



40th ANNUAL SOROKIN LECTURE

*The End of a Sensate Age -
What Next?*

Dr. Peter Jarvis
Professor of Continuing Education
University of Surrey, UK

Delivered March 27, 2009, at the University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

© 2009 University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon
ISBN: 978-0-8888-557-7

ABSTRACT

Sorokin frequently predicted the end of the age and longed for a different one in which his social, moral and religious ideals could be realised – it is clear that the Enlightenment project has not been a success and that Modernity (even post-modernity) has come to an end. We can now see how almost all the indicators of modernity are incorrect. The sensate age which Sorokin condemned is flawed – perhaps the present economic crisis is an indicator of the weakness of a major indicator of Modernity – and so do we move into an ideational age as Sorokin predicted, or has the sensate period destroyed those hopes for good? In *Democracy, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society* I argued that utopia is deferred indefinitely and that the ideational age is unrealisable – but our ideals have not been destroyed and so we do need to recognise and realise a more idealistic future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Jarvis is internationally known as a leading scholar in the field of adult, continuing and lifelong learning. His recent work includes the publication of three volumes in the Routledge Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society series, editorship of *The Routledge International Handbook on Lifelong Learning*, and a comprehensive, multidisciplinary orientation on *Learning to Be a Person in Society* (Routledge, forthcoming). He is widely sought as a visiting speaker on all aspects of the learning society, including adult education, distance learning and lifelong learning, with honorary memberships in numerous Professional Associations throughout the world.

He is a former head of the Department of Educational Studies and is a former Adjunct Professor, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia, USA. He holds honorary visiting professorships in several institutions, and has received a variety of academic honours, such as: being President of the British Association of International and Comparative Education (BAICE) in the year 1999-2000; the Cyril O Houle World Award for Adult Education Literature from the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education; the Comenius Award - International ESVA Foundation (Outstanding Adult Educator in Europe - First Holder); he was also the first non-North American to be elected to the International Hall of Fame of Adult and Continuing Education in USA, which is located in University of Oklahoma. He was also awarded a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science research fellowship at the University of Tokyo. He was Noted Scholar at the University of British Columbia, and has been a Visiting Professor at several other universities.

He has written and edited well over 30 books and 200 papers and chapters in books on adult education and learning, continuing professional education, nurse education, primary school education, distance education, third age education. He has also been involved in writing a number of research reports ranging from curriculum evaluation in nursing to older people mentoring in the workplace. He has been grant holder for a number of research projects. He serves on editorial boards of a number of journals in different parts of the world including *Adult Education Quarterly* in the USA, *Comparative Education*, the Editorial Board of which he chaired for five years and he is an assessor for *Nurse Education Today*. He is the founding editor of *The International Journal of Lifelong Education*, which he has edited for nearly thirty years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

Part 1: The End of a Sensate Age2

Part 2: Globalisation and the Emergence of the Neo-Liberal Economic Society6

Part 3: What Next?.....12

Conclusion15

References17

Introduction

Let me start by thanking the Committee for doing me the honour of asking me to present this fortieth Sorokin lecture. However, I have to confess from the outset that I am no Sorokin scholar since I have devoted most of my intellectual life to learning and education, although occasionally I have made recourse to Sorokin's work in my writing. Secondly, I have to confess to being an admirer of him – his biography shows the intellectual determination that drove him on from peasant boy to revolutionary to international scholar. Thirdly, as a mature undergraduate, studying for my second first degree I came across *Fads and Foibles* (Sorokin, 1958) and I was also attracted to the theory of cultural mentalities which is fully discussed in his *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1962) and which, while I now think that it is not a strong theory, provides the starting point for what I want to discuss today. At the same time, I will turn to another book written nearly twenty years later that explores much of the same ground as Sorokin – Martin's (1981) *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* – and comes up with a different set of conclusions.

In the Introduction to this paper, I want just to recapitulate Sorokin's theory of change. In the first part of the presentation I then want us to look at the end of the Sensate Age; secondly, we will look at the late developments in globalisation culminating in the present economic crisis and in the third part I will relate this to flaws in the modernity project which might eventually result in a major cultural change although I think that even this crisis is probably not sufficiently large to make people rethink the dominant values of the modern age.

Sorokin's Theory of Change: Basically, Sorokin posed a theory of change that was rather like a huge pendulum swinging between two ideal types of cultural mentality: the sensate and the ideational. In the process of change he postulated two other types – the idealistic and the mixed – through which the pendulum passed. For Sorokin, the sensate society is one where truth and reality are experienced through the senses – that is empirically – which are validated by the same methods. In his terminology, it is a super-system (language, religion, arts, ethics, and science) since it permeates the fabric of a society and its culture. Empiricism is exemplified in the super-system by science and once we specify it in this way, it is easy to see that in order for his formulation to be acceptable the concept of truth has to be redefined in terms of empirical existence. But as truth is more than empirical existence and

knowledge itself is more than the empirical we can already begin to understand some of the flaws in the Age, as Sorokin would have seen them.

The opposite pole to the sensate is the ideational cultural mentality, the potentialities of such are contained in the sensate system without being overt and about which Timasheff (1965, p. 239) says, ‘If men generally accept the truth of faith, believing that behind these sense impressions lies another, deeper, reality, the super-system is *ideational*’. The verb *to ideate* means to imagine or to form an idea and for Sorokin the underlying value of the ideational age is the spiritual. The ideational is, according to Coser (1977, pp. 465-46), a form of Platonic idealism. Plato’s theory of forms runs something like this: a form is an idea that must be true, an abstract idea that must be true without qualification but such a form cannot exist in reality – it transcends the world of the senses and is, in this way spiritual. Two types of ideational culture can be detected – the ascetic and the active. When the pendulum swings away from the sensate, it begins to uncover what lies beneath it and what always exists, even within the sensate – the spiritual, non-empirical reality of life itself. Sorokin thought when he was writing this material at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s that we were reaching the end of the Sensate Age and at this point the pendulum must begin to swing in the opposite direction. He calls this point the limit and the swing must continue because we cannot have stasis. As the pendulum swings it may give rise to a third form – the idealistic characterised by reason simply because it is reasonable to expect a fusion of the empirical and the spiritual – (1962, vol. 1, p. 75). However, the form might not be characterised in quite such a reasonable manner and then it can be seen as a mixed cultural mentality. For Sorokin, this is a historical process and it is this that he argues in *Social and Cultural Dynamics*; so for Sorokin, the Sensate Age must soon begin to change.

Part 1: The End of a Sensate Age

Had Sorokin’s theory of change just been a cyclical theory, then he could have written about change in a fairly rational manner, but because of his own background he felt that the manifestations of the end of the Age were most unacceptable and he condemned what he saw and experienced vehemently in his writing and especially in his autobiography. Quoting from Coser (1977, pp. 476-477), with Coser’s own comments:

All of Sorokin's tracts for the times that deal with his philosophy are imbued with a pervasive distaste, one may even say hatred, for modern urban culture and all it stands for. The *Sensate* world of the city jungle and the world of modernity as a whole are, to Sorokin, compounds of utter depravity, which he castigates in the accents of Old Testament prophets or Russian itinerant preachers. Consider the following lines from the final chapter of his autobiography: "In the human world around me the deadliest storm is raging. The very destiny of mankind is being weighed in the balance of life and death. The forces of the Sensate order are furiously destroying everything that stands in their way. In the name of 'God,' 'progress,' civilization,' 'communism,' 'democracy,' 'freedom,' 'capitalism,' the dignity of man,' and other shibboleths they are uprooting these very values, murdering millions of human beings, threatening man's very survival and tending to turn this beautiful planet into an 'abomination of desolation'.

This really contains the same type of condemnation that we find in the Old Testament. As Coser says, it is 'fire and brimstone' next! And so what did the Old Testament prophets have to say in their own condemnation of their age that was so similar? We will look at just one, Amos – from the very first completed book in the bible: having condemned the transgressions of all the surrounding peoples, Amos turned upon Israel:

'Hear and testify against the house of Jacob', says the Lord God of hosts, 'that on the day that I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish and the great houses shall come to an end,' says the Lord (Amos 3:13-15).

These are similar sentiments to Sorokin's – the age is coming to a close – but the parallel is probably even greater than that which appears on the surface. Amos was condemning the vast wealth – 'houses of ivory' – that was made possible by mercantile capitalism: for this book was written at the time when the trade routes from Macau, then a major trading port out of southern China, came to and passed through the Middle-East and those who lived there made vast fortunes from trade. In the Old Testament we see the condemnation of one age as a result of mercantile capitalism and in Sorokin we find similar sentiments about the sensate age as a result of

industrial capitalism. That we can find such illustrations gives some credibility for the idea of cyclical change in history although this is something that we can, and will, still debate, especially in the light of Max Weber's (1930, p. 57) comment that, 'At all periods of history, wherever it was possible, there has been ruthless acquisition bound to no ethical norms whatsoever', which opens the debate about the extent to which there is a cyclical system of change – but which in crude religious terms points us to the idea that humankind has fallen from the paradise of creation – or at least begins to ask the question as to why we do not live in a perfect world.

Sorokin (1962, vol. 4, pp. 775ff) actually sought to describe the last days (the twilight) of the Sensate culture and much of what he wrote bears repetition here:

- Sensate values will become more relative and atomistic;
- Atomised sensate values will become more debased, sensual and material – stripped of anything divine, sacred and absolute – 'a museum of socio-cultural pathology rather than the imperishable values of the Kingdom of God' (p. 775);
- The disappearance of public;
- opinion – the world's conscience – and we find in its stead a market of pressure groups;
- Contracts and covenants will lose their binding power;
- Rude force and cynical fraud will become the only arbiters of all values – might will become right;
- Freedom will be a myth for the majority and it will be turned into unbridled licentiousness by the dominant minority;
- Government will become tyrannical – giving bombs not bread and death instead of freedom;
- The family will disintegrate;
- The Sensate super-system will become increasingly shapeless, divorced from unity; creativeness will continue to wane, with
 - Thought to be replaced by information
 - Sages by smart Ales
 - Best by biggest
 - Classic by best-seller
 - Inner value by glittering externality
 - Genius by technique

- Lasting value by sensual hit
- Enlightened intuitionism by operational manipulation
- Real criteria by counterfeit criteria
- Great leaders by frauds;
- ‘In the increasing moral, mental and social anarchy and decreasing creativeness of sensate neutrality, the production of material value will decline, depressions will grow worse, and the material standards of living go down;
- populations will be split....

In a sense, we have the prophet of doom looking not far into the future and suggesting that this is how the sensate age will terminate. While we might not use his words and our sentiments might differ slightly from his, and remember that he was writing in the 1950s and early 1960s, much of what he wrote has clearly happened. Sorokin believed in the theory of immanent change, by which he meant that every cultural mentality had a career and as it came to an end so it would change.

‘*Immanent change* is a kind of destiny or life career of any technical system; it is an unfolding of the immanent potentialities of the system’ (Timasheff, 1965, p. 283).

Timasheff goes on, in the same page, to explain how it operates:

When cultural development approaches its theoretical limit, the trend is reversed (although cultural stagnation is a possibility). However, culture as such never dies; some parts may be rejected, but others are absorbed into different cultures and survive. Hence Sorokin shows himself much more optimistic than Spengler or Toynbee.

Sorokin’s theory of change appears to be rather like a sine wave, or even the swing of the pendulum: from one cultural mentality to another, allowing for a mid-way position. And so as we approach the end of the sensate age – what comes next?

Bernice Martin (1981), writing about the cultural change in precisely this period was influenced by two leading anthropologists – Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) and Victor Turner (1969) – and she suggests that there was not a swing of the pendulum in the way that Sorokin claimed but that there was a profound change in the 1960s because the structures of society were weakened – counter-culture became a

reality as changes occurred – both at a national and at a global level – which Mary Douglas saw as grid and group. The 1960s were an expressive period and the end of the period was when the social structures at the national level were re-established in slightly different places than before. For Martin, the 1960s was a period of liminality which could not last for long because when the structures of society were lowered many forms of social and cultural experimentation occurred – many of which were religious or spiritual in nature and in this sense we might begin to see it as a movement towards the ideational – but these social experiments led to some social unease and much of what Sorokin condemned remained unchanged. But there was another process of lowering of structures at a global level and a new form of globalisation began to emerge with the implementation of the logic of industrialism and the growth of the information society which were in turn to lead to a period of neo-liberalism.

Kerr *et al* ([1960], 1973) argue for a logic of industrialism and, significantly, the topic of ethics does not occur in the index and is not discussed in the book – although there is a brief reference on pages 108f and recognised elsewhere in passing: Kerr and his colleagues ([1960] 1973, p. 56) summarise the thesis thus:
Work force: increased skills, more mobile, more highly educated and structured;
Scale of society: urban with a larger role for government;
Social consensus: increasing ideological consensus in a pluralistic society;
World-wide industrialisation: spreading from centres of advanced technology.

Of course they were to prove to be wrong in some of their predictions, especially in the role of government and ideological consensus, but they were right when it came to a world-wide industrialisation and a more highly educated work-force.

Part 2: Globalisation and the Emergence of the Neo-Liberal Economic Society

The swing of the pendulum did not occur in the 1960s and the expressive period was soon replaced, but the lowering of structures at a global level was soon to lead to major social changes at both international and national levels that were going to affect the life styles of many people around the world and exacerbate the social conditions that Sorokin condemned. The speed of change increased dramatically and with it new priorities and life styles emerged and ushered in the period of late- or post-modernity. There were a number of contributory factors at this time which

speeded up this process, such as:

- the nature of capitalism itself and the need to make an increased profit on commodities produced and sold in an enlarged market;
- the technological innovations of post-Fordism that enabled commodity production to be faster and cheaper in the 1970s. Castells (1996, p. 52) makes the point that ‘to some extent, the availability of new technologies constituted as a system in the 1970s was a fundamental basis for the process of socio-economic restructuring in the 1980s’;
- the development of sophisticated information technology through the star wars programme, through which the information technology revolution took off, with one development leading to another, as Castells (1996, p. 51f.) demonstrates;
- the demise of the Bretton Woods Agreement, that eventually led to the GATT Agreement, enabling both free trade and the flow of financial capital to spread throughout the world;
- the oil crisis in the 1970s and the economic competition from Japan, both of which dented the confidence of and challenged Western domination, which led to corporations merging and the creation of multi-national and then transnational organisations;
- the prevalence of the idea of the minimal state and of neo-liberal economics allowed for power to pass from the State to the capitalist institution;
- the fall of the Berlin Wall – the ‘democratisation’ of the Eastern Bloc – for, from the time it occurred, there has literally been 'no alternative' (Bauman, 1992) to global capitalism or comparable political opposition to the USA.

I do not want to spend time here expounding each of these because that would detract us from the primary purpose of this study. However, we can see that during the immediate decades after the Second World War, especially after the demise of the Bretton Woods Agreement, corporations began to relocate manufacturing and to transfer capital around the world, seeking the cheapest places and the most efficient means to manufacture, and the best markets in which to sell their products. They were being forced to do this because of the loss of Western confidence, when the oil crisis demonstrated that the West was vulnerable to those who controlled oil

production and because, as the Japanese economy took off, the West realised that it would be forced to compete with another very efficient economic enterprise. This process was exacerbated in the Thatcher-Reagan era by the belief in a minimal state (Nozick, 1974) and through the process of privatisation not only of companies but of public assets, such as water. It was perhaps not recognised by many who supported this process that it was not just a transfer of economic processes ‘for the sake of efficiency’ but it was also providing a power base for those corporations who were given ownership of public assets. Corporations were able to use the functions that the State had specified to build up their own power-base and as they have expanded so they have become the transnational corporations that form the sub-structure of the global world. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States of America remained the only super-power and as its governments have been inextricably intertwined with the large multi-national corporations, it has lent it political and military might that support the capitalist system, which in turned furthered its own imperialist aspirations.

And so the limit that Sorokin suggested that would start the pendulum to swing in the other direction did not occur in the 1960s and 1970s – despite the emergence briefly of a counter-culture – and there was no swing backwards at all. Global capitalism endeavoured to conquer the world without the restrictions of state or government and the direction of change was the same. Indeed, Habermas (2006) made the point that the politicians were left behind powerless and they could either seek to catch up or endeavour to protect their people from the ravages of global capitalism – at that time neither appeared possible although the strong welfare states did play a stronger role during the period of neo-liberal economics. We have seen how global bankers and many other global corporations have pursued vast wealth, profits for their corporations: viewed from one perspective, ‘profit is seen as good to those who benefit from it, but viewed from another perspective, ‘profit’ is the exploitation of the masses: in both cases it is the excess of income over expenditure but we do not use this more factual statement because it is cumbersome. The corporations and the bankers have pursued this end, as Weber suggested, whatever the cost and the cost has been great – as Sorokin argued. Indeed, profit not people, has become the end of the process and the means to achieve that end have often been very dubious – often immoral, as Sorokin claimed. This is an expression of instrumental rationality.

What we have been doing to achieve these ends, claimed Sorokin, we have done ‘in the name of God, progress, civilisation, communism, democracy, freedom, capitalism and the dignity of man’. The paradox that he notes is that these are the very phenomena that contain the values of the better world that we seek and so in order to attain these conditions we murder millions and humankind and the planet are put at risk. The paradox is that we destroy these values that we seek in the process – but we do so by employing other valued aspects of modern thought for at the heart of modernity lies an instrumental rationality that is a form of a rule-bound teleological approach to thought that imprisons people within its rationale: we seek to act in a rational fashion to achieve our desired ends irrespective of the cost of the process. And one of the fundamental weaknesses of nearly all teleological arguments is that it is the ends that count and not the means. Bauman (1993, p. 69) summarises this position thus:

Desubstantiation of the moral agent in favour of proceduralism does a lot for the subordination of the moral agent to the external legislating agency, yet little or nothing at all for the increase of the sum total of good; in the final count it disarms the forces of moral resistance to immoral commands – very nearly the only protection the moral self might have against being a part of inhumanity.

The pursuit of profit has been taken for granted – it has been part of the cultural mentality of this period. It seems rational and common sense that this is what we do – and it is a form of rationality that has itself grown up with the money economy and science. Simmel ([1903]1971, p. 85) recognised this problem many years ago when he wrote of modern urban society: ‘Modern mind has become more and more calculating. The calculative exactness of practical life which the money economy has brought about corresponds to the idea of natural science...’ urban society and money economy generate a greater degree of instrumental rationality which is associated with natural science and people act with their heads and not their hearts. Empiricism, science and rationality have been joined together and are seen as being the most logical and efficient way of producing goods and, of apparently making the world a better place. Almost all politicians have talked of development and growth and relied on global capitalism to realise it. Science has become a symbol of instrumental rationalism and then, by default, everything else is less than rational. But the rationality that has developed from the Enlightenment is a less than a

complete understanding of rationality *per se* and it is this incomplete picture has been linked to pragmatism (instrumentality) and science, so that it now seems almost common sense that we should have aims and endeavour to achieve these ends. Moreover, instrumental rationality is not the only form of rational thought. Indeed, morality is not irrational for as Max Weber reminded us, there is more than one form of rationality. He distinguished between at least two forms: *zweckrational* action and *vertrational* action, with the former purposive or instrumental action and the latter evaluatively rational action (Wilson, 1970, p. xiv) but he recognised in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the former was driving out the latter. This has led us to further mistakes in our use of the term rational – it has been linked to pragmatic practical, measurable, outcomes (or in Lyotard's [1984] understanding of post-modernity, all legitimate knowledge has to be performative) and this is also associated with science and technology. Herein lies another of the irrationalities of this age – we know that there is no conceptual relationship between a fact and a value but scientific facts are frequently treated as if they are intrinsically good and will naturally lead to progress, which is a way in which the hegemony of the system functions.

But before we conclude this second part of the paper we need to ask further questions about this instrumental (teleological) view of rationality: we need to question the ends of the process – wealth/profit – and ask at least three questions, all of which have moral overtones: has the end been pursued in a moral manner?; is it a legitimate end?; and if so, is the profit fairly distributed? The first of these questions, Sorokin clearly answers when he writes about murdering millions and putting the future of the planet at risk – and it would be easy to adduce many more examples of this that have occurred since he wrote. The second reflects, I think, another of the values of modernity – society, apart from those who control the system, has been depersonalised and we now have the celebrity culture who make their wealth out of exposing themselves as persons, which deflects us from recognising the depersonalisation of the whole society and now people are servants of the system: this, in its turn, demonstrates something more of the inconsistency of modern thought since it was Kant, the great thinker of the Enlightenment, who insisted that people should always be ends and never means. Finally, has the profit been fairly distributed? People are underpaid, exploited and their resources stolen for the sake of profit: the system is managed by those who have power and it is they – in their banks

and board-rooms – who have displayed this ruthless quest for acquisition and a great number of us in the West who have benefited have been happy to concur – we are the silent majority. What we are seeing is a process that is defined as progress by those who define social reality and this is one way in which the hegemony of the powerful is retained. The difference between the financial returns of the most wealthy and their employees has become greater in recent years and the vast remuneration for the few has been justified by the rational argument that they receive the market rate for their work and no other evidence is produced about the extent to which the market is making a just return for the work rendered in relation to all the other working people who receive many times less returns. In a televised broadcast of one of the Hearings by a Parliamentary Select Committee in February, 2009 following the credit crash it was pointed out to one of the bankers giving evidence that his monthly salary could have paid the wages of 36 members of his staff – and that was without the bonuses and other perks that he had received, and we know of far more excessive salaries than this so that it would be easy to go into all the facts and figures to demonstrate that this is no isolated case – but that is not my purpose in this presentation: the purpose is merely to show that Sorokin’s condemnation of the Sensate Age is not without foundation. Indeed, we can see that this Enlightenment view of rationality is itself flawed by its very incompleteness and immorality.

We could look at other aspects of the Enlightenment and treat them in a similar critical manner but that would needlessly prolong this argument (see, however, Bauman, 1993; Gray, 1995; Jarvis, 2008, *inter alia*). However, this instrumentalism has now been built into our culture and our way of thinking despite the fact that we know that teleological arguments are flawed because they rarely consider the means to the end. It is the means that Sorokin was concerned about – murdering millions, putting humankind and the planet to risk and we have sought to justify by the type of rational argument to which he refers but it is here that we need to introduce a concept that is rarely mentioned in the terms of neo-liberal economics – power – the power to do these things operates because we have accepted the instrumental rationality that puts profit first but slowly we are beginning to recognise that this appeal to the market is flawed and that it is being very costly. Indeed, the present economic crisis is demonstrating that the means are wrong and failing and that the ends achieved are less than good – it is but another nail in the coffin of the Sensate

Age of modernity. But what comes next? Will the pendulum now begin to move backwards?

Part 3: What Next?

Presenting this lecture at a time of global economic crisis brings to the fore Sorokin's concerns yet again – have we reached the end of the Sensate Age? If so, what next? Can we now consider Sorokin's ideas of change? Coser suggests, in Sorokin's thinking, rather like the Hegelian dialectic, that we see a new form of cultural mentality arising from the excesses and natural decline of the past age and now we might be moving towards the ideational. The major problem here, though, lies in the fact that cyclic theories of change are no longer accepted and most social theorists no longer accept Sorokin's historical research for a number of reasons, including the point that he over-simplifies the facts of history (Timashaff, 1965, p. 283). And so, is he a utopian thinker? Significantly, Kumar (1978, p. 178) views him as a philosopher of history rather than a utopian thinker – probably because he did not see the ideational period as the end of time but as a phase in the development of history; none of the utopian writers that I can find mention his work although the idea of the ideational certainly points in the utopian direction without being utopian since it recognises that even if it is obtainable the ideational state is not the end of the age. But Sorokin was certainly a critic of the age: Coser claims that he was a social prophet and he (1977, p. 477) suggests that:

Sorokin saw himself as another Moses who, even though he could not enter the promised land, was still able, owing to his cultural estrangement, to forecast its main features in his Integralist philosophy. Let him who has never dreamt of a redemptive Utopia of the future cast the first stone.

Throughout this paper I have argued that Sorokin's critique of the Age is an early critique of Modernity, one which reflects his own background and struggles and so it is hardly surprising that it was not viewed very kindly at the time when he was writing by those in the USA who were enjoying the fruits of the age. At the heart of his work he condemns the means-ends ethical philosophy of the Age because it downplays the means and foregrounds the ends: it is instrumental. It is the classical teleological ethical position with all its well-known weaknesses – four fundamental ones being: What are the means? When does the end of an act occur since time does

not stand still? What were the intentions of the act? Can we assess the morality of an act by its unspecified and unknown consequences? It is, for instance, hard to determine what the ends of any action are because what happens one day may be reversed the next and, secondly, can the means to those amorphous ends be justified morally?

Let me illustrate how these criticisms work in practice – in two very simple examples. Firstly, if the better life is the good – the end-product of an action or policy – then the global capitalist neo-liberal economics structural adjustment policies espoused by the World Bank should result in the greater good for the people. But the means to implement these policies required governments to cut back on their spending on education and welfare, and Torres and Puiggros (2009, p. 67) make the point that the implementation of these policies – forced upon national governments by the World Bank – has resulted in a tremendous step backward in the standard of living of the people of Latin America. A second example occurred in UK as I was writing this paper: government targets – in order to meet government targets on cost and waiting list times for hospitals, hospitals actually cut the number of staff, left patients in terrible conditions which probably resulted in some deaths and considerable excessive hardship. The target is the end and the means to the end are very subsidiary. These are examples, and many others could be found, but in neither instance do the means justify the ends. But what about the ends themselves? In the first instance, we might never know if these policies would have achieved a better standard of living in the longer term since the present economic crisis has just added to the woes of the people who have already suffered as a result of the means to achieve the World Bank's ends. In the second, fewer people would have suffered had the patients been put before the targets. I think that we can say that the neo-liberal economic policies have not worked because ends have been put before people – neo-liberalism has a limited perspective on rationality and no strong ethic – amongst other reasons. Instrumental rationality itself is a flawed concept, as Sorokin recognised. But, those in power have pursued, and still pursue, ends – their own or those set by governments – at the expense of others but does this crisis mean that we will detect that movement towards the ideational for which Sorokin hoped? I am not sure since the financial markets have turned to the politicians for help – as Habermas (2006) observed, some of the politicians who were running to catch up with the global market are now – at the end of March and the beginning of April – seeking to create a global political platform

which will allow them to regulate the market. But, they are also trying to patch-up the failing system with the values of the modern age – values that have already failed! Only one politician, just a few days before the Conference, called for a new form of capitalism with ethics.

Amongst academic debate about the Enlightenment, MacIntyre (1981, p. 52) argues that the project had to fail because ethics was not a major factor in the project:

Within that teleological scheme there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. Ethics in this view therefore presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human *telos* (*italics in original*).

While I am not happy with his solution of virtue since he seems to be trying to resurrect the past, we can see that his criticism lies at the heart of this argument that teleological arguments omit the ethics of the means to the end. More recently, Gray (1995) also postulated that modernity is dead, and he takes his argument much further than MacIntyre (and he also argues against Rorty whom he sees as a modernist) since he (1995, p. 259) argues that Western rationality and religion has resulted in our present Western cultures being a ‘nihilist expression of the will to power’. He (1995, p. 267) goes on to suggest that ‘the Westernizing project of Enlightenment humanism has desolated cultures in every part of the globe and visited devastation upon their natural environments’. Such a comment comes close to the sentiments that Sorokin expressed a generation earlier. Clearly the sensate society still exists but now the weaknesses of the Enlightenment are more clearly exposed and more generally accepted. With the current economic crisis and with global warming we see that Sorokin’s criticisms were not without foundation but they were ahead of his time and that they were made at a time when change was occurring but before Sorokin’s limit had actually been reached. However they were also made with the voice of an ideologue – not with the dispassion of a social scientist.

Conclusion

We have argued here that the rationality of the Enlightenment is impoverished because it is incomplete: we do need instrumental action – but we also need the rationality of ethical action: this latter has been forgotten in the relentless search for profit and in the process we have done precisely what Sorokin said we were doing – we have uprooted the values of humanity, we have murdered millions, we had made whole peoples and nations redundant and we have put the planet at risk. This process has been exacerbated by the forces of globalisation – which removed the boundaries between societies and created a global core of finance and information technology – and this, we are seeing collapse around us at the present time and the politicians are trying desperately to patch up the system with the very values that have caused it. But in the process, we have also seen a brief experiment in social living when the social structures were lowered at national levels – the 1960s. It was at this time that personal relationships, peace, flower-power, and so on came to the fore – but the promised land was a mirage that soon disappeared and yet I think that in that mirage we can see the underlying values about which Sorokin was concerned and these are something that we have probably all experienced many times and which we actually experience for even shorter periods – like the period of a festival, or a party or even just a few magic moments with friends – it is what Turner called *communitas* – when the structures are lowered and we experience people, as people, and the prevailing ethical value is concern for the other, *agape* – Christ actually taught that the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you – perhaps Sorokin was looking in the wrong place for the Kingdom of God, for ideational! Businesses see these times as times of team-building, and so they make them possible with ‘away-days’ and other forms of activity but they are artificial compared to the reality of the *communitas* that emerges naturally in the process of daily living (I have discussed this further in Jarvis, 2008).

But society needs structures to function and so in everyday-life they are soon re-erected and the structured society re-appears with perhaps a few slightly different features. The same process occurred at the end of the 1960s: the new global structures were being put in place and global capitalism emerged and many of us in the West enjoyed unprecedented wealth and luxury while others were to live in dire poverty and many die of malnutrition and illness at a very young age. But we might well ask now – with the near collapse of the global system of capitalism – have we yet reached the end of the Sensate Age – or will we ever reach it? What does lie beyond

it? Will we discover that ideational society that Sorokin believed underlies the sensate? Or was Max Weber correct when he said people will always endeavour to acquire and were the elite theories right when they claimed that there is an iron law of oligarchy? Is the classless society – is the new Jerusalem or the City of Man even a remote possibility? Perhaps, as Gray suggests, we need an even bigger catastrophe to change our values – perhaps we do need an apocalypse (Bull, 1995) of global warming to force us to move from this sensate age – because of the prevalence of this debate currently, it is almost as if we are waiting for the end and yet not believing that it can or will really happen. But even if it does, we might still well ask, ‘What next?’ since it will not be the end of time nor the end of the human project – and humankind will still look forwards towards a world in which we would like to live as we continue to strive to acquire – herein lies the paradox of human hope and existence that is captured by Sorokin’s unrealistic cyclical theory of social change.

References

- Bauman, Z. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bull, M. (ed.). 1995. *Apocalypse Theory and the ends of the world*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell (Vol. 1 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*).
- Coser, L. 1977. *The Masters of Sociological Thought, 2nd Edition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (downloaded from www. bolender.com 1/12/08).
- Douglas, M. 1966. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Douglas, M. 1970. *Natural Symbols*. London: Barrie and Rockliffe.
- Gray, J. 1995. *Enlightenment's Wake*. London: Routledge.
- Habermas, J. 2006. *Time of Transitions*. Cambridge: Polity Press (edited translated by C. Cronin and M. Pensky).
- Holy Bible.
- Jarvis, P. 2008. *Democracy, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society: active citizenship in a late modern age*. London: Routledge.
- Kerr, C., J. Dunlop, F. Harbison, and C. Myers. [1960] 1973. *Industrialism and Industrial Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kumar, K. 1978. *Prophecy and Progress*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Liotard, F-F. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- MacIntyre, A. 1981. *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth.
- Mannheim, K. 1936. *Ideology and Utopia*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Martin, B. 1981. *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Simmel, G. [1903] 1971. The Metropolis and Mental Life, reprinted in K. Thompson and J. Tunstall (eds). *Sociological Perspectives*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Sorokin, P. 1958. *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences*. London: Mayflower Publishing Co. and Vision Press Ltd.
- Sorokin, P. 1962. *Social and Cultural Dynamics*. New York: Bedminster Press (4 vols).
- Sorokin, P. 1966. *Sociological Theories of Today*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Timasheff, N. 1965. *Sociological Theory; its nature and growth*. New York: Random House (Revised edition).

- Torres, C. 2009. *Globalizations and Education*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Torres, C. and A. Puiggros. 2009. The State and Public Education in Latin America in C. Torres *op cit*.
- Turner, V. 1969. *The Ritual Process*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Weber, M. 1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Unwin.
Translated by Talcott Parsons.
- Wilson, B. (ed.). 1970. *Rationality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.