphasis on disengaging their energies and attachments from bodily pleasures and from the great temporal flux of the sensory order so that they might draw nearer to the supersensible reality of God or the Divine Absolute. The ascetical ideational mentality, Sorokin says, has been a central feature of Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Sufist, Jainist, Zoroastrian, neo-Platonic, and early Christian societies.

“Active” ideational culture is similar to the ascetical variety, according to Sorokin, in that there is an emphasis placed on the control of human desires (e.g. the desire for such things as tasty food, material wealth, social status, bodily pleasures, etc.), but whereas the ascetical variety of ideationalism often disengages itself from the surrounding social environment, which it perceives to be corrupt, active ideationalism by contrast, is a proselytizing and transformative force that seeks to remake the unredeemed world according to the tenets of the ideational world-view. The early growth stages of Christianity and Islam would be examples of active ideationalism in Sorokin’s sense.

The third form of ideationalism—fideism—represents a late stage of ideational culture where intuition and the ongoing testimony of the mystics, prophets, and saints is replaced by a blind and desperate “will-to-believe” on the part of a people who have lost any kind of direct contact with the supraconscious. Sorokin says much less about this form of ideationalism than about the other two.

Economics and Technology in Sensate and Ideational Cultures

Given their radical differences in world-views (material vs. spiritual), and the ultimate task of human life (power/enjoyment vs. salvation), it is not surprising, says Sorokin, to find great differences between sensate and ideational cultures in terms of their economic and technological dynamism. Simply stated, ideational cultures are usually no match for sensate cultures in terms of their

levels of economic, technological, and scientific progress. Since material wealth and material comfort are major values of sensate societies, while ideational cultures revere ascetical role-models who spurn such wealth and comfort, sensate societies will usually be wealthier, more economically dynamic, and more scientifically and technologically innovative than their ideational counterparts. “The Sensate society,” Sorokin writes, “is turned toward this world, and, in this world, particularly toward the improvement of its economic condition as the main determinant of Sensate happiness. To this purpose it devotes its chief thought, attention, energy, and efforts. Therefore, it should be expected to be richer, more “prosperous,” and more comfortable than the Ideational society.” (SCD 524)

Sorokin is highly critical of the view propounded by Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, which sees capitalism and the scientifically and economically progressive civilization of the modern West as the outgrowth of certain strains in Protestant Christianity. These developments, says Sorokin, far from being the result of a religious movement, were really part of a broader shift in Western culture from the ideational mentality that was dominant until the 12th century to the more secular and sensate ethos which gradually replaced ideationalism beginning in the High Middle Ages. Western society was developing “the spirit of capitalism,” Sorokin writes, long before Protestants came on the scene. “Practically all the changes which Weber ascribes primarily to Protestantism and its *Wirtschaftsethik* [moral code dealing with economic matters],” Sorokin writes, “appeared from one to three centuries before the emergence of Protestantism.... The capitalist system of economy even in the Weberian sense emerged and began to develop in [Catholic] Italy, Spain, and Portugal some two hundred years before Luther published his theses.” (SCP 658)

Like the Italian scholar Amitore Fanfani, Sorokin contends that both Protestantism and modern capitalism are in some sense the products of a more general secularization process in Western society—one that began to take root in Catholic Europe in the period from the 13th through the 15th centuries. Besides a greater

emphasis on money making and technological innovation, this secularization process, according to Sorokin, involved other typical features of a growing sensate culture, including greater individualism, growing hedonism, secular rationalism, and a utilitarian *Wirtschaftsethik*. All of Europe would eventually be swept up in this secularization process, Sorokin explains, and the process developed a momentum of its own that required no prompting from the new Protestant religious sects. These sects would, in fact, eventually be stamped by the growing sensate secularism. Sorokin explains his views on this in the following words:

Though masked by its ideational phraseology, the real character of the ethics of Protestantism was largely utilitarian and sensate. Money-making was declared the sign of God's grace; it was elevated to the rank of a primary duty.... Early and medieval Christianity had denounced wealth as the source of perdition; money-making, as *summae perculosae*; profit, as a *turpe lucrum*; money-lending as a grave crime; the rich man, as a first candidate for perdition.... Now the Reformation and the Renaissance made an about-face. "On Sundays [the Puritan] believes in God and Eternity; on week days, in the stock exchange. On Sundays the Bible is his ledger, and on week days the ledger is his Bible." Hence the parallel growth of Protestantism, paganism, capitalism, utilitarianism, and sensate ethic during the subsequent centuries. The last four centuries have witnessed the supremacy of sensate ethics in western society. (SCP 622)

Sorokin might be a bit too harsh here on Reformation Protestantism. As a number of scholars have pointed out—the Dutch scholar Albert Hyma being one of the best—early Reformation Protestantism, which should not be confused with its late 17th and 18th century offspring, was “other worldly” by almost any measure, and the communities the early reformers started, including Calvin’s Geneva and the original New England settlements in Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, were unquestionably

“ideational-dominant” in Sorokin’s sense. What is true is that the sensate-secularizing spirit, which had infected much of European Catholicism during the Italian Renaissance period (a process reversed by Ignatius Loyola and the Catholic Counter-Reformation of the late 16th century), eventually infected and corrupted Protestantism as well. But it is simply absurd to view people such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Moravians, George Fox, Jonathan Winthrop, Anne Hutchison, Thomas Hooker, and Roger Williams as disguised hedonists or materialists, however true this description may be of many Protestants in the 18th and 19th centuries. In scattered places in his writings Sorokin acknowledges this, sometimes using the phrase “ascetical Protestantism” to describe the more austere Protestant practitioners and sects that grew out of the Reformation.

Sorokin’s theory of economic and technological progress is clearly at odds with that of certain contemporary Christian writers, including Michael Novak, Peter Berger, and Robert Sirico, who would tend to play down any inherent tension between a focus on ideational religiosity and the requirements of economic and scientific progress. “You cannot serve God and Mammon” is closer to the truth in such matters, Sorokin contends, though he also acknowledges the possibility of some kind of compromise or balance between the sensate and the ideational view on this matter. The contrast and tension, however, must not be overlooked or ignored, Sorokin argues, and there will always be some kind of trade-off between the requirements of scientific and economic progress, on the one hand, and the demands of a God-focused ideational existence on the other. This is as true on the level of the individual as that of the culture. “In the completely Ideational mentality and culture,” Sorokin writes, “the economic values logically occupy a much less important and less highly esteemed place than in the Sensate.” Elaborating further on this point, he writes,

Christ’s statement that it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God is

a typical formulation of an attitude common to the Hindu, the Taoist, and other Ideational mentalities. Even, as in the Middle Ages, when economic values and the institutions associated with them are of necessity admitted into the system, they are regarded merely as the lesser evil, unavoidable since the Fall of Man.... If we mean by economic values the totality of the Sensate values concerned with the satisfaction mainly of bodily needs, and prized as the means of securing Sensate—that is, utilitarian, hedonistic, and eudemonistic happiness and pleasure—it seems reasonable to expect that the predominantly Ideational cultures and periods must be less prosperous economically than are the predominantly Sensate. (SCD 523)

To say that sensate cultures are more economically, technologically, and scientifically progressive, however, is not to say that the people who live in them are happier or more materially content. The opposite, in fact, may be the case, since sensate desires have a way of running ahead of themselves and eluding any permanent satisfaction. The Komi peasants with whom Sorokin lived in his boyhood, whose society still retained a strong ideational cast, do not seem to have suffered any enduring unhappiness despite their very modest levels of material wealth (“rural poverty”). Sorokin clearly saw many of his Komi forbears as living a happier and more fulfilling life than many of the affluent professionals and businessmen with whom he associated in the great cities of Europe and the United States. One can draw a close parallel here with Tolstoy and his preference for the lives of the Russian peasants over those of the deracinated intellectuals of Russia’s urban centers.

The rapid pace of change in modern, economically and technologically progressive cultures is often a source of psychic instability and imbalance, Sorokin says, however much it might be the case that such rapid change leads to higher standards of material wealth and the unquestionable benefits that go along with such wealth (including better education and improved health care). Such instability and imbalance are certainly not themselves

sources of human happiness or contentment, Sorokin stresses. “A culture in the sensate phase,” he writes,

unceasingly tries to be “progressive, dynamic,” seeking forever new empirical values.... It values the latest fashion instead of the old-time consecrated tradition. It tears down the building just erected to replace it by a new one. It puts a premium upon anything swift, fast, dynamic, modern, “up to the last minute” and even beyond it. Hence its feverish tempi of change, its insatiable lust for change, its never-resting Becoming. (SCP 694)

Economic, technological, and scientific progress are also no guarantee of peaceful social relations among either nations or individuals, Sorokin says, contrary to what many early 19th century thinkers believed. After an exhaustive study of some 967 wars from ancient times up to the early 20th century, Sorokin came to the conclusion that once past a certain minimal subsistence level, expanded wealth and technological progress do not seem to confer any special peace benefit. One need look no further than the 1914-1918 European war, he says, to see the utter folly of the optimism of many enlightened thinkers on this matter. Many of the countries engaged in the fratricidal “Great War,” he points out, had unprecedented levels of economic growth and scientific progress in the century leading up to the war. While increasing prosperity and improved technology may confer genuine human benefits, more peaceful human relations, Sorokin insists, are not among them—and he backs up this claim with impressive historical scholarship that looks at the length, intensity, scope, and casualty toll of almost all of Europe’s significant wars up to the 1920s. Summarizing the conclusion of his studies on European wars, he writes:

The medieval centuries were predominantly monarchical and autocratic, illiterate, and possessed of very few scientific discoveries and technological inventions, yet the level of war was low. In the subsequent centuries, beginning with the thirteenth,

discoveries and inventions, literacy and education grew steadily, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, yet wars constantly increased from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, and in the twentieth reached a magnitude probably unequaled in the entire history of the human race. (SCD 498)

One-Sidedness and the Search for Integral Balance

A major theme in Sorokin's analysis of cultural dynamics is that civilizations, in their march through time, tend to develop the cultural equivalent of a one-track mind. Actual reality, Sorokin says, is always multi-dimensional and pluralistic—it is what Sorokin calls an Infinite Manifold—though the general tendency in both individuals and cultures is to develop a very partial view of this ontologically diverse manifold that lacks the self-awareness that its vision is severely limited and incomplete. Like John Stuart Mill and the later Wittgenstein, Sorokin contends that one-sidedness is the general tendency of the human mind, and that this one-sidedness often plays itself out for centuries within a civilization before countervailing forces arise that are powerful enough to offset the hegemonic position that a one-sidedly partial truth has come to occupy.

In their respective societies, the partial truths contained in the sensate and ideational perspectives, Sorokin says, are not only incomplete, but they tend to be taken as a model for all reality, leading to an inevitable distortion of that reality which lies outside each of their restricted domains. Ideational cultures tend to view all reality, even material reality, through a spiritual lens, just as sensate cultures look at all reality, including the spiritual, through a sensate lens. Material lenses, however, are of little use in surveying spiritual things, Sorokin contends, just as spiritual lenses are no good for grasping the nature of material things. "Whereas the mentality committed to the truth of faith," he explains, "spiritualized everything, regarding even matter as a mere appearance of supersensory reality, the mentality dominated by the truth of senses materializes everything, even spiritual phenomena themselves, viewing the latter as a mere

appearance or as a by-product of material phenomena.” (SCP 613)

In its multidimensional manifoldness and wholeness, Sorokin says, reality comes to be known through the integration of three major forms of cognition: sense-perception; logico-mathematical and other forms of abstract reasoning; and supersensory intuition. Living in a sensate-dominant culture, it is perhaps easiest for us to grasp the first of these cognitive modes. Through both science and our everyday interaction with the world, Sorokin explains, we come to know empirical reality by our sense organs and their artificial extensions through scientific instruments (e.g. telescopes, microscopes, X-ray devices, etc.). Sorokin sees John Locke’s empiricism as the clearest expression of a sensory-based epistemology of this kind. The dictum of John Locke, *Nihil esse in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu* (“Nothing is in the mind that was not already in the sense”) is an exact statement of the sensate form of truth, Sorokin writes:

In this system of truth the sense organs become the principle sources of cognition of sensory reality, their testimony decides what is true and what is false; they become the supreme arbiters of the validity of any experience and proposition. Another name for this truth of the senses is empiricism...Knowledge becomes equivalent to the empirical knowledge represented by the natural sciences. Hence in a sensate system of truth natural science replaces religion, theology, and even speculative philosophy [as means of knowing reality and truth]. (SCP 610-611)

The second method of ascertaining truth, the logico-mathematical and abstract reasoning mode, is one Sorokin describes in less detail than the other two. This mode of cognition, he says, involves the application of the human capacity for logical and quantitative reasoning, and may direct its gaze at a variety of phenomena, including phenomena made known through the human sensory apparatus. Knowledge gained through syllogistic reasoning, deductive models, integral calculus, statistical techniques, and the like would be examples of this type of cognition.

Supersensory cognition, the third mode in Sorokin's epistemological scheme, is one he devotes very considerable effort to describing and validating, especially since this mode of knowing is so much out of favor in a sensate-dominant culture like our own. Human beings have access, Sorokin believes, to a higher order spiritual reality through a uniquely human intuitive faculty that is most highly developed in the case of prophets, mystics, yogins, monks, and the founders of the great world religions. This intuitive faculty has also played a critical role, Sorokin believes, in the greatest creative works of artists, musicians, poets, and men of scientific genius. Supersensory cognition is enhanced by such practices as prayer, meditation, introspection, spiritual exercises, religious ritual, and the like, and it is the dominant focus of life for many who live in ideational cultures. The supersensory order is the source of both religious inspiration and some of the highest forms of creativity in the arts and sciences, Sorokin contends.

In itself, says Sorokin, the supersensory-supraconscious order cannot be described. It eludes, he says, all efforts to describe it by images, concepts, or language symbols drawn from the sensory order or the realm of logic and mathematics. It must not be confused with the conscious or unconscious human mind, as some psychoanalysts do, yet it is the source of all higher human creativity. Supersensory-supraconscious reality, Sorokin explains, "infinitely transcends any human ego...and is different from, and superior to, man's unconscious and conscious mind. It is the fountain head of man's great creative achievements in all fields of constructive creativity." (WPL 480)

While the supersensory order, according to Sorokin, cannot be adequately described or perceived in the manner of a sensory object, human beings, he contends, are so constituted that they have an intuitive grasp of its presence, though this intuitive grasp varies much more from person to person than is the case with knowledge gained through the human sensory apparatus. It is the central position that he ascribes to supersensory-supraconscious reality that makes Sorokin's thought so unique among American sociologists and social theorists.

A truly balanced or “integral” picture of the manifoldness of reality, Sorokin insists, must weave together elements from all three of these different cognitive modes against the all-too-human tendency towards occluded vision and one-sided world-views. Each of the three modes of cognition must be seen as a means of mutually enhancing, supplementing, and correcting the distortions and omissions which inevitably flow from this natural human tendency towards one-sidedness and restricted vision. “Our knowledge and our contact with the true reality,” he writes, “become incomparably fuller and more adequate when all three ways of cognition and knowledge are used and unified into one Integral cognition and system of truth in which each of the three ways and truths checks, corrects, supplements, and enriches the others.” (SAC 248)

Through creative integration, humans have the capacity to synthesize these three modes of cognition into a more adequate reality-picture than any of the single modes taken alone, and in the great philosophical works of Plato, Aristotle, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, Sorokin finds this synthesizing process achieving a high level of integral success. (These Western systems of thought also have their parallels, he says, in Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions). Sorokin’s views on “integral cognition” are well summed up in the following paragraph:

In contrast to one-sided theories of cognition which claim that we cognize reality (a) only through sense-perception and observation, or (b) only through rational, logico-mathematical reasoning, or (c) only through “superrational” intuition, the integral theory of cognition contends that we have not one but many ways of cognition....The empirical aspect of total reality is perceived by us through our sense organs and their extensions: microscopes, telescopes, radars, masors, etc. The rational aspect or differentiation of reality is comprehended by us mainly through our reason: mathematical and logical thought in all its rational forms. Finally, glimpses of the “supersensory-superrational” modes of being are given to us by the true “supersensory-superrational intuition,”

“insight,” “inspiration,” or “flash of enlightenment” of all creative geniuses: founders of great religions, sages and giants of philosophy and ethics, great scientists, artists and other preeminent creators in all fields of culture. (PSR 380-381)

Cultures in which a genuine integral balance characterizes their predominant “supersystem,” Sorokin says, are historically much rarer than cultures in which either the sensate or the ideational mode of truth predominates. But integrally balanced cultures have existed in the past and they will exist again in the future, Sorokin insists. This is because a one-sided sensate or one-sided ideational culture inevitably reaches a limit to its development when its one-sidedness becomes so pronounced and its creative élan so exhausted that the stage is ripe for a powerful correction to the direction in which it has been moving. This correction, says Sorokin, will typically take the form of a new interest in exploring that aspect of the infinite whole that has previously been neglected, and the culture will thereby begin to develop greater integral harmony and balance.

While individuals and cultures have a natural tendency towards one-sided development, at the same time human beings have a natural craving, Sorokin believes, for integral harmony and balance that reacts strongly against the development of one-sided extremes. When a culture’s development gets so out of line with this natural craving, he says, a reaction sets in that changes the direction in which the previous development has occurred. “Each of the principal supersystems possesses the germs of its own decline,” Sorokin writes.

Viewed ontologically, the decline of most cultural systems and supersystems is due largely to the growing inadequacy of their intrinsic values—their deviation from genuine reality—or to the exhaustion of their creative functions.... Each supersystem, during its ascendance and at its climax, has been marked by creative genius. Each has contributed immeasurably to humanity’s store of truth, beauty, and goodness.... [But] having fulfilled its

mission, each supersystem becomes increasingly sterile and progressively hinders the emergence of a new and vital supersystem representing an aspect of reality largely neglected during the domination of its predecessor. Such a situation presents, as it were, an ultimatum to the society and culture in question: they are forced either to replace the exhausted supersystem with a creative one or else to become stagnant and fossilized. (SCP 705-706)

Sorokin does not elaborate on the possibility of becoming “stagnant and fossilized,” but he seems to have in mind as examples certain ideational survivals in the modern world such as fundamentalist Christianity, ultra-orthodox Judaism, and fundamentalist Islam. Each of these can be seen as the offspring of a genuine ideational culture though each lacks the ideational dynamism and creative élan that characterized Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in their formative and growth stages of development. Fossilization and stagnation are seen in the absence of creativity in each of these religious survivals even in areas where ideational societies typically shine such as religious art, architecture, theology, and poetry. Sensate cultures can also become stagnant and fossilized, Sorokin says, when they lose their specific sensate creativity and élan. In the more advanced or “overripe” stage of this process sensate cultures fall prey to extreme narcissism and decadence, which tend to undermine the cohesiveness of such societies, as was the case, for instance, in the closing years of the Roman Empire and in the current state of modern European civilization.

Sorokin, it must be stressed, was not an historical determinist, and like Toynbee, he believed that while historical challenges present the occasion for transformative responses through the actions of creative minorities, such creative responses may or may not be forthcoming. When they do not occur, and when a culture has reached the limit of its creative development along a single cognitive line, fossilization and stagnation are what result.

Much of the “cultural dynamics” that Sorokin has so painstaking-

ingly analyzed derive from this ever-recurring tendency for human cultures to adopt theories of truth that capture only one aspect of the Infinite Manifold, thus provoking in time a reaction which seeks to give the truth that has been neglected its proper due. This neglected truth eventually becomes the new focus of cultural development and begins to crowd out the truth previously explored under the earlier dispensation. Mystical and faith-based theories of truth reach the endpoint of their development, give birth to empirical and logical-mathematical theories of cognition which move in a different direction, and these develop in turn in such a manner that the older truths are passed over and begin to exert pressure on the newer developments insofar as they take themselves to be all that there is.

“Full and complete truth,” Sorokin says, is “white” in the sense that it is a combination of all colors. Such truth, he says,

is possibly accessible only to the Divine Mind. We can grasp but its approximations. Our efforts in this direction seem in most of the cases to go beyond the proper limit when we accept this or that theory as radically true and reject other theories as radically wrong....When, in our eagerness, we go too far beyond the legitimate limit of a given theory, a reaction sets in and leads to its decline. But the new theory also goes too far, denying to its predecessor not only its value, but often the germ of truth which it contains. Hence, in its turn, it is destined also, after its period of domination, to be discarded for a new theory, which often is a modification of the one previously overthrown. And so it goes. (SCD 410)

The Ideational-Idealistic-Sensate

Pattern in Greco-Roman and Western Cultures

Much of the massive data and scholarship contained in the four original volumes of Sorokin's *Social and Cultural Dynamics* is devoted to showing how the ideological and cultural “supersystems” that characterized ancient Greco-Roman and later Western Christian civilizations displayed a similar pattern of long-term

fluctuations and change. This pattern is characterized by a transition from an initial ideational culture, with a distinctly supernatural or “other-worldly” orientation to life, to a mixed “idealistic” or “integral” form of society that incorporates along with the older ideational elements important sensate elements as well. This mixed form of culture then eventually gives way to a full-blown “this-worldly” or sensate culture that itself undergoes gradual change from an initial active phase to a period of increasing stagnation and eventual decadence and decay. This long-term, triple pattern—ideational-idealistic-sensate—has played itself out, according to Sorokin, twice in the Western civilizational orbit over the period from archaic Greece to the late modern culture of the contemporary West. The same pattern has also played itself out in several non-Western civilizations, Sorokin says, though the empirical focus throughout his writings has been on ancient Greece and the West since it is here that the historical record is most complete. Where historical material from other cultures is available, however, including Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, and Taoist cultures, Sorokin has sometimes used this material to illustrate his theory of cultural dynamics and cultural change.

In the case of ancient Greece, Sorokin’s story begins in the world of Homer and Hesiod. It is a world, he says, that is dominated by gods and heroes, by oracles and magical practices, by sacrifices and prayers, and by the universal belief that the events in the sensate world are ultimately governed by supernatural forces beyond the control of human will. There is little interest in natural science but great interest in morality tales and tales about the gods. Through the mouths of prophets and inspired poets, of Pythias and sacred priests, divine truths are revealed to mortals, who experience their lives in close communion with supernatural beings that they feel obligated to obey. While the world of archaic Greece contained subordinate sensate and rationalistic elements, it was, says Sorokin, a world dominated by the supernatural. “Before the fifth century B.C.,” he writes, “the theory of truth which dominated in Greece was the religious and

magical truth of faith.” (SCD 257)

With the fifth and fourth centuries, however, the leading Greek artists, writers, philosophers, and other creators of culture begin to absorb greater sensate elements into their work and develop a form of integral or idealistic synthesis of the ideational and sensate mentalities that Sorokin sees as the high point of Greek cultural development. In the works of philosophers like Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and others, Sorokin sees the movement towards this grand synthesis of the various truths acquired through dialectical reason, sensory perception, and the powers of prophetic inspiration. This process culminates, he believes, in the writings of Plato, whom, he says, develops a system of truth and knowledge that “embraces all the three main forms of truth—the truth of ‘divine madness or revelation,’ the truth of reason or intelligence, and the truth of the senses.” Plato, he says, brilliantly combines these three types of truth into a coherent whole “in which empiricism is assigned an unimportant but a real place and divine contemplation is given the highest place.” “All this is shaped through and by the finest dialectic of the human mind.” (SCD 258)

Aristotle, too, Sorokin believes, developed an integral form of truth, though the Aristotelian system of truth, he says, incorporates more sensate elements than the Platonic. Aristotle’s philosophy in this regard reflects the growing “sensualization” of Greek culture in the fourth century B.C., though Aristotle still remained within the integral/idealistic mold and saw the highest and supreme truths to be those of theology and metaphysics. Besides Plato and Aristotle, Sorokin sees the integral genius of the Greek classical age represented by the sculpture of Phidias and Praxiteles, the poetry of Pindar, and the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. These were all giants of creative genius, Sorokin believes, whose integral masterpieces have an enduring quality that has rarely been equaled and never surpassed.

When we come to Greece in Hellenistic times following the conquests of Alexander, we enter a very different universe. From the third century onward the Greece of Homer and Hesiod, of

Plato and Aristotle, of Pindar and Aeschylus—i.e. the Greece of high-minded ideational and idealistic values—rapidly gives way to an ever increasing preoccupation with the this-worldly and the here-and-now, with hedonism and sensuality, with diversion and the quest for material security. Belief in the gods has waned, the civic-mindedness and sense of communal solidarity once characteristic of the Greek city state has been destroyed, and men find themselves set adrift in an aimless world of lawlessness, sensual pleasures, insecurity, and anomie.

It is a major theme of Sorokin's writings that major shifts from an ideational or idealistic culture to a sensate culture, or from a sensate culture to an ideational or idealistic culture, involve turbulent periods of transition in which there is an increase in wars and civil disturbances, crime and delinquency, family breakdown and community disintegration, and in suicide and mental illnesses. This pattern of turbulent change, Sorokin says, characterized the transition to sensate culture that began in Greece in the fourth and third centuries B.C., and would similarly characterize the later transition of the sensate-dominated Roman culture that grew out of Greek Hellenism when it reached an "overripe" stage and began to give way to the ideational system of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries A.D. During such periods of transition, Sorokin explains, older forms of social control break down, traditional restraints no longer exert their force, and there is a general rise in anti-social and self-seeking behavior.

Such was the fate of Hellenistic Greece in the third century B.C. Sorokin quotes in this context from an eminent historian of the period:

Greece was in all respects in a hopeless state of decline.... The old morality and propriety of conduct disappeared.... The old belief in the Gods was gone. Art could no longer compare with the excellence of the strictly classic period. The government became more ineffectual. Each party as it gained supremacy, in turn massacred the prominent members of the opposition.... These and similar inflammable conditions throughout Greece

made the life of a peaceful inhabitant impossible. With no security for life and property, poverty and lawlessness spread apace; and the young not infrequently grew up indifferent to their country, skeptical of their religion, bent upon enjoyment, and seasoning sensuality with a dash of literary or philosophic cultivation.... Such was Greece in the beginning of the third century. (SCD 259)

Roman society took over from Hellenistic society some of its sensate elements, though in its early stages, at least, it acted clearly as a model of what Sorokin calls an “active sensate cultural mentality” rather than a passive, hedonistic, or cynical type of sensate attitude. Active sensate cultures, Sorokin explains, are dominated by men who seek to transform their physical environment, who enjoy overcoming obstacles, who seek power over nature and over other men, who seek to tame wildernesses, dig canals, build roads, fight for political position, make scientific discoveries, and achieve fame, glory, comfort, and wealth among their contemporaries. In the period of the Roman Republic and the early period of the Roman Empire, Rome displayed all these features of an active, energetic, and vibrant sensate culture. But by the third century A.D., this “active Sensate adaptation through change and improvement of the external world” began to lose its charm, especially as Roman power reached its limits and began to decline. As a result, says Sorokin, there was a surge of interest in ideational systems of truth that seemed to offer comfort and consolation to an existential situation that had become increasingly desperate and intolerable.

For some the decline of the active sensate mentality led to a kind of live-for-the moment hedonism, a *carpe diem* philosophy that Sorokin sees well summed up in the saying of the satirist Lucian, “religion is absurd, philosophy vacuous, therefore, let us enjoy the moment, eschewing enthusiasms.” (SCD 262) But this kind of Epicurean skepticism and nihilism, according to Sorokin, can never hold sway over the masses of mankind for any length of time. Humans crave more than senseless hedonism, and in the

Roman civilizational orbit there was a gradual proliferation in the later years of the Empire of all manner of “other-worldly” creeds, including Gnosticism, mysticism, Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, Neo-Pythagoreanism, Neo-Paganism, and Christianity. It was, of course, the Christian religion, with its strong other-worldly component and unshakeable belief in the final victory of the Kingdom of God, which eventually won out in the struggle for men’s hearts and minds in late Roman times. The decadent, anomic, sensate culture of the later Roman Empire was replaced by a new and vigorous ideational creed that would serve as the organizing center of the emergent Western civilization for almost a millennium.

The enormity of this transition from a decadent sensate to an inspired ideational culture can hardly be overstated, Sorokin believes. The early centuries of the Christian era, he says, were a period in which one of the greatest mental revolutions in all human history took place. During these centuries, he says, “the Greco-Roman and then the Western mentality changed from the predominant system of truth of the senses to that of the truth of faith. It was accomplished, as is any great mental revolution, not without bitter mental and moral clashes of the radically different systems of truth. The partisans of the rising Ideational truth (the Christians) realized fully its incompatibility with the truth of the senses and of reason and were fully aware of what they were doing when they pitilessly attacked the truth of the senses and the truth of reason. The partisans of the declining truth of the senses and of reason (the scholars, intellectuals, scientists, and philosophers) seem not to have understood, especially at the beginning of the struggle, the gravity of the situation and the mortal danger in which their system of truth and knowledge was placed. Like many contemporary scientists and scholars, they regarded the Christian, as well as other Ideational systems of truth, as mere superstition or ignorance. And yet, contrary to their firm belief, the truth of an unquestioning and professedly illogical, irrational, Un-Sensate, or, to use the current jargon,

‘an unscientific, blind, superstitious,’ truth of faith came and was monopolistic for almost nine centuries in the form of the system of truth of the Christian Faith. One of the greatest and deepest mental transformations in the history of mankind [had taken place]—[a] revolution in the very foundations of truth, knowledge, wisdom, upon which depend and by which are conditioned all the super-structures of all the theories and opinions about everything, in any field of culture and in any compartment of mental activity, in the sciences, in the arts, in philosophy, in ethics and law, and [in other fields as well].” (SCD 263-264)

This new “truth of faith,” Sorokin explains, was as openly disdainful about the truth of the senses and the truth of rational dialectic as the proponents of these alternative truths—e.g. the Epicureans, the empirical and skeptical philosophers, the sensate empire builders, and the like—were of the Christians and of the many other proponents of ideational creeds. Many of the greatest of the early Christian writers, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origin, Tertullian, St. Jerome, St. Basil, Gregory of Nazianus, and St. Augustine, were dismissive, Sorokin shows, of the quest for scientific knowledge and power over nature and things, seeing them as a form of worldly vanity that could only serve as impediments to the real business of Christian life, which lay in the quest for holiness and salvation. Sorokin illustrates their views with numerous quotations.

In essence, Sorokin writes, the religion of the early Christians represented a complete shift from the truth of the senses and that of reason—and from the skepticism, world-weariness, and general disillusionment of late Roman times—to the saving truth of divine revelation and supernatural faith. As the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Christian Gospels, Sorokin says, do not seek to demonstrate their truth by science or empirical tests but by faith and creed. “Already the Apostles,” he writes, “who had absolute confidence in the truth of the Gospel, revelation, and prophetic gift, clearly and unequivocally expressed this negative attitude toward empirical science, the empirical system of truth, and logical reason. ... From this standpoint ‘the wisdom of this world

is foolishness with God.’ Similar, perhaps even more forceful, language is used by the early Christian thinkers and Church Fathers in their radical rejection of the testimony of the organs of the senses or of reason (empirical and rationalistic systems of truth) as criteria of truth.” (SCD 264)

The ideational dominance of the Christian religion lasted, Sorokin says, from the 5th century through the 12th. It left its indelible imprint on every facet of Western medieval life including the art, poetry, philosophy, music and other cultural products of the period. The Catholic and Orthodox monasteries and the magnificent Christian cathedrals built in the center of cities and towns were only one of the many manifestations of this new, all-pervading ideational reality and truth. At the heart of this new truth, Sorokin explains, was the Christian Credo, with the Holy Trinity representing the invisible, super-rational, supersensory foundation of the entire social order. “Medieval science,” Sorokin writes, “was subordinate to theology, which was the queen of the sciences.” “Medieval architecture and sculpture were but the same ‘Bible in stone,’ articulating the same credo. So also were its painting and music, literature and drama. Medieval law and ethics were but an articulation of the divine and natural law, formulated in the absolute, God-given Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, with canon law supplementing secular law. . . . The spiritual power [was] subordinate over the sensate. Even medieval economics was notably Christian-religious, tangibly ‘non-economical’ and ‘non-utilitarian.’” (STT 25) While there were certainly many sensate and other non-ideational elements present during these centuries, Sorokin acknowledges, they were mostly seen, he says, as contrary to, and of lesser importance than, the dominant cultural ethos of the period, which was determined by the Bible and the Christian Church.

Beginning in the 11th century, and more rapidly in the 12th, a new empirical philosophy began to grow in Europe together with a new interest in the “sublunar” universe of man and his world as the object of sensory perception and science. This interest continued in the 13th and 14th centuries, Sorokin explains, but

rather than leading to a rapid decline in ideational interests, the leading philosophers, artists, poets, and other creators of culture during this period, Sorokin says, took upon themselves the task of pulling together into a new grand synthesis the truths of reason, science, and faith. Thomas Aquinas and the other Scholastics of the period were the models for this new idealistic synthesis.

Sorokin can hardly contain his admiration for these integral thinkers of the 13th and 14th centuries. What they achieved, he says, was a magnificent blending of the complimentary truths that make up the infinite richness of reality in all its aspects. They harmoniously blended into one organic unity the truths of reason, the truths of the senses, and the truths of faith, and did so in such a way that they “did not fight one another, but all were co-operating in the great service to God, to truth, and to man’s real happiness.” It was an age, he says, “in which science did not fight religion, and vice versa; in which the organs of the senses did not disdainfully reason, ‘Nothing is in the mind that was not already in the sense,’ or reason did not consider the senses as the foolish and incompetent registers of the shadows of reality, but respected them and accepted their testimony within certain limits in the fields where they were thought to be competent.” (SCD 251-252) The 13th and 14th centuries in Europe were in many ways a replica of classical Greece in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., Sorokin thinks, as both periods represented a high-point in integral creativity and an integral understanding of truth.

This great medieval synthesis, however, rapidly began to be replaced in succeeding centuries, Sorokin explains, as sensory truth began its triumphant march that continued for four centuries from the 16th through the 20th century, by which time it had come to be the dominant truth of Western culture. During the second half of the 16th century, and especially in the 17th century, empiricism and the sensate mentality that goes along with it became an ever greater force in Western culture, Sorokin says, and it would continue to advance in influence through succeeding centuries eventually reaching heights never before seen in any previous civilization. The end result of this process was the

triumph of sensate culture and the complete rejection of any non-sensory form of reality or truth. For four centuries, Sorokin writes, “the major parts of all the compartments of European culture have articulated the premise that the true, ultimate reality-value is sensate. All the compartments of this culture have become secularized. Religion and theology have declined in influence and prestige. Religiously indifferent, sometimes even irreligious, sensory science has become the supreme, objective truth. The real truth is now the truth of the senses, empirically perceived and tested. Sensate philosophy and sensate literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and drama have largely replaced the religious medieval philosophy and fine arts. Sensate, utilitarian, hedonistic, relative, man-made law and ethics have replaced the ideational, unconditional, God-revealed law and ethics of the Middle Ages. Material value, wealth, physical comfort, pleasure, power, fame, and popularity have become the main values for which modern sensate men have been fighting and struggling.” (STT 25)

While modern Western man may pay lip service to God and religion, it really has little to do, Sorokin claims, with how people actually conduct their lives in modern Western societies. Modern Western society is really post-Christian, and has been so for centuries, according to Sorokin’s reckoning. The ideational Christian remnants in the contemporary West fight a rearguard action against the overwhelming force of a four century-long, sensate juggernaut. “We are living,” Sorokin writes, “in an age of scientism! This means that our culture is Sensate culture par excellence! As a result, the other systems of truth have been constantly degraded to a lower level of sterile speculation, fantastic and unscientific.... Scientific truth leads the offensive in an effort to exterminate entirely the other systems of truth, and they in turn are fighting for their existence. So far the offensive of the empirical system of truth has been successful and has driven the other systems from the vast territory which they occupied before the seventeenth and especially the fourteenth centuries. It has weakened their inner strength and confidence in themselves and their validity. [And it

has led many to] the belief that in the future these other systems of truth will be entirely eliminated from human mentality as useless survivals of ignorance and superstition.” (SCD 252)

Sorokin doesn't believe that the extreme one-sidedness of contemporary empiricism can hold sway culturally into the indefinite future. On the contrary, as will be explained later, he believes that the course of modern Western culture is set for a huge correction in the direction of ideational or integral truth—a correction that he believes may be as momentous as the shift from sensate culture to ideational culture in the closing years of the Roman Empire. But the dominance of sensate thinking and sensate assumptions about truth in the 19th and early 20th century is an undeniable fact, Sorokin contends, and it must be the starting point for any assessment of the direction in which Western culture is likely to move in the centuries ahead.

Contrasting Styles in the Fine Arts

The radically different world-views represented by the ideational, sensate, and idealistic/integral mentalities, according to Sorokin, have a pervasive effect on the styles of the fine arts that are developed under each cultural supersystem. The sculpture, painting, architecture, imaginative literature, and music that one finds in these three differing types of cultures differ profoundly from one another in terms of both external style and internal content. The contrast, Sorokin explains, is less severe between the ideational and idealistic/integral forms of culture—he sometimes, in fact, speaks of these as a unity, especially when discussing architecture—but the difference between the fine arts in either of these two cultural systems and that typically developed in sensate cultures is extreme.

Sorokin shows that the style and content of the fine arts developed under a given supersystem in one time and place often bears uncanny resemblances to that developed under a similar supersystem that exists in a radically different time and place. Similar supersystems, in other words, produce similar types of art even if they exist in different epochs and in different parts of the

world—and the similarities usually cannot be attributed to imitation or cultural diffusion. Sensate, ideational, and idealistic cultures, Sorokin shows, each produce a similar type of fine arts that is distinct to their respective system of truth and is an outgrowth of their specific overarching cultural mentality.

Together with a group of distinguished assistants, including experts in the fields of art history, music history, and the history of architecture, Sorokin in the 1930s embarked on a massive study of the development of all of the major fine arts as they have evolved in the West from the time of the pre-archaic Greeks to the 1920s. His research group surveyed over one-hundred-thousand European paintings and sculptures—including virtually all of the major surviving works in these two fields from the early Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th century—and huge samples of the most important music, poetry, plays, novels, and architectural structures that influenced Western peoples over the past two and a half millennia. Never before—and never since—has anyone undertaken so comprehensive a study of the entire sweep of Western cultural productions in their multifaceted richness and dynamic change. As in the case of religion and philosophy, Sorokin has supplemented the data he has uncovered concerning Western civilization with less extensive coverage of material drawn from a variety of non-Western societies.

The ideational fine arts are best exemplified, Sorokin believes, by the art of early Christian society from late Roman times through the early Middle Ages, and in a less pure form by the art of archaic Greece, by the primitive art of the Zuni and Hopi Indians, by the geometric art of certain Neolithic tribes, and by the art of certain Australian aborigines. It is also found in a form more comparable in purity to Christian ideationalism in the art of Taoist China, Buddhist Tibet, Brahmanic India, and the art in certain periods of ancient Egyptian civilization, especially the period of Ikhenaton's reign.

Ideational art, Sorokin explains, is preeminently an art of the supersensory order. It is little concerned with facts, events, or personages in the mundane world but focuses its attention on the

supernatural forces and divine beings that constitute the ultimate reality of the cosmos. “The topic of ideational art,” he writes, “is the supersensory kingdom of God or its terminological equivalent. Its ‘heroes’ are God and other deities, angels, saints and sinners, and the soul, as well as the mysteries of creation, incarnation, redemption, crucifixion, salvation, and other transcendental events. It is religious through and through.” (SCP 593) Such art, he says, represents the ongoing communion of the soul with itself and its divine ground, and pays little attention to “realistic” developments in the sensory realm. Its object is the invisible divine order—an order made known through supraconscious intuition, prophetic and artistic inspiration, “divine madness,” and similar ideational means of apprehending ultimate truth.

Since the object of ideational art lies outside the sensory order, and art by definition must somehow engage the human senses, ideational art, Sorokin explains, is by necessity symbolic. It draws upon images and symbols from the sensory realm in order to direct attention away from that realm to a transcendental order beyond sensory images and symbols. The symbols used may be very simple—the cross, the olive branch, the dove, the fish, and the anchor in early Christian paintings are given by Sorokin as examples—but the transcendental reality they seek to symbolize is infinitely rich and alive with meaning.

The significance of ideational art, Sorokin says, is not in its external appearance, but in the inner values and supersensory truths towards which its external symbols point. “The signs of the dove, anchor, and olive branch in the early Christian catacombs,” Sorokin writes, “were mere visible symbols of the values of the invisible kingdom of God, as distinct from the empirical dove or olive branch. Such an art is wholly internal and therefore looks externally simple, archaic, devoid of sensory trimmings, pomp, and ostentation. It suggests a marvelous soul dressed in shabby clothes.” (SCD 594)

Since it is art with a religious purpose, ideational art, Sorokin explains, has a distinctive aura and tone that evokes a sense of

sublimity, pious awe, ethereal serenity, and divine grace. It is never flippant, buffoonish, farcical, satiric, or glib, nor does it allow for erotic stimulation, ungoverned passion, or sensory shock. Such art, Sorokin says, “is a part of religion, and functions as religious service.” “As such it is sacred in its content and form.” “It does not admit any sensualism, eroticism, satire, comedy, caricature, farce, or anything extraneous to its nature.” “Its objective is not to amuse, entertain, or give pleasure, but to bring the believer into a closer union with God.” (SCP 593)

Integral or idealistic art, Sorokin explains, can evolve out of either sensate or ideational epochs, but it seems to find its most fertile field in periods of late ideationalism. Greece in the classical period of the 6th through the 4th centuries B.C., and the Christian Middle Ages in the period between the 11th and the 14th centuries A.D., were the great epochs in the flowering of idealistic-style fine arts in Western culture, according to Sorokin. It is no coincidence, he says, that these are the same periods when the idealistic philosophies of the Pythagorean-Platonic-Aristotelian and Christian Scholastic varieties also flourished. A shift from one super-system (ideationalism) to another (integralism/idealism) can sweep along in its wake all of the major areas of a society’s creative and productive energies. The idealistic style in the fine arts, Sorokin writes, “usually occurs when the Ideational begins to decline, but without breaking entirely free from its ‘super-empirical’ moorings; and when the Visual (sensate) style begins to grow, without becoming, as yet, completely materialistic, mechanistic, hedonistic, and antireligious.” (SCD 96)

The gradual shift from ideationalism, with its emphasis on symbolic meanings and supersensory truth, to a more sensate or “realistic” depiction of objects, can be detected, Sorokin’s studies show, in both Greek vase painting and Greek sculpture beginning in the 6th century B.C. There is a growing improvement in visual technique during this period. The painters and sculptors display a more sophisticated knowledge of the human anatomy and improved techniques of rendering the human form in an art medium. And there is also an ardent desire on the part of the artist

or sculpture to elevate and ennoble life by depicting the most honorable, beautiful, and inspiring objects of the sensory order. The sculptures of Phidias (500-432 B.C.), and the paintings of Polygnotus (475-430 B.C.) are seen by Sorokin as the culmination of this movement from ideationalism to high-minded idealism. In these and other artists of the period, there is a marvelous blending of ideational and sensate elements, Sorokin says, one that combines majesty, wisdom, and beauty in a sophisticated form. Using the techniques of a mature, visual-sensate art medium, the idealistic painters and sculptors of this era, Sorokin explains, still had their soul in the ideational world of religion and ideal ethical values. Their technique is visual-sensate but the subject matter of much of the sculpture and painting of the classical period are still gods, heroes, and ideational entities like Victory and Nemesis. In this sense, Sorokin says, the art is still ideational.

Idealistic art, Sorokin contends, is never simply “art for art’s sake,” and is not created simply for entertainment value. It always seeks to celebrate, propagate, and express values that lie outside art, he says, and it is almost always a partner or companion to various higher ideals. In the Greek context this “idealism” clearly expressed itself in the choice of subject matter. Paintings and sculptures from the period of classical idealism, Sorokin shows, depict nothing debased, ugly or uninspiring. The postures and expressions of the heroes and others who are depicted are free from weakness, violent emotion, or distorting passions—they stand “calm, serene, and imperturbable like the gods.” (SCD 107) Heroes are valorized and elevated to immortal stature. Women appear strong and noble, never fragile or seductive. Children are depicted as grown up, never winy or inconsolable. And even the dead shine with the same calmness and serene beauty that permeates all of Greek idealistic art and sculpture.

“All the statues have a ‘Greek’ profile,” Sorokin explains, “not because the Greeks were such but because it was the profile thought to be perfect. The drapery is perfectly adapted to the body, simple and marvelous in its orderly beauty. Eyes are natural and perfect, and shine with calmness and serenity; the lips and

mouth are ideally cut; the postures are dignified and idealized.” (SCD 107) Idealistic art “idealizes, modifies, typifies, and transforms visual reality in conformity with its ideals and ideas. To this extent it is not Visual, but Ideational. It is visual in the form it which it renders its subjects, but not entirely; it ignores on principle the profane, the incidental, the negative aspects of visual reality and adds the noblest, the sublimest, the most beautiful and typical values, which are not apparent in the objects perceived visually.” (SCD 91)

The purpose of most of Greek art in the classical period was to pay honor to the gods and celebrate the heroic deeds of fellow Greeks, especially in the wars against the Persians. It was an art, Sorokin says, that was deeply religious, patriotic, moralizing, and instructive. It was not an art created for its own sake, but was always a powerful support to religion, community values, and social morality. The idealistic art and architecture of the Western Middle Ages was similar in content and purpose to Greek classical art in this regard with one great difference: Christian religious symbolism replaced the ideational symbolism of Greek paganism and the civic culture of the Greek city state. Like classical Greek art, the ideational and idealistic art of the Latin-Christian centuries, Sorokin explains, was overtly religious and moralizing. It was created to give glory to God and to instruct the faithful in the ways of Christian virtue. When it drew material from the earthly-sensory plane, its purpose was not to remain on that plane but to raise the vision of believers to the transcendental mysteries of the faith, including sin, salvation, and beatitude.

“Medieval art,” Sorokin writes, “was an articulation of the Christian Credo as the major premise of the medieval culture. Its greatest architecture was the cathedrals dedicated to God; its sculpture and painting were the Bible in stone and color; its music and literature were religious reiterations of the same Credo; ritual and mystery plays were its dramas. It was an art devoted to God and to the union of man with the Creator. It was a ‘visible or audible sign of the invisible kingdom of God,’ uplifting the soul of man to this exalted sphere. Its heroes were God, the angels, and

the saints; its 'plots' were the mysteries of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and redemption. Its artists wrought for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of the human soul. Such an art was the most powerful force for ennobling man and propagating the brotherhood of humanity." (RH 121)

A shift to a somewhat more sensate form of art appeared in the Middle Ages in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries A.D., Sorokin says, but it did not lose during this period its superempirical grounding in the invisible world of Christian ideationalism. Like classical Greek art, this later medieval art began to reflect a greater degree of material reality but only at its noblest and best. "Nothing ugly, debased, or pathological was portrayed by it," Sorokin writes. "It remained a value-laden art, not yet divorced from religion, knowledge, or virtue." As such, he says, it "ennobled the ignoble, beautified the ugly, immortalized the mortals; educated, inspired, purified, and uplifted man to the realm of great ideals." (RH 121)

Although the history and development of music in the ancient world cannot be so clearly constructed because of the absence of written musical scores, in the Christian West, at least, music development in medieval and modern times seems to have taken a similar path as that of the other fine arts and philosophy. Music, however, differs in one respect in its development from the development of the other fine arts, according to Sorokin. The transition from simple ideational music to the more sensory forms of idealistic music, he explains, occurred two centuries after idealistic developments in painting, sculpture, philosophy, and literature had reached their Western peak. Idealistic music continued to develop, Sorokin says, long after the other fine arts had begun their increasing sensate detachment from the older idealistic and ideational norms of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity.

The early medieval music, Sorokin explains, was dominated by the Ambrosian and Gregorian chants, and by the hymns and psalmody of the Church, including the *Kyrie Eleison*, the *Alleluia*, the *Agnus Dei*, the *Gloria*, and the *Requiem*. In both the Eastern

and Western Churches, he says, ideational music virtually monopolized the field from the 5th through the 12th centuries A.D. At the end of this period, however, there was a break in the dominance of purely ideational music with the appearance of the music of the troubadours and the German minnesingers. This new music, which found considerable resonance in many parts of Europe, focused its attention on more earthly subjects than the chants and other religious music of the period, with romantic love and courtship being its major theme. The mood was sentimental and gallant, and the new songs introduced a number of musical embellishments that were absent from the more austere church music of the day.

Despite absorbing greater sensate elements, however, the 12th and 13th century music of the troubadours and minnesingers, Sorokin claims, still retained a strong foothold in the ideational world of a neo-platonically tinged Christian faith. While they sung of earthly love, it was the idealization of such love, and its elevation to immortal status, that was the purpose of their music. The love songs of the period, Sorokin says, are shot through with an idealizing, platonic spirit, and maintain a cult of the ideal lady as the object of divine adoration that closely parallels the Christian cult of the Madonna. Idealistic music of this kind, Sorokin believes, served a similar edifying and ennobling function as medieval painting, sculpture, and architecture.

The high point in the development of idealistic music in the Christian West, however, occurred from the 16th through the 18th centuries, according to Sorokin, with the appearance of what in the wake of this development we call Western classical music. In the musical compositions of such masters as Palestrina, Vittoria, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, the purest, noblest, and most sublime ideals and values are incorporated, Sorokin says, in the technically finest compositions that move between the elevated heights of this world and the transcendental reality of another.

Through an exhaustive statistical analysis of almost all of the major Western musical compositions from the 16th century

onward Sorokin shows how persistent religious themes were in Western music through the classical period, and how rapidly they declined in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. While the number of great religious and secular musical compositions were roughly equal in the period from 1700 to 1720, two-hundred years later (1900-1920) secular musical compositions practically monopolized the field outnumbering religious ones by a factor of 20:1. Religious idealism in music had given way to a very different kind of modernist spirit.

When we come to the transition from idealistic forms of art and music to the sensate forms of fine arts we enter into a vastly different universe, and Sorokin's depiction of the difference between these two contrasting mentalities and cultural styles is among the most brilliant of the many insights found in his writings. Sensate art, Sorokin explains, breaks free from all transcendental grounding and higher idealism, and shifts its focus of attention exclusively to the shifting flux of the sensory order, which it embraces with a new fascination and for distinctly non-moral purposes. From the high idealism of integral and ideational art, which has its *raison d'être* in spiritual uplift, moral ennoblement, and the harmonizing of the soul, the goal of sensate art shifts to the less lofty task of entertainment, amusement, and general diversion from the boredom of everyday life. Cultures in which sensate art dominates, Sorokin believes, are ones that no longer place their highest priority on the cultivation of human excellence or the right relationship of the soul to God, but on much less edifying purposes including pure sensuous gratification and enjoyment.

Sensate art, Sorokin explains, is distinctly *earthly* in its choice of subject matter. It looks to depict historical events, landscapes, common people, interesting faces, peasants in the fields, urban street life, and the like, all chosen for their distinctly non-heroic, mundane, this-worldly appearance. Sensate art also displays an emphasis on voluptuousness, nudity, seductive women, effeminate and homosexual men, and erotic fare of every sort. In its late, "overripe" stage, according to Sorokin, sensate art displays a

preoccupation not simply with average sorts of people, but with the clearly subnormal, including criminals, prostitutes, hypocrites, rogues, street urchins, the insane, and the like.

Sensate art is also *naturalistic*, according to Sorokin, in that its style of representation eschews all supersensory symbolism, depicting all sensory phenomena simply as they look, sound, feel, and smell to the human sense organs. Sensate art, he says, both begins and ends in the natural world and tries to confine human awareness exclusively to that world, shutting out any ray of transcendental light that might be cast upon sensate reality by the light of the supraconscious. Such art represents a closure against the deeper reaches of the human soul, and in its later stages tends to denigrate, ridicule, and debunk all heroic, saintly, and self-sacrificial understandings of human excellence and human virtue. Sensate art can thus be seen as a revolt of the common, everyday, enjoyment-and-diversion-oriented mode of living against the older saintly, heroic and ascetical ideals of human perfection.

Sensate art, Sorokin explains, can be found as early as the Mycenaean civilization that developed on the island of Crete in pre-Homeric times. It also begins to emerge in Greece during late classical times, especially toward the end of the 4th century B.C. The sensate style would continue to dominate Greek sculpture and painting throughout the Hellenistic age and into Roman times, Sorokin says. Roman art and architecture are similarly seen by Sorokin as sensate-dominated throughout almost all of Roman history, with only a few exceptional periods, such as the Augustan age, when Roman sculptors and painters tried to imitate earlier models of idealistic Greek art. Not until the spread of the Christian faith in the 4th century A.D. did the sensate style of Roman art and architecture give way to the new ideationalism, Sorokin explains.

The sensate style of painting and sculpture that developed in Hellenistic and Roman times is characterized by Sorokin in great detail. Among some of its salient features are the following: a) the life of everyday people in everyday scenes becomes a common topic with a declining interest in demigods and heroes; b) the

expressions and postures of the people depicted lose their idealized patterns and become less serene and calm; c) there is a new emphasis on the passionate and pathetic in human life, including expressions of fear, pain, agony suffering and sorrow; d) whereas previously mortals were elevated in stature and depicted like immortals, now the immortals—i.e. the gods of the Greek pantheon—are increasingly portrayed in the forms of very ordinary-looking mortals; e) women, once uncommonly portrayed in Greek art and always chaste and noble, become much more commonly portrayed, usually as voluptuous, seductive, sexual figures—even Aphrodite looks like a courtesan; f) men are more frequently portrayed as weak and effeminate often in distinctly homo-erotic poses; g) there is an emphasis on the pathological and the subnormal, on the lives of prostitutes, criminals, street urchins and the like; h) colossal bigness comes to be the criteria of greatness in art and architecture, such that the biggest is equated with the best, quantity with quality; i) art and architecture come less and less under the influence of the city-state or community, which previously had instilled into artistic creations religious and patriotic values, and comes more and more under the influence of rich patrons with varied tastes and interests, some decadent, some more noble, but most frequently involving a taste to have their own selves professionally painted or carved in stone.

These features of sensate art in Hellenistic and Roman times would almost all be duplicated, Sorokin shows, by the painting, sculpture, and other forms of fine arts (e.g. literature and music) that developed in the Christian West in the period from the 16th through 20th centuries, especially in the later portion of this period. The same pattern of movement from ideational-dominant, to idealistic-dominant, to sensate-dominant art that his massive studies showed to be the case in the Greco-Roman world, was reproduced in the medieval and modern West. Some of Sorokin's quantitative findings in this area are striking. For example, a head count of almost all the major surviving paintings and sculptures in all the major European countries shows that secular themes were dominant in only 3% of the works in the

twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and 15% of the works in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This secular proportion, however, rises to 35% in the sixteenth century, to 50% in the seventeenth century, to 76% in the eighteenth century, to 90% in the nineteenth century, and to 96% in the early decades of the twentieth century. Judged by the themes of its painting and sculpture, it is clear that by the end of the 19th century modern western society had moved as far away from the ideational and idealistic culture of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity as Roman society during the late empire had moved away from the culture of classical and archaic Greece. In both cases we can see a millennium-long process of cultural dynamics and cultural change that in broadest outline, at least, seems to conform to the ideational-idealistic-sensate pattern that Sorokin has so assiduously described.

**The Crisis in Contemporary Sensate Art:
Demoralization and Creative Exhaustion**

Although he is clearly a critic of modern sensate culture, Sorokin, it needs to be stressed, by no means believes that sensate cultural productions have nothing to contribute to the enrichment and well being of mankind. On the contrary, he has great praise for much of sensate culture, particularly in its early stages and believes it often represents a needed contrast to a too exclusive preoccupation with ideational-type creativity. A culture like early medieval Europe, where virtually all of its cultural productions were religiously oriented, can use a large dose of sensate diversification, Sorokin believes. And he does not mean simply that in such situations a greater emphasis is called for on the development of science and technology—though he surely does mean this. In painting, literature, music, and other fine arts the sensate mind, Sorokin believes, has often been creative and has produced cultural products that surely have enriched mankind in multifarious ways. Painters like Rembrandt, Rubens, Renoir, Monet, and Cezanne; composers like Brahms, Wagner, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Tchaikovsky; writers like Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Dickens, and Tolstoy—all

of these and dozens more have masterfully developed a high sensate style of art, Sorokin believes, that has unquestionably enriched human culture and ennobled man himself.

When sensate culture reaches its “overripe” or decadent stage, however, it not only loses its creativity and dynamism, but begins to become a destructive force in the world that is a menace to the moral health and well-being of the society that embraces it. According to Sorokin the fine arts reached this point of dangerous decay in the West in the second half of the 19th century, a development which continued at an accelerated pace, he thinks, into the 20th. To some extent, Sorokin believes, this fate is built into the very structure of sensate culture and to the peculiar constellation of motives and purposes for which sensate cultural artifacts are produced and enjoyed.

His explanation goes something like this: sensate art is both produced and appreciated for very different kinds of reasons than ideational or idealistic art. The two latter kinds of art are generally created with a moral or ethical intent often by anonymous creators who create for the greater glory of God and service to their community. So self-effacing are many of the greatest creators of ideational and idealistic art that we do not even know many of the great artists and architects who designed and embellished the magnificent Gothic, Romanesque, and Byzantine cathedrals of Europe, or the comparably beautiful Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist temples of the East. Sorokin is fond of quoting in this context the saying of Theophilus, *nec humane laudis amore, nec temporalis premii cupiditate...sed in augmentum honoris et gloriae nominis Dei* (“Not for the love of human praise, not for worldly gain...but to further the honor and glory of God’s name”).

Sensate art, however, is very different. Sensate art is created primarily to amuse, entertain, shock, gratify, thrill, excite, or otherwise stimulate the nervous system of the art “consumer,” who is not necessarily concerned with developing any kind of higher virtues, purposes, or ideals. The artist too, has little interest in these latter goals, and is often motivated largely out of a desire to make a name for himself, to please a wealthy patron,

to display his individuality and distinctiveness before an appreciative audience, or to be a hit with the art-consuming public and derive from this his fame and fortune. Such motives do not necessarily lead to inferior art, but they do place pressures on the artist to please an often fickle public rapidly changing in its tastes and interests. Since its purpose is largely stimulation and amusement, sensate art must be incessantly changing lest it become boring and unable to stimulate, titillate, thrill, or amuse. It becomes an art of fads and fashions, of “best sellers” and blockbuster “hits,” and as such it is condemned to a never-ending search for novelty, “action,” and effect.

In the desperate search for novelty, for the latest in fads and fashions, the tempo of change becomes more rapid. Old styles that were new just yesterday are quickly replaced by new styles that are destined to become old tomorrow—and the process continues at an ever-quicking pace. In this climate of ever-changing sensual stimulation, art that celebrates the serene, the holy, the sacred, or the sublime has no chance of establishing a foothold. The finer sentiments and sensibilities of the human soul are overwhelmed by the coarser, giddier, more exhilarating and exciting stimulation that is provided by sensate art and music. But this art and music in its later stages finds itself in a constant dilemma. In order to be successful as a market commodity, it must impress an ever more jaded and sensually-stimulated audience. In its earlier stages, as it emerged from an ideational and idealistic background, the sensate fine arts could find novelty in the portrayal of normal personages, historical events, and everyday life. But in time such themes begin to lose their novelty and through constant repetition become familiar and trite. They thus lose their ability to stimulate, to fascinate, and to excite, whereupon the sensate artist is forced to turn to ever more exotic subjects. Hence the focus in the “overripe” stages of sensate development with the criminal, the pathological, the weird, the shocking, the outrageous, the degrading, the violent, the pornographic, and the bizarre.

It is Sorokin’s contention that Western civilization reached

such a stage of sensate “overripeness” in its fine arts in the 19th century and that this has had both a demoralizing effect on Western society as a whole—since sensate artists celebrate almost everything but heroism and virtue—and a destructive effect on sensate creativity itself. Had he lived into the post-1960s era, he would no doubt see the art and music trends he described in the 19th and early 20th centuries accelerating and becoming even more extreme. Sorokin, of course, died before the age of acid rock, gangsta rap, X-rated videos and Internet porn, deconstructionist literary analysis, shoot-the-cops video games, Jerry Springer, MTV, “Piss Christ,” “reality TV,” “slasher” feature films, Grand Theft Auto, discothèque-level sound blasting, the declining interest in classical music, special-effects video bombast, and the extreme left-modernist tilt of Hollywood and the leading art museums.

Sorokin’s critique of Western art and music is elaborated in the four volumes of his *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, but it finds perhaps its pithiest and most forceful formulation in *The Crisis of Our Age*, which was published in 1942 at a time when all eyes were focused on the world war. For Sorokin, both world wars, as well as the fascist and communist revolutions of the inter-war period, were intimately related to the final exhaustion and breakup of what he believed was a decadent and disintegrating sensate civilization that had not yet turned the corner in the direction of a new ideationalism. His description at that time of the cultural crisis of the West is eloquent and compelling and warrants quotation at some length. It begins by way of an account of the ideational and idealistic art forms that dominated classical Greek and medieval Catholic and Orthodox societies:

The heroes and other personages of Greek and medieval art were mainly God, deities and semigods, saints, or the noblest of human heroes—the bearers of the basic positive values. The subjects depicted were the mysteries of God’s kingdom; the tragedy of victims of fate, such as Oedipus; the achievements of such semidivine or human heroes, such as Prometheus, Achilles,

and Hector, the saints of the Middle Ages, or King Arthur and his followers. In this art the mediocre, and especially the subsocial, types of human beings found almost no place. The prosaic daily events of human life, and particularly its negative and pathological aspects, were ignored. If the devil, monsters, debased types of persons, or negative events were occasionally employed, they served merely to throw into sharper relief the positive values. Both Greek art (before the third century B.C.) and that of the Middle Ages immortalized the mortals, shunned the prosaic and mediocre, as well as the vulgar and the negative and pathological. It was a highly selective art, choosing principally the fundamental values of God's kingdom, of nature, or of man's socio-cultural life. It was an art that glorified man, ennobling him and elevating him to the level either of the child of God or of the immortal or semimortal heroes. It reminded him at once of his divine nature and of the importance of his mission in the world. (COA 64-65)

After explaining the main features of classical Greek and medieval Christian art, Sorokin then contrasts this with the sensate art that emerged in later centuries, especially during its late decadent stage:

As we pass from the Middle Ages to more recent centuries the scene changes. These ennobling and idealizing tendencies tend to disappear, their place being taken increasingly by their opposites.... Thus, in the realm of music, the "heroes" are comedians, clowns, murderers; smugglers and prostitutes; pregnant women and their paramours; seduced girls; urbanized cave men and cave women; insane persons; romantic brigands; and the exotic and erotic types [of innumerable descriptions]—not to mention the dandies of many an opera, suite, and other musical composition. Still more vulgar, negative, and pathological are the heroes of musical comedy and *opera bouffe*. The music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has turned increasingly from the divine and heroic to the mediocre and pathological. (COA 65)

When we come to the art of the present day, the contrast, as has already been observed, is well-nigh shocking. Like contemporary science and philosophy in their debasing aspects, contemporary art mortalizes the immortals, stripping them of everything divine and noble. Likewise, it ignores almost all that is divine and noble in man, in his social life and his culture, sadistically concentrating on the mediocre, and especially on the negative, the pathological, the subsocial and subhuman. In music and literature, painting and sculpture, the theater and drama, it chooses as its “heroes” either the ordinary, prosaic types of human beings or the negative and pathological. The same is true also of the events with which it deals. Housewives, farmers and laborers, businessmen and salesmen, stenographers, politicians, doctors, lawyers, and ministers, and especially detectives, criminals, gangsters, and “double-crossers,” the cruel, the disloyal, hypocrites, prostitutes and mistresses, the sexually abnormal, the insane, clowns, street urchins, or adventurers—such are the “heroes” of contemporary art in all its principal fields. God, saints and real heroes are, as a rule, conspicuous by their absence. Even when—as an exception—a contemporary novel, biography, or historical work chooses a noble or heroic theme, it proceeds, in accordance with the prevailing psychoanalytical method, thoroughly to “debunk” its hero. (COA 65)

The critique Sorokin offers here has been echoed by a number of more recent critics of contemporary Western art and music. Allan Bloom, Daniel Bell, Martha Baylis, Michael Medved, and Roger Scruton each offer a similar assessment of the dominant path of Western cultural development over the last century, particularly the last fifty years. None, however, have provided so rich, so wide-ranging, and so detailed a study of the matter as Sorokin, whose *Social and Cultural Dynamics* is a *tour de force* of scholarly creativity and detailed social science analysis that is a must-read for anyone who wants to become informed about the dramatic cultural changes that have occurred in the West since the time of the ancient Greeks.

**Law, Ethics, and Government
in Ideational and Sensate Cultures**

Given the radical difference in world-views between ideational and sensate cultures, it is not surprising that they differ greatly from one another not only in their fine arts and science, but in the foundations of their law, ethics, and government. Members of ideational and sensate cultures inhabit two very different moral and juridical universes, which reflect their differing views of man's place in the cosmos and the ultimate purpose of human life. Like everything else in his comprehensive sociology, Sorokin bases his characterization of the ethical and juridical norms of the two differing types of cultural supersystems on a vast storehouse of historical data, including extensive surveys of the law codes of hundreds of different societies that have existed in the past. As in the case of other cultural productions, he finds great similarities in the character of the legal orders within each of the two major types of supersystems even though they are scattered widely in time and place.

Ideational legal orders, Sorokin says, are well represented by ancient Egypt; by the ancient Incan Empire; by ancient Greece in the time of Hesiod, Aeschylus, Herodotus, and Pindar; by pre-Republican Rome in the period before the 6th century B.C.; by ancient and post-exilic Judaism; by medieval Christian society; by medieval Islamic society; by Buddhist Tibet; by Taoist China; and by India throughout much of its known history in so far as the Brahman caste was culturally dominant. Ideational legal orders, Sorokin explains, typically contain the following salient features: a) law is viewed as God-given and absolute rather than man-made or relative, and as such, it is sacred, binding, and obligatory; b) the terms of the law are usually unbending and unequivocal, with little room left for vagueness, uncertainty, ambiguity, expediency, skeptical questioning, or doubt—the law authoritatively proclaims, often in great detail, exactly what is required and prohibited (“thou shalt,” “thou shalt not”); c) as a result of “b”, those who live under such laws are given a clear-cut and trouble-free understanding of what is expected of them and of what they must

and must not do; d) the aim of the law is not exclusively focused on utility, profit, security, domestic tranquility, personal happiness, physical health, or other sensate values but seeks to subordinate all of these to the primary ideational value of bringing the individual soul and the community into a right relationship with God or the Absolute as this is understood in each culture; e) while punishments for breaches of the law may be similar to those in more secular cultures (fines, imprisonment, corporal punishments, maimings, torture, death, etc.), ideational societies also impose a variety of “supersensory penalties” not found in sensate cultures, such as excommunication, denial of access to sacred rites and rituals, priestly damnations and anathemas, denial of burial rights in consecrated ground, etc.; f) to the long-list of this-worldly crimes, ideational cultures add—and often punish severely—many breaches of ideational or sacerdotal norms including such actions as blasphemy, sacrilege, apostasy, heresy, Sabbath-breaking, witchcraft, black magic, etc.; g) in so far as there is an official educational system that is run by state authority, it is religious in character; h) the leading authorities in matters of law and morals are the high priests, pontiffs, religious scholars, and other sacerdotal luminaries, who are assisted in their tasks by prophets, oracles, shamans, seers, Pythias, and other specially inspired persons, as well as by the sacred books and sacred traditions of the specific ideational culture; i) the objective of punishment for breaches of law is not simply deterrence of crime, retribution, or the rehabilitation of the law-breaker, but expiation and atonement for what is considered to be a sin against God or the divine order.

Sorokin sums up much of his analysis of ideational law, morals and government with the simple statement that “in all societies ruled by ideational law the regime is always either explicitly or implicitly a *theocracy*.” (SCP 626) This doesn’t mean, however, that the leaders of the ideational state are always members of clerical orders (they may or may not be, but usually are not). But it does mean that the religious leaders and holy men in such societies command the greatest degree of prestige and respect in

the society, that they are the ultimate source of its values and moral judgments, and that they are those to whom government leaders and others usually turn when the weightiest moral, legal and political decisions are to be made. In this sense, medieval Europe was a “theocracy” from the 5th through the 12th centuries since all the major elements in the society, including most secular rulers, believed that ultimate moral and spiritual authority lay in the Catholic ecclesiastic hierarchy and the pope. (Things would change very rapidly after this period, especially in the 14th century when the Papal See was forcefully moved by secular rulers to Avignon, and as a result lost much of its commanding prestige). Sorokin considers India throughout much of its history to have been a theocracy, even though the priestly-aristocratic Brahman caste never ruled directly. The princes, maharajas, and others who have ruled India in the past, Sorokin explains, were always solicitous of Brahman advice even if they were from a warrior or other non-Brahman caste, so historical India should be seen, he believes, as an example of a decentralized theocracy rather than a secular monarchy.

The characteristics of a sensate legal order present a very different picture than that of an ideational order. The aim of such a legal order, Sorokin explains, is primarily utilitarian as its main objective is to promote the security of human life and property, and the general health and material welfare of the society. This goal, however, is often restricted, Sorokin says, to protecting the lives and possessions of a dominant or ruling class while the interests of the weaker, poorer, or less powerful segments of society may be neglected. Sensate legal orders do not attempt to regulate supersensory values or man’s relationship towards God or the Absolute. They are not concerned with the salvation of the soul or other transcendental values, nor are they concerned with ideational crimes such as blasphemy, heresy, Sabbath-breaking or the like. Laws in sensate legal orders, Sorokin says, are viewed as manmade with nothing eternal or sacred implied in their enactment or grounding. Punishment focuses on retribution and deterrence and is not concerned with the expiation of sin, nor does

it involve ideational sanctions such as excommunication, the denial of access to sacraments, or other supersensory penalties. Finally, the government that enacts and enforces such a sensate legal code “is a secular—not a theocratic—government, based entirely upon military and physical power, upon riches and abilities, or upon the mandate of the electorate.” (SCP 627)

Sensate and ideational legal orders thus have very different ultimate goals, according to Sorokin, which might be characterized in a very oversimplified fashion as *material progress* versus *obedience to supersensory imperatives*. The two types of legal orders diverge most radically, Sorokin believes, in their understanding of the kind of liberty after which human beings should strive. “Ideational liberty,” he says, “is inner liberty, rooted in the restraint and control of our desires, wishes, and lusts.” “It is inalienable—unconquerable by anyone or anything external.” “Such a liberty does not multiply sensory wishes; it does not lead to an incessant struggle for an ever-increasing expansion of the means of their satisfaction—wealth, power, fame, and what not.” “Ideational liberty [consists] in a reduction of one’s wishes, especially sensory ones.” “Its kingdom is not of this world.” (COA 173)

Sensate liberty, by contrast, “strives to expand endlessly both wishes and the means of their satisfaction.” Such a liberty, says Sorokin, leads to an incessant struggle of individuals and groups for as large a share as possible of sensate values, including wealth, love, pleasure, comfort, safety, and security. “Sensate liberty is thus mainly external.” But with sensate liberty, Sorokin explains, “the more one has the more one wants,” so the struggle to achieve sensate happiness often becomes elusive and ultimately self-defeating. Nevertheless, it is, Sorokin contends, the desire for sensate happiness and sensate enjoyment that has been the great motivating force in the modern West for the restructuring of social, economic, and political institutions in such a manner that they are conducive to the protection of individual sensate rights and freedoms and the promotion of material prosperity and other sensate values. It is sensate desires of this kind, he says, that

produced the expansion in economic, political, and civil liberties that have characterized Western civilization from the time of the Magna Charta (1215), to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), to the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776) and Bill of Rights (1791), to the expanding scope of civil and personal liberties which came to exist in England and other European countries by the end of the 19th century. (COA 174)

Sorokin's account of the expanding liberties in the West is in some ways reminiscent of Marx. While he is not as narrowly class-focused as Marx and his followers, he believes that material self-interest and the desire for "the good things of this world," have been the major motivating force for the expansion of individual and civil liberties in the centuries since the passing of Western medieval culture. And despite his obvious regard for certain features of ideational cultures, he does not see the results of this process as necessarily bad. Indeed, he regards the 18th and 19th century triumph of the ideals of inalienable human rights, of contractual liberty, of human equality, of individualism, and freedom of association as "unquestionably extraordinary, ranking among the most brilliant constructive achievements in the field of social relations." "Who can deny the value of this achievement," he asks? (COA 175)

Nevertheless there is a dark side to this development, Sorokin believes, and it derives from the exodus of sensate culture from the supraconscious grounding and religiously-based self-control that ideational cultures have typically provided to those who live under their protective canopies. It is sheer folly, Sorokin contends, to believe that a decent and orderly society can be created on the basis of an unceasing quest for more personal liberty, more material goods, and more sensuous delight. It is just as foolish, he thinks, to believe that people will honor—when they think they can get away with disobeying—manmade laws that reflect nothing more than the temporary and shifting alignments of various factions and material interests but are untethered to any natural law, divine law, or overarching vision of the common good. And in their later stages sensate cultures are always in danger, Sorokin

believes, of producing sensate personalities whose selfish lusts and desires are so out of control, and who become so narcissistic and self-absorbed in their daily lives that they are incapable of summoning forth the minimal level of family dedication, civic spiritedness, and altruistic self-sacrifice that is necessary to maintain any stable and decent society.

While Sorokin hardly wants to return to a regime that burns heretics, starts religious wars, prohibits lending money at interest, or relies on oracles and “trials by ordeal” to conduct its business, like Alexis de Tocqueville, he believes that modern commercial societies, with their libertarian-democratic-materialistic ethos, need a system of internally generated restraints—and these restraints, he holds, can only be supplied by the kinds of civic and religious values that were the primary focus of pre-modern ideational cultures. Thus in legal and juridical philosophy, as in other areas of culture and civilization, Sorokin is a strong believer in the need for integral balance. Modern sensate cultures, he contends, have become greatly imbalanced in their government, law, and morals, and by the law of immanent change they are destined, he believes, to move eventually in a different direction from which they have been going for the past five or more centuries. The direction in which they will move will be towards greater ideationalism.

The Achievements of Ascetical and Ideational Cultures

Although Sorokin is a great champion of mixed or integral cultures, given his belief that the late modern age represents a grotesque sensate distortion whose values and perspectives have blinded us to the many great achievements of non-sensate cultures, it is not surprising that he spends considerable effort to explain just what these achievements are. His most extended efforts in this regard are directed at recapturing what he believes is the greatness of Medieval Christian high-civilization and the long-forgotten achievements of the Catholic and Orthodox monastic traditions that flourished in the centuries following the collapse of Rome. In this regard Sorokin’s work can be seen as

similar in purpose to the scholarly work of the late 19th century Harvard historian, Henry Adams. (One could also draw a parallel to the rehabilitative work done on New England Puritanism by another Harvard historian, Perry Miller). Other ideational cultures are highlighted by Sorokin in a similar manner to the medieval Christian, though less extensively.

Early in his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* Sorokin sets forth a brief description of the “ascetic ideational mentality” as it has existed in many religions and cultural systems including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Sufism, monastic Christianity, and various Greco-Roman mystery religions and mystic sects. Sensate historians and philosophers are taken to task by Sorokin for ignoring the importance of this style of cultural mentality in the history of world civilizations and cultures. “Living in an age of a predominantly Sensate or Mixed type of cultural mentality,” he writes, “we are prone to think that the Ascetic Ideational culture mentality is something rare, almost abnormal; and yet a brief survey of the mental patterns that have dominated and still dominate millions of human beings, that permeates the vastest systems of culture, shows that the Ascetic Ideational culture mentality comprises not an island but several of the largest continents in the world of culture.” (SCD 43) He continues along these same lines:

Contrary to the opinion of most of the contemporary scholars and scientists, who are inclined to underestimate the role played by this mentality, it has been one of the most widespread, one of the most persistent, one of the most influential; it has played a major part in the vastest cultural systems that have shaped and conditioned the minds of hundreds of millions of human beings.... This mentality is not a curious pathological or exceedingly rare case, but a form set forth and endorsed by, and incorporated in, the ideologies and practices of most of the world religions of the past and present and by innumerable smaller groups and sects, in comparison with which all the rationalistic, positivistic, scientific, intellectual, Sensate ideologies that have had historical

existence are, in their diffusion and influence, as a flickering candlelight to the sun. (SCD 43, 45)

Much of the greatness of medieval Christian culture, Sorokin believes, was the work of cenobite monks, who sought to live a life of true Christian holiness in service to both God and mankind. At their best, their efforts reached truly heroic proportions, he says, and Sorokin can hardly contain himself in discussing the great achievements of the early Christian monasteries. It was the monastic orders, he says, which preserved much of the literary treasures of ancient Greece and Rome through their libraries and copy centers. The Christian monks were the ones who established most of the orphanages, schools, counseling services, and medical centers of medieval Europe. During times of grave personal crisis, it was to the monasteries that European Christians flocked in search of spiritual guidance and fatherly comfort.

“The best in the medieval culture of the West,” Sorokin writes, “was largely the creation of Christian monasticism.... Monks were the initiators and pioneers of what we now call social service, social work, charity, and philanthropy in the declining Greco-Roman and the emerging Western worlds. They established the first orphanages, asylums, hospitals, various relief agencies for feeding the poor, for helping the needy, diverse schools, retreats for the penitents, and medical, psychiatric, and counseling services to the nonmonastic secular population. Monks’ services to the human world went far beyond this relief, philanthropic, and welfare activities. At the period of the crumbling of the Greco-Roman culture, and the beginning of the ‘barbarian’ medieval period, the monasteries, following the example of Cassiodorus, became sanctuaries where the remnants of the old cultural heritage—its literature, art, etc.—were lovingly collected and preserved ‘so that the world might not be submerged completely in barbarism.’ Monasteries established the first libraries and museums with their *scriptorium*s for copying and preserving the ancient codices. Monasteries started and developed schools and educational institutions for children, as well as for adults. Mon-

asteries became the main art centers, and the centers for economic, political, and cultural organization of the whole medieval world.” (WPL 378-379)

The monks did all these things, Sorokin says, out of their love for God and their dedication to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and the highest ideals of the Christian Gospels. In his *The Ways and Power of Love* Sorokin gives an account of the various monastic techniques of moral and spiritual transformation which is among the most sophisticated analyses ever done in this area. Surveying the writings (often in the original Latin and Greek) of St. Basil, St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. John Cassian, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Pachomius, St. Ignatius Loyola, and many others, Sorokin explains the many techniques by which these “radical and consistent maximalists” of agapic love sought to overcome and transform man’s sinful nature so that they could become a more creative instrument of the Divine Will. The monastic fathers, he says, did not hesitate to put into practice the most radical methods for taming their lower natures if experience showed the efficacy of such methods in achieving the desired goals. “If the vocation of the athletes of God,” he writes, “required a strenuous training and complete mastery of bodily needs, they did not hesitate to impose the hardest training and to acquire the control however difficult.” “If possessions and private property appeared to be dangerous, they eliminated every vestige of private possessions, up to the private possessions of one’s egos and personality.” Viewed in this light, says Sorokin, the entire monastic system for transforming sinful men into “athletes of God” should be seen as one of the most radical, most consistent, and most fearless educational experiments in the whole history of man’s moral education. (WPL 419)

It was also one of the most successful. In the heroic age of monasticism, Sorokin says, most monks truly practiced the high and noble ideals which they preached. There hardly ever has been, he says, any organization which has excelled the monastic brotherhoods during their heroic age in “the rational and consistent organization of their life, behavior, and mentality for a maximal

possible realization of love.” None of the modern-day socialist, communist, or egalitarian groups, he says, has ever equaled the monastic communities of this older period in their renunciation of private possessions and in creating a genuine loving and caring community in which all are treated with equal love and respect. The monks succeeded where all the modern day political utopians have failed. “Many centuries have elapsed,” Sorokin writes, “since this system was introduced; many efforts have been made to establish a free, noble, and unselfish labor organization. So far none of these efforts has excelled the work organization of the monastic fathers, especially in its unselfish service to God and the community.” (WPL 396, 397, 402)

It is just such unselfish service to God and community that Sorokin sees as the most urgent task today in our age of sensate narcissism and general community decline. The most urgent need of our time, he says, is for the person who can control himself and his lusts, who is compassionate to his fellow human beings, who can seek for the eternal values of culture and society, and who feels deeply his unique responsibility in the universe. “If the conquest of the forces of nature is the main function of the Sensate culture,” Sorokin declares, “the taming of man, his ‘humanization,’ his ennoblement as the participant in the Divine Absolute, has always been the function mainly of the Ideational or Idealistic culture.” (SCD 638). And never has this process of moral and spiritual transformation been more systematically and more successfully carried out, Sorokin says, than by the great Christian monks in the heroic age of Christian monasticism.

The Demoralizing Consequences of

Sensate Science, Art, and Music in their “Overripe” Stages
Cultural change has consequences—this is the central theme of Sorokin’s work. As the culture of a people begins to change, Sorokin shows, every facet of life among those who live within the orbit of that culture also changes. And if the dominant direction of the change is negative, discordant, or disintegrating, so too will become the overall quality of life of a people as the cultural change

begins to work its way through the complex web of interlocking relationships that constitutes a living social network.

It is Sorokin's claim that modern sensate culture has entered a dangerous stage of "overripeness" or decay that threatens the overall health and vitality of contemporary Western society. This process, he says, has been going on at an accelerated pace since the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The rise of fascism and communism in the early decades of the 20th century are seen by Sorokin as a direct response to this sensate "overripeness" and the destructive effect it has had on Western communal solidarity and general social health. There is clearly some truth, Sorokin believes, in the charges made by communists and fascists that the advanced industrial societies of the West have fallen prey to a kind of self-seeking individualism, aimless hedonism, and loss of any kind of higher moral purpose. Communists and fascists, however, are themselves caught up in the sensate mode of consciousness, Sorokin contends, and wherever they have come to power have established tyrannical regimes much farther removed from Integral Truth and the proper balancing of science, faith, and reason than the disintegrating regimes they have replaced.

An "overripe" sensate culture, Sorokin explains, has a demoralizing and disintegrating effect upon the cohesiveness and vigor of any society since it encourages unbridled increases in the sensate appetites for money, power, and sensuous pleasures while simultaneously diminishing the capacities for such ennobling virtues as temperance, integrity, and agapic love that alone can keep such appetites from getting out of control and becoming socially destructive. Late sensate art, music, and social science, Sorokin charges, have exerted a corrosive effect upon the moral health of Western society because of their overemphasis on the negative, subnormal, and depraved aspects of human nature, and their penchant for ridiculing, ignoring, or debunking all that is genuinely heroic, saintly, or inspiring in human life.

Ideational and Idealistic cultures, Sorokin says, are dedicated to elevating the moral vision of humanity through uplifting art and

literature, through the celebration of the great deeds of gods and other heroic role-models, through rejuvenating religious rituals, and through a host of other inspiring practices. Literature, art, and music in such cultures have a serious moral mission and their creators see themselves as having a responsibility for the overall spiritual health and welfare of the community. The philosophy and social science that develops in such cultures—seen, for instance, in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Lao-tse, and Patanjali—have a similar purpose, Sorokin explains. Modern art, literature, philosophy, and social science, however, are very different. In much of modern art, psychology, sociology, philosophy, cinema, popular literature, and the like there is a preoccupation with the most negative and sordid aspects of human life, Sorokin says, including war, aggressiveness, sexual depravity, will-to-power, sadomasochism, psychosis, neurosis, suicide, class warfare, survival of the fittest, and the like. There is a near exclusion, however, of the most noble and sublime. Such an imbalance, Sorokin charges, not only distorts the human condition—in which love, altruism, charity, class-co-operation, holiness, and creative energies of every kind play an important role—but has a thoroughly demoralizing effect upon the society at large.

Sensate artists, historians, and social scientists, Sorokin writes, “study ‘culture and civilization,’ not in the works of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Phidias, Dante, Newton, Augustine, Bach, Beethoven, Kant, and Charlemagne; not in the finest creations of human genius; but mainly among the Ashantis and Trobrians, the Zulu and other primitive peoples; in the world of slums and gangs, in the ‘Middletowns’ and prisons, and in the autobiographies of notorious criminals and the like, whose writings become more and more popular as treatises on sociology, criminology, psychology, anthropology, and political science. All heroes tend to disappear from the social literature of the Sensate period. And when such a hero is considered, be he Washington or Lincoln, Napoleon or Goethe, Christ or Mohammed, Caesar or Dante, ... they are so psychoanalyzed and ‘reflexologized’ and sexualized and ‘physiologized’ that the poor hero is stripped of anything heroic

and debunked to the level of a mere physiological incarnation of sex or some similar complex.” (SCD 405)

“The Sensate culture,” Sorokin laments, “did its best in the way of degrading man to the level of a mere reflex mechanism, a mere organ motivated by sex, a mere semi-mechanical, semi-physiological organism, devoid of any divine spark, of any absolute value, of anything noble and sacred.” (SCD 628) But such a debasement, Sorokin warns, has become increasingly dangerous for the sensate man himself—and hence the urgency of the need for a shift from sensate culture to some form of ideationalism or idealism. The unprecedented number of wars and revolutions in the last two centuries, Sorokin says, should have convinced us of the need for a shift in focus “from the subjugation and control of nature by man to the control of man by himself.” Elaborating further on these themes, he writes:

In harmony with the negativistic character of the disintegrating Sensate culture, the prevalent theories of personality [of today]...move mainly in the region of the “social sewers.” They see mainly the lowest form of man’s energies and are blind to man’s highest supraconscious genius. They emphasize man’s animal, sadistic, and masochistic tendencies and pass by man’s sublime, creative, and altruistic properties. They interpret the highest creative *élan* as a mere biological reflex or drive; the sublimest sacrifice as masochistic tendency; the noblest inspiration as this or that subnormal complex; the genius as an abnormal neurotic; and the saint as a doubtful “deviant.” (WPL 83)

The Sensate mind [of today] emphatically denies the power of love, sacrifice, friendship, cooperation, the call of duty, the unselfish search for truth, goodness, and beauty. These appear to us as something epiphenomenal and illusory. We call them “rationalizations,” “self-deceptions,” “beautifying ideologies,” “smoke screens”...[and the like]. We are biased against all theories that try to prove the power of love and other positive forces in determining human behavior and personality ... This penchant to believe in the power of negative forces and to

disbelieve the influence of positive energies has nothing to do with the scientific validity of either type of theory.... A part of truth [negativistic theories] certainly contain. But this part is much more limited than is thought by the bulk of modern scholars, and even this part needs many reservations and qualifications to make it true.... And whether we like it or not, the fallacious portions of the negativistic theories have tangibly contributed to the present degradation of man and of all the great values from the supreme value called God—or some other name—to the values of truth, love, beauty, creative genius and sainthood, and, finally, to those of fatherhood, motherhood, the family, duty, sacrifice, and decency in treatment of man by man.... Directly and indirectly, the negativistic ideologies have notably helped in the mental, moral, and social disorganization of humanity, and in bringing about [our current] tragedy. (FFM 303-304)

The contemporary sensate system, in its virile stages, contributed markedly to the values of science and technology, the fine arts, and, in lesser degree, philosophy and ethics. But it is clearly approaching the end of its career, indeed, it is rapidly crumbling under our very eyes. In its present decadence phase, characterized by increasing wars and revolutions, by the perversion of science in the interest of ever more lethal weapons of destruction, by progressive sensualism and the like, it has begun to menace the further existence of humanity. (SCP 706)

Like Rome at the height of its decadence, an “overripe” sensate culture, Sorokin believes, lays the groundwork for its own dissolution and replacement by another kind of culture. His account of this change goes something like this: When a society becomes dominated by self-absorbed narcissists, pleasure-obsessed hedonists (“oversensual seekers for perverse pleasures that soon debilitate body and mind”), and self-aggrandizing egotists (“[those] who do not want to reckon with or respect any value except their own fancy or volition”), the society will be plagued by a massive proliferation of public scandals, indecencies, fraudulent behav-

ior, dishonest dealings, and criminal activities of every kind. (SCD 494) Such a state of affairs has a demoralizing effect upon the entire social order. “A society with a considerable proportion of these overfree members,” Sorokin writes, “cannot exist for a long time.... It will either disintegrate, or must take measures to bridle them.” (SCD 494)

These restraining measures will inevitably take the form of limiting sensate liberty, and they will be adopted with less resistance than one might suppose since advanced sensate cultures make abundantly clear that a life spent in endless pursuit of sensate values is not a happy or contented one, or one worth fighting to save. “The more a sensate man has,” Sorokin explains, “the more he desires to have, whether it be riches, popularity, or love experience; or fame or power or charm; or anything else.” The ability to satisfy these expanding desires inevitably lags behind the growth in the desires themselves, and the result then is ever-mounting frustration and dissatisfaction. Such growing discontent leads to a general reevaluation of sensate liberty itself. Its charm begins to fade; its value diminishes; and in time it will be little cared for or coveted. Finally, says Sorokin, “people are ready to say ‘good-by’ to [sensate liberty] as a pseudo value or of little account.” (SCD 494)

It is at such times, of course, that societies are perhaps most susceptible to the influence of determined minorities—the carriers of a radically different culture whose new system of values captures the imagination of the dying sensate order. The Christians in apostolic and patristic times were an example of such a “creative minority,” and ones whose achievement Sorokin believes can be reproduced in the current state of Western sensate decline. While Sorokin stops short of a belief in historical inevitability, after more than half a millennia of sensate development the time is now ripe, he believes, for a major shift to a more ideational or idealistic culture. Such a shift, he thinks, is long overdue and is the supreme task for the coming generations.

Against Marx and Freud

Given his view that much of modern social science has contributed to the demoralization and decline of Western culture, it is not surprising to find Sorokin writing extensively on what he sees as the many “fads and foibles” of the leading 20th century social scientists and social theorists. Among the weightiest critiques he offers are those of the followers of Marx and Freud. For those who have come of age in the West since the 1990s—that is, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the general discrediting of communism, and after the general shift in academic psychology and psychiatry from the once popular psychoanalytic models of human development to psycho-pharmacological, biogenetic, and behavioral-genetic models—it may be difficult to imagine just how dominant Marxist and Freudian theories once were in many of the social sciences throughout most of the Western world. No two thinkers have had a greater impact in shaping the social thought of the culturally dominant elites in the West during the first three-quarters of the 20th century than Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

And yet the central theories of both Marx and Freud, Sorokin has tried to show in his writings, are clearly wrong, and the criticisms he offers of each thinker are devastating. While Sorokin acknowledges that some of the ideas propounded by Marx and Freud were undoubtedly true, none of what they had to say that was true, he says, was original to their authors. What is true in the writings of these supposed giants of modern social theory, Sorokin contends, was known for centuries by many of the leading Western thinkers, in some cases going back to the time of the ancient Greeks. And the older versions of whatever truths can be extracted from the writings of Marx and Freud, Sorokin says, were often better developed and with less of an overlay of distorting falsehood than is the case with their modern Marxist and Freudian versions.

The Marxist theory of class conflict and of the class-determined basis of human belief systems is subjected by Sorokin to a withering critique. Marx, says Sorokin, was neither original in discovering class conflict as an important factor in history, nor

did he have much new to say in stressing the tendency of people to perceive reality differently depending on their socio-economic position and material self-interest. All of this was well known, Sorokin says, by many ancient Greek and Roman writers, and was a theme developed at great length by several medieval and modern thinkers including Marsilio of Padua, Machiavelli, and Pierre Bayle. (Sorokin might have added here, the Americans James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John C. Calhoun, among many others.) But many other factors besides class conflict have been important in human history, Sorokin says, including conflicts over religion, language, and issues of national identity. Other important factors that have played their part in the history of nations and peoples, Sorokin says, include geographic position, natural resources, population density, racial and ethnic factors, scientific discoveries, and the development of a legal system. All of these, says Sorokin, can be fruitfully viewed as part of a mutually interacting causal nexus no single element of which can be considered the one true cause, the truly “active” agent, or the “starter” reality. “There is no reason for thinking that, among the forces which mold social and historical processes or human behavior, only the economic factor is ‘active,’ or is ‘the starter,’” he writes. A single-factor analysis of a complex historical process, Sorokin believes, is the way of a simpleton not a social scientist: “To hope for an explanation of the most complex dynamics of social life and history through only one factor amounts to nothing but idiocy.” (CST 538, 535)

Marx is also taken to task by Sorokin for his theory that class position and class interests determine each person’s belief system. While not denying that there is often a statistical correlation between class position and belief system—sometimes moderately strong, sometimes weak—Sorokin points out that class position is only one factor, and not always the decisive one, in determining how people think, believe, and act. The Marxian type of hypothesis is contradicted most clearly, Sorokin says, by the existence of so much diversity of ideology and behavior among people of the same socio-economic position in society. “Among rich captains of

industry and finance,” he writes, “there have been liberal, conservative, socialist, and even a few communist ones, affiliated with different religions, espousing different philosophies and ethical systems, and having acquired contrasting aesthetic tastes, scientific education, and economic policies.” The same, he says, is true of the proletarian or “working class.” Such ideological and behavioral diversity, moreover, is seen not only under democratic regimes, but is also found under dictatorships, monarchies, and other systems of government. Such a cultural and ideological diversity among individuals whose positions are similar, and among groups whose structures are similar, clearly contradicts, says Sorokin, the Marxian-type of “social factor hypothesis.” (PSR 484) (Were he alive today, Sorokin would no doubt point out the contemporary anomaly of the blue collar “Reagan Democrats”—i.e. members of the “working class” who vote for conservative Republican candidates—and the professional and business-class “limousine liberals,” like New Jersey’s billionaire Senator Jon Corzine, who consistently support left-of-center public policies).

The Marxist “social factor hypothesis” also fails another crucial test, according to Sorokin. Just as there is often a diversity of world-views and cultural commitments among people of similar socio-economic backgrounds, so there is often great *similarity* in such commitments and world-views, Sorokin explains, among people from vastly *different* social and economic backgrounds. Differing beliefs can emerge from similar socio-economic backgrounds, just as similar beliefs can emerge from differing socio-economic backgrounds. “Hundreds of millions of individuals and thousands of groups with enormous differences in their social positions and structures belong to the same Taoist, Confucianist, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian religion,” Sorokin writes. Such people, he says, will often have similar ethical convictions on such things as the Golden Rule, or on the Mosaic rule of “an eye for an eye,” and they will often display similarities in their tastes, ideas, beliefs, and preferences. “If the social position of an individual, or the structure of a social group,”

Sorokin writes, “were the main determining factor in their total culture, or in adoption of any cultural system...the planetary diffusion of this sort of cultural system and supersystem over a multitude of different social groups and millions of individuals occupying the most diverse social positions would have been impossible.” (PSR 483-484)

While Sorokin is willing to concede that a few studies written from the Marxist perspective have had some value, he believes that the overall effect of Marxism as social science has been pernicious, as it has given rise to a cult-like following of dogmatic “true-believers” who treat the corpus of Marx and Engels’ writings as a religious fundamentalist treats sacred scripture. Sorokin is particularly emphatic in denying that Marx and Engels were the great path-breaking pioneers in the history of modern social science that many of their followers claim they were. On this he writes: “From a purely scientific standpoint, there is no reason for regarding Marx and Engels as the ‘Darwins’ or ‘Galileos’ of the social sciences. There is no reason even for regarding their scientific contributions as something above the average.... If they gave impetus for some few fruitful scientific studies, at the same time they have originated an enormous number of wrong hypotheses and ideologies, and an enormous bulk of literature whose essence consists only in a theological interpretation of the ‘scripture’ of Marx and Engels.” (CST 545)

Sorokin’s judgment on Freud is even harsher than his assessment of Marx. Freud’s major theories—including the Oedipus complex, penis envy, and the pansexual interpretation of dreams—are the product of a warped, degenerate, sex-obsessed imagination, according to Sorokin, and have little foundation in actual fact. They are a “phantasmagoria” with no scientific validity whatever. Their enormous popularity in the Western world can only be understood, Sorokin believes, as a reflection of the culture’s advanced state of sensate decadence and decline.

Sorokin was an early critic of Freud’s central concept of the libido, which he criticized for its infinite elasticity. He quotes in this context the definition of libido given by Freud in his *Group*

Psychology:

We call by libido the energy of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word "love." The nucleus of what we mean by love consists in sexual love with sexual union as its aim. But we do not separate from this, on the one hand, self-love, and on the other, love for parents and children, friendship, and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas. (cited in CST 606)

The problem with this definition, Sorokin says, is that libido is so extended beyond its primary meaning of the erotic instinct that it can mean almost anything. What starts out as erotic desire is expanded to include every kind of human attraction, attachment, or life energy. Freud's libido concept, says Sorokin, is as broad as a life itself. It is "a bag filled with everything, beginning with sexuality in a narrow sense and ending with hypnotism, sociality, idealism, parental love, friendship, self-protection, and what not." Through this boundless extension of the meaning of libido, says Sorokin, the term is deprived of any clear meaning. "Shall we wonder therefore," he writes, "that the [Freudian] school regards the whole activity of man as a sex activity; man himself beginning with a baby as a mere sex-machinery; and social phenomena, beginning with a society itself and ending with religion, magic, law, arts, and sciences, as a manifold manifestation of the sex-factor?" (CST 607) This procedure, says Sorokin, is akin to that of the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales, who viewed the whole universe as a manifestation of water. If libido means essentially any kind of life energy or attachment, then by calling it sex energy Freud only confuses us, Sorokin says. "Not a scintilla of knowledge is added through such a misleading identification of sex with life." (WPL 87)

Sorokin's critique of Freud's pansexual method of dream analysis is equally devastating. Freud assures us, Sorokin says, that "the male genital organ is symbolically represented in dreams

in many different ways: the penis is symbolized by the number three, by sticks, umbrellas, poles, trees, knives, daggers, lances, sabers, guns, pistols, revolvers, taps, watering-cans, springs, reptiles, fish, cloaks, hats, lamps, pencils, penholders, nail-files, hammers, balloons, aeroplanes, Zeppelins, and flying in dreams means penis-erection. The female genitalia appears in dreams as pits, hollows, caves, jars, bottles, boxes, chests, coffers, pockets, ships, cupboards, stoves, rooms, doors, gates, wood, paper, tables, books, snails, mussels, mouths, churches, chapels, apples, peaches, fruit, thickets, landscapes, various types of machinery, and so on.” (FFM 89)

This enumeration, which is taken from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, makes clear, Sorokin says, that in the Freudian universe almost anything can become a symbol of sex or sexual organs. But there is no reason whatever to believe in this identification other than a dogmatic adherence to Freudian assumptions, Sorokin says. “Using this method,” he writes, “one can claim with an equal right that almost all dreams deal with eating, or drinking, or praying, or fighting, or breathing, because whatever appears in dreams is but a symbol of a dogmatically assumed eating, drinking, praying, and so on. In their foolish fancy such theories are in no way more crazy, arbitrary, and unscientific than Freud’s pan-sexual interpretation of dreams.” (FFM 90)

What is most amazing about all this, says Sorokin, is not the sex-obsessed Freud putting forth such ludicrous theories—there is no shortage, he says, of such theories manufactured by dogmatic ideologists of one stripe or another—but the fact that “a legion of gullible psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, journalists, and even ministers of God, can seriously accept these phantasmagorias, and sell them to the public as the last world of science.” (FFM 90) We have here, Sorokin says, another indication of the depths of sensate decadence to which modern Western culture has descended. “The considerable success of Freudianism,” he says, “is due to its congeniality with the dominant Sensate culture of the West in which Freudianism was born and diffused. Freudianism is possibly the most typical child of this disintegrat-

ing culture.” (WPL 88)

The Freudians’ claim that little boys seek to have sexual intercourse with their mothers (Oedipus complex); that they fear castration as punishment for their errant sexual desires; that little girls envy little boys and develop an inferiority complex once they discover that they do not possess a male sex organ (penis envy); that human life must pass through the critical oral, anal, and genital phases of eroticism; that human psychic life is dominated by sexual desire—which must either be repressed, satisfied, sublimated, or turned into neurosis; that this sexual desire is coupled with an opposing “death instinct”—all of these ideas and many other features of the Freudian theory of the unconscious, says Sorokin, are “a grotesque phantasma, fallacious logically, wrong factually, ugly aesthetically, and demoralizing ethically.” (WPL 87) And herein, he says, lies their poisonous influence. Freudian psychoanalysis and similar therapies, Sorokin says, “interpret the greatest cultural values and creative geniuses, including Jesus, St. Paul, Buddha, St. Francis and others, in these libidinal and animalistic terms.” (WPL 333) They degrade motherhood, fatherhood, childhood, and other noble values in their muckraking ideologies. And they have contributed a notable share to the modern demoralization of humanity.

Sorokin concedes that some of Freud’s ideas were sound. Freud’s understanding of repression, displacement, rationalization, projection, sublimation, compensation, and the treatment of neurosis are all seen by Sorokin as genuine insights. But none of them, Sorokin insists, are *original* insights of Freud or his school. All were well understood, Sorokin says, by the organizers and supervisors of ancient and medieval religious orders. “An even superficial study of the technique of social control practiced in the old and the medieval religious orders,” Sorokin writes, “shows that [the] principles of the Freudian school were well known to them, and successfully practiced.” (CST 608) Freud and his school may have further elaborated some of these principles, and explored them in greater detail. But little that Freud and his followers have brought into the world is new, Sorokin insists, and

much of what they have done, he says, is both erroneous and degrading.

The Ways and Techniques of Spiritual Transformation

In describing himself as a “conservative Christian anarchist” Sorokin speaks only half in jest. While he does not believe that the state can or should be eliminated, like Tolstoy, whose philosophical writings greatly influenced him as a young man, he sees organized state power as the preeminent source of evil throughout human history. “Ordering thousands or even millions to kill or be killed,” he writes, “imprisoning or executing all kinds of violators including saintly martyrs and altruistic opponents of its unjust laws, eulogized and perhaps glorified in its sovereignty and power, the state has been the most militant and power-drunk of all social institutions, incessantly generating internal and international conflicts in their bloodiest and most inhuman forms.” (RH 160) From this basic observation Sorokin derives a number of conclusions about government, some sensible (like the need to prevent the accumulation of power in a single source where it would inevitably prove corrupting), others more airy and utopian (like his call for universal disarmament and a benign world government).

But Sorokin’s most valuable insight regarding the political order is essentially a variation on the Platonic theme that regardless of its government no society can be better than the character and moral decency of the people who comprise it. It is folly, he believes, to try to reconstruct a society purely through institutional tinkering with the mechanisms of government when what is really needed is the complete “reconstruction of humanity” from the bottom up. And this reconstruction, he says, requires not scientific or technological knowledge of the sensate kind, nor clever politicians attuned to the ways of a fallen world, but an understanding of the higher reaches of the human soul and of the ways of disciplining one’s life so that it is guided by the promptings of the soul’s inherent divinity rather than its animal-like rapacity or baseness. Only through a broadly based moral transformation,

one that seeks to tame the egotism of individuals and groups and that enhances the capacity of all to love one's neighbor as oneself, can modern societies move beyond the sensate chaos into which they have fallen, Sorokin says. Social transformation, he believes, is only possible on the foundation of genuine moral transformation, not on the basis of economic and political reforms, nor on the basis of new scientific discoveries, however welcomed and even necessary all of these may be.

Sorokin's views on these matters are well-captured in the following remarks:

There are times when mankind most urgently needs an upsurge of scientific discoveries and technological inventions. And there are times when the paramount need is a release of aesthetic or religious or philosophical creativity. Finally, there are periods when the greatest need of humanity is ethical creativity at its noblest, wisest, and best. An exuberant blossoming of ethical creativity seems to be the most desperate need of humanity today. (AL v)

The most urgent need of our time is the man who can control himself and his lusts, who is compassionate to all his fellow men, who can see and seek for the eternal values of culture and society, and who deeply feels his unique responsibility in this universe. (SCD 628)

There have been good and bad monarchies and republics; aristocracies, and democracies; regimes of one, of the few, and of the many. In themselves none of these forms guarantee that the government will function for the benefit of the citizens rather than for that of the few exploiting the many.... A genuine ennoblement of the state will be possible only when the citizens and the officials become wiser, more competent, more altruistic. (RH 160)

What is needed is a concentration of humanity's efforts on unlocking the secrets of the superconscious as the realm of the most powerful, most creative, and most ennobling forces in the entire universe. The more man becomes an instrument of the

superconscious, the more creative, wiser, and nobler he grows; the more easily he controls himself and his unconscious and egoistic conscious energies, the more he comes to resemble God as the supreme ideal. (RH 205)

Much of Sorokin's scholarly efforts from the late 1940s until his death in 1968 was devoted to uncovering the ways in which exemplary people throughout history have successfully pursued the goal of their own moral and spiritual improvement and provided creative role models for others to follow. Most of modern psychology and sociology, Sorokin complains, has focused its attention on subnormal persons and groups—alcoholics, criminal gangs, the mentally ill, etc.; or on exotic peoples in faraway places; or on ordinary people in the “Middletowns” or similar familiar settings. But it has shown little interest, he says, in the study of those saintly and heroic types of personalities who have done so much to shape human history and to elevate mankind morally and spiritually. War, delinquency, mental disorder and primitive exoticisms are seen by sensate investigators as the proper objects of social science research, Sorokin complains, but not love, moral transformation, saintliness, or heroic deeds. All this, Sorokin charges, is part of the myopia and bias of a declining sensate culture. To correct this situation, Sorokin set up the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism in the late 1940s for the explicit purpose of systematically exploring the ways and techniques by which human individuals and groups throughout history have become less self-centered and more altruistic. The Center was partially funded by a grant from the philanthropist Eli Lilly.

As part of the work of the Center, Sorokin and others carried out a number of comprehensive studies of some of the world's most important saints, altruists, and heroes of selfless love. The Center's studies focused (a) on the writings of many of the greatest Christian monastic leaders including Saints Benedict, Basil, Jerome, Athanasius, John Cassian, Bernard, Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola; (b) on the Indian systems of yoga of

Patanjali, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo; (c) on Zen and other perfectionist traditions in Buddhism; (d) on the pietistic farm communities established by the Hutterites, Mennonites, and similar Christian groups; (e) on the lives of all the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic saints contained in the standard histories on the topic, as well as the lives of comparable saintly figures from other Christian denominations (like the Quaker John Woolman); and (f) on the lives of more contemporary moral heroes such as Simone Weil and Albert Schweitzer. Sorokin also studied in conjunction with the Center's activities the lives of several hundred American "good neighbors," by which was meant people in contemporary America who led fairly mainstream lives but who struck those who knew them best as among the most loving, caring, and altruistic people that they had ever personally encountered. Several of Sorokin's later books grew out of the Center's work, including *The Reconstruction of Humanity*, *The Crisis of Our Age*, and *The Ways and Power of Love*, the last being a comprehensive summary of the Center's findings.

A study of history shows, Sorokin says, that one of the most important factors in the moral uplift of any people is the force of heroic example. Striking instances of this can be seen throughout history by the influence of figures like Jesus and St. Francis, the Buddha and Mahavira, Moses and Hillel, Lao-tzu and Confucius, Al Hallaj and Al Ghazzali, Gandhi and Schweitzer. These and other heroic "athletes of God," he says, "incalculably influenced humanity in the same decisive way in which any great hero in any field influences the ordinary folk—by striking their imagination, and by becoming a fascinating myth of heroic achievement. Their shining example grows into an irresistible and enchanting image calling forth mimesis and catharsis of the masses." "Heroic example," he observes, "never perishes in vain and always engenders an uncounted legion of followers." (WPL 308-309)

And what is most remarkable, Sorokin says, is that the great heroes of divine love exercised their enormous influence over mankind without the use of armies, without violence, without appealing to hate, envy, greed or any other selfish or lustful

motives. Their effect simply flowed from their total dedication to the highest forms of divine love and the purity of their heroic example. Through the inspirational, uplifting, and mimetic effects that such heroes of love have exercised on their millions of followers, Sorokin says, they have affected the lives of mankind more than the pleadings of countless ethical philosophers or “rational preachers.” For the moral ennoblement of humanity, he says, “the emergence of one hero of love, like St. Francis or Gandhi, is more important than the publication of thousands of utilitarian, hedonistic, and ‘rational’ books on ethics.” None of the greatest military conquerors and revolutionary leaders of the past, Sorokin notes, can even remotely compare to these apostles of love in the magnitude and durability of the changes they have brought about on this planet. (WPL 71-72, 484)

Most people, of course, are not moral heroes, and the techniques and ways of spiritual transformation often used by the morally heroic—including great bodily austerities, prolonged fasts, periods of social isolation and prolonged solitude, abandonment of all earthly possessions and temporary severance of all social ties—will not be suitable to the great mass of mankind. But many other techniques of moral and spiritual transformation more appropriate to average sorts of people are available, Sorokin says, and in *The Ways and Powers of Love* he offers and exhaustive treatment of some twenty-six different types of these. A small sampling includes: (a) private and public prayer; (b) the utilization of biological drives for altruistic ends including special training in body posture, movement, and regulated breathing techniques (e.g. yogic *pranyama*); (c) conscience examination and confession, both public and private; (d) exposure to uplifting literature, art, music, and poetry; (e) the doing of good deeds as in karma yoga; and (f) the rearrangement of group affiliations. This last mentioned technique is seen by Sorokin as indispensable to any kind of moral progress, at least in so far as a person is tied to any group that is both (1) inimical to spiritual and moral growth, and that, (2) places a considerable demand upon its members’ time, thoughts, aspirations, or deeds. “A person self-

identifying himself with the supreme values of love and its respective groups,” Sorokin writes, “must cut off all his affiliations with those groups whose demands contradict [these values].” (WPL 352) It is very important, Sorokin believes, for people seeking their own moral and spiritual uplift to affiliate with like-minded companions whether it be in a church, prayer group, family organization, charitable society, meditation center, classical music organization, or whatever.

Perhaps Sorokin’s most illuminating discussion in this context is his treatment of religious sacrament and ritual. Many people, including not only secularists but members of certain types of religious organizations like the Quakers, tend to view religious sacrament and ritual as a peripheral part of any genuine moral and spiritual life that is of little value for character formation or any other high moral purpose. According to this view, religious rituals and sacraments are of little more account for the higher cultivation of the soul than light recreation or participatory amusements. Sorokin offers a radically different view, however, one that no doubt reflects his own experiences as a youth participating in many Orthodox Christian religious services. “Great religions at their creative period,” Sorokin writes, “through their sacramental and ritualistic tragedies, dramas, and mysteries have been among the greatest moral educators of humanity.” He goes on to elucidate this point:

Religion has a specific service for all the important events in human life. The ritual of each important sacrament or the rites of each important service are marvelously adapted for their specific purpose. The rites of repentance, confession, and the Eucharist, the ritual of baptism or “the rites of passage” of marriage and funeral—each of these ceremonies is different from the others, and in each the prayers spoken, the hymns sung, the music played, the postures and motions acted, the instrumentalities used, the vestments and objects employed are again ingeniously adapted for their specific purposes and for arousing corresponding kinds of affections, emotions, and primeval drives. (WPL

314-315)

In each society its religious services are its greatest tragedies, its intensest “psychodramas,” and its most moving “sociodramas” actively played by each believer. There is hardly a greater tragedy than that of God or God’s Son sacrificing Himself for redemption of man or the tragic mystery of the *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi* [“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”]. There is hardly a more dramatic action than that of a sinful believer partaking the very flesh and blood of his God and Savior. There is no more moving role than that of a mortal assured in his immortality; of a greatest sinner redeemed by God’s love and granted a blissful salvation. No less important is the fact that the sacramental tragedies and mysteries are actively participated in by the believers: they do not merely look passively and listen or just “read their lines.” True believers actually live their role in a most real way, and live it collectively, surrounded and co-acted by their fellow believers, by their religious and moral leaders; and they do this in the presence of, and in communion with, God Himself. Playing their role they feel themselves becoming divinized, purified, sanctified, and blessed by the grace of their Supreme Being.... When carefully studied and fully understood, the ritual and sacramental techniques of the great religions turn out to be among the most scientific and effective techniques for spiritual and moral transformation ever invented. (WPL 313-315)

Even more important than religious institutions for the cultivation of high morals and altruistic love, according to Sorokin, is the family setting. Long before the term came into existence Sorokin was a “family values conservative,” whose study of altruistic personalities had convinced him of the overriding importance of a good family background in nurturing loving and caring people. He was aghast at the increase in divorce, spouse abandonment, and the declining commitment to raising children which he observed in late sensate societies, and he saw the social fallout from these trends to be everywhere present (not least in

the rising tide of juvenile delinquency). “Of all known factors, the family,” Sorokin writes, “seems to be the most important agency in determining the propensities of individuals and groups.” (WPL 192)

In his studies of Orthodox and Catholic saints and of the American “good neighbors” Sorokin found that a very high proportion reported their early family environment as warm and nurturing. In many cases, like those of John Woolman and St. Francis de Sales, they had parents who were both loving and deeply religious. There is, of course, no way to know for sure what the family features of an historical control group would be like, but Sorokin is certain that the saintly and altruistic people he studied were much more likely than others to have had the advantage of a warm and loving early family environment. There were some, of course, who came from less supportive family environments, but they were in a small minority, and many of these Sorokin describes as “late-catastrophic” altruists—i.e. people such as Ignatius Loyola who embarked on their saintly ways only after some dramatic precipitating event turned them away from their previous, more self-centered mode of existence. “It seems it is much easier,” Sorokin concludes, “to mold babies into altruists from their earliest childhood...than to reshape a grown-up selfish person into altruistic form.” (WPL 165) It is the rarest exception, he believes, when grown-up egotists turn their life around and become more caring and loving persons. For turning out altruists on a large scale then, there is no substitute Sorokin believes for dedicated and loving parents working within the family setting. This is even more important, he believes, than effective churches and schools, which he sees as the next most important influence on the development of loving and caring people.

**The Global Religious Revival, the “Clash of Civilizations,”
and the American Culture Wars: Some Final Sorokinian
Musings on the Current State of the World**

Within the context of American academic sociology as it existed in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Sorokin’s later writings were what

Nietzsche would have called *unzeitgemaess* (“discordant with their times”). His view of Integral Truth as a balance between empirical, rational-mathematical, and mystical-intuitional knowledge; his view of reality as an Infinite Manifold that the human mind could only partially grasp; his rejection of linear-progressivist views of history and his belief that the modern West had entered a stage of advanced sensate decadence and cultural decline but was ripe for a religious or “ideational” revival of the kind that had brought spiritual renewal to a decaying Roman Empire—these and other views characteristic of Sorokin’s later thought were so out of tune with the dominant positivist, liberal-progressivist, modernist, neo-Freudian, and neo-Marxist strains in the sociology of his day that Sorokin’s later writings were largely ignored by his sociological peers.

“Sociology’s Dostoyevsky” is how one expositor characterized Sorokin and his writings, and the characterization was an apt one—most American sociologists had as much interest in Sorokin’s theories as they did in learning about Father Zossima. To the extent that Sorokin attracted an audience it was a dispersed group of readers spread out among many academic disciplines and non-academic professions, and as a result, his views never achieved the overall influence of the more *zeitgemaess* among his social science contemporaries including Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, Herbert Marcuse, Erik Erikson, and Erich Fromm. As a contemporary reviewer of one of his books published in 1950 put it: “Who reads Sorokin? Whatever the answer to that question, sociologists generally are not included in the attentive group. To be sure *Social Mobility* [1927] and *Contemporary Sociological Theory* [1928] are frequently cited by sociologists and used by them in teaching and research. But the [*Social and Cultural Dynamics*] and all its progeny, among which can be included the book under review, are lost in sociological limbo. They are no longer even criticized, simply ignored.”⁴

Sorokin’s views, however, have aged well over time, while those of most of his contemporaries have not fared so well (who today, for instance, reads the neo-Marxist, neo-Freudian, or

structural-functionalist social theorists of the mid and late 20th century²⁾). Many of the events that have taken place around the world over the past few decades, including the collapse of Soviet Communism, the world-wide religious revival, the American “culture wars,” and the rise simultaneously of both a global economy and a global “clash of civilizations” were developments that from the standpoint of much of the dominant sociology and political science of the post-World War II years were thoroughly baffling and unanticipated. Any student of Sorokin’s thought would not only have found these developments readily comprehensible, but would have seen their occurrence or the occurrence of something very much like them as, if not inevitable, at least highly probable.

Where Sorokin’s views differed most significantly from that of the liberal secularists, Freudians, and Marxists of his day was his Christian and Platonic-like view of the theomorphic nature of the human soul. The human soul, for Sorokin, is a meeting place of different levels of reality, and part of that reality is supra-conscious, supra-organic, and super-sensory. The soul, he believes, is a window that looks out onto a transcendental horizon of Being that is experienced by man in his deeper prayer and meditative states as sacred and absolute. God, for Sorokin, is not simply an object of faith or belief, but an object of existential yearning and I-thou style of communication whose Presence is made manifest in moments of heightened religious awareness and illuminated grace. Like St. Augustine, Sorokin believed that human beings are so constituted that their most intimate desire is for union with God, even if they are unaware of this desire or are so preoccupied with their more worldly and sensate pursuits that they largely forget or ignore it. Desire for union with God is the deepest yearning in the human soul, Sorokin believed, and this isn’t for him a matter of faith but of simple empirical fact. Human beings are spiritual beings, he says, and to deny this as many modern secularists do is to deny one of the most palpable facts of human nature.

It is because of his belief in the ineradicably spiritual nature

of human beings and the theomorphic nature of the human soul that Sorokin disputed the claim that secularism and the sensate preoccupation of the modern West would persist indefinitely into the future. Contrary to the view of secularists, reality for Sorokin always remains a multi-storied manifold that is only partially illuminated through the methods of natural science and other sensate disciplines. God is always eternally present and eternally real for Sorokin, just as matter and mind are always temporally present and temporally real. Whenever this is forgotten, Sorokin held, a reaction will invariably set in that seeks to correct any one-sided view of truth that has come to dominate a culture. Sorokin's views on this matter were similar to those of Tocqueville, who likewise believed that a reaction against an excessive preoccupation with the reality of the senses would provoke in time a countervailing movement in any people so dedicated to materialism and the "pursuit of happiness" as the people he encountered in Jacksonian America. Tocqueville's remarks in this regard are worth quoting at length since they express a view virtually identical to that of Sorokin.

Tocqueville begins by describing the revivalist camp meetings which he witnessed in western New York, which seemed so strange to his French aristocratic eyes (they would not have appeared so strange, of course, to the eyes of a British subject familiar with Methodism and the Wesleyan revivalist tradition in England):

Although the desire of acquiring the good things of this world is the prevailing passion of the American people, certain momentary outbreaks occur when their souls seem suddenly to burst the bonds of matter by which they are restrained and to soar impetuously towards heaven. In all the states of the Union, but especially in the half-peopled country of the Far West, itinerant preachers may be met with who hawk about the word of God from place to place. Whole families, old men, women, and children, cross rough passes and untrodden wilds, coming from a great distance, to join a camp-meeting, where, in listening to

these discourses, they totally forget for several days and nights the cares of business and even the most urgent wants of the body. Here and there in the midst of American society you meet with men full of a fanatical and almost wild spiritualism, which hardly exists in Europe.

Tocqueville then explains why such spiritual outbursts have occurred among a people as seemingly preoccupied with material things as the Americans:

It was not man who implanted in himself the taste for what is infinite and the love of what is immortal; these lofty instincts are not the offspring of his capricious will; their steadfast foundation is fixed in human nature, and they exist in spite of his efforts. He may cross and distort them; destroy them he cannot. The soul has wants which must be satisfied; and whatever pains are taken to divert it from itself, it soon grows weary, restless, and disquieted amid the enjoyments of sense. If ever the faculties of the great majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men. They would drift at large in the world of spirits, for fear of remaining shackled by the close bondage of the body. It is not, then, [surprising that] in the midst of a community whose thoughts tend earthward a small number of individuals are to be found who turn their looks to heaven. I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance among a people solely engaged in promoting their own worldly welfare. It is said that the deserts of the Thebaid [i.e. where the Desert Fathers dwelled] were peopled by the persecutions of the emperors and the massacres of the Circus; I should rather say that it was by the luxuries of Rome and the Epicurean philosophy of Greece.⁵

For reasons similar to what Tocqueville articulates here, Sorokin believed that modern sensate society was long overdue for a change in course. Although he did not live to see it, he

certainly would not have been surprised at the religious revivals and “the return of the sacred” that we have witnessed taking place over the past twenty or thirty years among so many young Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and people of other faiths in virtually all areas of the globe that have come under Western secularist influences, that are threatened by such influences, or that were previously Marxist states.⁶ Nor would he have been surprised by the American “culture wars” over issues such as pornography, abortion, prayer in public schools, the posting of the Ten Commandments in public places, homosexuality, out-of-wedlock births, “living-together” arrangements, legalized gambling, no-fault divorce, gangsta rap, violent video games, Christmas displays in the public square, and the like. From a Sorokinian standpoint all of these controversies can be seen as a struggle between an ideology of late sensate individualism and the more religiously communitarian and distinctly nonsensate values of an older Christian integral culture, the latter reasserting itself after decades in decline. The emergence of a religiously-grounded “family values conservatism”—the kind one sees, for instance, in contemporary groups like Focus on the Family or the Family Research Council—was something Sorokin predicted more than fifty years ago at a time when most sociologists thought the American family was doing just fine and few voices were being raised about the possible harms emanating from general cultural changes and cultural decline.

Besides the world-wide religious revival and the new cultural assertiveness of the Christian Right in America, another major trend of our times that was so unanticipated—but that Sorokin could so well have predicted and so well understood—is the so-called “clash of civilizations” that has developed in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end to the bipolar division of power in the international arena. With the collapse of Soviet Communism, many Westerners assumed that the major conflicts between nations and regions of the globe would greatly subside as everyone would come to adopt for their countries some version of the Western, secular, democratic capitalist model of

governance. A few holdouts and backwater areas were readily acknowledged—Marxist fossils like Cuba and North Korea, or feudal Islamic states like Iran and Saudi Arabia, for instance. But mankind had reached the “end of history,” as the political scientist Francis Fukuyama proclaimed, since ideological wars, it was held, were now a thing of the past and all peoples of the globe would eventually adopt some version of secularized liberal democracy as the one right form of government.

Never was it imagined by the “end of history” proponents that conflicts over language, religion, ethnicity and culture would come to play as large a role in international affairs as they have come to play since the end of the Cold War. The “end of history” theorists were correct in concluding that class-based disputes over economic issues and ideological disputes regarding basic structures of property rights (free markets vs. state controlled socialism) would greatly subside once the socialist model of development had been so soundly discredited. But they failed to see the emergence of new sources of conflict among nations and peoples that would be at least as salient as the older ones. And they were particularly remiss in not realizing the oldest wisdom under the sun—that “mankind does not live by bread alone,” and that conflicts centering around ultimate values, social identities, and religious meanings were as pervasive in human history as economic conflicts.

The nature of the international arena that emerged in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union has been well described by Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in his influential book on *The Clash of Civilizations*. “In the post-Cold War world,” Huntington writes, “states increasingly define their interests in civilizational terms. They cooperate with and ally themselves with states with similar or common culture and are more often in conflict with countries of different culture.... Publics and statesmen are less likely to see threats emerging from people they feel they understand and can trust because of shared language, religion, values, institutions, and culture. They are much more likely to see threats coming from states whose societies have

different cultures and hence which they do not understand and feel they cannot trust.... In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities.”⁷ Huntington sees the post-Cold War world divided by several large cultural groupings each of which is centered around a different value-system whose contours have been shaped by differing religious and historical traditions. Western Christianity, Islam, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto form the cultural and religious core of these different civilizational groupings. While being part of the same civilizational grouping is no guarantee of peaceful relations, conflicts between peoples of different civilizations, Huntington believes, will be more common and more violent in the decades ahead.

Sorokin well understood the kinds of inter-cultural dynamics that Huntington describes here and saw them as a universal feature of human history from the earliest recorded times. The post-Cold War “clash of civilizations” would not have been seen as a new phenomenon for Sorokin, but as something that has always existed, even at the tribal level before large empires and nation states ever existed. His systematic study of war in the West and elsewhere, plus his reading of the relevant anthropological material on tribal societies convinced him as early as the 1930s that cultural divides between peoples are things very difficult to breach and are sources of general mistrust, misunderstandings, and very frequently of genocide and war. Sorokin certainly would not have been surprised by the way the international arena divided up after the collapse of Soviet power, and in fact, might have predicted an even greater “clash of civilizations” in the immediate aftermath of that collapse, since transition periods it is stressed throughout his writings are always the occasions for the greatest political and social instability. His views on these matters are well-represented in the following section of the sociology textbook he wrote just after the conclusion of the Second World War:

Early history and anthropology give us hundreds of cases of wars occasioned by the meeting of two formerly isolated tribes. If their basic values were different such a contact has almost invariably been followed by warfare. The same is true of historical societies. A notable portion of the wars of these societies occurred precisely when, in the process of migration or expansion or colonization, one society met another for the first time. The contact was almost invariably followed by wars, whether of defense, offense, misunderstanding, subjugation, or colonization, even when the societies had no conscious military objectives. So it was in the history of Egypt, Babylonia, China and Persia, Greece and Rome, Europe and the Americas. When Egyptians met Nubians or Palestinians or Hyksos or any other group with different values, war followed. When in the process of peaceful colonization the Greeks met other peoples and societies, war took place. The same is true of the Macedonians and the Romans throughout their history. The expansion of these empires meant contact with other societies having different systems of values. The resultant wars lasted until one part was destroyed or subjugated, or their values became compatible. The same is true when West met East; when the Spaniards or Pilgrims met the aboriginal Americans, and so on through the chronic colonial wars that have been going on continually. (SCP 509)

Sorokin explains further that contact between different peoples can greatly facilitate enmity and war but that it is not the contact itself that is the decisive factor. By themselves contact and interaction, Sorokin says, are neither war-making nor peace-making: "Inter-societal contact and interaction do not lead to war if the value-systems of the respective societies are not incompatible. The cause is the incompatibility. Social contact and interaction are facilitating factors." Hostile, war-like relations are thus seen as a result of combining two factors: prolonged contact, and fundamental incompatibility of the value-systems of two peoples. (SCP 509)

It was the combination of these two factors, Sorokin says, that

“partially explains why the rapid expansion of contact and communication after the thirteenth century has been followed by an increase of war on this planet. New technical means of communication and transportation have brought face to face an ever increasing number of tribes, societies, nations, and empires. The irreconcilability of their value-systems was thus systematically intensified.” (SCP 509)

Sorokin would have seen the contemporary clash between Islam and the West as virtually inevitable as the increasing globalization of economic relations between the Islamic and Western-Christian civilizational spheres brought two radically incompatible value-systems into conflict. And the value-contrast between the two cultures would be seen by Sorokin as even greater in modern times than in the time of the early Muslim conquests or the Christian Crusades.⁸ From Sorokin’s standpoint the conflict is one between an “overripe” sensate culture—one formerly but no longer Christian, that shows all the signs of sensate decadence including unbridled materialism, religious indifferentism, sex-obsession, drug abuse, family breakup, single parenthood, soaring juvenile delinquency, and a lack of creativity in music, painting, literature and art—and a fossilized ideational culture that is frozen in a time warp and has lost the creativity that once characterized its past achievements in philosophy, literature, science and architecture. One could hardly imagine a greater cultural contrast.

Sorokin, however, would differ from the conclusions of Huntington and his followers in several ways. Perhaps most decisively, he would stress the fact that cultures and civilizations are not stagnant entities but evolve over time. Sometimes this evolution happens slowly, other times much more rapidly. But change is the only constant in human history, Sorokin believed, and his theory of cultural dynamics, in which Integral Truth becomes the often-missed but never abandoned *telos* of the historical process, would lead to conclusions considerably more hopeful than those who believe that civilizational clashes are interminable and inevitable.

With regard to the current clash between Islam and the West, Sorokin would no doubt point out that both cultures currently find themselves at end stages of their respective ideational and sensate developments and are long overdue for a shift in direction. The Wahabist-Taliban style of Islamic fundamentalism strays as far from the goal of integral balance in Sorokin's sense as the one-sidedly sensate, post-Christian societies of Northern and Western Europe. Both are ripe for a correction, according to Sorokin's theory of cultural change, the Islamic societies in the direction of sensate development (particularly in the areas of science, technology, economic productivity, and democratic governance), the Western sensate cultures in the direction of ideational change (including the development of more stable families, greater temperance and self-control, and the reorientation of their cultural values in a more God-centered direction). Were he alive today, Sorokin would no doubt hold out hope for a political and cultural *rapprochement* between Islam and the West. While relations might not be close, mutual enmity, hostility, and distrust could give way to more cordial and business-like relations such as those that exist between the West and several of the Far Eastern cultures.

Sorokin was a great admirer of Confucianism, and in the early 21st century he would probably see several of the Confucian-based societies of the Far East, including Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan, as coming closer to his integral ideal of sound human development than contemporary Western and Islamic societies. "Among the great systems of human conduct," he writes in *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, "Confucianism best embodies [the sensibly mixed form of] cultural type." "Free from ascetic elements, this system at the same time represents a remarkable combination of the Ideational and the Sensate, its main purpose being to indicate the empirical mean, to keep the balance...the 'state of equilibrium and harmony.' ... It recommends a proper gratification of all the important sensate needs but in due measure and degree, and with necessary limitations which are imposed by social duties, the general welfare of the people, and the commands

of Heaven. All the other characteristics of Confucianism are summed up in the system of means which facilitate the realization of this goal.” (SCD 50)

For Sorokin, Confucianism possesses many of the same strengths of integral balance as Thomism and Aristotelianism, and it would be no surprise to him to see that those societies of the current day that have most lived up to Confucian ideals have been those most successful in combining modernizing economic development with the maintenance of the kind of family cohesiveness and social solidarity characteristic of ideational cultures. Sorokin was no great believer in the power of cultural diffusion—cultures, he believed, grew and developed according to their own internal dynamics (though outside events could speed up or retard these developments). So he would not think it either possible or desirable for Western or Islamic societies to adopt Confucianism or to look eastward for determining the direction of their change. But he did believe that both Western and Islamic societies possessed past models of integral balance that could suggest the direction for future development away from the one-sided extremes into which they had fallen.

Sorokin was an optimist in his later years and believed that after the enormous destruction of two world wars in the 20th century there would be a gradual emergence of a global society where integral balance would become the order of the day. And leadership in this development, he believed, would come not only from the West, but from Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the globe as well. Against pessimistic, “clash”-theorists like Huntington, who tend to underestimate the possibilities for intercultural cooperation, he would no doubt have pointed out that cultures are not fixed, that human beings are not prisoners to unchanging traditions, that learning processes do occur, and that many of the figures who have had the greatest impact in the formation of the leading civilizations on earth—including Second-Isaiah, Jesus, Mahavira, the Buddha, Al-Ghazzali, Patanjali, Asoka, Confucius, Francis of Assisi, Lao-tse, the Hindu sages, and Sufi saints—have been apostles of a kind of spiritual univer-

salism that transcends divisions of ethnicity, language, region, and culture. To be loyal to the best in one's own cultural heritage often means to transcend narrow cultural loyalties and political particularisms.

The "clash"-theorists, Sorokin would say, while grasping part of the truth, have failed to recognize the possibilities for positive and dynamic cultural change within individual civilizations, and the positive resources that each of the civilizations possess in the form of specific elements in their respective traditions that point in the direction of a universal humanity. They style themselves "realists," but they ignore, Sorokin would charge, mankind's more creative potentials for cooperation and justice, which are just as much a part of the reality of the human condition as war and conflict. In their one-sided focus on the negative in human nature, they are the typical offspring, he would say, of a declining sensate culture. Throughout human history, "the ways and power of love," Sorokin emphasizes in his later writings, have been just as real—and often more successful—as the ways and power of hate.⁹ The real challenge of our time, Sorokin would say, is for creative minorities and creative leaders to help bridge the enormous cultural divides that separate the peoples of the globe, and in the process, to elevate humanity in the direction laid out by history's greatest moral teachers. These teachers, Sorokin would emphasize, are to be found in all of the world's great civilizations. We overcome our cultural divisions, he would say, by following the teachings of the greatest moral lights in each of our respective cultures.

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NOTES

1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).
2. When Sorokin was writing this, most European countries still had birth rates above replacement levels (in advanced industrial societies with low infant mortality rates the replacement rate

is just over two children per adult woman). Today all countries of Western Europe have birth rates below replacement level, with some, including Italy and Spain, having birth rates barely half of replacement levels. The implication of this development for the future of Europe is ominous. In America birth rates have been steadily declining since the 1950s, though they are still above replacement level, and with the large number of immigrants coming to the country, the population continues to grow.

3. Barry V. Johnston, *Pitirim A. Sorokin: An Intellectual Biography* (University Press of Kansas, 1995) 6.

4. The review, by William Kolb, is of Sorokin's *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis*, and is cited in Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, vol. II, Second Book, Chapter XII, (Vintage Books, 1945) 143.

6. On the global religious revival see Gilles Kepel, *Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World*, translated by Alan Braley (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park Pennsylvania, 1994); and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002). Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington well captures the scope and nature of this *revanche de Dieu*, as well as the unanticipated nature of its arrival, in the following statement from his illuminating book on *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996):

In the first half of the twentieth century intellectual elites generally assumed that economic and social modernization was leading to the withering away of religion as a significant element in human existence. This assumption was shared by both those who welcomed and those who deplored this trend. Modernizing secularists hailed the extent to which science, rationalism, and pragmatism were eliminating the superstitions, myths, irrationalities, and rituals that formed the core of existing religions. The emerging society would be tolerant, rational, pragmatic, progressive, humanistic, and secular. Worried conservatives, on the

other hand, warned of the dire consequences of the disappearance of religious beliefs, religious institutions, and the moral guidance religion provided for individual and collective human behavior.

The second half of the twentieth century proved these hopes and fears unfounded. Economic and social modernization became global in scope, and at the same time a global revival of religion occurred. This revival, *la revanche de Dieu*, Gilles Kepel termed it, has pervaded every continent, every civilization, and virtually every country.... Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Orthodoxy, all experienced new surges in commitment, relevance, and practice by erstwhile casual believers. In all of them fundamentalist movements arose committed to the militant purification of religious doctrines and institutions and the reshaping of personal, social, and public behavior in accordance with religious tenets. The fundamentalist movements are dramatic and can have significant political impact. They are, however, only the surface waves of the much broader and more fundamental religious tide that is giving a different cast to human life at the end of the twentieth century. (95-96)

7. Samuel P. Huntington, *op. cit.*, 34, 28.

8. This is how many Muslims themselves see the conflict. Huntington well describes the current Muslim view of the modern West and how it differs from the older Muslim view of a Christian West: "It is hard to find statements by any Muslims, whether politicians, officials, academics, businesspersons, or journalists, praising Western values and institutions. They instead stress the differences between their civilization and Western civilization, the superiority of their culture, and the need to maintain the integrity of that culture against Western onslaught. Muslims fear and resent Western power and the threat which this poses to their society and beliefs. They see Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral. They also see it as seductive, and hence stress all the more the need to resist its impact on their way of life. Increasingly, Muslims attack the West not for adhering to an imperfect, erroneous religion—which is nonetheless a 'religion

of the book’—but for not adhering to any religion at all. In Muslim eyes Western secularism, irreligiosity, and hence immorality are worse evils than the Western Christianity that produced them. In the Cold War the West labeled its opponents ‘godless communism’; in the post-Cold War conflict of civilizations Muslims see their opponents as ‘the godless West’.” (213-214)

9. Sorokin would surely have taken issue with Huntington’s need-to-hate thesis, which posits a need for enemies as a precondition for energetic personal and collective action of any kind. “It is human to hate,” Huntington writes. “For self-definition and motivation people need enemies: competitors in business, rivals in achievement, opponents in politics. They naturally distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them. The resolution of one conflict and the disappearance of one enemy generate personal, social, and political forces that give rise to new ones.... [It is partially for this reason that] the end of the Cold War has not ended conflict but has rather given rise to new identities rooted in culture and to new patterns of conflict among groups from different cultures which at the broadest level are civilizations.” (*The Clash of Civilizations, op. cit.*, 130). Sorokin, who was a great admirer of Gandhi and Schweitzer, would have found this claim, as an empirical matter, grossly overdrawn and one-sided, and because of its one-sided distortion of the facts and its focus on human malevolence, pernicious in its moral implications. On this general topic he writes: “Sensate minds emphatically disbelieve the power of love, sacrifice, friendship, cooperation, the call of duty, unselfish search for truth, goodness, and beauty.... [Such minds are prone to believe] in the power of the struggle for existence, selfish interests, egoistic competition, hate, the fighting instinct, sex drives, the instinct of death and destruction, all-powerful economic factors, rude coercion and other negativistic forces.... This penchant to believe the power of negative forces and to disbelieve the influence of positive energies has nothing to do with the scientific validity of either type of theory. It is mainly the result of the congeniality of the ‘debunking theories’ and the noncongeniality of the positive ‘idealistic’ theo-

ries with...the negativistic Sensate world. As such they are at home in that culture and appear to be valid to the Sensate mind. They easily infect Sensate individuals, including Sensate scientists and scholars.... [However,] when both kinds of theories are carefully tested, their comparative validity becomes quite different from that determined by the extra-scientific, existential factor of their congeniality and noncongeniality with the dominant Sensate culture." (WPL 47-48)