
Sergei Pitirimovitch Sorokin

A human civilization achieves its greatest stability when most of its members agree to accept a common set of values under which to live. They may choose a set that recognizes “ultimate reality” to be “Sensate” (worldly, based on mankind), or another that affirms it as “Ideational” (otherworldly, based on God). Throughout history one or the other of these systems—of Sensate or Ideational order—has served for centuries effectively to influence or even regulate human behavior until large numbers of individuals in the population begin to question its underlying values. Consequently the support these values initially offered to human life and creative enterprise lessens, and the predominant order eventually loses influence and fades away, to be replaced by a new and different one. Human history has provided numerous examples where civilizations have moved away from an Ideational mentality to embrace another having Sensate characteristics, only to return to the former once again, and this suggests it is prone to cyclic changes. Nevertheless, even while popular approval for the Sensate order of values is at its peak, a small part of the population may still cling to Ideational values, and vice-versa, so that neither set of values is ever completely out of the picture. Rarely, influence from the two may strike just the right balance to give rise to a third, internally consistent “Integral” order whose characteristics fall somewhere between the “Sensate” and “Ideational” poles. Integral culture has flourished during certain past periods remembered as “golden ages,” but it has seemed to endure for shorter periods than the other two. Transition from a dying order to accession by a new one may take many years to complete. Historical records show the transition periods are strife-ridden and seemingly haunted by lost souls looking for something to give purpose to their lives, or by human groups clashing with neighbors supporting a different set of values.

Turning to the present, much of the Modern World is still in the “last throes” of a decline in the Sensate order of civilization that has dominated Europe and rest of the Western world for close to 700 years. Already clearly apparent to Pitirim Sorokin during the 1930s and continuing through the ‘50s and ‘60s, its value system—that true reality and value are sensory—has been breaking down, accompanied by increases in wars, revolutions, and civil unrest. Sorokin concluded that “this crisis involves all compartments of the Sensate culture and society and is, therefore, the greatest of all the crises of the Western world’s history.”[1] With little evidence that conditions prevailing in his day have materially improved since then, his thesis remains valid for the present. Critical evidence for the decline of the Sensate order
was fully laid out in the 4-volume edition of *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937-41) as well as in an abbreviated, more popular but still comprehensive form in *The Crisis of Our Age* (1941). Aspects of this decline and its consequences were singled out for further discussion in several shorter books written in later years but also based on the *Dynamics*. These include *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* (1950), *S.O.S: The Meaning of Our Crisis* (1951), *The American Sex Revolution* (1956), *Power and Morality* (1959), and *The Basic Trends of Our Times* (1964). In sum, a large part of Sorokin’s work centers on epic sweeps in sociocultural organization taking place throughout history, on factors in their causation, and on their consequences. All of these writings include critiques, prognoses, and advice germane to any discussion of major problems affecting our modern world. They argue that *a lasting solution to our present crisis can only be obtained after a new order takes hold, provided human beings do not destroy themselves in the interim*. Its arrival will bring promise for a more meaningful life because uncertainties of the transition would have passed, and mankind would be entering the initial, most creative phase of the new order.

Sorokin preferred that the succeeding order be an “Integral” one (also called “Idealistic” in the *Dynamics*) whose stabilizing influence tends to lower the level of interpersonal and international conflicts and to open our lives and those of nations to more altruistic behavior. He considered that its “true reality-value is an Infinite Manifold in which the super sensory, rational and sensory forms are inseparable.”[2](P The super-sensory component of this “reality” is the most difficult of the three to conceptualize, but some associate it with “intuition,” others with “divine inspiration,” and still others with “a flash of enlightenment” that many of mankind’s creative geniuses credit with setting them on the paths to their greatest achievements. At present no one can be sure whether or not this “inspiration” can come from outside or results from activity in circuits of the brain even while conscious thought is not taking place.

It is difficult to reconcile this functional concept with present-day neuroscience, except to say that (1) the classic five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell are mediated by specific anatomical structures located on external surfaces of the body, to which may be added certain receptors located on internal surfaces (gastrointestinal tract, lungs) that are also in contact with the outside. (2) The nervous pathways that connect these sensory receptors to circuits in the central nervous system are also well known. (3) Reasoning processes take place within the cerebral cortex, but rather than being limited to neuronal elements confined to a specific structure or location, apparently are more widely dispersed to several regions of the cortex. Many complex phenomena: memory, decision-making,
reasoning, and possibly integration of personality are now thought to involve many loci in the brain linked by complex circuitry. Such activities are not immediately dependent on sensory input, although they may be influenced by it. This topic currently interests many experimental neuroscientists. [3].

(4) Little is known about how super sensory signals might reach the brain. Many instances of mental telepathy have been recorded, for example, by a sister in England claiming to have heard the voice of her brother in India, only to learn weeks later that he had called out to her from his deathbed at the very moment she heard it. [4] Such claims are hard to corroborate. Nowadays neuroscientists frequently make use of “transcranial magnetic stimulation” in experiments to map conduction pathways of neurons in the primary motor cortex, for inducing visual illusions in the occipital (visual) cortex, or to study memory and other cognitive functions in the brain. [5] And it is now recognized that certain individuals can be affected by induced magnetic fields surrounding high-tension power lines. None of these signals are known to be mediated by the usual sensory receptors, and whether synesthesia may play a role in producing some illusions is uncertain.

Power and Morality was written in 1958 when the Cold War and other conflicts made the threat of thermonuclear war seem very real. In today’s world as in 1958 we are still living amidst the dying Sensate order. We face the same old problems as then and, retaining all the destructive tools from that time, the larger nations have added updated military hardware such as heat-seeking missiles carrying conventional or nuclear warheads, greatly improved piloted aircraft, unmanned drones intended for reconnaissance or combat, and so on. They have added specialized artillery capable of launching these missiles from aircraft carriers or silent (nuclear) submarines, as well as ones mounted on special railroad cars where they can be moved quickly once fired, to avoid being targeted. Sophisticated computer-mediated strategies have been developed to intercept email messages, disrupt internet communications, confuse battle orders, or to wreak havoc on electric power grids and other infrastructure in the lands of perceived enemies. Use of suicide bombers is now common; terrorists can surprise the enemy by sending the bombers off to populated places and detonating the explosives strapped on with devastating effects mainly suffered by civilians who happened to be gathered there.

All these things have notably added to warlike capability with nothing new being offered of pacific value, nor is there any light to be seen “at the end of the tunnel.” The updates mentioned serve only to heighten and not lower the chances for conflagration.
because an increase in one side’s military might brings compensatory measures by the opponents provided they can afford them. But large nations usually can. Short of the horrendous destruction of civilian lives that took place during sustained bombing raids in World War II and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, today’s regional wars have tended to center on sites housing large civilian populations and use no effective restraint to check the maiming or utter destruction of the people living there. Indeed today’s styles of warfare have only enormously increased the proportion of civilian victims killed as compared to the numbers in the military. And so present-day conflicts continue as the transitional period drags on. Meanwhile serious common threats like climate change come to the fore and do not receive the attention they deserve.

One consequence of the increased globalization of our world, the expansion of trade, instantaneous intercommunication, and so on, is that trading partners share common business practices for their deals regardless of whatever differences in value systems that these trading nations may hold. But since the West has been under a dying Sensate cloud for decades, it will have spread all over by now and infested the world. In ancient times when countries were oceans apart and travel slow and arduous, it was possible for one nation to retain its Ideational mentality while a distant neighbor held to the Sensate. Beyond the Himalayas, Tibet survived as an Ideational theocracy until 1950 when the Chinese army invaded and eventually drove out the ruling Dalai Lama in 1959. In more recent years other dissenters from the Sensate world have managed, either by withdrawing to some remote jungle, or like the Amish by negotiating a separation from surrounding secular neighbors in order to live a more pastoral life in communities where they can conduct themselves according to their own more religious and Ideational precepts. However, most of today’s belligerents appear to operate in a context of dying Sensate times.

In the case of The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh) there may be a difference in that the rebellion and the fighting supposedly are aimed at establishing a theocratic Caliphate based on Ideational values, and therefore it rejects the Sensate values dominant for so long in the West. Of course their forces show no hesitancy over using the latest Western technology to pursue their war with vengeance and enormous cruelty, as journalist videos have shown. Its youthful fighters, drawn from many parts of the world besides the Middle East and North Africa abhor many values now present in our decaying Western culture; but many escaping to join ISIS from crowded and now crumbling suburban ghettos in France may well have based their resentment more on their apartheid existence than from adherence to Ideational values, being given a poor education with dim prospects
for economic betterment, and excluded from society by a secular nation intolerant of public religious display. They would have made easy prey to ISIS agents. At least a few among these recruits, but possibly more among the better educated and truly devout, might look to the Caliphate’s formation as the dawn of a new Ideational era. And as in the French or Russian Revolutions, the first period (respectively “La Terreur” and Militant Communism) would be the most inhuman and destructive one. Thus, events in the Modern World to some degree reflect struggles over competing value systems. We must remind ourselves that this revolution is being carried out in Africa as well as in the Middle East and perhaps has taken somewhat different forms under different circumstances, being more of a struggle between ISIS Muslims against Christians in Africa whereas in the Middle East it seems principally to be directed against Muslims adhering to different divisions or sects, besides Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities living there. At present Israelis are not under ISIS attack perhaps because Israel at present is only marginally engaged in this Middle Eastern war.

The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as the two world-dominant powers, and a Cold War soon developed with increasing hostility and ever-expanding military budgets until the Soviet Union no longer could afford the cost and collapsed. The United States then became the world-dominant power and has maintained it primarily relying on the idea of “might makes right” and a politico-military strategy to support it. In exchange for taking on the responsibility and expense to defend Europe militarily by forces of its own and its NATO creature, the United States in effect had become the master whose approval was needed before independent policy moves by European member nations could be implemented. With the rapid rise of China, new challenges to American hegemony have appeared, and with Russia attempting to restore itself as a major world power, these moves have further shown that the period of Pax Americana is ending. No longer a matter of the United States versus Russia these days, with China as the most conspicuous challenger, with India rising and political agitation more apparent nearly everywhere—looming threats in the South China Sea, an Arab Spring gone awry, evidence of instability within the European Union now blown up by a Migrant Crisis with refugees mostly from the Middle East but from Africa as well—America no longer credibly appears as the great peacemaker, missionary for the spread of democracy, and guardian of human rights that it had seemed to many believers in the past. At the outset of the 21st century the United States entered wars in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Libya; these already have gone on for years and seem to have no end. They resemble the ones Great Britain had to fight in
imperial days to maintain control over its far-flung empire and in both cases can be taken as evidence of having been overstretched. Moreover, since “9/11,” when the World Trade Center in New York was destroyed, Americans have been shaken from their feeling of security. The unease continues to increase with each new set of terrorist attacks in Europe and more episodic ones at home until most recently, ticket holders at the Los Angeles airport evacuated in panic after hearing loud noises they imagined to be gunshots.

So what does Power and Morality contribute to the discussion? The book allot considerable space to an examination of mankind’s rulers from many nations and historical periods, to characterize them with regard to their physical and mental abilities, moral character, personality traits and other skills needed to govern, as well as, somewhat anecdotally, to judge how well they have succeeded in their role as “guardians of the people.” Heading the list are the absolute rulers—the kings, emperors, despots, dictators, secular heads of great religious organizations, and perhaps ruling oligarchs—following down the scale to the presidents of democracies and republics, to heads of state and city governments, to great business or labor leaders, and below that to various legislators, bureaucrats, and others including political ward bosses and the “godfathers” of criminal gangs, all of whom have aimed to hold people in subjection, respectively the entire population of a nation down to smaller numbers in the lesser domains. The survey mainly speaks in general terms but includes tables of relevant data and specifics about historical figures belonging to these groups. It is generous in its mention of politicians active in Sorokin’s lifetime.

Compared to standards in their subject populations, absolute rulers have included proportionately more bright individuals—exceeding the percentage of “A” students in a college class—but in their number a higher proportion of mentally or morally deficient persons as well, counting feeble-minded heirs in lines of succession. Most of these “guardians” have domineering, highly aggressive, selfish and manipulative personalities compared to those of their subjects. Some ruling activities can be morally uplifting although a larger number of governing tasks tend to demean. And while the former may ennoble a part of the the ruler’s makeup, preponderance of the latter tends to pull it down [6] “No man preoccupied with war activities for years and years can escape the demoralizing and criminalizing effects of this murderous business.” [7] The greater the power of the rulers and the less freely this is tolerated by the people, the tougher and more corrupt the rulers tend to become; but if their power be progressively limited, their criminality tends to diminish as well; and where the populace is well integrated and its moral opinion unified, this may fall to the level prevailing in the population.
In the 16th century Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) wrote approvingly of princes “who have had little regard for good faith, and have been able by astuteness to confuse men’s brains, and who have ultimately overcome those who have made loyalty their foundation.” With their belief that the ends justify the means, they were to rule taking full advantage of a double standard that exempted them from obeying legal and moral codes that were still applied to ordinary citizens. [8] At the time it was still possible to govern a principality in this way provided the ruler understood all the workings of his realm and held a firm grip over them. This no longer is possible because management of nations in our contemporary world requires so much input from the natural and social sciences that our rulers no longer are able to master all the information needed to run them. Quoting Sorokin, “Such a trend portends the eventual withering of the hitherto existing ‘governments of politicians, by politicians, and for politicians’ and their replacement by ‘governments of scientists and experts.”’ [9] For example, proposals for a government to apply a scientific process or device nowadays require expert testimony by physical or biological advisory committees as to their usefulness. Science is morally neutral, however, and with this attitude being shared by many of its practitioners, it would be much better if persons with high ethical and moral standards were authorized to pass on the wisdom of applying scientific discoveries. A person with high moral authority can also affect politicians directly: On the day after hearing Pope Francis address the Congress of the United States on September 24, 2015, a beleaguered John Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, abruptly vacated his leadership position, gave up his seat as representative from Ohio, and withdrew from politics.

**Nuclear disarmament.** Power and Morality’s 1958 plea for total nuclear disarmament was just one of many efforts peace activists began to make soon after the end of World War II. These efforts had greatly increased by 1958 when world powers became interested and Ireland took the first formal steps to launch the process that resulted in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. [10] It was opened for signatures in 1968, came into effect in 1970, and was extended indefinitely in 1995. At present 190 nations have signed on. Compared to the nuclear arsenals held by the United States and the Soviet Union in earlier postwar years, a considerable reduction in the number of bombs has since taken place in both countries, although the combined total is still close to 22,000, and the past quarter century has seen a slowdown in efforts to disarm further. Protracted negotiations with Iran came to resolution in October, 2015, with Iran’s agreement not to attempt to build nuclear weapons in exchange for lifting of the international sanctions against it. One would like to feel confident that the great powers are not beginning to retreat from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty
but some distrust remains. Otherwise there continue to be unresolved questions over regulating the use of bombs possessed by non-signatory countries in India, Israel, Pakistan, as well as North Korea, which withdrew from the treaty in 2003. [11] Other legal issues remain, such as whether NATO or European countries are entitled to use weapons given to them by the United States, or whether Asiatic countries once part of the Soviet Union had the right to retain or to use the nuclear weapons left behind when the Union dissolved. I remember my father saying that historically, criminal and other hostile groups usually take about 25 years to obtain the newest weapons in military arsenals. Organizations other than nations eventually might obtain them and be more willing than the great powers to use them. So the first step, he said, was total nuclear disarmament. Otherwise, and hovering over all, certainty, that in the event of war all bets are off.

What else? Besides repeating a call for complete disarmament from nuclear and other catastrophic agents of modern warfare, what else must one do and where should one start? The obvious answer to the first question is to reduce tensions that exist between, or among, the antagonistic parties. If indications are that a new cold war is developing, then measures need to be taken to calm things down. Most steps to bring this about are obvious and scarcely need mentioning because experienced government leaders know just what to do when they are so inclined.

For an example at an intra-national level, consider the Congress of the United States: Historically it has enacted many important measures with bipartisan support from the Republican and Democratic legislators, but in recent years passage of many bills has been arrested by parliamentary maneuvers to stall its motion through Congress, or simply by preventing House or Senate members from the party in power from “jumping ship” to add enough votes for a good measure to pass. When it matters to them, Democrats or Republicans angling for power use similar means. The result has been “grid lock” with very little accomplished by a “do-nothing Congress.”

During the first term of Barack Obama’s presidency (2008-2012), then Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Republican strategists did all they could to block passage of Obama’s Affordable (Health) Care Act, and two years before Obama’s election to a second term (2012-2016) McConnell stated, “the single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.” [12] Obstruction continues, tempers have risen at little action taken on important social legislation or funding to repair the country’s decaying infrastructure; but the huge National Defense budget receives its customary solid endorsement. And so a “mini cold war” not unlike the international ones has
for some time been waged in the District of Columbia! Washington’s “experienced government leaders” know just what to do, but they are not so inclined. The question is how to bring them to do it.

Whether the conflicts are *intra- or international*, the point is to reduce the tensions, and there are many ways to achieve this, beginning with small gestures up to more concerted ones involving constructive public activism, or by taking advantage of opportunities surprisingly afforded a group of citizens to meet the great leaders and discuss the issues directly with them, or at least try to break the ice. [13]

**Fluctuation between Totalitarianism and Freedom.** Sorokin explains: [14] “Each time when in a given society there appears an important emergency in the form of war, or threat of war, or great famine, or great economic depression, or devastating epidemic, or anarchy, unrest and revolution, or other big emergency, the amount and severity of the governmental regimentation invariably increase, and the society’s economy, political regime, way of life, and ideologies experience a totalitarian conversion; and the greater the emergency the greater the totalitarian conversion. And vice versa: each time when in a society its important emergency decreases, the amount and severity of its governmental regimentation begins to decrease and the society’s economic, political, ideological, and cultural systems undergo a detotalitarian reconversion towards a less regimented and more free way of life, and the greater the decrease of the emergency, the greater the free reconversion.” He adds that “these fluctuations depend little upon the wishes of the government and take place as regularly as mercury fluctuations in a thermometer in accordance with the factor of temperature. [15]

**Getting to know one better.** It is an old truth that once people get to know one another and see how much they have in common, especially their humanity, friendships begin to develop. Sorokin’s *Russia and the United States* (1944) and its follow-up from 1961 [16] teach us that a first step in reducing tensions between two conflicting nations can result from efforts by the people to discover to what degree their institutions and cherished values are shared. A convergence of these institutions and values has indeed been going on between Russia and the United States from the time of the czars. He showed that neither of these two countries, the first one described (after October, 1917) as “Communist” and the second “Capitalist,” can be so categorized today but have been losing their specific features and borrowing from each other since the 1930s, so that many aspects of their culture, social institutions, systems of values, and ways of life are now shared. The survey covered (1) natural sciences and technology, (2) social sciences and the humanities, (3) philosophy, (4)
ethics and criminal law, (5) education, (6) sports and recreation, (7) the fine arts, (8) religion, (9) the family and marriage, (10) the economic system, (11) social relationships, and (12) political systems.

Sorokin considered the natural sciences about equally advanced in both countries and that there no longer existed a clear contrast between the materialistic philosophy advocated during early Communist days and the predominant non-materialistic ones then espoused in the United States and Western Europe, since the former had been retreating from Russia the while it was advancing in the West. The political systems had become more alike, but this meant sharing newly-acquired characteristics, some good and some bad. Regarding the economy, during the Soviet period when the comparisons were being made, a corporate economy did not exist in Russia, but the nationalized industry was divided into big divisions like steel, oil, construction, and so on, each headed by a board of directors much like those in American corporations, only the directors were appointed by the government and not by shareholders. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union these industries were privatized, and the newly formed corporations became similar to corporations all over the world and like them controlled by an economic elite. As for religion, since that time the Russian Orthodox Church has experienced a remarkable resurgence, most dramatically in the years following the Soviet collapse, with many new churches being built, decrepit old ones meticulously restored, and clear support by a large part of the population plain to see, in contrast to the Western world where overall church attendance has sharply declined.

Summing up, Sorokin found that Russia and the United States, and by extension the West, have all been converging to an intermediate type of sociocultural order, “neither Communist nor Capitalistic, neither Totalitarian nor Democratic, neither Materialistic nor Idealistic, neither totally Religious or Atheistic-Agnostic, neither too criminal nor too saintly.” [17] In a “Sensate-to-Ideational” continuum this can be understood as a Mixed type, one that supports an eclectic set of values but lacks the perfect unity of the “Integral” cultural, social, and personal ones he so admired.

**Practical application in “realistic” politics.** An appreciation of the worthiness of Sorokin’s analysis as well as cogent advice from Andrei Sakharov apparently underlay Mikhail Gorbachov’s effort to achieve rapprochement and “perestroika” with the United States and Europe during President Ronald Reagan’s time in office. [18] The existence of many commonly-shared values between two nearly equal world powers was seen as the basis for reducing international tensions and increasing mutual respect. Sorokin’s recommendations are still being kept in mind in Moscow today. [19] As yet comparable...
recognition has not been given them by the State Department in Washington, although his works form part of a course in sociological theory for students at the United States Military Academy at West Point. [20] Regarding other conflicts, one should search for similar openings where people in opposing camps could see the others as not too different from themselves. If only they’d look!

Simple remedies. (1) Recognition of shared basic values serves as a step to pacification. As such this can be broadly applied to other conflicts now occurring all over the world and not just to Russo-American hostilities of the past or to the current threat of a resurgent Cold War. Regarding present-day cooling of relations between the United States and Russia, I believe that heated rhetoric by either side does little to mitigate matters. From a vantage point in the United States, my personal impression is that most of the American public knows very little about the Russians and the distinctively different nationals that live in the same land. [21] We are assailed by comments from unrepentant Cold War politicians far more than from moderate voices because statements by the former are then picked up and uncritically repeated by leading news media analysts, whereas few alternative views are given much heed, and the greater part of air time is given over to obsessive coverage over a narrow range of sociocultural topics, not unimportant of themselves, but overfamiliar from much repetition at the expense of other issues. Accordingly there is an “information gap” to fill here, whatever may exist in Russia.

(2) Stronger voices are needed to address current problems that lead to strife and terrorist attacks. Nearly everyone remembers Mahatma Gandhi whose powerful voice, bolstered by his moral strength and personal example, was used to bring about liberation of India from the colonial British Empire. One also remembers Nelson Mandela, and in Myanmar (Burma) one also thinks of Aung San Suu Kyi and her persistent, courageous stances against the ruling junta. Once again, a single strong voice can be enormously effective. But turning to the Middle East, many are still looking for mainstream representatives of the Muslim faith(s) to become more activist in their speech and actions to counteract ISIS and the revulsion that rises from news of their latest atrocities. In sum, it is especially important today to have the “good” leaders and people in a so-called “community” speak out courageously against those among them who are doing wrong.

With his activist voice, Pitirim Sorokin rarely hesitated to express his opinion about world affairs. He was always on the lookout for news and information from very wide sources to help him become better informed, even to skimming over publications heavily laced with propaganda to see what was being said there.
(3) A variety of initiatives aimed at increasing trade, small-scale joint scientific ventures, and cultural exchanges are tried-and-true actions that tend to increase mutual trust, and if relations between nations have soured these may again be relied on to restore them. [22] Success with these should in turn lead to cooperation in larger-scaled joint enterprises. Epidemics of human disease and other scourges of humanity have often brought responses from many nations and non-governmental organizations. Those interested in the peaceful exploration of space have for years been able to maintain a large-scale program that with help through diplomatic channels has brought in many engineers and astronauts from several nations. At present privately funded commercial space programs have begun to appear as well. Cooperative enterprises of these kinds are confidence-building measures for world peace. There is always danger, however, that if shadows of distrust should arise among the partners, funding by one or more of them might be diverted to specifically military space projects and closed to the now-potential enemies.

Threats of truly catastrophic magnitude—of an “Invaders from Mars” type—that awaken the fears of all humankind would naturally provide the most effective of all incentives for nations to cast aside their customary differences and join all-out efforts to oppose the challenge. Forces that threaten humanity’s survival, such as geophysical events like climate change, or something else from some conceivable outside source, would require mankind to take resolute action to overcome them, which if successful would surely lead to a long stretch for recuperation and world peace.

If progress is made using these simple remedies we will have already acquired some of the new values of the coming era and can use these to move closer to the establishment of an ideal kind of government.

**Government by scientists, sages and saints.** Power and Morality was not intended to present a completed plan for establishing an ideal type of government, naming all its departments and specifying how each must interact with all the others. Rather it described historical trends as seen by a practiced eye and how these were leading away from the fin de siècle remains of Sensate culture towards a fresher, more settled Integral order where the government largely would reflect its resurgent values. It would have abandoned the Machiavellian character still prevalent in the governments of today, whose familiar slogan, “peace through power” moved Sorokin to remark that “These rulers seem to be still ignorant of the well-tested verities that hate generates hate and love begets love; that aggression and fraud breed aggression and fraud; and that a policy of war is answered by war.” [23] So, accession of the better form of government was still some years away.
Qualifications necessary for the new governments included: “First, a growing requirement for higher intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge among the top-rulers of the governments; second, an increasing requirement for supreme moral integrity, almost saintliness, in the ranks of the governing elite; third a developing pressure for the replacement of their [the present-day governments’] tribal standpoint by the universal standpoint of mankind as a whole.” [24] The top rulers he saw in 1958 had not been adequately trained for their powerful positions and were executing policies they did not understand, and their successors were being hard pressed to keep abreast of new scientific and technical developments and to try to devise new executive policies and diplomatic moves to take them into account.

The amorality of science and the moral neutrality of many (but not all) scientists are the main reasons why Sorokin believed that persons of high moral integrity and great human sympathy were essential to include in these new governments. The persons he had in mind were not experts in theology, nor persons high in religious hierarchies but rather “apostles of love” who know how to connect with humanity. These leaders would guide governments not only from within but also serve outside like Gandhi as living examples of heroic morality, as educators and creators of new moral values, and as individuals easily able to reach out to people and inspire them to improve their own lives. Indeed, to repeat a point made earlier, the stronger the population holds to higher standards of moral conduct, the more likely the government will follow along.

Sorokin also recommended moving away from a “tribal” outlook to a more “universal” one that reflects the interdependence of humanity today. The tribal outlook, or “my country right or wrong,” he declared had been appropriate when people knew mainly their own group and little about any others, but this had changed. With a trend toward globalization spread far more widely today than in 1958, there is now all the more reason to consider mankind “as one unified, interdependent whole.” [25]
Abstract. Power and Morality was written as the Cold War was building toward its height, at a time when the world was dominated by two great nuclear powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, both of which Sorokin knew well. Collapse of the Soviet system in Russia brought with it a big change in the familiar world order. The United States was left alone on the top, and smaller states were abandoned largely to their own devices. The result has been the welter of vicious local and regional conflicts and the widespread sense of instability so familiar to us today. The present situation is now further complicated by the increasing unwillingness of states large and small to accept US hegemony and over all, of course, hangs the continuing threat of nuclear Armageddon. Sorokin’s analysis was substantially based on earlier comprehensive studies showing that the sociocultural world we inhabit reflects the set of values we accept, whether predominantly materialistic (Sensate order) or predominantly other-worldly (Ideational order). When the “creative spring”of the accepted order is over, a period of instability sets in marked by sociocultural disorder and political strife until mankind adopts a new set of values, and with its accession, reassurance returns and a new creative period begins. Sorokin concluded that political instability during much of the 20th century marked passage through the declining phase of the Sensate order, and a glance at recent political events shows little amelioration, with mankind still adrift and our “guardian” governments still in a Machiavellian mode but now highly dependent on technology for their operation. Who shall guard the guardians? Science and technology being morally neutral, governments should be reconfigured to authorize persons of high moral and ethical standards to weigh in on important political decisions.

If broad understanding and mutual trust could only be achieved among the US and emerging (China, India) and re-emergent (Russia, European Union) powers, then a new stable global order will evolve, and many of the world’s pressing problems, including conflicts between the smaller states, might be more easily resolved. In looking at today’s world, therefore it seems that Sorokin’s analyses and many of his proposed corrective measures are as valid now as when he first advanced them in the middle of the last century.

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Information about the author:
Sergei Pitirimovitch Sorokin
Director, The Pitirim A. Sorokin Foundation, Inc.
8 Cliff Street, Winchester, Massachusetts, United States of America

Academic degrees:

A.B. magna cum laude, Harvard University

M.D. cum laude et thesi propria admiserunt, Harvard Medical School

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“Integral” leadership

Footnotes:

[1] (Sorokin, Pitirim A, and Lunden, Walter A. Power and Morality, Who Shall Guard the Guardians? Boston, Porter Sargent Publisher 1959; henceforth cited as P&M, p.117. Co-author Walter Lunden (1899-1990) did graduate work at the University of Minnesota while Sorokin taught there and received a Ph.D. from Harvard (1934) while Sorokin was Chairman of its Department of Sociology. Lunden was an expert in criminology. Quotations from this work are so characteristic of my father that they have been attributed to him rather than to the two authors.)

[2] (P&M, p 120.)

[3] (Andreasen, NC, Ramchandran.K. Dialogues Clin Neurosci. 14(1): 49-54, 2012. These authors found that both gifted artists and scientists have association cortices that respond similarly to functional magnetic resonance imaging. Both show preponderance of activation in brain circuits involved in higher-order socioaffective processing, with “Random Episodic Silent Thought” the default mode.)


[6] (Bob Woodward, The Last of the President’s Men, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2015. The most imperialistic of US presidents, Richard Nixon’s “finest moment as president was surely the opening to China.” p 92. But “the hating was at Nixon’s center…This hate, the duplicity, the incessant plotting had become the engine of his presidency.” p 177.)

[7] (P&M, p 40.)

[9] (P&M, p 162.)
[10] (gloss from Wikipedia, 2016.)
[11] (South Sudan also did not sign but has no bombs.)
[12] (National Journal, October 23, 2010.)
[13] (A group of eleven 2016 graduates of Eton College were given an hour’s private audience by Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin towards the end of August, 2016. They had initiated the meeting, apparently discussed world affairs with him, and in turn answered Putin’s inquiries about their prestigious school from which 19 British Prime Ministers have graduated. One of the students, David Wei, remarked, “Guys, we truly gave Putin a deep impression of us and he responded by showing us his human face.”)
[15] (Passage of the U.S.A. Patriot Act, the imposition of a General State of Emergency in France, and the severe curtailing of democracy in Turkey by President Erdogan’s government all represent “totalitarian conversions.”)
[17] (Mutual Convergence, p 46.)
[18] (Lukyanov, F. The Lost Twenty-Five Years: Why no new order has been built since the end of the Cold War. Global Brief Magazine, Feb. 19, 2016.)
[19] (Lavrov, S. Russia’s Foreign Policy: Historical Background.” Russia in Global Affairs magazine, March 3, 2016.)
[20] (personal communication from Edward Tiryakian, May 9, 2016. A former student, Capt. Jessica Dawson, teaches the course.)
[21] (After the terrorist bombings at the Boston Marathon Race on April 15, 2013, however, they had certainly become aware of Chechens from the Caucasus.)
[22] (Speaking about renewing bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: “Restoring the trust to its former state is too abstract a category. Everything will depend on our approach to cooperation and contacts...how we are going to trade with each other...build things together, implement joint investment projects and, largely, on how we will cooperate on the Syria peace process.” http://sputniknews.com/politics/20160722/10433468194/lavrov-t…)
[23] (P&M, p 191.)
[24] (P&M, p 160.)
[25] (P&M, p 172.)