Emiliana MANGONE, *Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revisiting the Work of Pitirim A. Sorokin*

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REFERENCES

Emiliana MANGONE, 2018, *Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revisiting the Work of Pitirim A. Sorokin*, Cham, Springer International Publishing AG, 90 p.

- 1 Emiliana Mangone's book, *Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revisiting the Work of Pitirim A. Sorokin*, is a part of an ambitious project. As noted by its editors, Giuseppina Marsico and Jaan Valsiner, the SpringerBriefs in Psychology and Cultural Developmental Science "aims at integrating knowledge from many fields in a synthesis of general science of Cultural Psychology as a new science of the human being" (p.II). Given the growing dissatisfaction of international academic communities within the social and humanistic sciences, with their rigid and counter-productive self-referential practices of intra-disciplinary communication, the integrative and cross-disciplinary attempt by Mangone and the editors in chief of the Book Series is eminently relevant. What is also noteworthy is the synthetic and pedagogical effort deployed in the book, for Mangone has summarized an immense wealth of information in just under 100 pages.
- 2 For sociologists elaborating on Pitirim Sorokin's ideas, it may seem questionable that his vast intellectual heritage can serve as a proper foundation for promoting the arguably "new science" of Cultural Psychology. Sorokin, one of the most widely published sociologists in the world, would probably suggest that sociology, as "a generalizing science of sociocultural phenomena viewed in their generic forms, types, and manifold interconnections" (1962, p.16), should be the pivot and center for renovating social and humanistic knowledge. However, instead of using a single disciplinary perspective (sociology or cultural psychology), Mangone succeeds in

persuading the reader to look at Sorokin from different angles—that of the dialogue between different disciplines as sociology and cultural psychology. Mangone’s work is notable (and original) when compared to the extant contemporary literature on Sorokin. Though declaring herself as a sociologist (p.1), she starts not from the “mainstream” discourse on Sorokin in contemporary sociology but rather from a wider perspective, drawing on a broader understanding of social theory. She neither pays much attention to the writings by Lawrence T. Nichols (“Science, Politics, and Moral Activism”, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 35-2, 1999, p.139-155; “Sorokin as Lifelong Russian Intellectual”, *The American Sociologist*, 43-4, 2012, p.374-405) or Vincent Jeffries (“The Integral Paradigm”, *The American Sociologist*, 30-4, 1999, p.36-55; “Pitirim A. Sorokin’s Integralism and Public Sociology”, in Lawrence T. Nichols (dir), *Public Sociology. The Contemporary Debate*, Oxford, Routledge, 2017, p.155-184) nor does she consider other scholars who made significant efforts to promote Sorokin’s ideas in various domains of disciplinary discourses and practices (see Pavel Sorokin, “Vision and Mission of Sociology: Learning from the Russian Historical Experience”, *The American Sociologist*, 48-2, 2017, p.135-171, and “The Ethical Challenge for Sociology in the Face of Global Modernity”, *The American Sociologist*, 49-3, 2018, p.414-433). However, Mangone’s approach is absolutely justified by its originality and creativeness. The normative stand of other contemporary followers of Sorokin, with its focus on the issues solidarity and loving kindness (Nichols, Jeffries, Sorokin and others) is not of primary interest for the author. Mangone concentrates on the nature of science itself and digs deep in the epistemological and methodological issues of social and humanistic knowledge. Following Sorokin (but on her own terms and interpretations) Mangone asks truly fundamental questions. What are the boundaries of sociology? How does it relate to other disciplines? What is knowledge? What are its core elements? What are the connections between them? What is society? What is culture? What is personality? How do they relate to one another? In her analysis of each of these questions, Mangone carefully convinces the reader that the perspective of cultural psychology probably is the most logical and natural continuation to give to Sorokin’s social theory in the 21st century.

- 3 The structure of the book is built around eight chapters: after the prologue (chap. 1), which explains the motivation for the whole endeavor, chapter 2 focuses on sociology—the discipline central for Sorokin—and tries to build a comprehensive vision of this science as well as of its connections with other branches of social and humanistic knowledge. Insightfully, Mangone manages to establish a conceptual framework that not only colorfully highlights and illustrates the core ideas of Sorokin—but that also is highly valuable for the discussions relative to the difficulties in the current development of sociology and its neighboring disciplines. Most importantly, Mangone offers a persuasive argument for interdisciplinary collaboration given the necessity of combining the knowledge of culture with that of the individual—possibly two of the most neglected objects in the academic world presently. Chapter 3 focuses on the pivot of Sorokin’s theoretical heritage—Integralism, linking together Sorokin’s indivisible sociocultural trinity: Society, Culture, and Personality. The three subsequent chapters address each of these elements in more detail. The primary focus of the third chapter is on a particular aspect of Sorokin’s Integralism: the integral theory of knowledge. It should be noted that for Sorokin, sociology was not only one of the disciplines responsible for the understanding of what is human and what is social (along with psychology and others disciplines) but the “general” social science. It means that

sociology does not aim at shedding light on the unique characteristics of particular social contexts and individuals (like, ethnography, for instance), but intends to reveal the universal laws and principles of sociocultural reality.

- 4 However, Mangone still finds methodological and epistemological connections between sociology and cultural psychology that support her main argument: the quest for the renewal of social knowledge should put greater emphasis on the dynamic nature of society, culture and personality—each being seen as an open system where internal and external factors operate in complex relations. Moreover, this approach finds a solid foundation in Sorokin's ideas. From a sociological perspective, one of Sorokin's greatest contributions is the idea that society cannot be understood independently of culture and personality (the latter being conceived as an integrated whole made of body, mind and soul). Mangone elaborates on this argument further and links Sorokin's Integralism to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman's theory of social constructionism (*The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York, Penguin Books, 1966). Thus, she achieves two important things: first, she links Sorokin directly to one of the most influential paradigms in the social sciences of the 20th century, which continue to frame the mindset of many academic communities worldwide; second, she sets the discussion about the intellectual legacy of Sorokin in the context of the most “psychologically friendly” theoretical perspective in social sciences: social constructionism. Thereby, Mangone not only demonstrates the relevance of Sorokin for present theoretical and practical issues but also promotes an innovative interdisciplinary perspective that shows how a psychologically-interpreted sociology may become one of the cornerstones of a new integral science—cultural psychology.
- 5 The fourth chapter elaborates on the first element of Sorokin's indivisible trinity—society. Mangone carefully describes his theoretical vision and points to some “paradoxes” of the present social world that Sorokin's theory helps to grasp. Mangone summarizes Sorokin's approach to society very much in line with Berger and Luckman's theory: “society cannot exist ‘beyond’ individuals and ‘independently’ from them, but only as a system of interacting units in the ‘world of everyday life’» (p.43). Mangone fully investigates the societal part of the integral trinity (society, culture and personality) and offers a “representation of the relationships linked to the institutional and subjective dimensions” (p.46). It is not only a theoretical and methodological interpretation of Sorokin; it is also a rather unique elaboration inspired by Sorokin's Integralism, as well as Berger and Luckman's constructionism and some other sources. Her audacious and innovative theoretical approach allows Mangone to offer a new view of contemporary society and its paradoxes—focusing mostly on the global/local nexus and the problems of freedom, equality and related issue of rationality. Especially valuable, in my view, are her thoughts on Amartya Sen's capability approach and the way Sorokin's understanding of freedom and intuition is relevant to Sen's ideas.
- 6 The fifth chapter focuses on Culture—and again not merely in a “pure theory” style, but with strong problem-oriented approach focused on the most acute issues of the day. Mangone disagrees with the Durkheimian idea “that cultural objects [cultural systems] are an exclusive product of society (p.61). It leads her to question the role of culture in “identifying and selecting social problems” (*idem*). The sixth chapter explores the domain of personality. Given the cultural psychology perspective adopted by Mangone, this chapter is probably the most central of the book. Drawing on Sorokin's theory of

personality, Mangone provides clear arguments for its relevance (for instance, concerning the various types of consciousness) and even suggests several further steps (for example, through the elaboration of the distinction between *doing* and *being*). Again, it is likely that the main contribution here consists in linking Sorokin's legacy to present practical problems—in this instance, the problem of identity (p.65). In the seventh chapter, Mangone directly addresses the problem of Creative Altruism (the most widely discussed topic in current debates concerning Sorokin's heritage); however, unlike other scholars, she does not call for a direct implementation of Sorokin's ideas. She rather invites us to go “beyond Sorokin” towards “the ethics of responsibility”. The eighth chapter is an epilogue: there, Mangone remains as original as she was previously and suggests “no end to any discourse on Sorokin and the integral method” (p.83). She urges us “to emphasize [...] a condition of dynamism, of ‘openness’ among the disciplines falling under the label of humanities and social sciences” (p.83). Then Mangone goes on straight to promote her vision of “Integral Social Sciences” illustrated by an analytical scheme (p.84).

- 7 To conclude, Mangone's attempt opens bright perspectives for future works that would aim at renewing behavioral, social and humanitarian knowledge, drawing on Sorokin's theoretical, methodological and empirical legacy. Sorokin is quite relevant here because he did not try to promote the particular vision of a concrete discipline (like, for example, Émile Durkheim). Sorokin's main concern bore on the holistic understanding (and improvement) of the world—and for this task, he relied on the resources of many disciplines. Sorokin's “trans-disciplinary” orientation could very well serve as a proper perspective for building a new integrative behavioral, psychological and social science. Thanks to Mangone, this process is likely to be quicker.

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