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Comment by David Wilkinson

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Finally, **Dr. David Wilkinson**, one of the world's leading scholars of comparative civilizations, is leading a freshman seminar this fall at the University of California, Los Angeles, that would surely be of enormous interest to every reader of this journal. Its purpose is to involve discussion "of a topic of current intellectual importance."

Now, as readers may know, Dr. Wilkinson is the author of "Sorokin vs. Toynbee on Civilizations," in a 1995 work edited by J. Ford, M. Richard and P. Talbutt entitled *Sorokin and Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*. So, it is no surprise that his course is entitled Political Science 19-1: **Pitirim Sorokin and Covid-19**.

The syllabus begins by observing that in 1942, Pitirim Sorokin published *Man and Society in Calamity*. The calamities he discussed were:

- war,
- revolution,
- famine, and
- pestilence.

Sorokin had personal experience of each: war (World War I); revolution (Russian Revolution); famine (Soviet famine 1921-1922); and pestilence (typhus in Russia, Spanish flu in the world).



Notes Dr. Wilkinson:

In his life, Sorokin was variously a starving peasant orphan, an itinerant icon gilder, a self-taught bookworm, a political activist, a six-time political prisoner, an empirical penologist, a quantitative sociologist, a Socialist Revolutionary, a starving intellectual worker, an involuntary passenger on the Ship of Expelled Russian Thinkers, a founding comparative civilizationist, a conservative Christian anarchist, a Tolstoyan believer that “the Kingdom of God is within you,” and an elected write-in candidate for President of the American Sociological Association.

He continues:

The book *Man and Society in Calamity* reflects Sorokin’s life experience (the sections on famine are particularly vivid), his empirical-sociological praxis, and his Tolstoyan focus on altruistic love as the primary counterstrategy against all calamity.

In *Man and Society in Calamity*, Sorokin gave an extremely brief overview of the artistic, behavioral, cultural, economic, ethical, ideological, political, psychological, religious, scientific, sociological, and technological consequences of calamities; and he proposed, again, an extremely brief view of their causes, remedies, and future.

Covid-19 is, of course, the world’s latest calamity of “pestilence.”

Furthermore, by disrupting supply chains in a globalized world economy, Covid-19 also threatens the companion calamity, “famine.” A total of 12,000 people per day could die from hunger linked to Covid-19 by end of year, potentially more than the disease, warns Oxfam. This prediction was published on July 9. See: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/12000-people-day-could-die-covid-19-linked-hunger-end-year-potentially-more-disease>

The seminar is shaped as follows:

- Week One: Students are to read *Calamity*, Introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz (ix-xviii) and Preface by Sorokin (9-10). They are then to post an essay of 500 words on the question, “Why are you here?”
- Week Two: Further reading of *Calamity*, Part One: The Influence of Calamities Upon Our Mind. Special attention is to be paid to “Pestilence” (21-2, 30, 45), while deducing from the general propositions their application to pestilence.

The students are next asked whether the theories of Sorokin match or mismatch their personal experiences, including those that are indirect (via conversation or media review). He inquires: “Would you be inclined to endorse, amend, or replace Sorokin’s theory of ‘the influence of calamities upon our mind’?”

- Week Three: The reading moves on to Part Two: The Influence of Calamities Upon Our Behavior and Vital Processes.
- Week Four: Next, it is Part Three: The Influence of Calamities Upon Social Mobility and Organization.
- Week Five: Students read and write about Chapter IX, Two General Effects of Calamity Upon Sociocultural Life, and Chapter XV, Dynamics of Ideology in Calamity.
- Week Six: Next, it is Chapter XIII, The Influence of Calamities Upon Science and Technology, and Chapter XIV, The Influence of Calamities Upon the Fine Arts.
- Week Seven is devoted to reading and discussing Chapter X. How Calamities Affect the Religious and Ethical Life of Society; Chapter XI, Calamities and Ethico-religious Processes; and Chapter XII, Sinners and Saints in Calamity.
- Week Eight involves reading and written analysis of both Chapter XVI, Causes of Calamities, and Chapter XVII, The Way Out of Calamity.
- Week Nine calls upon students to read and write a discussion of Chapter XVIII, A Glance into the Future.
- For the final session, Week Ten, students are to reconsider Sorokin’s theory of pestilence, explicit and implicit, through the entire book. What (if anything) survives unscathed by history? What needs amendment? What needs replacing, and by what?

Dr. Wilkinson notes that students in their posts are to pursue the following possible lines of commentary: Request further information; Request clarification; Offer opinions; Describe comparable experience; Suggest crossroad of another’s posts; and Suggest outside reading.

He further adds, “Other lines of comment will no doubt come to mind as you proceed to read one another’s posts.”

In his syllabus Professor Wilkinson lists the following additional works by Sorokin, first those of general interest:

Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs. Petrograd: Kolos, 1922 (in Russian; suppressed by state censorship). English translation, University of Florida, 1975.

Sociology of Revolution. Philadelphia, 1925.

Social Mobility. New York: Harper, 1927.

Contemporary Sociological Theories. New York 1928.

Social and Cultural Dynamics. A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law and Social Relationships. 4 vols. Volume 1, *Fluctuation of Forms Of Art (Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Literature, and Criticism)*; Volume 2, *Fluctuation of Systems of Truth, Ethics, And Law*; Volume 3, *Fluctuation of Social Relationships, War, And Revolution*; and Volume 4, *Basic Problems, Principles, And Methods*. American Book Company, 1938-1941.

The Crisis of Our Age. New York, 1942.

Sociocultural Causality, Time, Space. Duke Univ. Press, 1943.

Russia and the United States. Dutton, 1944.

Society, Culture and Personality. New York, 1947.

The Reconstruction of Humanity. Boston: Beacon, 1948.

Social Philosophies in an Age of Crisis. Boston, 1950.

Altruistic Love: A Study of American "Good Neighbors": and Christian Saints. Boston: Beacon, 1950.

Leaves from a Russian Diary, and Thirty Years After. Boston: Beacon, 1950.

The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors and Techniques of Moral Transformation. Boston: Beacon, 1954.

Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences. Chicago: Regnery, 1956.

Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revised and abridged in one volume by the author. Boston: Porter Sargent, 1957.

A Long Journey: The Autobiography of Pitirim A. Sorokin. New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1963.

Then, he offers students a way to read more Sorokin online. It is at:
<https://www.questia.com/library/sociology-and-anthropology/sociologists-and-anthropologists/pitirim-sorokin>

Next, for pestilence, in general, as a factor in human affairs, he recommends:

Charles Creighton. *History of Epidemics in England.* 2 vols. Cambridge, 1891, 1894.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42686>
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43671>

Finally, for a look at Conservative Anarchism, he lists:

Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You.*

Leo Tolstoy, *The Gospel in Brief.*

Petr Kropotkin. *Mutual Aid.*

Albert Jay Nock. *Our Enemy the State.*

Paul Eltzbacher. *Anarchism.* (Chapters on Godwin, Proudhon, Tucker, Kropotkin and Tolstoy)

My conclusion: How lucky can students be to take such a course!!