

## РЕЦЕНЗИИ

DOI: 10.34130/2233-1277-2019-4-239-244

**Review by Emiliana Mangone, Department of Political and Communication Sciences, University of Salerno, Italy**  
**Folco Cimagalli. Sorokin. Attualità di un classico della sociologia, Roma, Aracne, 2010, 175 p.**

Мангоне Эмилиана. Рецензия на книгу Фолко Чимагалли «Актуальность классика социологии». Рим: Аракне, 2010. 175 с. (Folco Cimagalli. Sorokin. Attualità di un classico della sociologia, Roma, Aracne, 2010, 175 p.).

The relationship between Sorokin and Italian scholars, one might say, has never been an idyllic one. With the exception of Vilfredo Pareto and Corrado Gini — whose correspondence with the author is kept at the University of Saskatchewan (University Archives & Special Collections, P. A. Sorokin fonds) — Italian social scientists have disregarded Sorokin's work. This is easily demonstrated, and the following pages will prove it.

The first time I read about Sorokin was in 1989 and I was a student at the University of Salerno (in southern Italy) at the course of Sociology. I was studying for the Sociology of Knowledge exam and the reference book was *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context* (Coser, 1977) in its Italian version (Coser, 1983/1977). What surprised me at the time — now I can understand why — was that, while his name recurred in relation to other authors, the Italian edition (Coser, 1983/1977), unlike the American one, did not include a chapter on him.

When Sorokin died in 1968, only two of his works were translated into Italian: *La mobilità sociale* [Social Mobility] and *Mode ed utopie nella sociologia moderna e scienze collegate* [Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences], both in 1965. Other books were translated only much later: *Storia delle teorie sociologiche* (in two volumes) [Sociological Theories

of Today] in 1974 and *La dinamica sociale e culturale* [Social and Cultural Dynamics] in 1975. In the years 2000s, the interest of Italian scholars towards Sorokin has been rekindled and two more works by the Russian-American sociologist have been translated into Italian: *La crisi del nostro tempo* [The Crisis of Our Age] in 2000 e *Il potere dell'amore* [Ways and Power of Love] in 2005.

In all probability, the disinterest of Italian scholars is mainly due to two reasons: first, the closeness of his thought with that of Corrado Gini, who was considered very close to Fascism and therefore relegated to the shadows as the others who were deemed too close to the fascist regime; second, Sorokin's anti-conformism. The author was certainly non-mainstream and strongly opposed all the branches of sociological studies not focused on serving humanity — and the American sociology was certainly was not oriented in this sense. Of the two reasons suggested, the second is perhaps the most accredited, also due to the fact that after the Second World War we assisted to what has been called the Americanization of Social Sciences (Manicas, 1987). Indeed, Gini defined Sorokin as «self-taught; and if not a revolutionary, he is certainly a non-conformist, with all the virtues and faults that inevitably accompany such a role» (1963, p. 307). And it is precisely Sorokin's nature that made him “unpalatable” to Italian scholars. I apologize for the unscientific nature of this statement, but it is otherwise inexplicable that there are no traces of studies on Sorokin until the third millennium when two scholars — Emiliana Mangone (myself) and Folco Cimagalli — decided to go “dust off” [some of] Sorokin's works and thoughts.

I published two books, one in English (Mangone 2018a) and one in Italian (2018b), as well as several articles in both Italian and English (Mangone, 2018c, 2018d; Mangone & Dolgov, 2019). Reviews of the English book highlight: «Появление этой книги должно привлечь серьезное внимание уже потому, что автор живет и работает в Италии, а европейцы в последнее время интереса к идеям Питирима Сорокина практически не проявляли» (Zyuzev, 2018, p. 168) and «Mangone's work is notable (and original) when compared to the extant contemporary literature on Sorokin» (Sorokin P., 2018, p. 279) in an attempt to update Sorokin's thinking; while the Italian one shows how today, many years later, the *law of diversification and polarization of the effects of calamity* is still valid (Sorokin P.A., 2010/1942).

In 2010, Folco Cimagalli published the book *Sorokin. Attualità di un classico della sociologia* [Sorokin. Actuality of a sociologic classic] in which, for 175 pages, he carries out what is stated in the title, *i.e.*, he demonstrates the current relevance of Sorokin's theories. He also recently published an article (Cimagalli, 2017) dealing with Sorokin's thought and the idea of “public sociology”. The following pages will illustrate the steps through which Cimagalli manages to demonstrate how Sorokin's thought, far from debates and above all from academic polemics, is still useful to reflect on today's ever-changing society.

Cimagalli's book is developed along six chapters, plus the introduction, the conclusions and two appendices (the works and a sitography). In each

chapter the author tries to address a theme dear to Sorokin: the crisis, social mobility, urbanization, social and cultural dynamics, integral sociology, and, finally, creative altruism.

The introduction sketches a brief profile of Sorokin, fundamental to understand who he really was and, above all, what disturbed other scholars of social sciences when referring to Sorokin's theories: «Sorokin is a unique figure in the history of sociology. Many saw him as one of the most acute and complex minds in the sociological reflection of the first half of the twentieth century. Equipped with encyclopedic culture, he was a fine connoisseur of sociology, philosophy, history, law, Russian and Western religious thought. He contributed to the foundation of North American sociology and has been a controversial protagonist of it for thirty years» (Cimagalli, 2010, p. 9). According to Cimagalli, Sorokin was never forgiven for having «realised — perhaps this is the great sin that the scientific community has not forgiven him — that there is a spiritual dimension to individual and social life and that this can be studied with the cognitive tools of sociology» (p. 10). Sorokin, however, did not call for a «sociological humanism» but for a «humanistic sociology». A sociology that does not only analyse and study social phenomena, but a science that, with its peculiarities, contributes to the analysis and study of the most human part of individuals and society (living man). The aim is to contribute to the discovery of human beings as creative and responsible social actors. There is a need for studies that not only analyse social phenomena in their negative effects or conditioning, but also contribute to a science — positive sociology (Nichols, 2012; Yogan, 2015) — that with its specificity can contribute to the analysis and study of the more human part of the individual and society. Clearly, Pitirim A. Sorokin's legacy is the main historical and intellectual basis for the development and institutionalization of positive sociology or of what we prefer to call «public sociology» (Cimagalli, 2017).

Folco Cimagalli, for the whole length of the book, does nothing more than follow a single direction, that is, finding the answer to the question posed in the final part of the book: «A classic still current? »

How does Cimagalli proceed in this direction? He does so by analysing the works that [have] most marked Sorokin's theoretical elaboration, starting from *The Crisis of Our Age* (Sorokin, 1941). In it, the Russian-American sociologist devotes his reflection to a detailed description of the crisis of Western society in the different spheres of action of individuals, highlighting the diagnoses and various viewpoints on the crisis. In just a few lines, Cimagalli summarizes Sorokin's thought on the crisis, a thought that will then become the pillar of all his subsequent reflections: «Community ties and affiliations know processes of progressive disintegration; traditional institutions and values no longer seem to be able to reassure and bridle the subject of the new time. New systems of social relations progressively replace the relational forms based on closeness and common belonging; the individual appears increasingly erratic, free and isolated. A *mobile individual*, freed from binding personal ties and autonomous with respect to ideas, ever-changing and largely independent. An individual who seems more and more able to

construct his own identity through social exchange and no longer only in the light of traditional rank or place affiliations» (pp. 23-24). And, in the second chapter (Social mobility), Cimagalli analyses the concepts, characteristics, factors and effects of mobility as presented by Sorokin.

Chap. 3 follows a similar perspective, since «Social mobility is a powerful theoretical key to qualifying the specific nature of urban life and identifying the differences between the city and the countryside» (p. 57). In this chapter, Cimagalli highlights how the work *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology* (Sorokin & Zimmerman, 1929) represented a pioneering study in the field of urban and ecological studies, thus initiating the tradition of research that will be called the Chicago School, whose results had a profound influence in many directions and especially in the ecological theory of behaviour.

The middle chapter (Chap. 4), which is also the longest, inevitably focuses its attention on socio-cultural phenomena. In this chapter, Cimagalli first describes the characteristics and elements that make up sociocultural phenomena as Sorokin described them and then addresses the cultural mentalities (Idealistic, Ideational, Sensate) and their cyclic nature. Sorokin deemed necessary for the sensate mentality, for too long the supreme ruler of contemporary society, to leave room for the Ideational mentality in order to save humanity. These studies outline a theory of social change: «Sorokin's philosophy of history therefore identifies the development of oscillatory movements and great transitions between sensate, idealistic and ideational phases. Change does not have an external nature, it does not depend on environmental causes, but on the system itself, which contains within it the seeds of change» (Cimagalli, 2010, pp. 92–93). In the same chapter, Cimagalli also addresses Sorokin's theory on social change, recalling another of the author's works: *Man and Society in Calamity* (2010/1942). Cimagalli refers to this work because calamities represent a particular case study for investigating the characteristics of social systems: «On these premises, Sorokin considers in his study a series of events that share the characteristic of upsetting more or less strongly and in a variously unexpected way the routine of a social group» (p. 99). A few pages later, he will explain that «Following the same logical thread, on the issue of the way out of the emergency situation, the attention of the Russian sociologist is placed on the capacity of the social system to promptly give itself a new order to face in a rational way the changed needs. [...], the centre of reflection, fatally, shifts *from the event to the system*: it is the lack of a solid patrimony of shared values that causes the social organization to collapse and makes the 'black angel of destruction' victorious» (p. 103).

This statement leads Cimagalli to the last two chapters of the book, in which he deals, on the one hand, with integral sociology (Chap. 5) and, on the other, with creative altruism (Chap.6). Both these chapters can be traced back to Sorokin's basic idea that social scientists must play a leading role in the social transformations needed to «rebuild humanity». Here we find the idea of an integrated system of knowledge that can project the activity of sociologists and other social scientists in a direction of positive social change,

as well as the idea of an integral sociology with a leading role towards these positive changes. Sorokin was so convinced of the potential of the social sciences as a guide for humanity, that he even hypothesized the birth of a new applied science (*amitology*) that would deal with the promotion of friendship, unconditional love and mutual aid.

The chapter on creative altruism closes the exemplary examination that Cimagalli offers of the main themes present in Sorokin's theories.

And in his conclusion, he could only say, concerning Sorokin's role in the history of sociology, that «We do not know how long he will remain a pariah of sociology. We are certain, however, that Sorokin's work — profound, critical, eclectic — still has much to offer to today's sociology» (p. 157). Cimagalli reaches this conclusion by dwelling, in the pages immediately preceding it, on three points which he deems ever-present in Sorokin's thought and which are still valid for contemporary debate: «First: the relationship between theory and research. As we have seen, Sorokin's dislike for sociological fashions does not stem from a preconceived aversion to a certain type of technique, be it 'quantitative' or 'qualitative'. The basic message in his battle against 'testocracy' is not only in the scientific inconsistency of some analytical procedures, but in their unconditional use and in the claim that the technique — alone — can support the correctness of a reasoning. [...]. Second: sociological reflection cannot help but consider the complex society-culture-personality as its object. [...]. Sorokin strongly proposes the overcoming of all individual-anchored visions, as well as those anchored to the complex of structures and institutions, rather promoting an integral harmonic conception in which the individual and society are considered contextually, in a synthesis that is not merely mechanical. [...] Thirdly, sociology has a public role. For Sorokin, social science does not merely play a function of analysis and interpretation of society, but embodies a high and non-deferrable social role. Beyond the contents of his message that in a radically different historical context can be shared or not, Sorokin argues that the interpretative capacity of sociology must constitute, for its mission, a resource for society as a whole» (pp. 156-157).

Folco Cimagalli's book, in the panorama of the scarce literature produced by Italian scholars on Pitirim A. Sorokin, with the exception of the above mentioned very recent works by Mangone, is the work that, in the scientific context of the Italian social sciences, «rehabilitates» the eclectic figure of the scholar that was Sorokin. Cimagalli does this by pointing out that some themes — widely addressed by Sorokin and sometimes criticized by his contemporaries (the relationship between theory and research, the indivisible triad society-culture-personality and the public role of sociology) — are the elements that make him current and, therefore, to be removed from the list of «forgotten sociologists» (Romano, 2002) and included in a list of «sociologists to be rediscovered».

Folco Cimagalli's book, in Italy, had the merit of «rehabilitating» Sorokin in the eyes of many still skeptical scholars.

## References

- Cimagalli, F. (2010). *Sorokin. Attualità di un classico della sociologia*. Rome: Aracne.
- Cimagalli, F. (2017). Pitirim Sorokin e il ruolo pubblico della sociologia. *Sociologia*, LI(3), pp. 93–101.
- Coser, L.A. (1977). *Masters of Sociological Thought. Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich.
- Coser, L.A. (1983). *I maestri del pensiero sociologico*. Bologna: il Mulino (Original work published 1977).
- Gini, C. (1963). How Gini of Italy Assesses Sorokin. In P.J. Allen (ed.), *Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review* (pp. 306-317), Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mangone, E. (2018a). *Social and Cultural Dynamics. revisiting the work of Pitirim A. Sorokin*. Cham, Springer International Publishing AG.
- Mangone, E. (2018b). *Dalle "calamità" di Sorokin alla "rinascita". La sociologia integrale per lo studio dei disastri*. Milan: FrancoAngeli.
- Mangone, E. (2018c). From calamities to disasters: Pitirim Aleksandrovič Sorokin's insights. *Human Arenas*, 1(1), pp. 79–85.
- Mangone, E. (2018d). Pitirim A. Sorokin il teorico della sociologia integrale. *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale*, 2, pp. 41–60.
- Mangone, E. & Dolgov, A. (2019). Sorokin's "Altruistic Creative Love": Genesis, Methodological Issues, and Applied Aspects. *Human Arenas*, doi: 10.1007/s42087-019-00058-w.
- Manicas, P. T. (1987). *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Nichols, L. T. (2012). North Central Sociological Association Presidential Address. Renewing sociology: Integral science, Solidarity, and Loving kindness. *Sociological Focus*, 45(4), pp. 261–273;
- Romano, M. A. (2002) (ed.). *Lost Sociologists Rediscovered*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Sorokin, P. (2018). Emiliana MANGONE, Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revisiting the Work of Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 56(2), pp. 279–282.
- Sorokin, P. A. (1941). *The Crisis of Our Age. The Social and Cultural Outlook*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
- Sorokin, P. A. (2010/1942). *Man and Society in Calamity*. Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.): Transaction Publishers.
- Sorokin, P. A. & Zimmerman, C. C. (1929). *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Yogan, L. (2015). North Central Sociological Association Presidential Address, 2014: Positively Teaching Positive Sociology. *Sociological Focus*, 48(1), pp. 1–15.
- Zyuzev, N. F. (2018). Review of Emiliana Mangone. Social and Cultural Dynamics: Revisiting the Work of Pitirim A. Sorokin, Cham, Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, p. 90. *Nasledie*, 2(13), pp. 168–171.