Retrospectus and Prospectus: The Discursive Humanities

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In 1949, at Harvard, I took a course under Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968), then did research on him, and continued to work on him for many years after that. In 1979, I presented a paper on Sorokin at a meeting of the ISCSC and, for the first time, listened to Vytautas Kavolis (1930-1996) deliver his presidential address to the assembled participants. The following essay is based, in part, on my experience with these two formidable men and their work.

While I have been most influenced by Sorokin, I also have found Kavolis to be greatly stimulating. Sorokin, like Spengler and Toynbee, had made a great assault upon Eurocentrism and modernity. Kavolis, a student of Sorokin, presupposed much of such shifts in attitude, though without accepting Sorokin’s triadic account of sociocultural dynamics. He more nearly focused upon the here and now, unfolding toward the future, while giving great attention to symbolic designs and their analogues in other cultures, conditioned by social arrangements. His view of civilization analysis paralleled that of Ben Nelson, who followed Sorokin as the second president of the ISCSC. Kavolis attended closely to social orderings and orders, to processes and to conditions, in a comparative framework respecting other cultures.

The formative influences upon Sorokin, such as Comte and Tolstoy, had come from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; those upon Kavolis, mainly European, were from our mid-century and were structured in a this-worldly way, social, economic, and political. Kavolis did seek a broad view and suggested that cultural elements were the correlates causally shaping social behaviors. Moralizing Cultures was the title of his penultimate book. He looked at such cultural factors in terms of their obligatory force. In this respect, and also in terms of his more particularistic starting places, his views were less high-flown than Sorokin’s somewhat neo-Platonic readings of ideational and idealistic supersystems. Sorokin worked from the top down, drawing on his triadic frame, Kavolis from particular symbolic designs socially ensconced, that is, in some sense from the bottom up.

Where should the discursive humanities come into the picture? Sorokin’s sociocultural processes operate at a higher level, and with
more external and internal complexities, than does any history of ideas. And Kavolis, as we suggested, seems to regard moralizing cultures as determinative of behavior, as do other this-worldly sociologists. But how determinative could they be?

This paper takes leave of Sorokin and Kavolis. If the discursive humanities are to be appreciated on their own terms, greater autonomy is called for, plus an allowing for their intermediate status between prior symbols and previously expected social behavior, with full play for adjustive reinterpretation and transformative dialectic. The troops may be derelict, sometimes in great numbers. And occasionally even the ruling religious or political elites may change their minds. A new villain or iniquity of the week may be proffered. On subtler levels world-views may slowly shift. New standards may be blessed. The humanities must be seen as more fluid, transformable, free-wheeling. Surely some cultural expressions are coercive in their social effects, such as jury decisions, warrants, or military commands. But not all. Some are persuasive or commendatory, some open up ranges of possibilities for action. Some, as in fictive poesis, allow possibilities just for contemplation. Dialectical mergings challenge and change the options for human behavior. That is where the humanities reside, and in their elevated expression are most subject to variation and multiple dynamic branchings, for instance, in politics, philosophy, and religion.

What we shall be looking at first are those aspects of the human situation, thematic coordinates, which appear concretely in poesis (literature and drama), abstractly in philosophies, and mythically in systems of religion. They are transposable across the three domains. Their qualitative affinities point up the possibilities for interactive dialectics between the latter two cultural types, both of which have, as their very cores, orientative strategies. The next step is to consider transmutations of, and meldings between such strategies. Strategic susceptibilities for my exemplary institutions are largely concerned with creative syntheses, how far they may go, and what constraints are socially imposed limits to their so going.

Certain provisional morals will be drawn at the end of each section. At the paper’s end, those morals will be conjoined for the sake of tracing broader implications, defensive and justificatory, for the humanities, putting them into the greater scheme of things.

Part I. Qualitative Affinities within the Discursive Humanities

There are no fewer than eleven thematic coordinates readily dis-
cernible within the human situation: these, together with their combina-
tory potential for elemental unity (let us call that "Plot," acknowl-
edging its source, poesis, as stage one), are all capable of being trans-
posed as between the domains of (literary and dramatic) Art, Philos-
ophy, and Religion.

(1.) The most manifest coordinate is **time**, its omnipresence invari-
ably resulting from literature being a temporal art of the human situa-
tion. Since **time** is ubiquitous, it is minimally a background factor. When

*only* that, it can be ignored. It becomes salient and of human interest
when in the foreground. Consider *War and Peace*: the reader is aware of

**time** as bringing death to some, maturation with self-knowledge to oth-
ers, and major historical and social change to all. Not only serious his-
torical novels and *Bildungsromanen*, but dramas present nostalgias
("Memories" from *Cats*) and awarenesses of life’s foreclosings (the sub-
plot about old Adam, and Jacques’ “Seven Ages of Man” from *As You
Like It*, Prospero’s later musings, and innumerable other instances from
art and drama.) Epics in particular are likely to emphasize **time**, not only
that of Ulysses’ absence, but also in Tolkien’s more recent epic, running
from Gollum’s Riddle to the Passing of Middle-Earth.

**Time** also figures in philosophy. See, for instance, Heraclitus, Aristot-
le on change, Plato’s “moving image of eternity,” and centrally
today the legacy of Whitehead’s process thought, as well as Heidegger’s
phenomenological ontology, as basic twentieth century expressions. When
we regard **time** in religion, we see not only the extraordinary Hindu and
Buddhist cosmic cycles, but also Judaic and Christian eschatologies.

(2.) Another coordinate, also admitting of degrees, is **status** rank-
ing. Transposed into medieval, Renaissance, or modern literature, there
are plentiful instantiations of this mode, some deadly serious, and others
more humorous. Jane Austen’s greatness partly comes from her unique
juggling of four or five basic social coordinates in the novels. Drama,
whether tragic or comic, quite frequently carries the theme of status.

When transposed to philosophy, the **status** ranking appears in
Plato’s *Republic*, in Confucius’ *Analects*, and in a variety of ethical and
political philosophies up to very recent times. (Here, an idealist article
by F. H. Bradley is exemplary: “My Station and Its Duties.”) When we
attend to the vector’s transposition within religious contexts, we cer-
tainly find the Hindu caste system, Confucianism again, and the clear
distinctions drawn between Christian clergy, themselves ranked in ser-
ial order, and the laity; that is, up until the revolutionary Protestant
emphasison “every man a priest.”
(3.) The coordinate based on differentiations of **wealth** typically is deployed invidiously whether in **poesis**, philosophies, or religions. A qualitative difference frequently appears between "New" and "Old Money." However, Jane Austen’s heroines at least aim for a decent financial arrangement in marriage, so this coordinate does not invariably carry the same satirical weight. When transposed to philosophy, the coordinate is basic to a range of political philosophies, ranging from Milton Friedman’s to Karl Marx’s. As for religious discourse, we find warnings about greed and the insuperable difficulties experienced by the rich in entering the Kingdom of Heaven. The merchants constitute a moderately respectable caste in Hinduism, though they are outranked by the upper ranks of priests and warriors. But all oligarchs are free to cry all the way to the bank.

(4.) Another coordinate admitting of degrees is that of **generations**. It is more deeply centered in the human situation since, though not everyone is at an extreme pole regarding possessions, the parental relation is universal. As for **poesis**, this coordinate appears richly developed in Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, Shaw and others. As for philosophies and religions, it is very much a part of biblical and Confucian ethics, as one can sense in divinely warranted commandments and ceremonies of reverence toward ancestors.

(5.) The next coordinate has to do with contrasts and relations between urban power centers and their peripheries, both as hinterlands and as outlands. Let us call it the **urban/regional** vector. Like the **wealth** and **status** vectors, which I once labeled "vertical contrarieties," it looks upon social location, but unlike them carries no necessary implication of subordination. So this one I then called a "radial contrariety," referring to the radius proceeding out from a center towards its further peripheries.

The most blatant expressions in **poesis** of this coordinate are in popular culture and also in politics, consider as examples, "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Green Acres," "Our American Cousin," *Innocents Abroad*. In these the "slicker" and the "rube" go through all their paces. The other obvious placement for the vector is in popular (and Populist) politics, which might also be seen as an essential aspect of public entertainment. Higher instances of **poesis** so affected are in regional literatures, the Southern Agrarians for example, and other classics, typically which, like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, engage subtle interplays of additional coordinates, of generational, social, and economic status etc. (Jane Austen’s novels are also excellent examples of such multidimensionality.)
When the urban/regional vector is transposed into philosophies, these are usually social and political. For the most part they are populist, expressing a regional point of view, although more symbiotic (while paternalistic) urban-centered developmentalisms express the same vector. This is the case with Talcott Parsons from yesteryear and with the IMF from today. Such instances seem to be more up-to-date and more politically correct versions of "white man's burden" thinking.

Where are transposed examples to be found in religious systems? Consider how the biblical religions originated with peoples very peripheral to, and highly suspicious of, early high civilizations: Egypt and Babylon for the people of Israel, Jerusalem with its "city slickers" as the foil for Jesus and followers, Rome for its rebellious provincial Jews and for Christian apocalyptical thinkers, and finally Constantinople's Eastern empire as assaulted by Mohammed's Arab followers. If we turn to the Far East, Taoism expresses regional irony over against centralizing Confucian bureaucracy. Various expressions of the adversarial mode are most obvious of course. Compromises and symbiotic combinations are much quieter.

(6.) Another thematic coordinate, quite multiform in its instantiations, is that of subjects/ruler. Like its predecessor, it admits of degrees and many Russian-doll-like inclusions, given hierarchies of governance. With this vector, transposings for poesis would call to mind Antigone, An Enemy of the People, Julius Caesar, aspects of Hamlet, King Lear, All the King's Men, and so on. Wherever governmental oppressions, occasions for rebellions and/or political changes, are the themes for literature and drama, then this coordinate is operative.

Related transpositions into religious traditions yield a confusing welter of secular/religious overlaps, claims for dominance, and latterly peace-making proposals for their separation. And that pertains only to Western cultures. In India, the top two castes have long been in competition. Sacred rulerships also present interesting problems for the vector.

(7.) The next coordinate, self/other, comes as highly concrete and personalized in poesis; protagonist/antagonist (or white hats vs. black hats) and so on. Alternatively, it can appear as highly abstract and depersonalized for philosophies, notably construed epistemologically as subject/object.

For religion the vector can achieve again, in part or in whole, a personalized status, either as finite self over against an infinite Transcendence or as Martin Buber pointed out, as "I-Thou." Complex variants and partial blendings with other coordinates, including some
yet to be discussed, may be found.

(8.) The **male/female** coordinate transposes into *poesis* as lyric poetry, romance, romantic tragedy, and Chaucerian, Shakespearean, Restoration, and “screwball” comedies. Into social and moral philosophies it may polarize into male chauvinist or, more recently, into feminist forms. Transposed into religions, it can crystallize into patriarchal or matriarchal expressions. And there are many associated controlling disciplines for behavior, whether philosophically or religiously based.

(9.) This next coordinate admits of considerable ambiguity, **humanity and nature**. The conjunction diverges into “with” or “against.” As to *poesis*, “with” is illustrated by the Lake Poets, *Walden* and the like; “against” by *Moby Dick*, *Jack London*’s novels, *The Grapes of Wrath, The Last Days of Pompeii*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*. Transposed to philosophies, on the one hand we find Romantic nature mysticism, Taoisms, Green conservationisms; on the other, capitalist theories of engineering dominance. “When you’ve seen one Redwood, you’ve seen them all.” All those divergences overlap with comparable religious perspectives, whether licensing or limiting exploitative behaviors.

(10.) and (11.) The final two thematic coordinates, **actual/ideal** and **natural/supernatural**, are closely akin. The contrast between **actual** and **ideal** is suggested by F. O. Matthieson’s lectures on Shakespeare; manifestly, it also applies to Cervantes. Transposing to rational thought, philosophies of Platonic and idealist sorts clearly play upon the polar tension from this vector.

Sorokin’s “sensate-idealistic-ideational” trichotomy and his revealing comments upon “integralism” make it clear that the intermediate type reflects an overlap between worldly and otherworldly opposites. Just so, the **natural/supernatural** vector admits of Immanence in between the purely secular and the Transcendent. Furthermore, the kinship between the final two coordinates is hinted at, often proclaimed, within the course of Hellenistic thought and religion.

Now, having gone through the inventory of thematic coordinates criss-crossing the human situation whether expressed in *poesis*, in philosophy, or in religion let us postulate a unitary transposable. We can call it a **plot-analogue**, out of acknowledgment for its origin in *poesis*, but at the same time conceding it is not literally a **plot** when transposed elsewhere. In any case, it is a richer notion since a “plot” can be trivialized as a mere story-line. A **plot-analogue** gets shaped by all its salient ingredient coordinates, becoming thus available for **Verstehen**, or empatheic understanding.
A key difference between philosophy and religion can be indicated by the different transposings of the plot-analogue into those domains. Where a philosophy is concerned, the transposing is abstract (as it naturally is for coordinates) but it also is carefully superimposed upon the central orientative strategy itself. A culturative strategy includes considerably more than its core orientative strategy, which is narrowly, and essentially that which has to be taken on by the cultural recipient. By contrast, the plot-analogues for religious systems, include "super-stories," which serve to justify and explain their core orientative strategies, giving their whys and wherefores. This is certainly true for brahmologies, buddhologies, theologies, and Christologies.

One shortcut clue to that difference is the Reason and Revelation contrast. Poesis and philosophy both answer to the phrase "De te fabula narrantur," while by contrast religion paints more sweeping canvases, with awe-inspiring backgrounds.

Morals to be drawn: First, deconstruction could never be enough, since context is required by all the meaningful coordinates and by the resultant plot-analogues. "Text" is certainly not sufficient for the elucidation of the discursive humanities.

Secondly, multiculturalism shows its weakness by the several groupings displaying retreatings into, and sulkings within, their various ideological tents. Transposings and dialectical interchanges, too often frozen out, are essential to keep the larger cultural game going.

Thirdly, the transposing dynamic should be illumined by the best available cogitations upon "myth" in its broadest sense. Mircea Eliade, Ernst Cassirer, and Joseph Campbell (especially regarding his Hero with a Thousand Faces) are appropriate authorities, as is Pitirim Sorokin.

Part II. The Analogous Structures of Culturative Strategies

Let us suppose that culturative symbolics and cognitive symbolics (plus their overlaps) constitute human learning. Where then do the three varieties of the discursive humanities, poesis, philosophy, and religion, fit? Literature and drama are highly particularized; they are about culturation, its conflicts, and their results in fictive characters; philosophy and religion culturate, they say things and commend values. In seeing how culturation works and how orientative strategies are susceptible of mutual accommodation and sometimes even of creative synthesis, we must look to philosophies and religions more than to dramatic and lit-
erary works. (Of course artistry marks great examples of both, though not to the point at which the proper distinction is lost.)

That intellectual and communal sorts of culturation each have their own different centers of gravity generates a measure of distrust between the philosopher and the theologian. Indeed, where they achieve apparently effective creative syntheses, they may be regarded from one extreme or the other as outrageous kidnappings. My professor of the history of philosophy, John Herman Randall, Jr., once remarked that “Thomas Aquinas made a hash of Aristotle.”

Philosophical syntheses, despite the contentiousness of the discipline and the competitiveness of the schools, are more sympathetically received than syntheses between philosophy and religion, especially when the latter predominated. This last sort manages to irritate the more autonomous, and even sceptical, thinkers.

The developments of Hellenistic philosophies out of classical Athenian schools were nonetheless marginally touched by the less institutionalized Greek religion. This is briefly spelled out in F. M. Cornford’s From Religion to Philosophy and illuminates Porphyry’s apologetic aim in editing Plotinus’ Enneads. The intervening of inherited and borrowed philosophical materials in the history of Western thought makes for increasingly creative dialectic. When idealistic and more explicitly ideational blendings take place, greater reconciliative effort is called for. These blendings often go back to precedents from two pivotal thinkers, both intermediate between the idealistic and ideational types; I refer of course to Philo and Plotinus.

What are the three culturative moments which constitute bases for structural analogues among idealistic and ideational systems? Those which enable mutual accommodations and creative syntheses having some lasting effect? One of these is the “latching-on” place, the invocative moment addressing the cultural recipient; another is the commendation for ways of life and thought, hopefully to be conveyed, the normative moment. Lastly, and for the ideational cultural type the most important, is the Focus, the legitimating source and/or goal for the culturation. Examples are the One or Form of the Good, the Tao, Brahman, God, the Absolute Spirit, the Transcendent, deus sive natura and so on.

Another way of referring to this most significant moment would be to call it a foundational insight; it integrates key values. The Plotinian and Philonic religious philosophies notably set the directions by which later syntheses were achieved. Those three culturative moments jointly provide resources for coordinating and accommodating distinct particular strategies.
The preceding section outlined basic analogues between orientative strategies, both philosophic and religious. Those kinships allow for accommodations ranging from coexistence, or *modi vivendi*, up to and including fruitful cultural syntheses. The best of the latter are affirmed through Pitirim Sorokin's notion of “integralism” which ideally characterizes cases of philosophical and religious harmony. The points of juncture are, as has been argued, threefold, the Focus or foundational and integral insight, the normative or authorizing moment of culturation, and thirdly the invocative moment addressing the incipient/recipient of meaning, and here we mean the subject of culturation, whether such shaping is intellectual or communal.

Yet Sorokin’s integralist ideal for intellectual/spiritual synthesis seems to depend upon selective borrowings from diverse traditions. Does not such a quest risk bumping up against barriers and obstacles, those being defense mechanisms all traditions deploy against threatening imports? The intellectual activities of the four organizations shortly to be examined illustrate both potentials for syntheses or accommodations on the one hand, and their limiting constraints on the other.

Four impressive lines of cultural interplay have come to my attention, highlighted within four institutions—the first of which I long observed and three in which I have participated. All, in Janus fashion, draw deeply on the past, while their scholarly products furnish the future with diverse and insightful resources. Such creative syntheses provide ever-fresh symbolic materials for new combinations, there being no final terminus in any fixed Perennial Philosophy. It is undeniable that the future undoubtedly remains open, certainly by reason of unforeseeable scientific discoveries, technological applications, and social innovations, but also from trends in the discursive humanities.

The eldest institution is the Gifford Lectureship, going back well over a century. Its precedents are even older, from the overlaps between Hellenism and Judaism. The fact that a plaintive Tertullian even asked, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” demonstrates the power of the overlaps. Sorokin’s distinction between “ideational” and “idealistic” cultural forms bears upon much of this interplay, as holding in such cases between Judaic sectarianisms and Greek philosophy. Underlying this level, of course, were earlier partial absorptions of Hellenistic ideational forms, such as the “mystery religions,” sometimes acknowledged by Christian Apologists as *praeparatio evangelicu*um.

The great patron, Lord Gifford, had wished Christian thought to be
buttoressed judiciously by natural theology, itself standing as the con-
temporary heir to Greco-European philosophy. A series of distinguished
lectures at Scottish universities ensued, along with a stream of subse-
quent books. This mostly “idealistic” and “ideational” interchange
must, however, be seen as confined within limits, notably those set by
doctrinal constraints. While few of the participants were as suspicious
of natural theology as Tertullian would have been and as Karl Barth in
fact came to be, most were careful to give pride of place to revealed the-
ology or at least to established religious institutions. In short, idealistic
and ideational creative syntheses were not evenly balanced blends, but
rather careful accommodations borrowing elements that did not under-
mine the borrower’s prime culturative strategy.

One’s own orientative strategy can sometimes afford to take on new
elements, normatives and customs. Ernst Troeltsch’s Social Teachings
of the Christian Churches demonstrated acceptable moral and political
change over time. Another example is this: the iconoclasm of some
Eastern emperors reflected their susceptibility to a tangential Moslem
influence. But orientation cannot risk yielding to basic disorientation;
defenses by orthodoxies against heretical and infidel influences are thus
a recurring theme. (“Orthopraxies” and “orthosophies” can be ascribed
elsewhere, the former to Judaism or Islam on one hand, the latter to
Vedantic Hinduism and to “New Age” movements on the other.)

Emulative approbation is the specific engine for dialectical inter-
play, and sociocultural overlap is the primary occasion for its working,
all within the limits of established and authorized priorities. Consider
the cautious precept: “Hold on tight to Nurse, for fear of something
worse.” That maxim is either strictly (Karl Barth) or more loosely
adhered to (as by theological liberals).

The second exemplary institution in question had been in existence
for just over twenty years, the Society of Christian Philosophers. Its
chief organizers often take a rather more conservative stance than do
many Gifford lecturers. How? By virtue of their willingness to apply
philosophical analysis to explicit doctrinal tenets and propositions. The
result is close to a modern version of philosophy as ancillae fidei, or as
handmaiden to the Queen of Sciences. Notre Dame, Calvin College,
Wheaton, and Asbury are the home institutions for four of the society’s
typical leaders. Here takes place a fairly cordial doctrinal interplay
between Roman Catholics and Protestants, with serious interconfes-
sional interchanges, elucidated in terms of able deployments of linguis-
tic philosophy.
In an old motion picture, the name of which I have forgotten, Yankee soldiers are seen escorting their Confederate prisoners toward their fort, when all of them are set upon by hostile Indians. Naturally, the Northerners and the Rebels join ranks. The current case of conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants is not too dissimilar, with secularists and theological liberals playing the threatening forces. That comparison may illumine some of the core motivations for the founding leaderships of the Society of Christian Philosophers.

As for the third example, the first of the “Philosophers East and West” Conferences began at the University of Hawaii under Professor Charles Moore’s leadership in the mid-30’s. Hawaii served as a natural meeting ground; indeed with its population mix it already constituted a significant sociocultural overlap. Their regular journal began in 1951; the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy proceeded to flourish from then on. Scholars from around the world participate regularly in the journal and in the meetings.

Where Tertullian had questioned the relevance of Athens to Jerusalem, the British man of letters, Rudyard Kipling, had famously declared that “East is East, and West is West and never the twain shall meet.” Now although there may not have been the closeness of interaction that had once obtained between the Hellenistic heritage and that of Judaism and its derivatives, still the Pacific basin, not to mention the British Raj, had allowed for significant cultural interplay. There may have been more to bridge, but the bridging has taken place and continues to take place. Many publications from all regions of the scholarly world count as evidence for a great mutual enrichment. It may be said that the width of the Pacific and the vast extent of the Eurasian continent show that the earlier comparable Diaspora-Hellenism overlap covered far less territory.

It should be remarked that South and East Asian philosophies are more closely bound to their ancestral religious traditions than is Western philosophy. In short, the continuity between their ideational and idealistic traditions, as with the six schools of India, is more pronounced—given the previously mentioned cultural gap between Athens and Jerusalem. “Comparison” stands as the common term between the SACP and the ISCSC, as both similarities and differences are elicited within their respective inquiries. The discerning of similarities, of affinities, recapitulates for the serious scholar, through Verstehen, the temptation of imitation or emulation, as felt by the peoples studied. Imitation, the sincerest form of flattery, may be said to take place, but
falling well short of institutionally feared disorientation.

Let us turn to the fourth exemplary institution. We find that the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, by virtue of its task, provides the broadest context. The Gifford Lectureship and the Society of Christian Philosophers are accordingly more localized, and despite the geographic scope of the SACP’s interactive domain, it too falls within the purview of the ISCSC’s agenda. The latter’s studies of social and cultural causations illumine all of the other rich interactions, which serve as exemplifying data from the three other scholarly institutions.

The ISCSC itself dates from the early 60’s, and then in its current form, from 1972. Naturally enough, the membership is broadly interdisciplinary and international. Particularly relevant to cultural borrowings, or to cultural conflicts under the circumstance of group overlap, is the problem of assigning precise boundaries to civilizations. The lively discussion of civilizational boundaries, in time as well as in space, occupied the energies of a number of active ISCSC participants during the 1980’s. Accordingly, sociocultural overlaps preclude drawing boundaries with too much exactitude, given the presence of both fairly peaceful “melting pots” and also highly contentious areas like Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and the Balkans.

To repeat the earlier point, the prime condition for cultural interplay deploying meaningful dialectical syntheses seems to be group and sociocultural overlap. For example, Philo Judaeus found himself a member of a Platonic school as well as a legatee of Judaism; rather than pursuing any escapist compartmentalization, he looked to creative and accommodative fusion by presuming the Bible’s historical influence upon Plato. Professor Radhakrishnan, rather more plausibly, detected strong Indian influences upon Hellenistic thought in general and upon Neo-Platonism in particular. The first case is more manifestly one of “felicitous misidentification” than the latter, although Radhakrishnan’s studies in England may well have nourished sympathies on his part for idealism and neo-Platonism, all this indirectly reinforcing his diffusionist attribution.

How can such dynamic overlaps be best characterized? An individual could be a member of two groups, and his/her loyalties to both sets of values may lead to a mutative synthesis. This is increasingly likely under conditions of external pressure. Individuals from different groups pushed by circumstances may become allies co-involved in joint enterprises; their intense common interests leading to positive modifications of their original orientations. Sympathetic softenings of differ-
ences among them, down-gradings at least for the moment of old animosities, may result from shared difficulties. Interfaith movements, extending beyond more localized ecumenicities, may reflect felicitous reprioritizings among the respective leading elites.

Again, any changes and assimilations that go too far may be institutionally and doctrinally resisted. The world is so overcrowded with competing orientative strategies that some such crises lead to actual warfare, though crises internalized within sociocultural overlaps occasionally stimulate novel syntheses. (As with Pitirim Sorokin’s “principle of polarization,” sometimes for some persons, crises engender “altruization.”) The case is never quite so simple as “monkey-see-momkney-do,” when approbative emulation is in full swing. Inbuilt rigidities, and selective cautions against unwelcome absorption by outside forces, have to be taken into account. The Incas and the Polynesians had unfortunately been swamped; other communities understandably wish to avoid such a sorry fate (partly no doubt from their own well-earned historic guilt.)

Finally, beyond the relative continuance of orientative strategies, hedged about by their defenses against disorientation, we should take a look at the comparatively rare, major reorientations that only occasionally succeed in taking place. The Gifford Lectures, the SCP, and the SACP upon occasion examine localized examples of those, while the ISCSC from its higher conceptual altitude ranges widely above such instances. Orientative strategies, adaptable within comfortable limits as they usually are, happily more often resemble gyroscopes than they do Weberian “Iron Cages.” The most heroically extensive reorientations would include “higher (and therefore supercessional) religions” as well as major supercessional philosophical efforts. Suggestive lesser analogues within the history of science may be the problematic “paradigm shifts” of Professor Thomas Kuhn.

Such reorientations, to be acknowledged only grudgingly well after their success, belong to convulsive temporal trends more obviously than to sociocultural overlapping spaces. These involve elaborate harkings back to selected traditions for the sake of subsequent leapings forward: and such successes are rare, however imposing they might turn out to be as cultural transitions.

Creative synthesis is more authentically synthetic when it arises from an actual sociocultural overlap. It may however be vicarious, and thus highly problematic, given an agent’s imperfect imaginative identification with a distant group. Consider the case of naive American
Communists, of fellow-travelers, who knew little about the Moscow-centered party, or certain fervent followers of Reverend Moon’s Unification movement.

Vicarious participation with distant groups may engender one type of meaningful synthesis, however feeble and unfruitful it may be. Another form of vicarious extension for consciousness could very well be alleged, that is, identification across time, rather than across space. Identification with the values of earlier groups should perhaps better be interpreted as the possession of certain legacies or selections therefrom, which have resulted from influences upon one’s own historic groups.

Oftentimes extraordinary, and wildly anachronistic, appeals are made to the past for the sake of legitimizing novel movements into the future. Consider classicism as a buttress for revolutionary actions: the statue of Washington in a toga, the Order of the Cincinnati, and the French artist David’s paintings contemporary with their Revolution as well as with Napoleon’s imperial ascension. On the religious side, consider frequent scriptural appeals to the Jewish scriptures, typically to the Septuagint, by early Christians; much later there were proof-texting efforts by different generations of innovating Protestants from Luther to Alexander Campbell. Such instances were creative retrospects in the service of multiple novel prospects. Here, as it were, long runways are designed and built for heavily-laden flights into problematic skys.

In the Janus-mode we look back and ahead in consideration of the morals drawn and suggested. For example, as just seen, past precedents may be chosen to give justification and direction to a novel future. Again, we consider earlier symbolic sources, in the creative syntheses we lay as bets upon the future. Thus our dialectical symbol-juggling is temporally self conscious.

In the early treatment of (literary and dramatic) Art, Philosophy, and Religion, eleven thematic coordinates were introduced. One major implication there, the inevitability of context, points up the limitations of deconstructive attentions to mere text. Another moral, the need for open and ongoing dialectic and dialogue, casts doubt upon the merits of ingrown and dogmatic movements, with all their diverse consciousness-raisings, inhabiting a jointly defended “multicultural” realm. Cordial interactions, especially with older ongoing concerns, seem to have been precluded. All of that showy defiance constitutes a standing embarrassment, especially in academe, and more vulgarly in political life.

Time, and the long view fore and aft, brings us again to reconsideration of culturative strategies in interaction, and especially those "ide-
alistic” and those “ideational.” (Pitirim Sorokin’s theory of supersystemic rhythms or oscillations is relevant here.) How do they engage with “latching-on” places? How do basic plot-analogues effectively superimpose or merge? What becomes the true center of gravity?

Here is the briar-patch of myth, the examination of which raises all sorts of suspicions. Yet the mythic domain is itself highly generalized and resultant from major transposings of vectors and plots. In the case of philosophies, and mergers mainly idealist or philosophical, the center of gravity is the invocative moment, the subject for culturation. This is the “hero with a thousand faces.” He is Everyperson or the ubiquitous Kilroy. When we turn toward a more ideational synthesis, a “Focus” having juncture with the Transcendent, we may go to a “Superhero,” that is, to a Christ, a Buddha, a Krishna, or on a more modest scale to a Prophet empowered with the answers. A purer Transcendence, the reaching for which is more mystically depersonalized, puts the center of gravity upon Sankara’s Brahman, Plotinus’ One, or some analogous Focus. But whether hero, Superhero, or Transcendent/Immanent Divine, there is a center, proximate or ultimate, for meaning and value. When it is only proximate, the total transposing may be to something just as simple as the phenomenological subject-object polarity. So I am suggesting that transpositive culturative symbolics cannot get away from Kilroy and yield a pure naturalism, for that is what is sometimes attempted and even claimed by cognitive symbolics. Kilroy (the Subject) may be camouflaged but not obliterated, within any true culturative strategy.

We should admit that metaphysics (the most significant intersection between culturative and cognitive symbolics) has been thus far largely neglected. In early modernity the justificatory support of metaphysics then later with its trimming back toward epistemology was greatly needed, since the would-be scientist was overshadowed by the theologian and the superstition-monger. Then the new forms of metaphysics, and later the Enlightenment as such, constituted a whistling past the medieval and Renaissance-magico graveyards. Today the sciences are large enough and powerful enough to take care of themselves; they also undergo so much change among divergent lines that on the whole, Kilroy can’t keep up, much less conjure up a steady reliable metaphysical support system. Yet process thinkers and others defy the purported “end of philosophy.” With this nod to metaphysics we acknowledge its part among the humanities.

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NOTES


2. Pages 99-104 from Reanimation in Philosophy anticipates Chapter 9 from *Rough Dialectics.* As I suggest there, parallels obtain between those processes and intellectual history. An interesting feature is the way notable thinkers often do not simply exemplify one of Sorokin’s three cultural types, but rather show mixes and unfolding trends toward fresh emphases. Predominances reign rather than monopolies.

3. The British inherit a more hierarchical order than do we. This shows in Bradley’s article, in which family, community, and so forth have greater weight than does the individual, who inhabits multiple spheres. But see Bradley 160-213.

4. Whether wealth is honorific, as purchasing status, or dishonorable, as signifying dirty work at the crossroads, is debated by two sorts of “city slickers,” capitalists who argue for the concentration of wealth and power among oligarchs, and socialists who seek to empower urban bureaucrats. (The original “city slickers” were ancient priesthoods who sanctified centralized wealth and power.)

5. See *Rough Dialectics* 123ff, 149f.

6. Huck observes claimants to status, like slaveholders, duellists, and con men (the Duke and Dauphin). Passing judgment on civilization, he hopes to “light out for the Territory.”

7. Sorokin liked to quote Taoists against centralized and overly-bureaucratized governments.

8. See Buber, First Part.

9. Matthieson’s own excessive idealism and disillusionments about American political life no doubt contributed to his tragic suicide.

10. In one case, Buddha’s pre-existence and his accumulation of merit encompass the Dharma. In another case, I suggest that Adam’s fall, the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Atonement were all features of a wider culturative horizon, encompassing the forgiveness of sins and Jesus’ prophetic admonition to do better.

11. Campbell includes what I call a “Superhero” in the Hero class. See Campbell, next to last chapter.

12. Randall is typically kinder in print. See Randall, viii.
Subsequently, his own interpretation of Aristotle was “functionally realist,” heavily Deweyized.

See Sorokin’s article on Tolstoy, chapter 3, *Rough Dialectics*.

Any good university library will be well-supplied with books published by Gifford lecturers. Virginia Tech really only began to collect seriously in the middle-sixties. Yet we have 73 volumes; a number of others were published. Sometimes two lecturers would present during the same calendar year.

Consider Philo’s enthusiastic misreading, his very “felicitous misidentification:” “Plato must have read the books of Moses!” Undeniable priority was left on the biblical side. The same was true of Christian Apologists; however generously they ascribed truth to classical legacies, the building of bridges was for conversion purposes, as it would have been for the Jesuit mission of Matteo Ricci, even had the Rites controversy turned out with a favorable result.

The journal *Faith and Philosophy* contains candid and illuminating statements by five of the Society’s founders. See vol. 14, no. 2, p 141ff.

*Philosophy East and West* is a quarterly now in its fiftieth year. It is elegantly produced by the University of Hawai‘i Press.

For a judicious sampling of those discussions, see Melko and Scott (eds). *The Boundaries of Civilizations in Space and Time*.

See Radhakrishnan, pp 135ff, 207.

See Sorokin SCP, pp 487ff.

Alexander Campbell was an earnest Scot who hoped to bridge sectarian differences by doing back to authentic biblical Christianity. He founded the Disciples of Christ. Much good that did him with my Asbury Methodist grandmother, who referred to his followers as “Campbellites.”

I am disposed to regard feasible naturalisms as those which allow easy archeological digs to retrieve the Subject (as proximate center for meaning and value), in short, Kilroy the Hero, and also distinctive values and meanings. Less feasible are those who want to lock Kilroy into an Iron Zombie-mask, behaviorisms, and so forth.

E. A. Burtt earlier on in this century candidly admitted bafflement as to what sort of metaphysics would do for today’s sciences. Dualisms, materialisms, evolutionisms—none of those seemed persuasive. (But of course Process Thought is even today a contender.) See Burtt, last chapter.
WORKS CITED
