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Pitirim A. Sorokin's Sociological Anarchism

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Introduction

Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889–1968) was a Russian emigre, an internationally renowned sociologist, the first chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University, a president of the American Sociological Association, among many other honors, and a gadfly to the discipline of sociology (Sorokin, 1950a, 1963a, 1963b). Robin M. Williams, Jr (1980 : 103), a former student of Sorokin's at Harvard, called his teacher a sui generis thinker and a man who thinks otherwise. He was a thinker who, as Nietzsche might have said, was 'out of season' with the discipline with which he identified.

Sorokin was a lone scholar during the ascendancy of team research (cf. Merton, 1959), a pessimist during a period of postwar optimism, an antipositivist during the reign of positivism, an internationalist during the rise of American sociological hegemony, an advocate of cyclical theories of change while the contrasting view of liberal progressivism prevailed, and a grand theorist during a period of skepticism and hostility toward such theories.

But times change. At present, when there is a renewed appreciation for grand theory (e.g. Skinner, 1985), when there is a return to cyclical theories of change (e.g. Kennedy, 1987), when there is a renewed interest in altruism (Piliavin and Chamg, 1990), and when, with the evident conclusion of the cold war and collapse of state communism, there is a revived interest in global harmony (see Goldfarb, 1989), the time is ripe for a re-examination of Sorokin's work. The challenge of this undertaking has been accepted by scholars both here and abroad. Not only is a Russian scholar writing Sorokin's comprehensive intellectual biography,¹ but in the United States Barry Johnston

¹ Professor Nikita Prokovsky, University of Moscow. Information contained in a letter to the author from Robert K. Merton, 13 July 1991.

(1986, 1987, 1991) continues his efforts to elucidate Sorokin's life and work.

The present essay contributes in a modest way to this re-examination. It does not provide an analysis of Sorokin's work in its entirety, which, given the extensiveness of his output, would be a monumental task (e.g. Cowell, 1952). Rather, the present study investigates an important but neglected strain in Sorokin's oeuvre, the anarchistic dimension of his work. With few exceptions, such as Tiryakian's (1968) encyclopedia article on Sorokin, most studies fail to mention Sorokin's links to the anarchist tradition. Yet, my recent survey of Sorokin's published writings and unpublished correspondence demonstrates the centrality of this tradition to his works.² A re-examination of his writings along these lines is long overdue.

In what follows I first establish the pertinence of this line of thought to an understanding of Sorokin's work and, second, explore the ethical project of Sorokin's writings and reveal its roots in ethical anarchism. In the conclusion, I draw implications for future Sorokin studies and for contemporary theorizing.

Sorokin as 'Conservative, Christian Anarchist'

Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin was born in a rural village in the north of Russia in 1889. The beauty of the terrain, its pristine rivers and lakes, vast forests and flowery meadows, provided an aesthetic counterpoint to the simple but harsh conditions of life. Sorokin's mother died when he was about 3

² The Sorokin Papers are located at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. I would like to express my gratitude to Shirley A. Martin, head, Special Collections and her staff for assistance with my research. The research was funded by a grant-in-aid from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

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years old, and his father, an itinerant artisan, and a loving man when he was sober, became depressed and violent during his occasional alcoholic binges. Leaving home to escape their father's domination and wrath, Pitirim Alexandrovich and his older brother moved from village to village while earning their living in their father's trade, as gilders of religious icons and other cult objects (Sorokin, 1963b: 4–7).

Sorokin's background in the village communities of northern Russia at the turn of the century provided fertile ground for developing sensibilities favorable to the anarchist tradition in at least two respects. First, the Russian anarchist literature, such as the writings of Peter Kropotkin, was consistent with the rural experience and homespun political ideas of the peasants and local artisans, such as their vigorous individualism, their preference for local autonomy, and their commitment to communal ownership of land. A receptiveness to the anarchist literature was based, in no small measure, on the fact that those writings systematically expressed the relatively inchoate ideas and sentiments voiced by the peasants.³

Second, in the early years of the 20th century, revolutionaries from the rival political parties — Social Revolutionaries, Social Democrats, Anarchists, among others — went directly to the peasantry to propagandize, recruit support and spark revolution (Perrie, 1990). These newer revolutionaries were added to the older radicals of the late 19th century who had settled in remote villages as country doctors, teachers and artisans (Venturi, 1960; Walicki, 1989: 88–107).

Networks of revolutionaries of many stripes were in place, then, to shape the thoughts and sensibilities of the relatively insular peasantry.

³ Kropotkin's own views, of course, were profoundly shaped by his association with the petty trade workers, and especially the watchmakers, of the Jura Mountains in Switzerland (see Kropotkin, 1988: Part IV, Ch. 9).

It was contact with representatives of the various political parties, along with the influence of crystallizing events such as the 1904 Russian-Japanese War and the 1905 Russian revolution, which shaped Sorokin's early political views and led him to join the ranks of the anti-tsarist revolutionaries (Sorokin, 1963b: 21). At the age of 14, while enrolled in the Khrenovo Teachers' School, Sorokin travelled throughout the town and nearby villages preaching revolutionary ideas to the peasants, the students and the local textile-factory workers.

For his revolutionary activities Sorokin was soon arrested and jailed, one of six times he was to be incarcerated, three times by the tsarist government and three times by the Bolshevik government. The four months of his first incarceration contributed to his further political education. Circumstances in the jail were such that revolutionary reading material and viewpoints on the burning issues of the day were openly exchanged. In that jail Sorokin read and discussed with his fellow inmates the revolutionary classics of the Communists — Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov; of the Populists — Lavrov, Mikhailovsky; of the Anarchists — Bakunin, Kropotkin; and of the Social Revolutionary leader, Chernov, a disciple of Mikhailovsky (E. Sorokin, 1975 : 4).

These political positions contain not only substantial similarities, but also substantial and meaningful differences. For example, Marxism, populism and anarchism were similar in their contention that the state was an instrument of domination and oppression. The mutual target of all three positions was the Russian autocracy. In addition, both populism and anarchism differed from Marxism in exhibiting a positive attitude toward the peasantry, including advocating peasant ownership of the land. At the time, Marx's own positive view of the Russian peasant commune, revealed in, among other places, his letter to Vera Zasulich (8 March 1881), was not commonly known (see Walicki, 1989:192J4). Finally, populism differed from anarchism in its gradualism and in its willingness to countenance

current efforts to mend disciplinary fragmentation. Sorokin's (1928) monumental text on theory deserves rereading by contemporary students of theory. Revisiting Sorokin's work should be guided less by his answers than by his questions: Can sociology exist without a central vision? If not, then what should that vision be?

Does history reveal a direction, goal, or end? Is there a place for values in sociological inquiry? Can logic, empiricism and intuition be admitted as complementary routes to knowledge? What are the virtues of theoretical synthesis as compared to theoretical eclecticism or monism? Many of these questions occupy the attention of contemporary metatheorists (e.g. Ritzer, 1991); a broadening of participation in this dialogue, and a discussion of Sorokin's position within it, may have a salutary effect on the discipline.

In addition, Sorokin contributed to a long and venerable intellectual tradition. Whatever the preferred denomination may be, the 'Ecological Community' or anarchism, for example, this tradition contains a measure of truth. The emphasis on spontaneity, simplicity, autonomy and cooperation, simple truths lost in the rush of modernity, may yet reveal their potency. Social scientists who are now involved in theorizing ecological concerns may find it useful to return to this tradition, and perhaps to Sorokin, for inspiration and guidance.

Lastly, Sorokin remains a model of dissent against both intellectual and political vacuity. He had the courage to take and defend unpopular intellectual stands, and he was a fighter for humanity during politically antiseptic times. We need such figures today.

Bibliography

Conclusion

The works of Pitirim A. Sorokin have long been neglected by many. Even the current writings exploring themes and problems which he helped found seldom mention him or his works. Perhaps this is a not uncommon fate given the rush for reputation which now characterizes the social sciences, and which Sorokin (1956) himself noted and named — the ‘Columbus complex’ — years ago. But I believe the current interest in the history of sociology, founded in a triple conviction, makes a return to Sorokin, but not only to Sorokin, both possible and desirable. The triple conviction is that rereading the works of major sociological thinkers can contribute to intellectual and personal growth (cf. Rorty, 1979: ch. 8), yield insights into the substantive moral and political issues of the day, and provide new and extend old knowledge (cf. Merton, 1967). A revisit to Sorokin is likely to yield such edifying, practical and scientific benefits.

Recent intellectual developments have faulted liberalism for neglecting community, Marxism for its eschatology and vanguardist pretensions, and positivism for excluding meaning and interpretation from sociological analysis. Moreover, the separation of philosophy from sociology and of sociology from public dialogue have been roundly criticized. Scholars attempting to disentangle these current dilemmas may find a revisit to Sorokin not only personally edifying, but also practically and scientifically productive. For while Sorokin made many mistakes, he did not err in our modern ways. His politics includes community; his history eschews eschatology and accepts hermeneutics; his sociology admits philosophy; and his writings exhibit the talents of a public intellectual.

Rereading Sorokin in light of these current issues and debates may reveal his value as a significant contemporary. For example, Sorokin’s ‘integralism’ is congruent with the ecumenical spirit in contemporary sociological theory. His battle against theoretical monism anticipates and may help guide

some forms of authority (on Russian populism generally, see Berlin, 1978; Walicki, 1969).

This last aspect of populism was consistent with Sorokin’s sympathies of the time, such as his admiration for western governments in general, and for the United States government in particular (Sorokin, 1963a: 100), and shaped his choice of political affiliations. Sorokin became a member of the neo-Populist Social Revolutionary Party, a loosely organized, informal and ideologically synthetic party incorporating anarchist, anti-capitalist, communitarian, democratic, personalist, revolutionary and socialist elements (see Radkey, 1958; 1963). The Party Program of the Social Revolutionaries from 1905, the year in which Sorokin joined the movement, reveals that they advocated a revolution of the peasants and other workers and supported local autonomy, peasant communal ownership of land and solidarity between town and country (McCauley, 1984 : 32–3).

Sorokin’s prominence within the Social Revolutionary Party earned him an important position in the provisional government that followed the February Revolution of 1917. In addition to many other duties, Sorokin was private secretary and consultant to Prime Minister Kerensky (Sorokin, 1950a: Part I). It was most likely in this capacity that, as he reports, Sorokin met and befriended Peter Kropotkin when in 1917, upon hearing of the revolution, the anarchist leader returned to Russia from his exile in England (Miller, 1976:232–47). In Sorokin’s words, ‘It was my good fortune to meet and to know him personally during the last years of his life in Russia [Kropotkin died in 1921]. He was an excellent personality in his life and conduct’ (Sorokin, 1942:11).

To summarize the argument thus far, not only was Sorokin exposed to the anarchist literature during a formative period of his life. And not only was he in his youth an ardent member of the Social Revolutionaries, a party with a strong strain of anarchism derived, in part, from its Populist roots. He was

also reportedly a personal acquaintance and lifelong admirer of Peter Kropotkin, the great anarchist, ethicist and author of *Mutual Aid* (1899).

It was these fateful circumstances, along with his disillusionment with the United States government after the First World War (Sorokin, 1963a: 101), that are largely responsible for developing Sorokin's later political position which, using Henry Adams' term, he described as 'conservative, Christian anarchist' (Sorokin, 1963b: 34, referring to Adams, 1961: Ch. 27). It is understandable that Sorokin would identify with Adams' 'own fantastic and imaginary political party', as one of Adams' biographers called it (Stevenson, 1955: 300). The title of Adams' imaginary political party was naturally appealing to Sorokin, given his moral and economic conservatism, his early socialization into the Russian Orthodox Church, and his view of the state as 'the most aggressive, most cynical, and most predatory of all organizations' (Sorokin, 1955: 3). But more than the title of that party, Sorokin must have found congenial the philosophy underlying the politics.

Adams maintained in Hegelian fashion that the end of all great philosophy was the 'larger synthesis', where contradictions were partially resolved. 'In the last synthesis', Adams proclaimed, 'order and anarchy were one, but the unity was chaos.' According to Adams, the duty of the anarchist, conservative and Christian, was to attain and hasten the largest synthesis, 'because a rigorous philosophy required it, in order to penetrate the beyond, and satisfy man's destiny by reaching the largest synthesis in the ultimate contradiction' (Adams, 1961: 406, 407).

Adams' emphasis on the larger synthesis must have struck a responsive chord in Sorokin's mind. In the intellectual atmosphere of Sorokin's youth, any beginning scholar wishing to be taken seriously had to avoid the label 'eclectic'. With this label the Marxists would stigmatize their opponents. Peter Lavrov himself was one such target, being called 'eclectic'

of the social life of animals and of the historical record of humans, it revealed that both the evolution of animal species and the social and ethical progress of humankind are based not on mutual struggle but on free and spontaneous cooperation or mutual aid. In short, it demonstrates 'the idea that mutual aid represents in evolution an important *progressive* element' (Kropotkin, 1989 [1914: XXXI]).

The studies of the Research Center in Creative Altruism are animated by the same purpose and come to the same conclusions. Enlisting science on the side of social and moral transformation, those studies identified scientific foundations of cooperation, altruism and love; and they tested techniques for the realization of those values. In addition to the ancient techniques of the eastern religions, such as Zen Buddhism and the Yogas, and of the western monastic orders, Sorokin and his colleagues tested the effects of 'good deeds' on hateful relationships and found many of them efficacious in the altruistic transformation of persons and groups.

In a sympathetic review of this work, Bierwiler (1973:192) identified what is perhaps its central problem: '[his studies] raise profound questions which strike at the premises of our sociology'. The profession responded to Sorokin's iconoclasm, his scientific research into love and religious practices, with scorn and bemused rejection. Nevertheless, Sorokin remained optimistic in believing that the internal, spontaneous transformation of society from Sensate system to Integral utopia was proceeding apace. This process would be realized sooner rather than later provided that societal members recognized and adhered to the principles of conservative, Christian anarchism.

The work of the research center represents the culmination of Sorokin's project, not as some believe its aberration. For he had early endorsed the view that the chief value of sociology was moral (Sorokin, 1927b: 317). And his long journey was also a pilgrim's progress.

and generated a quest for creative and constructive change. To this social and moral transformation Sorokin dedicated his energies with the incorporation in 1949 of the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism.

This 'little Research Center', as Sorokin called it, funded almost entirely by Eli Lilly, the pharmaceuticals magnate and patron of leading scholars from several fields, survived a full decade, from 1949 to 1959.⁷ The near-exhaustion of funds, coupled with Sorokin's advancing age and loss of university support upon his attaining Emeritus status, all contributed to the research center's termination. Despite its relatively brief existence, the output of the 'little Research Center', much of which was authored by Sorokin himself, is considerable. It includes two Symposia volumes, *Explorations in Altruistic Love and Behavior* (1950) and *Forms and Techniques of Altruistic and Spiritual Growth* (1954), which together include contributions from more than two dozen scholars; as well as Sorokin's own volumes, *Altruistic Love* (1950), *The Ways and Powers of Love* (1954) and *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences* (1956), among other works.⁸

These studies, Sorokin was convinced, 'confirm[ed] the main conclusions of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*'.⁹ Kropotkin's most celebrated book, based on articles published in the British journal *Nineteenth Century* from 1890 to 1896, sought to work out the basis of an anarchist ethics. Through an examination

⁷ The quotation is from a letter to Robert K. Merton from Sorokin, 5 November 1957, Sorokin Papers, box 19, M-33. Lilly was a patron not only of Sorokin, but also of the anthropologists Edward Sapir and Carl Voegelin, and of the archeologists James B. Griffin and Georg Neumann, among others (see Madison, 1989).

⁸ For a complete account of the research center, along with complete references to the above-cited works, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, 'Studies of the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism', n.d., Sorokin Papers, box 4, excerpted in Sorokin (1950a: 281–90).

⁹ Sorokin to Stewart H. Marsh, 19 March 1952, Sorokin Papers, box 19, M-28.

by Plekhanov, among others (Vucinich, 1976:16, 48). Efforts to avoid this label, along with adherence to the Comtean notion of philosophy as a synthetic discipline, resulted in a propensity for larger syntheses of the many contending intellectual positions.⁴

Sorokin's own 'integralism' (Sorokin, 1957)-his reconciliation of rationalism, empiricism and intuitionism – synthesized the diverse lessons of his teachers: the logical analysis of Peirajitsky, the empiricism of Pavlov and the mysticism and intuitionism of the Russian Orthodox priests. The result was Sorokin's view that logical analysis, empirical investigation and creative intuition were together necessary to reveal truth. This affinity between Adams' 'larger synthesis' and Sorokin's 'integralism' explains why an early statement of Sorokin's integralist philosophy was titled 'Conservative Christian Anarchy' (Sorokin, 1940).

Anarchist Themes in Sorokin's Work

Not only was the adult Sorokin an avowed anarchist, of sorts, but more significantly the themes and problematics of his writings reflect anarchist principles. Analysts of anarchism as a political philosophy, such as Avrigh (1973), Hacker (1968) and Nisbet (1973), have proposed a number of inventories of anarchist themes and principles. These lists converge on the following four elements, themes that are manifest in Sorokin's work. First is the view that the free human personality is the supreme end-value of human existence. All forms of social authority other than free human cooperation, and especially private property and the state, are unjust. Second is the belief that

⁴ Sorokin continued to avoid the label of 'eclectic' later in life, as witnessed by his continuing reference to his integralist philosophy as 'non-eclectic'. See, for example, his autobiographical contribution to a German encyclopedia, translated and reprinted in the journal *Science in Context* (Sorokin, 1989: 299–302).

peace is a natural and war an unnatural condition created by the openly militaristic nature of the state.

Third is the preference for cooperation, mutual aid and love rather than coercion as the proper bases of social stability. Fourth is the view that social change occurs primarily through spontaneous renewal, through evolution rather than revolution. At most, rational processes can help guide the otherwise autonomous and spontaneous social process.

As Robert Nisbet (1973) has shown in his discussion of what he terms 'The Ecological Community', there is a long tradition in western thought organized around principles such as these. Of course, other traditions emphasize one or another of these themes. For example, both political liberalism and some versions of Christianity incorporate spirited elements of individualism. But taken together, these four tenets help to constitute a distinct anarchist tradition and inform to various degrees the writings of all adherents to this philosophy. Along with the thought of St Benedict, Sir Thomas More and Peter Kropotkin, Sorokin's writings share in this heritage. That Sorokin viewed his work as following in this tradition, and especially in the footsteps of Kropotkin, is clearly reflected in his writings and will become evident later.

The origins of Sorokin's ethical views are of complex derivation. They stem from the Russian Populist sociology of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky (see Hecker, 1915; Walicki, 1989: Part II); from the Social Revolutionary ideology of Chemov, its main architect; and from the teachings of anarchist and Christian authors and their progenitors. Given the complexity both of Sorokin's work and of the intellectual influences on his thinking, only a partial dissection of these influences can be offered here (cf. Coser, 1977).

From Russian Populist sociology he inherited especially the ethical themes of individuality and solidarity. According to Alexander Vucinich (1976: 33):

to Avvakum, the spiritual force behind the Old Believers. To his credit, however, Sorokin did not inherit Avvakum's xenophobia.

Sorokin forecast the likely transformation of western civilization along the lines of a 'conservative, Christian anarchist' utopia. In this utopia, private property would be limited and 'turned into a kind of public trusteeship' (Sorokin, 1944 : 445). The state would largely disappear and its administrative functions would be replaced, as Proudhon and Kropotkin advocated, by 'the concerted actions of individuals united in groups which, in turn, are merged into larger federations or associations' (Sorokin, 1949:4). Leadership functions would be assumed by the more capable scientists, sages and saints. Familism, social relationships based on free and mutual devotion, would supersede contractual and compulsory types of social relations. Mutual aid and love would build a durable social order. Culture would be spiritual, life-affirming, ennobling and inspiring. Such are the main outlines of Sorokin's 'integralist' utopia.

This new society would be ushered in not by a political revolution, he believed, but by the 'vast, impersonal, spontaneous forces that animate' the historical process, assisted by the creative genius of saints and scholars (Sorokin, 1949: 5). Having lost faith in the anarchist dream of a spontaneous revolt of the masses, Sorokin transmogrified the anarchist stress on spontaneity into an inherent characteristic of social systems to change. Much like Talcott Parsons who dissolved the problem of authority into the inherent harmony of the social system (Vidich and Lyman, 1985), Sorokin dissolved the problem of change into the inherent tendency of system dynamics. In this way, Sorokin was able to retain a measure of optimism about the future.

Sorokin maintained that, with the outbreak of the Second World War, these immanent, spontaneous forces had inaugurated a global crisis, fostered disaffection from Sensate values,

the certain consequences of the full-scale third world war.

The letter was so provocative that Albert Einstein, an ardent pacifist, asked for Sorokin's permission to 'draw public attention' to the letter by publishing it in the form of a one-page advertisement along with supporting signatures of eminent scientists and scholars. Sorokin gave his permission, but apparently nothing came of this offer.⁶

As one would expect given his ethical anarchism, the solutions that he thought were necessary to end war are nothing less than radical. Sorokin supported the cessation of nuclear weapons experimentation and the complete disarmament of all countries. Only a small international police force would exist to cope with ordinary crime and any violation of peace conditions. He advocated the resignation of world leaders who are unable to prevent war, and the reallocation of military funds to peaceful purposes (Sorokin, 1950b). In addition to these political prescriptions, Sorokin believed a world without war 'requires a complete remodeling of all institutions and reorganization of the motives of men, away from power, popularity, and material wealth toward altruism, love, co-operation' (Sorokin, 1949: 2).

Both the substance and the style of Sorokin's jeremiad bear a remarkable resemblance to the writings of the Old Believers, the 17th-century Russian defenders of the old forms of worship in the face of religious subordination to the new secular state (Billington, 1970). Nor are Sorokin's protest against modernization and his relentless opposition to war and *raison d'état* the only features that are in line with the Old Believers; Sorokin's style, a mixture of prophecy and vituperation, is a throwback

⁶ Albert Einstein to Pitirim Sorokin, 21 January 1951, Sorokin Papers, box 13, E-10. While apparently nothing came of this offer, Einstein's interest in making a public declaration against war did not wane, as is shown by the '[Bertrand] Russell-Einstein Declaration' of 5 April 1955 (Clark, 1971: 625–6).

Populist sociology is built upon the notion of social solidarity or cooperation as the primary factor of social stability and cohesion and upon the notion of progressive affirmation of individuality as the primary factor of change. 'Solidarity' and 'individuality', as they work in social life, are interdependent: the gradually expanding solidarity or cooperation leads to a more versatile expression of individuality, and the growing individuality opens new avenues of solidarity and cooperation.

Evidence of the influence of these ideas on Sorokin's social and ethical thought can be found in his monumental text, *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (Sorokin, 1928). It is true, Lavrov is given short shrift in those pages, perhaps because the Populist thinker befriended Marx and Engels, participated in the Paris Commune and the First International, and generally supported Marxist thought, all positions for which Sorokin had little sympathy. It is no less true, however, that Sorokin self-consciously lived his life according to Lavrov's ethical notion of the 'critically thinking and morally responsible' individual (Sorokin, 1950a: 71).

The works of Mikhailovsky, on the other hand, exercised a formidable influence on Sorokin's ethical views, both through the original texts and through their interpretation in the ideology of Chemov, the Social Revolutionary leader and disciple of Mikhailovsky. Mikhailovsky's original writings are given close and favorable attention in Sorokin's early book on theory.

Especially noteworthy in this connection is Sorokin's endorsement of Mikhailovsky's notion of the 'struggle for individuality', a view of evolution which he substituted for the Darwinian view of 'struggle for existence'. Mikhailovsky's view of evolution linked the development of individuality to expanding social cooperation, as represented in my quotation from Vucinich, rather than linking individuality to social

differentiation, as represented in the works of Durkheim and Spencer. Both Sorokin and Mikhailovsky rejected the latter thinkers' modernist identification of progress with the rise of industrialized society. On the contrary, such a society, in Mikhailovsky's words (quoted in Sorokin, 1928: 217), 'is the worst enemy of man', a view Sorokin implicitly endorses. According to this view, industrialization and specialization result in a withering of the manifold human potential, rather than promoting the full flowering of the many-sided human personality, a necessary condition of social and moral progress. In his anti-modernism, in his dislike of the city, and in his naturism and romanticization of the village community (see Sorokin, 1963b: 15–16), Sorokin reveals his affinity with Mikhailovsky.

The ethical lessons which Sorokin learned or found support for in Populist sociology were paralleled and reinforced in the Anarchist and Christian traditions. Like the Populists, both of these traditions apotheosized the individual, extolled the virtues of free human cooperation and mutual aid as substitutes for coercion, and emphasized the role of nonconformists as bearers of change. On this last point consider the Russian Orthodox Church's views on the saliency of saints in human history (Meyendorff, 1966), a view which found its secular counterpart in Kropotkin's, and later Sorokin's, belief in 'the force of creative genius' (Kropotkin, 1988:292) as a necessary element of social reconstruction.

Sorokin's Sociological Anarchism

According to Geoffrey Hawthorn (1987), the central project of western social theory has been the grounding of a theory of ethics. Beginning with attempts in the ancient world to ground ethics in character and custom, and continuing with attempts in the 18th century to ground ethics in politics, efforts in the

Sorokin was an indefatigable critic of militarism and of palliatives for war. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s he sponsored at least four exposes on the militarization of America which were produced by the National Council Against Conscription, directed by John M. Swomely, Jr. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the surge in cold war tensions, Sorokin supported the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, established in 1948 to assist COs with their legal difficulties; he sponsored the Third World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs for Disarmament held in 1957 in Tokyo; he sponsored a number of pacifist statements, such as SANE's full-page advertisement, 'We Are Facing A Danger Unlike Any Danger That Ever Existed', printed in the *New York Times*, 15 November 1957; and he served on the Advisory Council of the pacifist Student Peace Union during the early 1960s revival of peace activism on college campuses (Sorokin Papers, boxes 22 and 24).

In addition, he wrote letters to American presidents and other notables urging them to support peace,⁵ and sent copies of his books, such as *Power and Morality* (Sorokin and Lunden, 1959), to politicians, religious leaders, prominent scholars and public figures.

In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Sorokin (17 January 1951: 26) warned of the apocalyptic consequences of world militarism:

Apocalyptic death and destruction; irreparable waste of the best and young blood of the nations involved; vital, mental and moral deterioration; unprecedented total anarchy; irredeemable decay of the whole Western culture and society; and untold oceans of sorrow and suffering — such are

⁵ Sorokin to President John F. Kennedy, 23 May 1961, Sorokin Papers, box 17, K-24.

Having provided a theoretical and factual foundation for his ethical anarchism, Sorokin set forth his jeremiad against modernity and militarism. Sorokin maintained that the decline in western Sensate culture from the 18th to the 20th centuries coincided with an increased militarism, liberticide, rapaciousness and dehumanization. He believed the responsibility for these evils rested in the ‘preeminently militant sociocultural nature’ (Sorokin, 1944:443) of Sensate values and institutions. These values — empirical, utilitarian, hedonistic, materialistic — not only sanctioned an anything-goes search for money, power and status; they also deprived humankind of soul and spiritual substance, thereby cheapening and contributing to the destruction of human life. Of the social institutions in a Sensate culture, Sorokin (1944: 442) wrote:

... they are permeated by the same militarism [as the values] and are incessantly generating interindividual, civil, and international conflicts. Private property, with its inevitable differentiation into the excessively rich and the utterly miserable, generates persistent criminality, class antagonism, and class war. The state with its naked power policy of the Machiavellian *raison d’état* is an openly militaristic institution unrestrained by any of the ethical norms that are obligatory for private conduct. The same is true of our political parties ... our occupational union ... [e]ven the family.

Since Sorokin believed this systemic militarism was responsible for war and other crimes of the age, it followed for him that no partial and piecemeal plan could offer a lasting peace. Not the United Nations or other political prescriptions, nor an extension of free enterprise around the globe, nor education into liberal and democratic values offers a panacea for war.

19th and 20th centuries have turned to grounding ethics in the facts and laws of society. While we accept Hawthorn’s recommendation to abandon this project, it is useful nevertheless to consider Sorokin’s work from this perspective. Doing so reveals that Sorokin’s project was a grounding of ethical anarchism — emphasizing individualism, creativity, cooperation, mutual aid and love — in the facts and discernible directions of social existence. Following Kropotkin’s example, Sorokin sought to place anarchism on a scientific footing.

Sorokin expressed no sympathy for speculative or metaphysical ethicists. He equated such moralizers to the charlatans and medicine men of the past (Sorokin, 1927b: 315). Because moralizing obstructs the objective study of society; because moralizing sociologists, when they are ignorant of social facts, can do more harm than good; because there is a logical difference between what ought to be and what is, or what has been, or what will be — because all of these problems obtain, Sorokin believed in ‘the urgent necessity for getting rid of moralizing and valuation within the realm of sociology as a science’ (Sorokin, 1927b: 316). That Sorokin himself was not immune from moralizing is consistent with his own observation that the logical strictures against admitting value-judgements are honored more in the breach than in the observance (Sorokin, 1927b: 313).

Sorokin expressed little sympathy not only for moral vision divested of factual knowledge, but also for facts divested of vision. He focused on this latter problem in a scathing review (Sorokin, 1933) of *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, compiled under the direction of William F. Ogburn. Sorokin criticized the book’s statistical excesses, its sterile objectivism and, most notably, its lack of a ‘central view’. In short, the book was, to use Ogburn’s own words, ‘a pile of knowledge’ (in Banister, 1987: Ch. 12), lacking both originality and fecundity.

Of the identified trends in population, communication, culture, social structure, and so on, what can be said about the so-

cial situation as a whole or about the direction of social change? According to Sorokin, the meager pseudo-philosophy of adaptationism informing the work inadequately supplies such a vision. By adaptationism is meant Ogburn's (1922) cultural lag theory which holds that non-material culture tends to lag behind material cultural advances and must continually 'catch up' or adapt to new circumstances. This view Sorokin considered a 'diluted variety of Marxian philosophy' (Sorokin, 1933: 203), one which was conceptually vague, practically ineffectual and morally questionable. Moreover, Sorokin maintained that imagination, insight and understanding — intellectual resources rejected by the report's positivist underpinnings — are necessary to provide the needed vision. Finally, he argued that when competent sociologists fail to supplement facts with vision, a lacuna is created in the public consciousness that is filled with speculative thought. On this issue Sorokin (1933: 210) wrote of the *Trends*:

Since these competent scholars do not undertake to open 'the central vista', either because it is too risky or because they cannot or are not inclined to do it, should we blame ourselves and the public for turning, in this quest, to such works as those of O. Spengler, or of the 'technocrats,' or to the flat philistinism of H. G. Wells, or to the shallow brilliancy of E. Friedels, or to a legion of others, none of whom can do it satisfactorily?

Sorokin believed that a science of society could valuably serve the ethical purposes of society. The accumulating data on the social order command the attention of ethicists by offering knowledge which, first, grounds the ethicist's highest moral principles in valid knowledge and, second, aids the ethicist in formulating concrete and realizable prescriptions for action (Sorokin, 1927b: 315). Sorokin's sociological anarchism,

his attempt to ground his ethical anarchism in sociological verities, provided the needed and desired synthesis of facts and vision.

Sorokin did not enter the United States with a ready-made central vision. His early publications in English on the Paretian theme of the circulation of elites (Sorokin, 1925; 1925–6) and on the anarchist theme of expanding governmental control (Sorokin, 1926), for example, were written with both feet on the ground, so to speak; they are factual, competent and prosaic. Yet, with the publication in 1937 of the first volumes of *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Sorokin, 1937–41), he, as it were, straddled both heaven and earth. In those volumes, Sorokin presents an imaginative theory of goalless historical cycles, a theory developed in the United States but influenced by the experiences and ideological predilections of his youthful activism in Russia. The existential sources of the book lie in the shattering of his faith in progress by the brutality of both the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution (Sorokin, 1950a), and in his antipathy toward Marxism and its eschatological conception of history.

In addition to these existential factors, Sorokin found inspiration in the cyclical conception of history presented in Vico's *New Science* (Vico, 1970: Book Four, Section 1). Vico's conception of history consists of three stages — of gods, of heroes and of men — 'through which all peoples pass, and which, having run, revolve again' (Sorokin, 1927a: 34). Sorokin's own three stages — the Ideational, or otherworldly; the Idealistic (later called the Integral), or half-otherworldly; and the Sensate, or this-worldly — closely follow Vico's stages in conception and substance. Rather than offering a recasting of Comte's three stages, as some suppose (e.g. Talbutt, 1980), the *Dynamics* is closer to the poetic genius of Vico's *New Science*. Not Comte's teleological and positivist view of history, but Vico's goalless and religiously inspired vision of history was congenial to Sorokin at this stage of his thinking.