

“Confirm Thy Soul in Self-Control, Thy Liberty in Law”¹: New Insights into Pitirim Sorokin’s American Sex Revolution

Paul E. Kerry

THE DISTINGUISHED HARVARD SOCIOLOGIST Pitirim Sorokin published a remarkable book, *The American Sex Revolution*, in 1956.² It was ignored by most in the social science profession, one reviewer calling it “an explosive little volume”³ and another “scalding,” “censorious,” and “scolding.”⁴ Some thought that Sorokin was a hysterical⁵ and prudish ivory tower Cassandra, and even mocked his use of the phrase “sex addiction,”⁶ which has now of course become commonplace. More recently the book has been called “apocalyptic,” “opinionated,” and “sparsely documented.”⁷

-
1. Katherine Lee Bates, *America the Beautiful and Other Poems* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1911). I thank Megan Kearney (Keble College, Oxford) for her helpful suggestions in a draft of this paper.
 2. Pitirim Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956), hereafter cited as ASR.
 3. “Sensate Society and Catholic Opinion,” editorial in *American Magazine*, February 9, 1957: 519-20 (at 519).
 4. M.J.V., review of *The American Sex Revolution* by Pitirim Sorokin, *Sociology and Social Research* 1957-1958, 42: 133.
 5. Albert Ellis, review of *The American Sex Revolution* by Pitirim Sorokin, *Marriage and Family Living* 19.3 (August 1957): 305-6.
 6. David Cort, “Sex Scares the Professor,” *The Nation*, March 23, 1957: 255-6 (at 256). There were also positive reviews. Cf. Frank S. Meyer, review of *The American Sex Revolution* by Pitirim A. Sorokin, *National Review*, April 20, 1957: 385; Joseph L. Lennon, O.P., review of *The American Sex Revolution* by Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 19.2 (June 1958): 154-5.
 7. Suzanne G. Frayser and Thomas J. Whitby, *Studies in Human Sexuality. A Selected Guide*

Over time *American Sex Revolution* has been neglected, and although several of Sorokin's other works have been reprinted, this one has languished. It was in fact not meant to be a technical work of scholarship, but to exemplify theories contained in Sorokin's major writings, including *Social and Cultural Dynamics*,⁸ *The Crisis of Our Age*,⁹ and *Man and Society in Calamity*.¹⁰ Sorokin first published his ideas in a periodical, *This Week*, in a 1954 article, "The Case Against Sex Freedom," and perhaps the book's popular genesis made it less palpable to the scholarly community.¹¹ The arguments in *American Sex Revolution* go well beyond his magazine piece. *American Sex Revolution* is meant to pass on the practical wisdom and insight that Sorokin believed could be understood in its own right, through common sense, as well as through the lens of the socio-cultural theories propounded in his major works.

The purpose here is to reconsider the premises on which Sorokin's arguments about sexual ethics are based, the nature of marriage, and the nature of the human-divine relationship, as well as to dig deeper into and draw out overlooked philosophical assumptions that undergird Sorokin's thinking in *American Sex Revolution*. These include his definition of marriage, a foundational element upon which many of the book's insights are predicated, including what he calls the "marriage-family school"; his trenchant analysis of the personal and social costs of sex addiction; the meaning of his view of what it means to be human and the origins of human dignity; and his call for the establishment of "noble patterns of total love" in marriage, family life, and culture.

A few scholars since its publication have taken account of *American Sex Revolution*, including Sorokin's latest biographer, Barry V. Johnston,

(Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1995), 32.

8. Pitirim Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics. A Study of the Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law, and Social Relationships*, revised and abridged in one volume by the author, with a new Introduction by Michel P. Richard (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010). Quotations throughout are from this readily available edition, published in 1957, condensed from the original four-volume edition published between 1937-1941.
9. Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1992 [1941]). Sorokin delivered the Harvard University Lowell Lectures in 1941 and these became *The Crisis of Our Age*.
10. Pitirim Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010 [1942]).
11. Pitirim Sorokin, "The Case Against Sex Freedom," *This Week*, January 3, 1954: 7, 16.

who explains the book's thesis:

In *Sex Revolution* Sorokin argues that any significant change in the patterns of courtship; marriage; premarital, marital, and extramarital sexual relationships; and care of children would have significant consequences for society. Following J.D. Unwin's *Sex and Culture*, Sorokin asserts that societies tend to blossom, be creative, and grow when the sexual mores favor exclusivity, monogamy, fidelity, responsibility, and family stability. Conversely, when mores encourage permissiveness, sexual exploration, serial monogamy, easy divorce, and brief changeable family relationships (particularly with children), then societies become unstable and alienating, and they decline. His thesis was that America was undergoing a sexual revolution that threatened the continued moral growth and vitality of our culture. As evidence he cites the increasing rates of divorce and desertion, the growth of single-parent households, a decline in fertility, poor adjustment to and rising unhappiness with marriage, less attention to children, more adultery and infidelity, increasing promiscuity and illegitimate births, exploding numbers of sex crimes, and a growing preoccupation with sex. These changes in primary relationships had been accompanied by a growing sexualization of American culture, media, art, literature, music, and political life.¹²

One of the most incisive readings of *American Sex Revolution* is given by Russel K. Nieli.¹³ He captures both Sorokin's macrocosmic philosophy of history at work, as well as his microcosmic analysis of the individual. Sorokin is unsettled about both realms and recognizes their interdependence. As individuals and families weaken, societies become debilitated; as cultures weaken, crucial external cultural guideposts disintegrate or become delegitimated that would otherwise assist persons and families in their quest for self-mastery and self-development.¹⁴

Nieli spotted the breadth of Sorokin's contention over several of his

12. Barry V. Johnston, *Pitirim A. Sorokin: An Intellectual Biography* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 218.

13. Russell K. Nieli, "Critic of the Sensate Culture: Rediscovering the Genius of Pitirim Sorokin," *Political Science Reviewer* 35.1 (Fall 2000): 264-379.

14. Sorokin's view of this self-development is close to the Goethean meaning of *Bildung*.

major works that sexual libertinism compromises a “culture’s creative élan”; he points out that Sorokin “shows unmistakably that any society given over to sex obsession, such as ancient Greece and Rome in their later stages, loses the self-discipline, sensitivity, sense of purpose, and dedication to a demanding task that is necessary for any kind of great creative achievement.”¹⁵ This holds true not only in aesthetic, religious, and moral areas, but also in economic growth: “When a sex obsession grips an entire society, according to Sorokin, it not only loses its artistic creativity, but it also becomes devitalized in many other areas of life, including eventually the economic realm.”¹⁶ These crucial connections are emphasized throughout Sorokin’s oeuvre in the 1940s and 1950s.

Sorokin also counters and repudiates the notion that creativity in all fields of the arts are benefitted by sexual permissiveness:

Mere sex is neither a sufficient nor an advantageous condition for writing a poem, composing a piece of music, painting a picture, or achieving any other significant goal. . . . Any notable achievement requires long training, persistent labor, and concentration. . . . [W]hen an individual lives in order to satiate his passion, he has neither the time, nor the energy, nor the power of concentration necessary for the development of his creative potential.¹⁷

These parts of *American Sex Revolution* have been identified as central to Sorokin’s concerns. The aim here, however, is to dig deeper into and draw out overlooked philosophical assumptions that undergird Sorokin’s thinking in *American Sex Revolution*. Sorokin’s great project in his four-volume *Social & Cultural Dynamics* was to engage a number of research assistants to gather two and a half millennia of historical data, mainly from Europe, that involved tracing the arts, religious movements, aristocratic families, legal and ethical ideas, and so forth to be able to observe what patterns emerged. Johnston incisively concluded that “*Dynamics* is

15. Nieli, “Critic of the Sensate Culture,” 268-69.

16. *Ibid.*, 269. See the research of W. Bradford Wilcox, Robert Lerman, and Joseph Price on the question of how strong families contribute to prosperous states: <http://www.aei.org/publication/strong-families-prosperous-states/>.

17. *ASR*, 72.

a philosophy of history that becomes cast as a quantitative study of social change."¹⁸ Sorokin's work is an "analysis of Western civilization" intending to give an "image of the future."¹⁹ It contained his epistemology, that "truth came in three forms: the truths of faith, reason, and the senses."²⁰ This was of course a major challenge to prevailing notions in social science disciplines. *Social & Cultural Dynamics* represented Sorokin's positive contribution to the social sciences in that it attempted to embody his call, in Johnston's estimation, that the "social disciplines must abandon the insane ambition to be a natural science and reclaim their heritage. That is, they must develop principles and methods better suited to the study of human behavior. This required a fundamental revision in their systems of truth and knowledge."²¹

Michel P. Richard summarizes that what arose from this mammoth undertaking was

a pattern of recurrent fluctuation between what [Sorokin] calls "sensate" and "ideational" value-systems. During a sensate period all aspects of life are dominated by a materialistic world view, and economic and scientific activities flourish, particularly during the "active" sensate phase. During the "passive" phase hedonistic values prevail, and in the final "cynical" stage the sensate mentality negates everything including itself. Ideational periods, in contrast, are spiritually oriented, and social relationships are familistic rather than contractual. Ideational periods move from the "ascetic" to the "active" (expansionistic) mentality, but finally degenerate into "fideism" (a desperate will to believe).²²

When a civilization moves between these two "supersystems," there is on occasion an integrated period that Sorokin calls "idealistic," a "harmonious combination of the best elements of the two supersystems; a

18. Johnston, *Intellectual Biography*, 127.

19. *Ibid.*, 126.

20. *Ibid.*, 127.

21. *Ibid.*, 141

22. Michel (Introduction), *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, viii and see Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, 679-80.

blend of faith, reason, and empiricism.”²³ Johnston proposes that Sorokin held that society ought to pursue Integral truth, of the kind

that combines the empirical truths of the senses; the rational truths of reason; and the superrational truths of faith. Integral truth gives us a more complete and valid grasp of reality. In Integral philosophy Sorokin brought together the religious, scientific, and rational aspects of culture. Cultures change out of a need for a more adequate knowledge to deal with life’s major questions. Sensate knowledge gives us science, technology, and physical comfort but tells us little of the spirit. The truths of faith address those issues but leave us relatively helpless in the face of nature. As each type of culture tries to provide what is missing the culture changes. Integralism, however, binds the truth of science, reason, and intuition into a comprehensive whole.²⁴

What interests us here, however, is not the supersystems as such, but what civilizations and societies experience during transition periods, particularly in marriage and family culture. Michel notes that in Sorokin’s model “there is a stormy period of transition marked by increases in the intensity and magnitude of wars and revolutions, and by general social disorganization (increasing rates of crime and mental illness, breakdown in family structure, *etc.*)” It is also during such transitional periods that “violence and egoistic behavior increase, but there is a counterbalancing increase in altruistic behavior (love, self-sacrifice, and mutual aid). At the same time, government becomes increasingly coercive during these periods.”²⁵ Sorokin’s theories indicated that America (and Europe) were in the midst of just such a transition. Yet, Sorokin does not analyze in detail in his *Social & Cultural Dynamics* how such supersystemic movements affect social relationships. He categorizes these relationships in three groups: familistic, contractual, and compulsory.²⁶ Still less does he explain what happens to these kinds of relationships as civilizations transition between the two supersystems.

23. *Ibid.*, ix (footnote).

24. Johnston, *Intellectual Biography*, 145. See Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, 24-39 and 683-5.

25. Michel (Introduction), *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, ix.

26. Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, 445-73.

In *Man and Society in Calamity* (1942), Sorokin continued the closing thesis of *Social & Cultural Dynamics*,²⁷ namely, that catastrophes and spiritual renewal may be causally related. Sorokin's catastrophe thesis could lead one to conclude that Sorokin was a Spenglerian pessimist, but this is not the case. Johnston contends that "almost all fail to see that what began as a twenty-five-hundred-year study of social order and change became a theory for social action and reform. The ideas developed in *Dynamics* culminate in a sociology of altruistic action whose goal was the reconstruction of society."²⁸ Sorokin's aim would become clearer when in 1949 he founded and directed the Harvard Center for Creative Altruism at Harvard University and published his theory in *The Ways and Power of Love* (1954),²⁹ a work designed to show how society could be socially renewed and reconstructed through the active power of altruistic love.

Sorokin remained deeply perturbed about a destructive force that could impair the wellsprings of altruistic love by eroding the institutions of religion and the family.³⁰ It was in these twin and self-reinforcing institutions—family and religion—that the power of love could be exemplified, nurtured, taught, and passed on. Now ensconced as the director of the new Harvard center, Sorokin in 1954 took aim at what he perceived to be a growing pestilential power that could disintegrate the family itself.³¹ As he examined the evidence of mounting divorce, desertion, and illegitimacy, as well as increasing premarital and extramarital sexual activity,³² he observed what he called the "sexualization of American culture" in literature, painting, sculpture, music, stage, movies, television,

27. *Ibid.*, 701-2

28. Johnston, *Intellectual Biography*, 128

29. Pitirim Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love. Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, with an introduction by Stephen G. Post (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002 [1954]).

30. Johnston, *Intellectual Biography*, 182.

31. Sorokin's examination supports the recent "double helix" analysis of Mary Eberstadt, namely, that changes in family life (and she examines several categories) have a profound impact on how faith is lived out. Cf. Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Press, 2013).

32. ASR, 13-14.

radio, and popular press.³³ Moreover, he detected the obsession of social science with “sexological theories” and noted that “Freudian ideology” had seeped into education and religious communities; in short, he could see that a revolution in the sexual ethics, values, mores, and laws of the nation was taking place, and in particular a redefinition of the purpose of marriage was underway. He was one of only a few, perhaps the first,³⁴ to observe the trends and identify a sexual revolution. Marriage was increasingly defined as “an institution established mainly or only for the satisfaction of the sex drive.”³⁵

The meaning of marriage is a load-bearing element of Sorokin’s work, and his definition of marriage must be explored in some detail as it provides the philosophical underpinning for much of his book’s argument. Sorokin defined marriage as “an all-embracing union,”³⁶ indeed, “the most vital, the most intimate, and the most complete unification of body, mind, and spirit into one socially approved, indivisible ‘we.’”³⁷ Marriage is the “social evidence” of a man or woman’s “physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and civic maturity.”³⁸ Thus, for Sorokin, marriage is a life-long personal union between a man and a woman, a unique institution designed to help perfect all elements of what it means to be human and thus a profound human good. Sorokin, however, also adds that

33. A recent collection of essays shows how media and in particular popular television have mediated the sexual revolution and contributed to the reshaping of sexual mores and norms. Cf. *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, ed. Eric Schaefer (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014). Pamela Paul argues that pornography has lost much of its stigma owing to the broad “pornification” of American culture: *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families* (New York: Times Books [Henry Holt], 2005).

34. *ASR*, 19-55. Cf. Lawrence R. Samuel, *Sexidemic. A Cultural History of Sex in America* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 33: “Sorokin can be credited for anticipating the actual sexual revolution . . . Few if any social critics foresaw . . . the sexual revolution.” Some may find it striking that Sorokin is detecting this in the 1950s, given the often romanticized view of that decade being a more morally stable time prior to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Historians are now suggesting otherwise about the 1950s. Cf. Alan Petigny, in *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

35. *Ibid.*, 42.

36. *Ibid.*, 5

37. *Ibid.*, 4. He posits that marriage is the unconditional pledge of “mutual loyalty” and that the “joys and sorrows of one become the joys and sorrows of the other. All their values, aspirations, and life-experiences become fully shared.”

38. *Ibid.*, 4.

marriage is a sign and contribution to one's "civic maturity." He thus makes the connection and points out that marriage sustains civil society and promotes the common good.³⁹

Marriage is also the "momentous transformation of a boy into a husband-father, and of a girl into a wife-mother."⁴⁰ His formulation here is critically important and should not be overlooked. Marriage converts a man and woman into a husband and wife, a change accepted socially, civilly, theologically, legally, and so forth. Furthermore, Sorokin asserts that marriage transforms a woman and man into a mother and father. These two transformations occur simultaneously through marriage, once again using his formulation, as a man and woman become a "husband-father" and a "wife-mother." It seems as if Sorokin is here suggesting that the full bodily union of male and female within the "bond of marriage . . . sacred and indissoluble"⁴¹ not only contains the biological power of procreation, but that the "all-embracing union"⁴² wherein husband and wife "merge"⁴³ confers the status of father and mother regardless of whether a child is conceived.⁴⁴ Sexual relations within marriage are the acceptance of "responsibilities" and "privileges"⁴⁵—a wife and husband welcome the responsibility and privilege of children, whether they are conceived or not, through this organic bodily union because marriage itself is ordered

39. Sorokin anticipates the reasoning put forward by later advocates who make the connection between marriage and social goods. *Cf.* *Marriage and the Public Good. Ten Principles* (Princeton, New Jersey: Witherspoon Institute, 2008).

40. *Ibid.*, 4.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 5. *Cf.* Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

43. *Ibid.*, 4.

44. A digression: it is interesting to note that in Genesis 3:20 Adam's wife, Eve, has a name that we are told means that "she was the mother of all living" (King James, Douay-Rheims and many other translations). Some modern translators seem to sense this tension—they do not yet have children at this point in the narrative—and translate the verse: "because she would become the mother of all the living" (New International Version). See <http://biblehub.com/genesis/3-20.htm>. Yet, in the Sorokinian sense worked out here, Adam and Eve, by virtue of being married, already have the status of father and mother because they have become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

45. *ASR*, 4.

to the creation of children.⁴⁶

The “noblest and best” expression of marital love is “the moral ennoblement of the married and the true socialization of their children.”⁴⁷ Sorokin here does not say that the best expression is having children—accepting the responsibility of being a father or mother occurs through marriage as a full bodily union so it is already a given—but it is in the husband and wife exalting one another and teaching their children. Sorokin avers that “married parents have been the most effective teachers of their children, and the family has been the most important school for the transformation of newly-born.”⁴⁸ Therefore, on Sorokin’s view marriage safeguards children and promotes their well-being.⁴⁹

Sorokin here brings together concepts such as “true socialization” and “transformation” into what he would call the “marriage-family school”—he sees parents as the major catalyst in rearing and developing the potential of their children. This, then, is the course and labor of love, the parental “mission,” the nurture and teaching of their children. Nevertheless, this is not merely one-sided; parents grow and experience fulfillment as they raise, lift, and love their children:

Furthermore, the cultivation of mutual love and the task of educating their children stimulate married persons to release and develop their best creative impulses. For surely the mission of molding their own and their children’s personalities is as ennobling as the creation of a masterpiece in the arts or sciences. And regardless of education, social status, religion, or economic conditions, each married couple derives

46. One may well add here, without stretching Sorokin’s point too much, that this would suggest that married couples who are infertile nevertheless accept the same responsibilities and therefore have the same privileges as fertile couples—their organic union endows them as a father and mother. Although applied to different ends, Girgis *et al.* have somewhat similar insights on infertile conjugal unions, see: Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, “What is Marriage?” *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 34.1 (Winter 2010): 245-87 (at 265-8).

47. ASR, 5.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Cf. Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994); Mary Parke, “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being” at <http://www.clasp.org/>; David Ribar, “Why Marriage Matters for Child Wellbeing,” *The Future of Children* 25.2 (Fall 2015): 11-27.

from a good marriage the fullest satisfaction of this creative urge which is in all of us. In this sense, marriage is the most universal and the most democratic school for the development of the creative potential of every human being.⁵⁰

Sorokin maintained that a great challenge to developing these healthy relationships in marriage and family was the "progressive sexualization of our culture"⁵¹ that polluted the moral environment. As one overexcites sexual appetite and pursues sex impulses and activities without restraint, inhibitions are worn down; one begins "to approve, glorify, and justify" promiscuity,⁵² and one's actions and resources are increasingly aimed at seeking out "less and less restrained sex relations."⁵³ *American Sex Revolution* charts the course of the baleful effects of the spread of sexual anarchy that Sorokin was witnessing in American society. This, his theory holds, is a sign of the final phases of the Sensate system and an indicator that America was "at the crossroads."⁵⁴ In his system, "Ideational values tend to restrain unlawful sex activities, the Sensate values aim to disinhibit and approve them."⁵⁵ Those Ideational values—whether springing from a religious, moral, aesthetic, or social course—inhibit, discipline, and restrain promiscuity and all forms of illicit sexual relations.⁵⁶

Sorokin compared "sex addiction" to drug addiction,⁵⁷ for it was very similar in how it corrupted and stunted a person's development: "Dedication of an individual to the pursuit of sex pleasures means a growth of the sex drive at the expense of the power of other factors determining his total activity, and radically changes the whole system of forces governing his behavior. . . . [A] tangible modification of the system of

50. *ASR*, 5.

51. *Ibid.*, 131.

52. *Ibid.*, 15.

53. *Ibid.*, 16.

54. *Ibid.*, 131

55. *Ibid.*, 17

56. *Ibid.*, 16.

57. *Ibid.*, 14. "Through the use of drugs an addict strives to relieve his painful tensions and to experience the intensest forms of sensual pleasure. The more one indulges in the use of drugs, the deeper he is caught by their tentacles."

forces conditioning human behavior transforms the total personality of the individual, his body and mind, his values and actions.”⁵⁸ As marriage and family life, according to Sorokin, are a school for the actualization of one’s potential, sexual addiction takes an axe to the core of these institutions not merely by fostering disloyalty and infidelity, but because it separates sex from its unitive and procreative purposes and highest creative potential.

Illicit sexual relations are not “schools of moral, mental, and social education of the partners. To the contrary they often lead to demoralization, social irresponsibility, mental disorders, and crime, and they thus do not contribute to the development of the creative potential.”⁵⁹ Moreover, such relations “do not serve the vital task of procreation, of determining the qualities of future generations.”⁶⁰ Sorokin recognized that not only does sexual promiscuity undermine a marriage and wreak havoc on a family, but the moral fabric and vitality of a society are threatened when such behavior is aggregated. He opines: “Any considerable change in marriage behavior, any increase in sexual promiscuity, and illicit relations, is pregnant with momentous consequences. A sex revolution drastically affects the lives of millions, deeply disturbs the community, and decisively influences the future of society.”⁶¹

Sorokin named not only declining birth rates but also widespread divorce as indicators of a lack of social cohesion foreboding “even greater difficulty in mutual adaptation of all other social groups.”⁶² He understood that marriage is a crucial mediating space between individuals and groups: marriages and family life ensure that there will always be people

58. *Ibid.*, 15.

59. *Ibid.*, 7. C.S. Lewis makes the argument that often the claim to a right to happiness is actually a masked claim for sexual liberation: “Our sexual impulses are thus being put in a position of preposterous privilege. The sexual motive is taken to condone all sorts of behaviour which, if it had any other end in view, would be condemned as merciless, treacherous and unjust.” C.S. Lewis, “We Have No ‘Right to Happiness’” [1963], in *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002), 388-92 (at 391). I thank Jonathan Pike (Harris Manchester College, Oxford) for pointing this out.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 10 and 47.

who have been trained through the institution of marriage to know how to get along with others.⁶³

Moreover, Sorokin was deeply concerned that the "sex drive is now declared to be the most vital mainspring of human behavior. In the name of science, its fullest satisfaction is urged as a necessary condition of man's health and happiness."⁶⁴ Sorokin is not here referring to sexual relations in marriage. Rather he detected a growing social science sanctioning of libidinous behavior outside of marriage and the concomitant accusation that any institution or ethics that would teach modesty and chastity or inhibit sexual expressions outside of married life were absurd, old-fashioned, and pernicious. People who taught sexual restraint would be ridiculed and accused of causing mental suffering and illnesses.⁶⁵

On Sorokin's view sexual liberationist teachings were fatally flawed ideologies that would produce the opposite of health and happiness—living such teachings would rend the social fabric of society and produce illness and misery, "anguish, anxiety, fear, remorse, hate, and pain."⁶⁶ Sorokin fathomed that given the liberationist narrative and rationale, men and women could justify illicit sexual behavior by claiming to want to liberate themselves from sexual inhibitions. They would seek to be authentic by freeing themselves from family or religious or other moral teachings that set external measures of behavior against which humans could measure their moral and ethical efforts at self-mastery. Sorokin concluded that by casting these standards aside, truth was degraded and "[w]ith the degradation of truth, man is dragged down from his lofty pedestal as a seeker after truth, as an absolute value, to the level of an animal who tends, by various 'ideologies,' 'rationalizations,' and 'derivations,' to exalt his greed, his appetites and his egoism."⁶⁷

Not only were men and women unable to see that an "evanescent sex pleasure" could wreck "their whole life,"⁶⁸ but the more pernicious and

63. *Ibid.*, 11.

64. *Ibid.*, 17.

65. *ASR*, 17.

66. *Ibid.*, 7.

67. *Crisis of Our Age*, 101.

68. *ASR*, 7.

insidious elements of sexual addiction were, according to Sorokin, going largely unnoticed or unrecognized. Those with sex addictions

are in a state of continuous emotional upheaval, are incessantly involved in endless conflicts with some of the current sex partners and with people connected with them: the parents and other relatives of a seduced boy or girl, the husband and children of a married woman, or the wife of a licentious husband, the friends of the illicit partner, with rivals competing for the favors of the same male or female, with the authorities and the public at large. In these most unhealthy conditions the profligates sap their vitality and shorten their life's span.⁶⁹

Here Sorokin calls attention to the insidious centrifugal force of illicit sexual liaisons that tear asunder relationships. In healthy, familistic relationships there are firm bonds of fidelity between husband and wife, of loyalty amongst family members, and of duty in the community. Sorokin understands that the entire network of relationships can become deeply wounded through sexual profligacy, and the negative rippling effect spreads outward and distresses all in its wake, not least the children who can be demoralized owing to the debauched behavior and may follow the bad example.⁷⁰

Indeed, Sorokin unflinchingly describes the “disastrous influence which the libertine has upon his family and his immediate associates.”⁷¹ This kind of reasoning stands in the face of claims that extramarital sexual relations are individual choices and private matters. Sorokin's analysis, given in some detail here because of its extraordinary insight, shows that ethical liberalism—whether based on J.S. Mill's harm principle or on consequentialism—must acknowledge the social harm of illicit sexual behavior:

The transgressor disrupts the orderly life of the family. An illicit or promiscuous affair always involves more individuals than the sex partners. Each libertine has some family, husband or wife, father

69. *ASR*, 57.

70. *Ibid.*, 75.

71. *Ibid.*, 74.

and mother, children, siblings, and other relatives. They cannot help being deeply concerned in and with the dishonorable behavior of the libertine. They cannot help feeling a deep sorrow and shame for the infamy brought upon the family name. They are also beset by an intense anxiety and fear for the future of the transgressor.

Furthermore, hatred, contempt, desire for revenge, and similar emotions are aroused in the parents of a seduced adolescent, in the husband of an unfaithful wife, or the wife of an adulterous husband, or in other members of the family of a victim of another's lust. The profligate thus becomes the enemy of the family of his bed partner.

However, the effects do not end there. The libertine has friends and acquaintances, and often their vital interests are violated by his promiscuity. In this way the sex glutton becomes entangled in another series of conflicts with yet a larger group.

Sorokin concludes that religious, civic, and government agencies become involved and that the sex addict's life becomes embroiled and less free on multiple levels.⁷²

Sorokin's concerns also include the person who lives a sexually disordered life. It is in this area in particular that one senses his compassion for those who suffer from a sexual addiction. "Lust," says Sorokin, "dominate[s] [a sex addict or libertine's] thinking and feeling, and controls his overt behavior."⁷³ Such a man or woman experiences constantly "conflicting emotions and passions [that] are continuously excited."⁷⁴

72. *Ibid.*, 74-75. A recent collection of essays makes a similar argument, that viewing pornography is not a private vice without consequences, but that social costs are also involved: *Social Costs of Pornography. A Collection of Papers*, eds. James R. Stoner, Jr. and Donna M. Hughes (Princeton: Witherspoon Institute, 2010). Religious leaders are calling the widespread consumption of pornography a "public health crisis." See the document "Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography Use" that was developed by the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/pornography/index.cfm>, and the address by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland at the Utah Coalition Against Pornography, March 12, 2016, available at <http://utahcoalition.org/elder-jeffrey-r-holland-the-plague-of-pornography/>.

73. *Ibid.*, 63.

74. *Ibid.*, 64.

Sorokin does not shy away from stating that a person who engages in licentious and promiscuous behavior is “tormented by feelings of guilt and remorse.”⁷⁵ As sound marriages and nurturing family relationships create the “marriage-family school” and are vital to the unfolding of one’s personality and the growth of one’s gifts and talents, the sexual libertine’s growth is impeded. Flourishing human relationships are not established, the sex addict becomes irrational and loses perspective and no longer has a vision of his or her “potential self” or “higher self.”⁷⁶

This loss of vision of who he or she should be or would wish to be is especially tragic because the addict begins to live exclusively for sexual encounters and in a dissipated state is unable to sustain the self-control and focus to achieve higher goals, not least in the realm of moral development and maturity. A negative cascade occurs in which the sex addict’s life spirals downward, and he or she enters social spaces that become increasingly dangerous:

The environment and mode of living of sex gluttons are saturated with intense strains, red-hot emotions, deadly conflicts. The pursuit of pleasure necessitates continuous outbursts of lust, jealousy, anxiety, envy, fear, doubt, insecurity, hate. The hunt for new thrills is inseparable from these passions, which spring up now and then between sex partners and almost always between the profligate and the persons and groups whose vital interests are violated by his transgressions.⁷⁷

Sorokin calls this emotionally-conflicted and morally-splintered individual, the person in bondage to biological drives but who still retains “fragments of values and motivations” the remembrance of which often causes further turmoil, a “malfunctioning organism” and “easy prey” for mental anguish and clinical conditions.⁷⁸ As with any addiction, it is dif-

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*, 63.

77. *Ibid.*, 64. “The activities of the debauchee brings him into the sharpest, and chronic, collision with a large number of persons and groups.” (*Ibid.*, 75)

78. *Ibid.*, 64. “The slightest adverse event in the environment of the sex gluttons can precipitate a series of disintegrative personality changes. Disappointment, suspicion, failure, frustration, as well as vulgarity, ugliness, and disease of their environment can precipitate neuroses and even psychoses.” (*Ibid.*) Sorokin held firmly that the etiology of mental illness as traced by those who

difficult to understand the challenges faced by the addict to overcome the addiction. Sorokin reminds readers that "even a person of sound body, strong nerve, and integrated personality would need to mobilize all his resources in order to withstand successfully such great pressures. The weakened physical, emotional, and spiritual condition of the sex glutton usually makes him incapable of resisting them, and he eventually cracks under their weight."⁷⁹

Choosing a life of "excessive sex preoccupation" reduces the individual in so many ways that it seems an Orwellian linguistic perversion to call it "sexual freedom" or "sexual liberation"; since promiscuous sexual activity "debilitates the body, undermines the vitality, destroys mental health, disintegrates moral integrity, and depresses creativity, it obviously cannot bring the grace of durable equanimity and happiness." Sorokin continues:

Except for short-lived moments of sexual intoxication, the life of the debaucher is devoid of security and peace of mind, and is filled with suspicion, hate, fear, jealousy, remorse, boredom, and endlessly painful conflict. Being barren of the greatest and noblest values, it deteriorates to the level of primitive vulgarity.⁸⁰

Sex addicts are caught in a terrible cycle in which the more they seek to fulfil their addiction, the more "flat, routine, and even painful" such sensations are, and these "diminishing returns sometimes push the sex glutton into a search for perversions, and these further aggravate the illness, torment, and wretchedness."⁸¹ Sorokin's aim is not to scaremonger, but to help readers understand that sexual mayhem ruins and wastes lives:

All in all, the debauchees pay an exorbitant price for their fleeting moments of pleasures. They pay with their health and vitality, with their

claimed that the way to mental health was to liberate oneself from moral frameworks to clutch sexual freedom was completely misguided and utterly wrong. (*Ibid.*, 65)

79. *Ibid.*, 64-5.

80. *Ibid.*, 73-4.

81. *Ibid.*, 74. He adds soberly that, "life eventually turns into a pitiful existence" and can even end in suicide.

mental and moral integrity, with their creativity and happiness. Such is the Nemesis of the sex gluttons. And such are the consequences of their abuse and misuse of one of the greatest vital functions of homo sapiens.⁸²

Sorokin returns to his earlier contention that self-mastery, specifically following the moral and aesthetic values of the “higher self” to discipline “animal drives,” is key to having an “integrated personality.” The rewards of exercising self-restraint in sexual matters are manifold, as Sorokin eloquently describes:

The inner world of the individual and his overt behavior are one orderly whole, free from major conflicts and contradictory motivations and actions, from a multitude of tensions and stresses. Such a person enjoys peace of mind; he follows a clear-cut line of conduct determined by his system of values and his moral norms of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” He is insulated against most internal and external disintegrative influences. However trying and painful the strains of life, he bears them valiantly. Temptation to actions that conflict his code are unhesitatingly rejected, while calls to actions are joyfully accepted and, to a large extent, followed.⁸³

Perhaps most distressing, according to Sorokin, is the great damage done by those who espouse sexual liberation,⁸⁴ by imparting a restrictive and diminished understanding about a person’s relationship to a Supreme Being, a divine parent.⁸⁵ He was enormously troubled that “[i]nstead of being depicted as a child of God, a bearer of the highest values attainable in this empirical world, and hence sacred, man is reduced to a mere

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*, 63.

84. The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich, is not mentioned in *American Sex Revolution*, but it is precisely the kind of sexual liberationist philosophy found in his *Sexual Revolution* (translated into English from German in 1945), as well as in the writings of Alfred Kinsey, that is the target of Sorokin’s criticism.

85. Throughout *American Sex Revolution* Sorokin points to many faiths whose moral codes uphold traditional norms and values in sexual relations. Harold O.J. Brown connects Sorokin’s work more explicitly to a Christian context. See Harold O.J. Brown, *The Sensate Culture* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996).

inorganic or organic complex, not essentially different from billions of similar complexes."⁸⁶ In addition to this detrimental and myopic view, Sorokin argues that "[t]he traditional 'child of God' created in God's image is turned into a sexual apparatus powered by sex instinct, preoccupied with sex matters, aspiring for, and dreaming and thinking mainly of sex relations."⁸⁷ One might wonder how a sex addict (or any addict for that matter), whose sense of self-depravity and lowliness might make him or her feel imprisoned and beyond any kind of redemption, could recover without having the self-understanding that he or she is more than the addiction, that he or she is a bearer of the divine spark and possesses talents and gifts that could contribute to the common good, that there is a celestial measure for which he or she has been fashioned and divine destination to which he or she may aspire. A self-understanding rooted in being "a child of God" reorients one's perspective on all human relationships and in particular those within marriage and family life. Sorokin's thesis is that individuals are robbed and impoverished by being taught the limited and deficient view that they are no more than a chemical creation driven to fulfil biological imperatives.

The origin of human dignity according to Sorokin is divine, inherent in the spiritual DNA, so to speak, of a human being and not conferred by any human institution, including the State. Sorokin stands against the teaching that humans are only the sum of their biological instincts, sexual drives, or economic forces, that we live a merely materialistic existence.⁸⁸ If one is taught that all it means to be human is to be a "sex-driven apparatus" then this deprives a person's understanding of his or her divine nature. This calls into question a man or woman's sense of individual worth and accountability, values that strengthen a person's integrity and consequently prepare a person to make and keep marriage covenants and strengthen home and family life. In *Crisis of Our Age*, written as World War II raged in Europe, Sorokin makes clear why human life must not be disconnected from its divine origins, for reducing man to a materialistic

86. Sorokin, *Crisis of Our Age*, 100.

87. ASR, 17.

88. Sorokin, *Crisis of Our Age*, 100.

origin meant that a utilitarian view would prevail and mankind could be treated in an industrial manner and destroyed as waste material—an especially chilling insight given that when his book was published Auschwitz was made operational on the other side of the Atlantic:

Stripping man of his divine charisma and grace, sensate mentality, ethics and law have reduced him to a mere electron-proton complex or reflex mechanism devoid of any sanctity or end-value. “Liberating” him from “superstitions” of the categorical imperatives, they have taken from him an invisible armour that unconditionally protected him, his dignity, his sanctity and his inviolability. Divested of this armour, he finds himself a plaything in the hands of the most fortuitous forces. If he is useful for this or that, he may be treated decently and cared for as we care for a useful animal. If he is harmful, he can be “liquidated,” as we exterminate harmful snakes. The very existence of a man or a group as an unintentional obstacle is enough to eliminate them.⁸⁹

The proper view of what it means to be human helps us to understand what Sorokin calls “noble patterns of total love,” patterns that include being a chaste man or woman who honors marriage vows of fidelity and loyalty, loves and respects the children born into the family, and who would fulfil the measure of his or her divine creation in developing talents to contribute to the well-being of his or her family and community. Sorokin proffers that establishing these “noble patterns” in families and in a nation is crucial to assisting young people grow into maturity: “control of sex impulses can be notably assisted by a continuous exposure of the youths to the noble patterns of total love among their parents and friends, and to the moving ethos of such a creativity and love in the literature they read, in the grand music they hear, in the pictures, plays, movies, television they see, and in the total environment in which they live and act.”⁹⁰

All of this, Sorokin puts forward, is premised on the right understanding of one’s relationship to the divine. This provides the template for the “noble patterns” which inform us in our relationships to others. This

89. *Ibid.*, 134-5.

90. *ASR.*, 160.

also throws light on why Sorokin cares so much about all aspects of a civilization's culture—arts, law, ethics, education, religion, and so forth—because these reinforce the “noble patterns” and inform the cultural, social, and political space in which children and youth live, and assist them in ordering their understanding to life's highest goods and thereby helping them to lead principled and flourishing lives.

Paul E. Kerry, Ph.D., is a visiting scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and co-convenes the Seminar in Constitutional Thought and History for the University of Oxford's Rothermere American Institute, where he was an associate visiting research fellow. He is associate professor of history at Brigham Young University and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society.