Vytautus Kavolis: A Memorial

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A MEMORIAL*

Vytautas Kavolis, one of the leaders in the transplanting of the ISCSC from Europe to the United States and President of the ISCSC from 1977 to 1983, died suddenly this past June while visiting his native Lithuania.

After Roger Wescott had informed a number of Americans about the financial difficulties of the ISCSC in Austria, Kavolis called a meeting of civilizationists during the annual American Sociological Association gathering in Washington in 1971. This led to the ISCSC organizational meeting in Philadelphia a few months later.

In the 1970's Kavolis worked closely with Benjamin Nelson in the organizing and developing of the association. Between them they led the ISCSC for the first dozen years of its existence in the United States. He was anti-bureaucratic, Nelson pro-bureaucratic, but both of them ran the ISCSC pretty much by themselves. Nelson ran the society with anguish, warning us that we would neglect at our peril the problem of the week. Kavolis ran it with a thousand one-paragraph letters that he typed himself: could you review this, draft that, check with so-and-so? Best, Vytas.

Their viewpoints were very different, Nelson looking into the historical roots of every civilizational problem, Kavolis being concerned with multiple comparisons between civilizations. Between them they wrote a manifesto for the Comparative Civilizations Newsletter that accommodated both views and provided a theoretical basis for the work of the Society.

After his second term as president, Kavolis served until his death as co-editor of the Comparative Civilizations Review, the journal of the ISCSC.

Kavolis was born September 8, 1930 in Kaunas, Lithuania. After obtaining his secondary education in Lithuania and Germany, he completed his undergraduate studies at the

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Universities of Wisconsin and Chicago, and received his M.A. (1956) and Ph.D. (1960) from Harvard. After teaching at Tufts and Defiance, he came to Dickinson College in 1964 where he served as chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for ten years and then became Charles A. Dana Professor of Comparative Civilizations in 1975. After the liberation of Lithuania, he went three times to that country for semesters as a visiting professor. He was the recipient of Lithuania's National Prize for Culture and Art for 1993.

He was the author of well over 100 articles and 16 books, including *Artistic Expression: A Sociological Analysis* (1968) and *History on Art's Side: Social Dynamics in Artistic Efflorescences* (1972), both published by Cornell University Press. His most recent civilizational book, *Civilization Analysis as a Sociology of Culture* was published last year by Edwin Mellen.

Kavolis was comfortable with multiple perspectives, not just three or four, but 18 or 22, and he often revised them, seeming to have a new schema every year. He was amused by the idea that there could be a multiplicity of viewpoints, and was never judgmental himself.

As a scholar he applied interactionist sociology to the comparative study of civilizations, producing some wonderful ideas. His presidential lectures were tightly packed with information and concepts. It required careful attention to stay with his leaps and juxtapositions.

Perhaps one of his most fruitful ideas appeared in *History on Art's Side*. He argued that creative activity tended to flourish after a crisis, as the artists explained or came to terms with the civilizational changes the crisis represented. After several decades, this activity died down, and an indeterminate period of latency followed. Then a new phase of creative activity arose, this time anticipating the next crisis. When the crisis itself occurred, the creative activity died down as the artists, writers, and philosophers were drawn into the necessities the crisis involved. (In Kavolian terms, it might be argued that Western Civilization is entering a period of latency after a creative period that followed...
the crisis of the World Wars.)

We remember him as very sweet, and a wonderful father. How he loved those summer Lithuanian retreats, and how he looked forward to the liberation of Lithuania. How excited he was when it happened! He was a man of great learning, remarkable insight and a Baltic sense of humor. He will be greatly missed.

Mathew Melko, Edmund Leites

Vytautas Kavolis:
Personal Friend and Mentor

I first met Vytas at the ISCSC meeting in Northridge, California nearly two decades ago. I can still see him walking down the hallway between sessions with his head down, hands behind his back and his sport coat draped casually over his shoulders. This became a common sight to me at the annual ISCSC meetings and I must admit that for the next dozen years or so I found Vytas to be an enigma: scholarly, aloft, intimidating with his silence, and yet, one who commanded respect.

It wasn't until I became co-editor of the MDUL/Comparative Civilizations Review (CCR), which necessitated frequent contact with him, that the true Vytas began to appear. Not only did I find him to be a scholar of the highest magnitude, but he was a shy, charming, individual who had an undying love for the ISCSC and a paternalistic attitude toward the journal that defies exaggeration. He had nursed the CCR from its infancy and would brook no infringements on its integrity.