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Five Selected Writings Authored by Prof. Palmer Talbutt

Palmer Talbutt

Editor’s Comment

Prof. Palmer Talbutt (1927- 2017) was a professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University from 1959 to his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1991. He earned his B.A. in English from Harvard University, his Master's in Philosophy from Columbia University, a B.D. from Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, and a Ph.D. from Duke University.

A long-time, active member of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, he proposed in 1987 that the ISCSC organize sessions on the thought and writings of the organization’s first president, Pitirim A. Sorokin, upon the occasion of Sorokin’s centennial in 1989. Subsequently, he co-edited with Joseph B. Ford and Michel P. Richard the resulting volume, *Sorokin and Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*. The preface was written by Prof. Roger Wescott and leading scholars in the field contributed chapters. A committee was authorized by the Council of the ISCSC, upon the suggestion of then president, Dr. Michael Palencia-Roth, and the final product was guided to publication by Transaction Publishers in 1996. A new, 2018 edition of the book is now available from Routledge.

Prof. Talbutt studied under Sorokin at Harvard, began writing on Sorokin’s contributions while in graduate school, and was an expert analyst on his life and thought. He was widely published on philosophical topics, with many books, articles, and scholarly papers published during his highly active career as an American intellectual.

He was also a great friend and a kindly, charitable and thoughtful support to all members of the ISCSC.

The following is drawn from materials he wrote and was gathered for this printing by CCR Editor-in-Chief, Joseph Drew.
I The Relevance of the ISCSC for Scholarship

The best-selling point for the relevancy of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, and for an academic shift of attention, is Sorokin’s prophecy of cross-cultural flowering in the Pacific area.

Such a trend clearly follows increased trade, travel, study abroad, translations of basic works, recent heavy investments attending “globalization,” and so on. Mostly this has been going on, faster and faster, for over two centuries, but very much so in the past fifty years.

On the other hand, whatever its economic progress, “Old Europe” and for that matter the “Old (and very dangerous) Middle East” are less likely to undergo any comparable creative change. Earlier civilizational interplays had, of course, given rise to “Athens and Jerusalem,” then to “Mecca and Alexandria,” to “Granada and Paris.”

But Christianity and its many branches, Islam with its own, and Judaism, have all defensively constructed their own institutional barriers to assimilation and change. Grudging sociocultural updatings and recapitulations are as much as can be expected in those regions.

Despite a residue of Marxisms, not to speak of local nationalisms, the Pacific realm is much more subject to cross-cultural interactions. Anglophone North Americans have fallen heir to post-Raj, post-Opium War British legacies. And the Asian partners are now remarkably outpacing their Western counterparts. (Didn’t Napoleon once say, “Let China sleep”?)

Interactive examples on the scholarly side are the “Philosophy: East and West” movement centered at the University of Hawaii, and the Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Reitaku University, Japan. The latter group publishes a journal partly in English, partly in Japanese.

The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy co-sponsored a conference in Hawaii in 1984. Its most distinguished papers were published by Princeton in 1988, *Interpreting across Boundaries*. The editors were Eliot Deutsch and Gerald James Larson. A very sizable representation to the conference was from Japan, as indeed was the case in 1999 at the Third International Whitehead Conference at Claremont, California.

The ISCSC has had meetings in California, in Fairbanks, Alaska, and in Reitaku, Japan. (Clearly that listing is a very partial sampling for Pacific Rim scholarship.)
Incidentally, the former effective leader of the state of Singapore, of the “Seven Tigers,” Lee Kuan Yew, recently predicted: “By 2050 the world’s economic center of gravity will move from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Indian oceans.” (Forbes, July 2005). Given his previous track record, that utterance should not be discounted. And such a trend would drive the ongoing cultural exchanges faster still.

The members of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations include numerous scholars whose origins, backgrounds, goals and sometimes locations, are at for furthering cross-civilizational developments predicted by Pitirim Sorokin. Our President is now Professor Andrew Targowski, who would welcome scholars with cross-cultural interests.

II. Civilizationists and Think-Tankers

Civilizational study in its breadth across cultural boundaries and its long-term orientation differs from “think-tank” worldly practicality. Perhaps Samuel Huntington with his Foreign Affairs article and William McNeill, with his Rise of the West’s comforting antidote to Spengler, count as bridging exceptions. Even so, let’s itemize some contrasts for the sake of strategic self-knowledge, if not simply to nurture our complacency.

Think-tank clients want advice, hopefully congenial with their strongly-held views and those of the populace. (The latter, according to Sir Humphrey Appleby of Yes, Prime Minister, only want to know “who are the goodies and who are the baddies.”) Policy issues of some urgency focus the attention of the tankers. Emotion-laden opinions then must be either carefully stepped around or catered to. (An opposition to “multipolarity” and discreet favor toward so-called “Atlanticism” can be more dignified than “freedom fries” zeal or taking French dressing off the menu.)

James Madison had warned us against “emotion-based opinions,” though he, like Thomas Jefferson and Nathanial Hawthorne¹, engaged in considerable wishful thinking about slavery’s fading away. Insofar as he was one of the voices for Publius, he was an early tanker. Roughly speaking, emotional opinions can be sorted in three piles. “Wishful thinking,” which bets on continuing some doubtful policy: e.g., “There’s light at the end of the tunnel.” “There will soon be democracy all over the Middle East, and in all the seceded Soviets.” “Iraqi oil will pay for the occupation.”

¹ For Hawthorne’s wishful thinking “there is still another view (which) looks upon slavery as one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream.” (Wallner, Peter A., Franklin Pierce: New Hampshire’s Favorite Son. Concord, NH: Plaidswede, 2004, p. 214.)
By contrast, there is “fearful thinking,” as backing for drastic changes in policy. Consider Senator Vandenberg’s “Mr. President, you must scare hell out of the American people.” Red scares. The domino theory. Monolithic Communism.

Lastly, there is “grandiose thinking.” The Christian Century indicated what Protestants optimistically thought of the 19th; “The American Century” showed what Henry Luce thought of the 20th. “The world’s only superpower.” The Imperial Presidency. The “imperial” theological and political thinking of Henry VIII. Such thinking leads to vicious reactions when it is thwarted; consider former stooges who go off the reservation or otherwise disappoint their impatient masters. Presidents Diem and Trujillo, Russia’s stooge Imre Nagy, our Noriega, and one former stooge just recently plucked from a spider hole.

Think-tankers and advisors likewise should tiptoe carefully, e.g., consider Confucius, Robert Barnes, Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell. Civilizationists are less well-known and well-paid, but generally safer. They sail hopefully on high seas, well away from turbulent waters, rocks and shoals. (CIA evaluations which are defective or more wisely ignored by pigheaded clients could also be illumined by the preceding remarks. As Roger Miller once wrote in a lyric: “I don’t like to think things I don’t like to think; I like to think just what I please.”)

Let us return to a strategic question for the ISCSC, “Quo vadimus?” Where we shall be going can best be charted by a vector from the past, tracing where we have been going. Apart from my bibliographical handout, which includes some cognate items from members of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, as well as a few scholarly works critical of our greatest lions, here are some presentations what I found especially stimulating.

Such remarkable samples of ISCSC work include the following: Maria Gimbutas discussed evidence for widespread matriarchal religion in southeastern Europe. Knud Lundback discussed the Jesuit mission to China and Leibniz’s response to Chinese thought. John Hord, David Wilkinson, David Richardson, Matt Melko, Gordon Hewes, Leighton Scott, Bill Edwards and others contributed to a series of lively sessions on civilizational boundaries in space and time. Wilkinson, along with Arthur Iberall, elaborated on his “Central Civilization” theme. Melko and Bill Eckhardt presented wide-ranging data on wars through history. Professors Choi and Robel dealt with Asian matters in depth, as have our distinguished colleagues from Hong Kong. James Billington once gave a fine plenary address on Romantic nihilism in nineteenth century Russia, closely following Vytautas Kavolis’ Presidential paper on Romanticism and Taoism. Corrinne Gilb had presented detailed comparisons for major urban centers. Midori Rynn, along with others, has thrown subtle light upon Japanese culture and history.
As well as the Presidential Addresses by Kavolis, published in the *Review* and elsewhere, Roger Wescott, Shuntaro Ito, Michael Palencia-Roth, Wayne Bledsoe, and Matt Melko gave such major speeches themselves. As a Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Boris Erasov discussed civilizations falling into criminality in their decline, focusing upon breakdowns in Russia.

Braudel has come up for careful examination, as have the “world-systems” theories of Wallerstein and his followers; Sanderson edited a series of such papers. Pitirim Sorokin’s Centennial in 1989 occasioned several careful assessments of his work, published later by Transactions. Our 1991 meeting in Santo Domingo had a rich program concerning the three major interacting cultures in the area — indigenous, Hispanic and African, arranged by Professors Elpidio Laguna-Diaz and Michael Palencia-Roth. Gordon Hewes had given a presentation on the overland Silk Road. Some years later Professor Eiji Hattori illuminated the *overseas* Silk Road, both in papers and in his fine book, translated by Wallace Grey.

There is a considerable difference, it seems to me, between the wide range of such works couched in depth, and typical “think-tank” products. Admittedly, all are scholarly, but the latter are rightly bound to the present time and its urgencies.

The policy-oriented “tanker-types” are often afflicted by pressures of the moment, whether economic, political, or international. Consequently, they tend to view with alarm, or desperately seek to reassure. Consider Daniel Bell’s “End of Ideology” and Fukuyama’s “End of History”; the former, while implausible, is a well-meaning effort to calm jangled nerves, and the second is a paean in favor of globalization. Far better than either is John Lukacs’ more soberly thoughtful “End of an Age.”

Whether the civilizationist essays a balanced comparison, as Nelson and Kavolis would have liked, or whether he digs deep within one civilization to clarify some element crucial for a high-level comparison, most think-tankers would prefer shorter, more expedient routes to answers for their clients. However, some tankers do take a road less traveled.²

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² In all fairness, many think-tankers advise on uncontroversial administrative matters, helpfully refining and improving practical procedures. Others bravely speak truth to power, even when they go unheard. Another point: the lion’s share of governmental folly is to be laid at the door of authorities (and the fickle populace), not at those of advisors, however timid. (I cannot resist adding a reference to P.G. Wodehouse, one of whose characters had a specific position in Hollywood; as a variant of a “yes-man,” his role was that of a “nodder.”)
III  

Select and Relevant Bibliography for the  
International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations

Journals

Comparative Civilizations Review. The International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations Numbers 1-46. 1979-and following. (Founding Editor: Vytautas Kavolis. Present Editor: Joseph Drew.)

Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Reitaku University: Reitaku, Japan. Numbers 1, 1996-and following. (Editor: Keisuke Kawakubo.)

Books


Muller, H. J. *The Uses of the Past.* New York: Garland Publications, 1940. (Another critique of Toynbee’s views, especially upon Anatolia and its environs.)


IV. A Scholastic Quadrant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Power and Its Uses</th>
<th>Strobe Talbott</th>
<th>Niall Ferguson</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Great Experiment</td>
<td>The War of the World</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Domain of Sociocultural Meanings</th>
<th>Pitirim A. Sorokin</th>
<th>Charles Taylor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and Cultural Dynamics</td>
<td>A Secular Age</td>
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Each point of reference may be expanded in terms of “whence” and “whither.”

Each may be read as in polylactic with the others, especially on the parallel planes, where there are contrasts in terms of scope and of optimism and pessimism (or of “idealism” and “realism.”)

Remarks on the Quadrant

The four monumental works give room for polylogue. That is not to say that their assumptions and conceptual frames are congruent. Far from it. Indeed, polylogue among members of the same choir is without profit.

Monumentality here does not mean a frozen status, but rather richness and complexity. Each work carries a lively vector, given their antecedents, whether precedents or influences or both. (The origins of diplomacy and international law for Talbott; Tolstoy, Spengler, Danilevsky, and the Platonic legacy for Sorokin; the history of conflicts and warfare for Ferguson; and the best of the Giffords lecturers plus social scientists on secularity for Taylor.)

Talbott and Ferguson deal with the uses and misuses of power. Ferguson, like Timothy Snyder, author of Bloodlands, confronts the qualified optimism of Talbott’s history of the United Nations with grimly pessimistic data about human nature gone mad. (Ferguson does suggest a three-fold diagnosis of occasions for disaster: economic volatility, declining imperial power, and multiple small ethnicities and national minorities.)

Sorokin and Taylor deal more with sociocultural transitions than with exercises of power. Yet they differ; Sorokin’s scope is far wider, temporally and geographically, while Taylor’s is localized, phenomenological, and detailed. Sorokin’s sensate supersystem cannot be equated with Taylor’s secularity, but Sorokin’s “active sensate” stage is at least compatible with Taylor’s “exclusive humanism.”
The convulsive transitions of Sorokin’s supersystems in part capture challenges to Talbott’s statesmen and the civil and international struggles of Ferguson’s account. Secularity (Taylor’s theme) is at minimum a necessary condition for establishing a United Nations. Were bin Laden, or even the Pope, a truly major player, we would promptly slide into a “clash of civilizations” precluding any such founding negotiations.

Relating Taylor to Ferguson could be done in terms of partisan religiosities, often as scapegoating heretics or infidels, by slogans like “Gott mit uns” or “Deus vult.” Even pseudo-religions (e.g., Communism, according to Bertrand Russell) generate a destructive zeal. So, wars such as Ferguson recounts could be heated up by similar fierce language.

Lastly, Sorokin’s and Taylor’s works gain illumination from two other writers. Karl Jaspers’ The Origin and Goal of History may be superimposed on Sorokin, and Jacques Barzun’s From Dawn to Decadence upon Taylor. Die Achsenzeit evokes the sublimation of myth, as does the transition from ideational to idealist culture for Sorokin. Furthermore, Jaspers’ stages of history seem to leave another Axial Age an open possibility; Sorokin predicts another “integralist” phase centering within the Pacific rim. Taylor also mentions the Axial transition, as does Robert Bellah. “Decadence” is compatible with the dreariest aspects of secularity, as is Sorokin’s “overripe sensate” phase. (Polylogue can always use a little extra help.)

The interest of the first three books lies in the future: The problematic nature of the UN, or NATO; knight-errantry; the emerging hazards of conflict; the shifts from “sensate” to “ideational” phenomena. That of the fourth, Taylor’s tome, belongs to the past: The unfolding of the best Gifford Lectures, and Giffabili (works worthy of Gifford status), as they culminate in A Secular Age. Taylor is also nostalgic for pre-axial, or Dionysian, conditions.

V. Sorokin and Philosophical Polylectic: A Trilogy

Sorokin and Philosophy

Given Sorokin’s defiant attitude toward modernity and recent philosophy’s “closed-shop”, not to say “inside-baseball” preoccupations, (philosophy confined to what certified scholars say to other certified, or soon-to-be-certified, experts), this enterprise appears unpromising. As does my recent trilogy upon the same topic, relating Sorokin’s metaculture to the broadest sort of metaphilosophy.

3 As a sample of such professional parochialism, in 1987 while touring Great Britain, I went out from Edinburgh’s King James Hotel to two nearby, amply-stocked bookstores. Having asked about their philosophy books, I was turned away. One clerk said I should go out to the environs of the University. This was in the homeland of David Hume and the locale for the Gifford Lectures. It would be better to
Going back to the origins of my quixotic pursuits, there were two crucial semesters. In the spring of my junior year, I enrolled in Morton White’s “American Philosophy.” The major text was an anthology, edited by Muelder and Sears, richly compiling Gold Age thought. To this White added his own excellent Social Thought in America. Among its virtues it offered an acute critique of Dewey’s ethical naturalism, not unlike G.E. Moore’s argument against John Stuart Mill. That point must be kept in mind.

Immediately afterward, in the fall of my senior year I enrolled in Sorokin’s course for which he used his recently completed, very comprehensive, Society, Culture, and Personality. My appreciation had been primed by two earlier semester courses with the Russian historian Michael Karpovich, and by readings of Spengler, Toynbee, and Berdyaev, also of classical Russian works.

Simultaneously, I was introduced to J. H. Randall Jr.’s Making of the Modern Mind, the main text in my final philosophy elective. The interaction between all those influences was stimulating. For all their different emphases — Randall had once written a highly critical review of the third volume of Social and Cultural Dynamics), both scholars saw philosophical change as embedded within cultural change. Each saw these processes as stimulated from without, in Sorokin’s case by convulsive crises, in Randall’s by scientific and social or political innovations. (My second book referred to these as “rough” and “progressive” dialectics respectively.) Both took creative cultural change as ongoing, both were anti-authoritarian. Neither saw philosophy as developing solely between professionals.

Sorokin Neo-Platonized Comte’s three stages, and he turned his unidirectionality into a loose (non-cyclical) oscillation. Sociocultural supersystems were famously labeled “ideational, idealistic, and sensate).” Shifts among these were illustrated in his magisterial and controversial four-volume Social and Cultural Dynamics. (In 1957 Sorokin compressed these into a one-volume book, but the full value must be sought in the longer version, especially the fourth volume.)

Alluding back to Morton White (and G.E. Moore), I found that his critique of Dewey illumined Sorokin’s distinction between the idealistic and the sensate. The distinction between ideational and idealistic was typically drawn in many of the Gifford Lectures, as well as in Jaspers’ Revelation and Philosophical Faith.

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Take philosophy as the very core of liberal education, indeed, to follow Karl Jaspers’ maxim: “Philosophy is for everyone.”
After graduation and an interval of study I proceeded to Columbia, there taking three semesters with Randall and doing further research on Sorokin. The provocative contrast between Sorokin and his scholarly rival Talcott Parsons should be tempered by Sorokin’s own “Similarities and Dissimilarities” essay, recast both in *Fads and Foibles* and in *Sociological Theories of Today*. I argue in my Centennial paper on Sorokin and in its expansion in *Rough Dialectics* that there are deep affinities between Sorokin on the one hand and Protestant and post-Protestant liberals on the other.

Kant, Hegel, and American Golden Age thinkers can be classed as Protestant liberals, with William James at the cusp of that movement. John Dewey departed from Congregationalism and Hegelianism to a post-Protestant liberal stance, just as J. H. Randall Jr sublimated his father’s religious liberalism.

Now admittedly Catholic scholars, of whom a number have been rightly active in affirming Sorokin’s continuing importance, find echoes of Thomas Aquinas in Sorokin’s triadic scheme (Revelation, Reason, and observation in parallel to the ideational, idealistic, and sensate). And Sorokin’s researches in altruism did attend to the lives of saints, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic. That said and concurred with, I would point to Sorokin’s attachment to Tolstoy, whose generalized mysticism bears a remarkable likeness to American Transcendentalism.

But more central still to the alliance I seek to forge is Sorokin on the “internalizing of norms,” also his student Vytautas Kavolis on *Moralizing Cultures*. In short, the emulative transfer of approbated ways of life and roles – this being the common ground shared by all. The chart drawn for my Centennial paper affirms such affinities between Sorokin, Parsons, and Max Weber.

Myth can no longer be drawn upon for filling temporary gaps in natural science; however, it does have its role in grounding and legitimizing, in “button-holing” the subject as proximate center of meaning, or recipient/incipient of values — all in commending, facilitating, the transfer and correction of approbated patterns of life.

Myth can be sublimated and re-sublimated, even in some measure attenuated. But that does not amount to demythologizing, as Jaspers correctly argued against Bultmann. That sublimation vector is expressed in the ideational idealistic relation, also detectably through Jaspers’ Axial Age, in F. M. Cornford’s *From Religion to Philosophy*, and in many books based on Gifford Lectures. Although the world may be disenchanted, ideal culture may not be purged of all mythic traces. Sorokin’s rehabilitation of the ideational and the idealistic threw down that gauntlet.
Distinguished scholars have argued for Sorokin’s continuing importance for sociology. Recently Russians have joined Americans in that affirmation. The trilogy I present takes a detour, a “road less traveled,” emphasizing his contributions toward philosophy. Such a path goes through hostile terrain.

But nonetheless, sociocultural dynamics is inclusive of philosophical change, among other factors. His transforming use of Comte’s three stages, whereby “oscillations” or “rhythms” preserve the relevance of “ideational” and “idealistic” symbols, finds reinforcement in the works of Cassirer and Jaspers. His attention to crises is appropriate, given enforced changes in religious and political thought, not to mention modes of self-consciousness.

The hostility of the terrain follows from what William James referred to as the “PhD Octopus,” W.H. Werkmeister called the “diremption in philosophy”, and what Cornel West noted as the “technocratic” trend in universities. Two examples: Rüdiger Bubner omits Jaspers from his Modern German Philosophy on the ground that he “wrote for the educated middle class.” Secondly, some time ago a member of our department introduced a freshman level logic course, requiring an advanced text in philosophy of language. Responding to widespread complaints, we asked her what she had in mind. Her answer was that students needed preparation for graduate study.

These three volumes on philosophies (mainly Western, incidentally Eastern) inscribed within Sorokin’s sociocultural dynamics demand a Prologue. Philosophers wildly content, and Westerners have trouble understanding Sorokin. In turn, the trilogy points to a “basic trend of our time,” the emerging cross-Pacific “integralist” renewal.

My books Reanimation in Philosophy (1986); Rough Dialectics: Sorokin’s Philosophy of Value (1998); and Circumstantial and Philosophical Dynamics (2007) can be regarded as a trilogy, interrelating overviews of philosophy within a context provided by Sorokin’s sociocultural theory.

The first was written pre-Gorbachev and thus retains some ideological content; the second follows the Soviet Union’s collapse and the increase of ideational and “pseudo-ideational” preoccupations; the third, written after the fanaticism of 9/11 and fundamentalisms elsewhere, attends to intrusive religion in “the public square.” Such convulsive moves away from the “overripe sensate” toward nascent, sometimes unpleasant, religious turmoil does fit in with Sorokin’s account of transitional crises.

Volume One proffers substantive sets of typologies, that is, multipolar snapshots to be loosely interwoven as a matrix for philosophy, revealing its outline, fault lines and contrasts, also a reaching back past Jaspers’ Axial Age toward sources in myth and animism. The history of Western thought is sketched within Sorokin’s sociocultural typological dynamic.
The term “polylogue” suggested by Vytautas Kavolis and introduced in Volume Three is quite apt for such typological interweaving, also displayed in the eight concluding charts.

So, Volume Oneroughs out an accounting for philosophy, how we get a grip upon it, with special attention to the transfer of ways of life and thought.

Facilitating such transfer, sublimations and attenuations of myth set up a contrast with positivisms and naturalisms. Sorokin’s oscillations account for philosophical change, convulsive as it is, can be contrasted with J. H. Randall Jr.’s historical matrix stressing scientific and social innovations as change agents. That is spelled out in Volume Two.

Volume Two shifts the major focus to Sorokin himself, his life and intellectual career. It includes a translation by Lawrence Nicholls of his defense of Tolstoy as a philosopher together with Nicholls’ comments on Tolstoy’s influence. Two charts are drawn, the first a follow-up to the “Chain of Being,” where three moments of sublimated myth appear, all these attending the transfer of orientative strategies, guidance grounded in the first, approbatability or telic structuring in the second, and accessibility in centers of recipience/incipience for meaning in the third. Such moments are projected, as it were, either away from or into nature.

While the first volume takes a loose grip on philosophy by way of polylogue among typologies, the final book proposes a classificatory macrosystem drawing upon multiple inventories. In that way, the boundaries and neighboring disciplines, as well as internal differentiations, are suggested as central to the Noosphere. Modes of recent philosophy that are in contention with mythic remnants are scanned, as are philosophies of history and of culture that are compatible with Sorokin and with sublimated mythic elements.

The ultimate point of the trilogy is to defend possibilities for cross-cultural exchanges on a grand scale, as Polylectic Writ Large, among the Great Traditions. This would be a mutual accommodation among high level sublimated myths. Geographically, such exchanges and integralist enrichments, according to Sorokin, would take place across the Pacific Rim. Given that important analogies span traditions and cultures, here are a few instances:

Philosophus claimed, “Plato must have read the Books of Moses.” These was a (loose) analogue between biblical monotheism and Plato’s “One or Good.” Tertullian doubted this: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

Radhakrishnan saw affinities between Neo-Hegelianism and non-dualist Vedanta. Also, he detected Indian influences behind Neo-Platonism, a more plausible notion than Philo’s.
Process Thought and Theology share features with Buddhism. Charles Hartshorne received a warm reception in Kyoto and other Eastern centers of learning. I myself observed a large Oriental attendance at the Third International Conference on Whitehead, held in Claremont California.

Sorokin’s use of the term “supra-conscious” is significant, as is his enthusiasm for Whitehead’s “intuition.” Those terms point to the remarkable origins of upper levels of the Chain of Being, notably the founding symbol and the ways of life and thought, authorized and integrated thereby.

Recapitulation

**Volume One: ** *Reanimation in Philosophy*, University of America Press, 1986

This is mainly philosophy, plus a neo-Sorokinian scanning of Western thought, also reaffirmed in Volume Two. It is compressed, taking account of multiple typologies in time, Golden Age through thirty years of post-war analysis. The overall compression suggests that expository treatments in the endnotes, and the chartings, plus explanations, in the Appendix merit more attention.

As to origins, there’s a reaching back past sublimations in the Axial Age toward myth and animism. Animism as nature-worship leads to the ambiguous monism of Stoicism (and that of Taoism), later to the double-aspect monism of Spinoza. Spirit-worship runs through Orphism to Plato (and elsewhere naturally enough to Confucius).

Sublimated myths appear in culturative symbolics, the legitimizing and transfer of ways of life and thought. The upper levels of the Great Chain of Being provide three operative moments of culturative symbolics, the founding, grounding, or authorizing moment as highest, then the normative moment well grounded in the former, and thirdly, the invocative moment for the incipient/recipient self, eliciting susceptibilities or propensities toward ways of life. (The second and third phases are like the two adhesive sides of Velcro.)

Shakespeare’s witches in their threefold invocation of Macbeth: “Thane of Fife, Thane of Candor, and King thereafter,” awaken an unlucky propensity in their victim. But surprising and very surprising invocations for the philosopher attune him to extraordinary affinities, as in non-naturalisms, phenomenologies, and philosophies of life. No such destructive malice entraps that innocent thinker. The unsurprising “Thane of Fife” rubric captures the naturalist (everyone knows he is part of nature, looking into nature for his dinner and a place to sleep), and it enlists the philosophical analyst as well (everyone knows he’s a user of language). They proceed as unsurprised as was the actual Thane of Fife. But *res cogitans* and Transcendental Subjectivity, for example, are surprising, and rejected by analyst and naturalist alike.
The lowest level of the Chain of Being, the World, functions as the domain for cognitive symbolics. Again, the naturalist rallies around that scientific flag. “Bring me no surprises” is his, and the analyst’s, motto. Sorokin’s ideational and idealistic cultures, on the other hand, are chockful of surprises.

Between the mythically sublimated “well-founded strategist” and the sturdy no-nonsense naturalist lies the “placement strategist.” He locates himself in Culture and in Nature, without any support from Transcendence.

It is a comfort-zone, while “Blessed Assurance” attaches to an ideational complex, the placement strategist finds, at a minimum, “Cognitive Assurance.” Consider C. D. Broad’s *Mind and its Place in Nature*, C. I. Lewis’ *Mind and the World Order*, and A. O. Lovejoy’s epistemological dualism, as in his *The Revolt against Dualism*. Richard Rorty files his complaint against such comfort-seekers in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. But dualisms go way back, and have been mounted in many guises, not all of them so mythical.

As regards the eight diagrams in the Appendix (plus the two in *Rough Dialectics*), one might repeat Hans Reichenbach’s objection against “picture-thinking.” But I would respond that multiplying pictures is a salutary loosening up, a “hair-of-the-dog” remedy against being stuck with just one dogmatic image.

**Volume Two: Rough Dialectics: Sorokin’s Philosophy of Value.** Rodopi, the Netherlands, 1998.

Sorokin’s article on Leo Tolstoy enriches the book, as he defends his status as a religious philosopher. The translator was the sociologist Lawrence Nichols, who also adds an essay examining Tolstoy’s considerable influence upon Sorokin. The term “Rough Dialectics” refers to the way sociocultural crises and convulsions dramatically alter philosophy. By contrast, the historian John Herman Randall, Jr. looks at major changes in thought as stemming from scientific or social and political innovations. This by contrast can be called “progressive dialectics.”

Sorokin’s life and career, including controversies with rival scholars, receive appropriate attention. Such marked differences show contrasts between urban and regional values. Here a “radial contrariety” comes into play, where the radius reaches out from the city to the hinterland and to outlands. Sorokin had identified with the Social Revolutionaries, a peasant party, certainly not with the Marxists. He took a dim view of “over-urbanization” and of the “overripe senate” culture, hence of Modernity in general. The turning away from “Eurocentrism” advocated by Spengler and Toynbee was emphatically shared by him as well.
The ambivalent American response to Sorokin can be read in terms of the “radial contrariety,” expressed locally in our nation, through politics, art, journalism, popular entertainments, and religious self-identifications. But at the same time Sorokin’s positions can reasonably be recognized as complementary to the best of urban values.

Eastern thought, Indian and Chinese, receives favorable recognition from Sorokin, while Western philosophers of history and culture, such as Dilthey, Cassirer, and Jaspers, can be drawn into alliance with Sorokin, since his social science expresses the Geisteswissenschaften perspective so strongly. His Society, Culture and Personality as well as Social and Cultural Dynamics, notably confirm this affinity.

Indeed, negative criticisms of Sorokin as a speculative philosopher of history do so backhandedly as well. His long, and broad, view taken on sociocultural changes and crises, entails a macrosociological, not a microsociological, venture, embracing a plethora of religious and philosophical transformations.


Lest this final volume become an orphan of the storm, its familial ties to the first two books must be acknowledged. Parts I, two sections of Part II, and Part III look back to, and wind up, strategic metaphilosophic proposals offered earlier, as varied typologies within an ongoing polylectic.

A verbal novelty, “polylogue,” put forth by Vytautus Kavolis alludes to many groups and individuals in full interaction, the results being polylectic. Polylogue is the manifest process, polylactic the result or product. Retrospectively, both terms throw light upon the exposition in Volumes One and Two. (Why isn’t “dialogue” enough? In its way it may be a good thing, but it can lead to pigheaded deadlocks. Polylogue does cover effective mediations; “blessed are the peacemakers,” in short. Second and even third opinions can be helpful.)

The chief aspect of the macrosystem’s double-duty concerns its role as detailed backdrop for the earlier typologies, for the “sublimated myths” on high negotiated through Polylectic Writ Large, for the encasement of seminal positions with their collateral sub-branchings (polylactic writ small), and for its hospitality toward a non-Western enclave, the elements of which are loosely analogous to those from the West. Sorokin’s ideational and idealistic cultures, not passé as they are for Comte, Dewey, and Reichenbach, are always latent, and sometimes strikingly recurrent. Cassirer on myth as primordial, though sometimes politically destructive, and Jaspers on the modes of the Comprehensive and the principles of philosophic faith, give us a strong defense against naturalist or analytic dogmatics.
The Book’s final part sums up the implicit morals to be drawn from the macrosystem, imagined as activated and judiciously supplied with sociocultural defenses. The “choreography” must be taken with a grain of salt: what we have there can be taken as a metaphilosophical monster, tuxedoed-up like Peter Boyle in the film, “Young Frankenstein,” and attempting a soft-shoe. The inventories, not the codings, are what provide the coverages alluded to above.

However awkward the codings, they do suggest a prototype for holding the classifying together. Down the road somewhere, there may appear an enthusiast to improve the coding arrangements.

Additional Thoughts on Sorokin

Looking down the road, what can we see ahead for Sorokin Scholarship? First, here are four basic empirical insights, all shaped by his Social and Cultural Dynamics and its later developments.

1. There has been an “epochal shift” of civilizational interactions to the Pacific basin, Eurocentrism being bankrupt.

2. Sorokin’s descriptions of our “overripe” sensate culture in crisis were sounds and have received additional confirmation since 1941

3. The oscillation from the senate extreme toward rising ideational symptoms has become obvious with ethnic and religious revivals and conflicts.

4. Sorokin argued that there should be no necessary conflict between the United States and Russia; he also held a “convergence theory” regarding the two societies. Recent circumstances have given marked plausibility to that theory.

Here follow six insights, more theoretical than empirical, where Sorokin gives the context for undermining positivism and presents his accounting for drastic cultural change.

5. Social realities and cultural patterns are not only co-involved, but they are jointly vulnerable to historic crises. Sorokin treats the Geisteswissenschaften concretely as under tribulation.

6. Neither positivism, naturalism, nor Marxism can explain major sociocultural shifts. Sorokin’s critiques of sociological methods make it clear that the humane studies are not natural sciences.
7. Sorokin deploys principles of “immanental change” and of “limits” to explain sociocultural oscillations. One clue to this may be that supersystems are marked by deep axiological imbalances. This renders problematic any “boundaries” of sociocultural systems and makes moot any external vs. internal causal dispute.

8. “Integralism” must be taken dynamically, as bespeaking a transforming unifying force:
   As in culture, “putting it all together,” markedly in coherent philosophical and religious systems.
   As in society, “bringing us all together,” in altruistic ethics.
   As in personality, in strivings toward integrity.
   As in macrosociology, in synthesizing worldly and otherworldly values.

9. Sorokin’s multifaceted work gives the opportunity of forming three sorts of alliances. The first sort, the alliance with “social philosophers in an age of crisis,” was affirmed by Sorokin himself on several occasions since 1950. A second enriching sort may be posited on the basis of affinities, one with certain West European philosophers of culture and history. Such thinkers as Wilhelm Dilthey, Karl Jaspers, Ernest Cassirer, Benedetto Croce, and Jose Ortega y Gasset help shore up the defensive flanks against naturalisms and determinisms. Crucially, many of these men also support the anti-authoritarianism in Sorokin’s political and social thought. Thirdly, there are American empiricist and rationalist liberals – likewise anti-authoritarian in affirming the ongoing creative dialectic in culture – whose roots in one degree or another lie in liberal Protestantism.

   One remark is essential. Intellectual alliances, like political ones, never imply across-the-board agreements, but rather urgent, high priority common ground in great causes.

10. Lastly, Sorokin’s conceptual repertoire makes possible the explanation of the world’s Great Traditions as diverse articulations of the sociocultural dimension, illuminating their clashing overlaps, providing tools for much-needed conflict resolution.
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<tr>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>CORRELATIONS</th>
<th>IN SOCIAL SCIENCES</th>
<th>IN THE ARTS</th>
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<td>Massive</td>
<td>With vast systematic interactions. A high-level scanning of overall “traffic patterns”, with too much distance for the human. Roles are seen as causal linkages within larger systems.</td>
<td>“Social physics”, the study of impersonal systems, e.g., geopolitics, realpolitik, or market analysis.</td>
<td>Where the self is swamped as an atom. Kafka; Chaplin’s <em>Modern Times</em>; Lang’s <em>Metropolis</em>; much modern architecture; non-representational painting such as Pollack’s; “Pop Art” such as Warhol’s; Theater of the Absurd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-scale or Personal</td>
<td>With patterns that can be commended as apt or worthwhile. Exemplifications that may also be seen as exemplary, “Worldviews” included. The role grasped in its integrity is conveyed through emulation.</td>
<td>Studies involving sociocultural “meanings”, susceptible to Verstehen or the “logico-meaningful method”. Shared ground between Weber, Sorokin, and Parsons. This level joins the humanities and sciences.</td>
<td>Poesis: e.g., philosophical poetry; most novels and drama; representative art displaying character and humanly meaningful contexts, e.g., Rembrandt, George Catlin, Norman Rockwell.</td>
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<td>Minute</td>
<td>With fragmentary, privatized moments and moods. Its microscopic closeness allows too little distance for the human.</td>
<td>Associationism, psychological hedonism, Freudianism, Behaviorism. (e.g., dealings with ideas, wants and impulses, stimuli and responses.)</td>
<td>Where the self is pulverized. Impressionism; Expressionism; Surrealism; short lyrics of momentary mood; “stream of consciousness” writing.</td>
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Cosmopolis tends to deflect attention from midscale norms toward vast public systems and toward private motivations.