ИСТОРИЯ СОЦИОЛОГИИ

SOROKIN, PARSONS AND HARVARD: RIVALRY, STATUS REVERSAL AND STRATIFICATION IN SCIENCE

Lawrence T. Nichols (ltnichols@retiree.wvu.edu)

West Virginia University, Newington, United States

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Abstract. The paper examines the lengthy, complex and sometimes conflicted professional and personal relationship between Pitirim A. Sorokin and Talcott Parsons, approaching them as representatives of consecutive generations in social science. Two of the most prominent and influential U.S. sociologists of the twentieth century, they held simultaneous appointments for some thirty years at Harvard University, where they competed for leadership both at the organizational level and in the field of sociology more generally. The treatment combines narrative with conceptual analysis, by setting out a series of events that have not been fully documented previously and considering them within a broad framework in terms of several phases. The paper emphasizes Harvard as a context, including its organizational culture and prevalent understandings of science, as well as key decision makers and influential figures there who acted in support of, or in opposition to, the careers of Sorokin and Parsons. The analysis has implications for understanding processes of stratification over time in sociology and other sciences, especially at the organizational level.

Keywords: intergenerational relations, stratification in science, Pitirim A. Sorokin, Talcott Parsons, Harvard University

Introduction

Although there is a large, and still growing, literature about both Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968) and Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), no one has traced out in detail the dynamics of their relationship or considered it in terms of a conceptual framework. This paper will attempt to provide such an account over the period from 1929 to 1968, by applying three broad ideas, namely, intergenerational relations in science, professional rivalry and stratification.[1]

[1] The analysis is grounded in several types of evidence. Much of the most directly relevant data come from unpublished documents in Harvard University libraries. I have

Sorokin is best remembered for his sweeping historical analysis of cultural fluctuations (Sorokin 1937), including the alleged "crisis of our age" (Sorokin 1941a), for his articulation of an "Integral" approach to sociology (Sorokin 1941b, 1966), and for his efforts to create a sociology of love (Sorokin 1954). He also did much to launch the field of social stratification ("inequality") and mobility (Sorokin 1927, 1959a). Parsons is often discussed in terms of his work on "structural-functional" analysis (Parsons 1951), as well as the related effort to define a sociological-psychological-anthropological frame of reference (Parsons and Shils 1951). There is also continuing interest in his writings on modernization and the evolution of societies (Parsons 1960, 1966), and in his concept of the "societal community" (Sciortino 2021).

Harvard University, in the period under consideration, was a predominantly white and male institution with regard to its faculty and staff. Women, as well as members of minority racial and ethnic groups, worked at the university in a wide range of support occupations. Harvard had also developed a close relationship with nearby Radcliffe College, where women took their degrees. Radcliffe did not have its own faculty, and students received instruction from members of the Harvard faculty, who "repeated" their courses for an additional salary (until 1947), and who also acted as tutors to women students. The university was closely linked to the business and professional classes in the Boston area, and family background was often a key to acceptance or advancement. In the 1930s, moreover, Harvard retained a strong "regional" identity, though it began moving toward the more national identity it has now acquired.

The analysis draws upon earlier work on intergenerational relations in science (Nichols 1996; 2019b). I take the position that successive generations, which can be thought of as contiguous dyads, are simultaneously natural allies and natural rivals. There is, in other words, an inherent, organized, intergroup ambivalence (Merton 1976) or a dialectic of complementarity and conflict.

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drawn especially on the faculty papers of Talcott Parsons, as well as those of Lawrence J. Henderson, Gordon W. Allport and Edwin B. Wilson. Sorokin's correspondence is mostly located in the Records of the Department of Sociology. Also important are the correspondence of several consecutive deans of the faculty of arts and sciences in Harvard College, as well as the official correspondence of Presidents A. Lawrence Lowell and James B. Conant, along with annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard University. Other archival data come from the Robert K. Merton Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University. The discussion is further informed by relevant professional literature, including the presidential addresses of both Parsons and Sorokin, published reviews of their major books, and Barry V. Johnston's excellent intellectual biography of Sorokin. Parts of the analysis also draw upon published autobiographies of Sorokin and Conant, as well as reminiscences of Parsons and Merton.

Earlier generations in each pair occupy a socially superior position from which they educate and train later ones, preparing new colleagues for careers in science, advancing those careers in important ways, and themselves reaping professional rewards in the process. As newer generations acquire entry-level status, their elders continue to exercise control and dominance as administrators, reviewers and other types of evaluators. But younger generations eventually supplant their elders, and their members often rise competitively as their former teachers and mentors move toward retirement and decline in status and influence. Such reversals can generate interpersonal stress as well as feelings of resentment and betrayal on the part of members of older generations. In some cases, there are open ruptures in which younger generations depart from, or even repudiate entirely, the ideas and methods of their elders, perhaps especially in times of "paradigm shifts" (Kuhn 1962). Meanwhile, however, members of rising generations, even while advancing, sometimes work to sustain the stature of their mentors, perhaps out of respect and gratitude, or perhaps because they gain rewards from being identified in terms of a "distinguished academic lineage," or for other reasons. Significantly, the enduring high status of members of earlier generations is often more about "prestige" than about "power" and control over events, which largely passes to newer generations that assume managerial and executive responsibilities.

Thus, some types of rewards are shared across generations, while others are generation specific. Younger generations, meanwhile, are at risk of being discredited indirectly, in the event that their teachers and mentors are somehow discredited. It is also noteworthy that members of third generations, who may have various ties to the two preceding generations, sometimes become actively involved in the cooperation-competition dynamic between their predecessors.

There is an ecology to intergenerational processes, because science is necessarily situated in distinct contexts. Of particular importance here is its location in university settings, especially in colleges and academic departments and related "interstitial" arrangements (Isaac 2012). These are part of larger stratified systems, including private and public research universities, liberal arts colleges, Catholic or other religious institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, etc. The "reward system of science" (Merton 1973) operates in highly consequential ways in such places, as influenced by organizational cultures and "local understandings of science" (Nichols 2001). Intergenerational cooperation, rivalry and rupture also play out within professional associations at regional, national and international levels. These dynamics, moreover, occur within segments of disciplines, including "clusters and networks" (Mullins 1973), as older generations of, say, qualitative or "big data" sociologists, or earlier "waves" of feminists, or senior critical theorists ("Old Left"), etc., interact with

younger entrants. The same holds true of successive generations within "schools" (Tiryakian 1979), for instance between the "classic" and the "second" Chicago school (Fine 1995).

The "rivalry" between Sorokin and Parsons had three particular focal points: (1) competition for status at Harvard; (2) competition for recognition as preeminent sociological theorists; and (3) competition for recognition as visionaries of sociology's future. The emergence of the rivalry required about seven years, after which it continued, in an irregular way, for some three decades. It can be considered part of a much larger rivalry between members of successive generations that is beyond the scope of the analysis.

Phase One, 1929–1934: Acquaintance, Collaboration and Initial Tension

The best hypothesis regarding the first Sorokin-Parsons encounter might be that they were introduced in early 1929, when Sorokin lectured at Harvard at the invitation of the Department of Economics in which Parsons was an instructor.[2] They were presumably in contact in the fall of 1930, when Sorokin joined Economics, and they served together in that unit during the following academic year. Meanwhile, Sorokin became chair of the Committee on Sociology and Social Ethics (CSSE) that was developing plans for a new curriculum, and this would have involved further contact with Parsons, the committee's secretary (Nichols 1992).[3]

The CSSE was created in fall 1927, when the twenty-five-year-old Parsons arrived at Harvard, because the administration of President A. Lawrence Lowell decided to abolish social ethics as a field of concentration, and to replace it with a broadened field oriented toward sociology. The Department of Social Ethics

[2] Economist-sociologist Thomas Nixon Carver seems to have played a leading role in arranging this invitation. Sorokin had also prepared the way by sending copies of his publications to Frank W. Taussig, a senior professor in the department and the editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. It was also in 1929 that Robert Merton first encountered Sorokin, at the conference of the American Sociological Society, and he was so impressed that he immediately decided to study with Sorokin. See (Merton 1994).

[3] The Department of Social Ethics offered courses on social problems, social policy and social work, and, in effect, took the place of a department of sociology. From its founding in 1906 to 1913, the Reverend Francis Greenwood Peabody, a professor in the School of Divinity, served as its chair. Following Peabody's retirement, the department's status was in doubt until 1920, when Richard Clarke Cabot, an established member of Harvard's medical faculty, became chair. For the next several years the unit flourished, but it lost a key financial backer and it also lost credibility with the administration. As a result, in 1927 the administration ruled that social ethics would be replaced by "sociology and social ethics." See (Ford 1930). See also (Potts 1965).

(1906-1931), authorized by President Charles William Eliot, can be considered an expression of the historical Christian component of Harvard's culture, especially as articulated by the Reverend Francis G. Peabody, a leading "Social Gospel" advocate (e.g., Peabody 1904). In a sense, it might be described as a "Unitarian public sociology" that had ties to "settlement house sociology" and to the field of social work.[4]

The interdisciplinary composition of the CSSE is worth noting. Its members included Richard Clarke Cabot, the chair of Social Ethics, as well as William Yandell Elliott (Government), Edwin F. Gay (Economics), Earnest A. Hooton (Anthropology), Arthur M. Schlesinger (History), and Edward Allen Whitney (History), with Ralph Barton Perry (Philosophy) as the committee's chair. Within Harvard, there was a longstanding tendency to regard sociology as, in effect, an interdisciplinary field. Economist-sociologist Thomas Nixon Carver, the main instructor in sociology for three decades, preferred the term "social science." It was, therefore, in a sense natural, as well as a matter of expediency, for the administration to appoint "interdepartmental" members when the Department of Sociology was created. This aspect of organizational culture also arguably prepared the way for the later establishment of a Department of Social Relations, while facilitating the rise of Parsons, who always inclined toward an interdisciplinary perspective.

Harvard had delayed creating a sociology department long after such units had appeared elsewhere, including at state schools (e.g., Kansas, Minnesota), as well as at a historically Black institution, Atlanta University, and among Harvard's elite peers, including Chicago, Columbia, Penn and Yale. Eliot (a chemist) and Lowell (a professor of government) were skeptical of sociology's qualifications as an academic discipline that offered more than reformism and political ideology. Sorokin and Parsons were therefore under pressure to gain recognition for sociology as a genuine science, as this was understood at Harvard.

Archival materials show that Parsons served on the CSSE during the 1929–1930 academic year, developing proposals for the subfield of "the ethics of society and the individual." In early 1930, the committee began sending drafts to Sorokin (then at the University of Minnesota) for his comments. Thus, Sorokin and Parsons were personally acquainted, and they collaborated even prior to becoming colleagues in a department of sociology. The CSSE also

[4] See the following accounts of "settlement-house sociology": (Deegan 1988; Lengermann, Niebrugge-Brantley 2002; MacLean, Williams 2012). Professor James Ford offered graduate courses in Social Ethics during the 1920s on the management of social service agencies. These were discontinued when the Department of Sociology was created.

brought Parsons into contact with several senior professors, some of whom would soon become "interdepartmental" members of Sociology. Another would offer guest lectures in one of his early courses. These connections, along with others in Economics, were the beginning of an internal support network that proved vital to Parsons's ascent.

Sorokin would probably also have learned of Parsons's new translation of Max Weber's essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1930). Coincidentally, he had recently examined Weber's sociology of religion in his *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (Sorokin 1928). Importantly, Sorokin disagreed with Weber's causal-factor explanation of how religion shaped modern economies, and he had begun to develop an alternative theory in which the key was the historical fluctuation of "culture mentalities" that are presumed to underlie all social institutions and to link them as an integrated system.

In spring 1931, Lowell approved the creation of a Department of Sociology that would incorporate faculty and courses from Social Ethics—which lost departmental status--while also introducing new courses as outlined by the CSSE (Nichols 1992). The department's initial tenured faculty included Sorokin, Cabot and James Ford, an associate professor of social ethics.[5] Rural sociologist Carle C. Zimmerman, Sorokin's former co-author, joined the unit in 1932.

Interestingly, Sorokin (1963) reported in his autobiography that, as the designated department chair, he had to struggle to gain approval for the transfer of Parsons. Whether Parsons knew of this cannot be determined. Parsons (1970) did state, in a memoir, that the long-serving chair of Economics, H. H. Burbank, was not supportive of his work.[6] This is confirmed by a letter from Burbank (1931) to Clifford H. Moore, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences:

Talcott Parsons is now serving as an Instructor in Economics and Tutor in the Division of History, Government and Economics. Since he is on a one-year

[5] Cabot, from one of the area's most prominent families, was a cardiologist who published influential works on diagnosis. He was an important advocate for social casework in medicine, and well known in professional social work organizations. Among his publications are *Social Service and the Art of Healing* (Moffet, Yard, 1909) and *Honesty* (Macmillan, 1938). James Ford earned a Harvard Ph.D. in Economics in 1909, with a thesis on cooperatives. His specialty was housing problems, and he held a high position in the national organization Better Homes in America. His major work was *Slums and Housing: History, Conditions, Policy, with Special Reference to New York City*, with Katherine Morrow and George N. Thompson (Harvard University Press, 1936).

[6] Harold Hitchings Burbank (1887–1951), whose special field was finance, taught economics at Harvard for nearly forty years, and he served as the chair of Economics for eighteen years.

appointment I suppose his new appointment will be in terms of Sociology. We do not plan to use him in Economics.[7]

Parsons's appointment in Sociology would likewise have been for only one year, except for the intervention of a CSSE member, Professor Edwin F. Gay, an economic historian and the first dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Business Administration. Thus, in May 1931, Dean Moore (1931) informed Gay:

> I have decided to recommend Parsons for three years in place of one … I am moved to take this action, primarily by your testimony as to the knowledge and quality of mind shown by Parsons in this new article that is not yet in print.

The move to Sociology allowed Parsons to remain at Harvard, to advance in rank, and to make a fresh start in a new field, with far less peer competition than in Economics. Parsons himself (1970) later acknowledged that he would likely not have received tenure in Economics.

Obtaining Parsons was also in Sorokin's own interests, for his elevation involved new vulnerabilities. Specifically, he would begin to be judged, according to Harvard's standards and culture, in terms of his performance in building and administering an academic department. President Lowell, who read some of Sorokin's publications and made the decision to hire him, had also entrusted the development of sociology to him. Thus, at this point, Sorokin and Parsons arguably needed one another in order to advance.

Parsons's initial assignment was to give one-fourth of the lectures in Sociology 1, "Introduction to Sociology," to organize and coordinate Sociology 6, "Social Institutions," and to work with fifteen tutees.[8] As a "full" course, Institutions ran for two semesters, and it seems a natural choice for Parsons, in view of his related work on the CSSE. As is well known (e.g., Wearne 1989, 1996) Parsons had a background in institutional economics, from undergraduate studies at Amherst College through a year at the London School of Economics and then two years at the University of Heidelberg. The Institutions course was a "serial," with guest lecturers who spoke about their own areas of expertise. Parsons coordinated the presentations and interpreted them within a conceptual framework. This involved

[7] This quote, as well as subsequent quotes from unpublished Harvard materials are by courtesy of the Harvard University Archives.

[8] Lowell, perhaps influenced by British practice, had introduced a tutorial system that provided individual guidance to both undergraduate men at Harvard and to undergraduate women at Radcliffe College. Junior members of the faculty, as well as others on non-permanent appointments, did most of this work, which also helped to supplement their salaries.

direct collaboration with established members of the faculty, including twelve "full" professors and one associate professor. There was also an assistant professor, Crane Brinton a historian of the French Revolution. Of these, Arthur Darby Nock, a specialist on religion, would soon offer tangible support for Parsons's advancement (see Nichols 2019), while Brinton would remain an ally.

Throughout this first phase, Parsons was far more vulnerable than most people realize. This became evident even before the end of his first semester in Sociology, when the new Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Kenneth B. Murdock, wrote to Sorokin, saying he was "considerably disturbed by the situation of the two younger instructors in the Department, who, as I understand it, have not proved themselves fit for permanent positions" (Murdock 1931). This referred to Parsons and also to Carl Smith Joslyn, who had studied sociology within Economics under Carver.[9] Murdock asked Sorokin, "Do you think it would be well to consider, at least, the possibility of replacing one of them this year by a new instructor?"

In reply, Sorokin agreed that the instructors in question "have not been quite successful in the most fundamental course to which they were assigned as lecturers" (Sorokin 1931a). But he defended his junior colleagues, telling the dean that "the dryness of their lectures is the principal criticism to be made, and this is not due to intellectual but to temperamental factors. In general, their work has been entirely satisfactory." Murdock relented, but Sorokin sent a follow-up note that again reveals the precariousness of the situation: "I have already warned Dr. Parsons and Dr. Joslyn that they should not regard their appointments as permanent, and [I] have advised them not to fail to interest themselves in any considerable offer" (Sorokin 1931b).

In the 1932-1933 academic year, with Sorokin's approval, Parsons introduced Sociology 21, "The Sociological Theories of Hobhouse, Durkheim, Simmel, Toennies and Max Weber,"[10] which was an advanced one-semester course. In view of later events, it is interesting that the title did not include Vilfredo Pareto, and also that three of the five selected thinkers did not feature prominently in Parsons's first major book. Importantly, Parsons proceeded on the assumption that sociology did not yet have a commonly shared conceptual

[9] On Carver, see the autobiographical *Recollections of an Unplanned Life* (Los Angeles, Ritchie, 1949) as well as (Church 1965). Joslyn did a dissertation on U.S. business leaders and subsequently became chair of a sociology department at the University of Maryland, where he participated in the hiring of C. Wright Mills in 1941. Despite political differences, Mills spoke of Joslyn as one of the finest people he had met.

[10] During the 1930s, Parsons developed an initial version of what became the "pattern variables" in his later structural-functional model on the basis of Toennies's analysis of "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" social orders.

scheme that he considered a requisite for its development as a science. This assumption seems to have resulted in part from Parsons's study of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and it accorded also with the view of Alfred North Whitehead (1925) in *Science and the Modern World*. Parsons was especially fond of quoting Whitehead, who had joined the Harvard faculty in the mid-1920s, on "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Evidently regarding himself not only as an explorer but also as something of a maverick, Parsons set out to define an appropriate frame of reference for sociology. Sorokin, by contrast, believed he had successfully defined the field in his treatise, *a System of Sociology* (Sorokin 1920), in *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (Sorokin 1928) and in the recent article, "Sociology as a Science" (Sorokin 1931).

Sociology 21 attracted graduate students, and it became a recruiting mechanism for a discussion circle that Parsons created, which met biweekly and became known as the Adams House Group (Johnston 1995).[11] Members of this circle, which was active from about 1932 to 1939, included some who would later contribute to the development of functional analysis, especially Kingsley Davis, Robert K. Merton, Wilbert Moore and Robin Williams. The seriousness of the exchanges is reflected in the fact that participants kept detailed notes that are preserved in the Harvard University Archives. Consequently, graduate students began to drift away from Sorokin. This may have been partly a result of very different styles of interaction. According to Barry Johnston's (1986) interview data, Parsons, then only about ten years older than many students, treated them as collaborators, whereas Sorokin seemed distant, intimidating and hyper-critical. Importantly, Parsons's two early courses led to beneficial alliances with members of both older and younger generations.

Earlier, Sorokin had worked closely with graduate students at Minnesota, some of whom (e.g., Otis Duncan, Walter Lunden, T. Lynn Smith) remained loyal to him for many years. Jessie Bernard also took coursework there with Sorokin, and she held him in high regard. Perhaps significantly, however, at Minnesota Sorokin produced "American-style" interactionist sociology, rather than the "European-style" cultural and historical sociology he pursued at Harvard (Nichols 2012). Quite a few Harvard graduate students did theses under Sorokin's direction, but many — e.g., John Boldyreff, Neal B. DeNood, Edgar Schuler, Emile B. Smullyan — did not become as professionally prominent as

[11] Parsons also had small discussion groups at his home that met in the evening, often sharing about a selected theme such as "rationality." As I have suggested elsewhere, one key to Parsons's ascent was his method of positioning himself as the "indispensable hub" of such groups, among which the 1949 Carnegie Seminar on the fundamentals of social science was arguably the most important.

others who worked closely with Parsons, such as Robert F. Bales, Bernard Barber, Marion Levy, Wilbert Moore, Robin Williams, and Logan Wilson. Perhaps Charles P. Loomis had the most prominent career among those in Sorokin's orbit. Matilda White Riley, a future president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), took courses with Sorokin on the way to an M.A. from Radcliffe College, and she later contributed to a festschrift in his honor.[12] But she was not seen as "one of Sorokin's students" in the way that others, such as Williams and Levy, were linked to Parsons. The professional success of Parsons's students, as well as that of his "school" (Tiryakian 1979), would help to sustain his high status in the 1950s and 1960s.

The case of Robert Merton, the most prominent sociologist trained at Harvard in the 1930s (Nichols 2010), is complex. As a member of a third generation that followed those of Sorokin and Parsons, Merton (1910-2003) was a potential rival to Parsons via the logic of generational succession. As he recounted in "Remembering the Young Talcott Parsons" (1980), Merton entered Harvard in order to study with Sorokin, but he was soon drawn to Parsons (see also Merton 1994) and the Adams House group. Meanwhile, Merton served as Sorokin's teaching assistant, carried out research on scientific discoveries for Sorokin's major work, and co-authored two articles with him (Sorokin and Merton 1935, 1937). Merton's dissertation extended Weber's "Protestant ethic" explanation from economics to science –– an approach which, as noted, Sorokin rejected (Merton 1996) but which Parsons promoted. Although he is usually identified with Columbia University, Merton (1936; 1938a; 1938b) published a number of early, influential works while at Harvard. These writings, still widely cited, reflect his studies with Sorokin and with Parsons, as well as their personal mentoring of him. Merton's deep dual loyalty would be a key to events three decades later (see Nichols 2010).[13]

Despite success with graduate students, Parsons remained vulnerable. a major reason was the attitude, and the broad executive power, of Harvard's hard-driving new president, James B. Conant, who took office in 1933. Lowell (in office from 1909 to 1933) had been a social scientist. Conant, like Eliot

[12] For more on Radcliffe, especially a comparison between the teaching of sociology there and at Harvard, see (Nichols 1997).

[13] Merton benefited from the presence of George Sarton, a historian of science who had been displaced from Belgium by the First World War. Given an office in Widener Library, Sarton carried on research that was supported by special foundation grants. Sarton also did some teaching, and he edited two periodicals, called *Isis* and *Osiris*. After serving on Merton's dissertation committee, he published Merton's thesis on science in seventeenth century England in *Osiris*, thereby helping to launch his career and the field of the sociology of science. See (Merton 1985: 470-486).

(in office from 1869 to 1909) was a chemist. Indeed, he was among the most distinguished research chemists of the era. Like Eliot, who had transformed Harvard decades earlier, Conant aspired to reshape the university into the world's foremost research institution, on what might be called a German model. Believing (Conant 1970) that "second rate" faculty had been retained under Lowell—something "almost criminal" in his mind--he swiftly disposed of some through new, harsh policies. The organizational climate, affected also by the financial losses of the Great Depression, was so frightening that Parsons, Merton and other junior members of Sociology sent Conant a letter expressing concern about their prospects. Conant's draconian approach triggered a near-revolt as angry faculty packed a meeting and demanded concessions. Facing a possible vote of no-confidence, the president relented somewhat, but anyone seeking tenure would need his approval. Significantly, Conant (1970) held an unapologetic "hard science" point of view, and he regarded the social sciences with much skepticism, considering them akin to "astrology." In order to gain Conant's full support, faculty in the social disciplines would need to emulate those in the natural sciences—an approach that had been developed in Economics, in Psychology, and in Anthropology (i.e., in physical anthropology and archaeology) more than in History, in Government or in Sociology.

Throughout this initial period, the gap between Sorokin and Parsons was quite large. Parsons, for instance, initially earned only about one-third of Sorokin's salary. Sorokin, moreover, was a "founding chair" who had played a special role in gaining acceptance for sociology. He also enjoyed greater access than did Parsons to other resources, including funds from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation that were distributed through the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences on which Sorokin had a seat. Sorokin played a dominant role in building up the department, submitting proposals to the administration and exercising control through continuous recommendations on appointments and promotions. Meanwhile, Sorokin corresponded with sociologists around the United States and in Europe (where he was elected president of the International Institute of Sociology). He was, in short, one of the most prominent sociologists of the era, virtually everyone in U.S. sociology had heard of him, and his writings were read also in Europe and in Asia. Parsons, on the other hand, was largely unknown in sociology except as the translator of *The Protestant Ethic*.

Phase Two, 1935–1939: a Rivalry Begins

Approaching his thirty-second birthday, Parsons (1934) sent Sorokin a lengthy letter seeking support for promotion to assistant professor. He began by detailing

contributions in teaching that were, he claimed, well beyond what was expected of an instructor, especially work with graduate students. Regarding scholarship, Parsons reported publishing, during eight years at Harvard, five journal articles along with seven entries in *The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* and the translation of the *Protestant Ethic*. He acknowledged that the articles had appeared in economics journals, that he had not published empirical studies, and that he had not published a book, though he added, somewhat defensively, that this was mostly because he had chosen to work on an unusually challenging volume.[14]

Although the tone of the letter was generally deferential toward Sorokin as the undisputed superior, there was a significant assertiveness as well. In particular, Parsons claimed to have developed something of a reputation, especially among highly respected members of the Harvard faculty but also more widely, as reflected in an invitation from Columbia University to teach in a summer session. Indeed, identifying himself in terms of a generational membership, Parsons (1934) declared a willingness to have his work compared with that of any sociologist "of about my age [who is] writing on Sociological Theory in this country." All in all, he concluded, "I do not feel any longer that I am an apprentice in sociology and on probation" (Parsons 1934).

A year later, Parsons reiterated the request, reminding Sorokin that, "In our discussion of my status last fall … you agreed that my accomplishments had then earned the rank of Assistant Professor for me and that you motivated your advice to me not to raise the question at that time with considerations of the difficult internal situation of the Department" (Parsons 1935b). Now, however, he delivered a "quite irrevocable" ultimatum: he would not "remain in the Department in my present rank after the present academic year." Interestingly, in closing, Parsons asked that Sorokin not reach a decision without "private consultation with influential members of the Department who may legitimately be considered to be concerned with the question" (Parsons 1935b). This suggests that Parsons believed he had important supporters, especially among the numerous "interdepartmental" members of Sociology such as Gay and Nock.[15]

As events unfolded, the key consideration became an assessment of Parsons's lengthy draft manuscript, whose working title was "sociology and the elements of human action." Sorokin quickly read through it, and he provided Parsons with several pages of a handwritten response (see also Johnston 1995). He congratulated

[14] The *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, which published some of Parsons's early articles, was edited at Harvard, and this likely helped Parsons. Archival records do show, however, that the editor, Frank W. Taussig, rejected at least one of Parsons's early submissions.

[15] For a fuller account of the interdepartmental professors in the 1930s, see (Johnston 1995: 67–70).

Parsons on the ambitious project that displayed "fine qualities of an analytical mind" (Sorokin 1935). He concluded, however, that the draft would prove largely unreadable, and he offered suggestions for major revisions. Sorokin found the critical portion easier to follow than the constructive section on a proposed "voluntaristic theory of action" that allegedly emerged from the "convergence" of the thought of Pareto, Weber, Emile Durkheim and Alfred Marshall. He complained that the draft employed terms such as "positivism" in unconventional ways. Sorokin (1935) also found fault with the central conceptual pair of "means and ends." While assuring Parsons that these critical remarks "do not annul the really fine points of your work," Sorokin refrained from endorsing it, stating that the manuscript showed promise but did not yield "a fruitful harvest."

Meanwhile, Parsons had acquired a highly influential advocate in Professor Lawrence J. Henderson, a physician, biochemist and physiologist who had become an "interdepartmental" member of Sociology in 1931, mostly on the strength of his knowledge of Pareto (Cannon 1943). Henderson had attained eminence in physiology via pathbreaking work on the acid-base equilibrium in human blood. For some twenty years, he had also taught a course on the history of science which, along with his research, gained Henderson a local reputation as an expert on science generally. Henderson had successfully urged Lowell to bring Whitehead to Harvard, and this led also to the creation of Harvard's unique Society of Fellows (Homans and Bailey 1948; Brinton 1959; Homans 1984), which began operating in 1933, and for which Henderson served as the initial director. This project, personally sponsored and largely financed by Lowell, provided three-year stipends to selected students (men only) and allowed them to pursue independent research without taking traditional graduate coursework. The fellows, both senior (faculty) and junior, dined together once a week in their own building, with the president of Harvard participating ex officio. This gave Henderson regular access to Conant (his nephew via marriage), as well as to Lowell, who attended as president emeritus. The extraordinary range of Henderson's local influence was also reflected in an office he occupied in the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration next to that of Dean Wallace B. Donham,[16] who wanted Henderson there to participate in research on human relations in industry.[17]

[16] Wallace Brett Donham (1877–1954) was the second dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, serving from 1919 to 1942. He was known for an emphasis on "human relations" in business and industry, and for promoting use of the experiential case method in instruction.

[17] Henderson had also chaired the search committee that recommended Conant's appointment as president. At the Business School he participated in the "industrial hazards" project funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, directing a "Fatigue Lab." For

Parsons and Henderson seem to have connected initially in the early 1930s via Henderson's seminar on "Pareto and Methods of Scientific Investigation," which was first offered in fall 1932. Thus, Parsons was a member of "the Pareto circle" (Heyl 1968) at Harvard, though he was less of a Henderson disciple—if at all—than were Brinton, the young George Homans,[18] and others (Nichols, 2006).[19] The seminar might have influenced Parson's thinking about the ideas of "system" and "equilibrium," which Henderson emphasized, and Parsons assigned Henderson's (1932) article, "An Approximate Definition of Fact" in his teaching. Henderson (1935d) published an article on "physician and patient as a social system" (Barber 1970), and he also brought out a small volume (Henderson 1935c), via the Harvard Press, on *Pareto's General Sociology: a Physiologist's Interpretation*. Henderson subsequently launched Sociology 23, "Concrete Sociology: a Study of Cases," in which guest lecturers applied Pareto's ideas to various practical issues, especially at the level of small groups or organizations.

It is not entirely clear when and how Parsons first became interested in Pareto and "non-logical action." Barry Johnston (1995) has suggested this happened while Parsons was taking economics courses at Harvard in the late 1920s. Significantly, by summer 1932 — prior to Henderson's seminar — Parsons had drafted a monograph of about one hundred and thirty-five pages on "Pareto and the problems of positivistic sociology." It is interesting to consider whether Parsons might have regarded Sorokin's publications — as well as sociology in

details, see (Buxton, Turner 1992). The best-known product of the "hazards" research was the study of Western Electric and its discovery of the alleged "Hawthorne Effect." See (Roethlisberger, Dickson 1939).

[18] George C. Homans (1910–1994), who came from a prominent family, earned a Harvard A.B. in 1933, with a major in English. He then became a protégé of Henderson, who arranged for his induction in the second group of Junior Fellows, and who steered him in the direction of sociology. During the period of his fellowship, Homans traveled to England and did research for what became *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1941). When Robert Merton left Harvard for Tulane in 1939, Homans was hired in his place as an instructor in sociology. Following service in the U.S. Navy during World War II, he received an appointment as associate professor of sociology. Not long thereafter, Homans became one of the strongest internal critics of Parsons. Meanwhile, he developed an exchange-based sociology with an emphasis on interaction in small groups. He became chair of a revived Department of Sociology in 1970.

[19] "Others" included Charles P. Curtis (a member of Harvard's governing body) and Chester Barnard (an executive with New Jersey Bell). Homans and Curtis, as a direct result of the seminar, brought out *An Introduction to Pareto: His Sociology* (Knopf, 1934). Barnard also wrote a well-known book that Henderson subsequently used, *The Functions of the Executive* (Harvard University Press, 1938).

the U.S. more generally--as essentially positivistic, and thus not a model to be followed.

Although he could not find a publisher for the Pareto monograph, Parsons did receive a favorable, career-advancing response from one very prominent colleague with whom he shared it. This was Robert M. MacIver, a European-trained sociologist and political scientist at Columbia, who offered warm congratulations and commented, "It seems to me that you have penetrated the essential sociological quality of Pareto's work and excellently brought out the internal inconsistencies" (MacIver 1932). [20] As a result, MacIver offered Parsons the opportunity, which he accepted, to teach courses in Columbia's 1933 summer session. Robert Lynd, the author (with Helen Merrell Lynd) of the "Middletown" community studies, told Parsons that this might be an informal "audition" for a job. Shortly thereafter, Parsons (1933) published an entry on Pareto in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.* Within the next several years he would author an article on Pareto's analytical scheme (Parsons 1936) and deliver lectures in Henderson's "Concrete Sociology" that applied Pareto's ideas to medical practice.

Meanwhile, Henderson took a deep personal interest in the Pareto section of Parsons's long monograph, and he invited Parsons to his home near Harvard for direct consultation on final revisions. The invitation was a response to a request from Parsons (1935a):

> Dear Professor Henderson —
>
> I have lately been occupied with the revision, which amounts to an almost complete rewriting, of my study of Pareto. … I should very much

[20] Robert Morrison MacIver (1882-1970) was born in Scotland where he earned degrees at the University of Edinburgh before obtaining a graduate degree from Oxford in 1907. He taught political science and sociology at Aberdeen University from 1907 to 1915. After moving to Canada, MacIver served as head of the department of political science at the University of Toronto from 1919 to 1927. He then became head of the department of economics and sociology at Barnard College, the undergraduate women's unit of Columbia University. In 1929 he was named a professor of political philosophy and sociology in Columbia's graduate faculty. In the early 1930s, Sorokin nominated MacIver for the presidency of the American Sociological Society, and MacIver subsequently held that office in 1940. In 1934, the Department of Sociology recommended hiring MacIver, but Conant declined to make an offer, partly, it appears, as the result of L.J. Henderson's criticism of MacIver's writings as not genuinely scientific (see Nichols 2001). MacIver criticized the fourth volume of Sorokin's *Dynamics*, leading to a rift between them that was eventually healed. MacIver remained vigorous in later years, and he served as president and then chancellor of the New School for Social Research after his eightieth birthday. See his autobiography, *As a Tale That Is Told: The Autobiography of R.M. MacIver* (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

> like to submit it to you for your criticism, if you are willing. The changes will, I think, bring it considerably more into accord with you own view than was the first version.

Henderson opposed "philosophical" approaches, but he believed that sociology lacked a scientific conceptual scheme and that Pareto's work might supply it. Parsons (1970: 832) would later recall the intense, one-on-one sessions with Henderson, over a period of three months, as "an extraordinary experience, both personally and intellectually."

Parsons doubtless realized that Henderson (a voting member of Sociology) might help him attain tenure. It is also significant that Parsons actively sought mentoring from Henderson, whereas he was unwilling to accept criticism from Sorokin, whose sociological authority he did not consider binding. Parsons also received suggestions from both Nock and, interestingly, from Merton who was completing his dissertation (Johnston 1995: 100).

Archival documents reveal that, between 1935 and 1939, Henderson intervened repeatedly in order to advance Parsons, both within Harvard and within the academy more generally. Thus, in December 1935, the time by which Parsons had requested a decision on his status, Henderson (1935a) wrote to George Birkhoff, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to say, "I have rarely felt more confident about the desirability of promoting a man to an assistant professorship."[21] Based on limited knowledge of sociology (mainly from department meetings), he asserted that "there is probably nobody else in the country … who is anywhere near him." At about the same time, Henderson (1935b) also wrote to Henry Allen Moe at the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in support of Parsons's application for a fellowship (which Parsons planned to use if he left Harvard).

Meanwhile, the Department of Sociology recommended that Parsons be promoted to assistant professor, and President Conant concurred. Thus, in fall 1936, after nearly a full decade at Harvard, Parsons finally attained professorial rank. It's an interesting question whether this would have happened if Parsons had not published on Pareto, and if members of the Harvard faculty had not valued Pareto's work so highly. In addition to Henderson, these included E. B. Wilson, a professor of vital statistics who taught population courses in Sociology, entomologist William Morton Wheeler who initially urged Henderson

[21] George David Birkhoff (1884–1944) was a prominent mathematician who served as president of the American Mathematical Society. Interestingly, at the time of this letter, Birkhoff's son, Garrett, also a mathematician, was a Junior Fellow in the Society that Henderson directed.

to read Pareto's *Treatise*, as well as Brinton and the writer Bernard DeVoto, who tutored George Homans. Parsons (1970: 832) later recalled, with evident bitterness, that it had been Henderson, Wilson and Gay who had "pushed" for his promotion, not his department chair, Sorokin.

Parsons also gained support from the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences, which had provided limited financial grants for his work. Members of a subcommittee (which included Nock) assigned to read "sociology and the elements of human action" were impressed by its intellectual quality. Henderson, though not on the subcommittee, became deeply involved, as noted by the chair, agricultural economist John D. Black: "The executive committee wishes me to extend to you their very great thanks for the extraordinary amount of time and trouble you spent in going over Professor Parsons's manuscript … McGraw Hill has decided to publish it" (Black 1937).[22] Thus, it was a group of internally respected, mostly senior scholars—none of them sociologists—who vouched for Parsons and helped persuade Conant that his unusual ability and early achievements met Harvard's high standard for advancement (see also Buxton 1998).

The book, now entitled *The Structure of Social Action*, established Parsons as a significant figure in sociology and in social science more generally in the U.S.[23] Floyd House (1939: 129) told prospective readers in an *American Journal of Sociology* review that, "This meaty book is important both … for the elucidation of the persistent and difficult problem of the place of values in social behavior and because it contains the best summary and interpretation of the sociological theories of Pareto, Durkheim and Max Weber that is now available in English."[24] Similarly, Louis Wirth (1939: 404) of the University of Chicago, concluded in *The American Sociological Review* that "this thoughtful treat-

[22] Black, like Sorokin, had come to Harvard from the University of Minnesota, where they were acquainted. The two seem to have remained on good terms.

[23] There is a significant secondary literature on *Structure*. Many of its leading ideas are analyzed by Uta Gerhardt in (Gerhardt 2002), as well as in (Scott 2021). See also (Buxton 1989).

[24] Sorokin, in *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, had also dealt with all three theorists. *Theories* organized its treatment in terms of "schools," such as the "mechanistic" (Pareto) and the "sociologistic" (Durkheim). Parsons was arguing, by contrast, that a new frame of reference was emerging *across* theorists or schools, at a higher level of generality. But he omitted such prominent approaches as Edward A. Ross's "social control" and that of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, which blended formal sociology in the style of Georg Simmel with American pragmatism. a strong tradition of social psychology that included Ross, Charles Cooley and Charles Ellwood likewise received no attention.

ment … might serve as a model … on the history of sociology." In *Social Forces*, another top journal, Warner Gettys (1938: 425) assessed *Structure* as "almost unique" and an "outstanding contribution." Meanwhile, George Catlin (1939: 264) characterized it as "a solid volume that should delight the heart of any student seriously interested in the development of political science." Robert Bierstedt (1938), at Columbia, provided a mixed assessment for non-academic audiences in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Sociological reviewers were actually ambivalent (Owens 2010: 167): they commended *Structure's* theoretical reflections, and complimented its introduction of European thinkers, but they did not embrace its proposed "voluntaristic theory of action." *Structure* also presented a sort of mission-statement or "charter" (Camic 1989) for sociology as the science that focuses on the integration of all types of human groups by means of institutionalized values. Parsons always thought of sociology within a larger matrix of the social sciences, somewhat in the manner of Andrew Abbott's (2001) more recent analysis of disciplines as "fractals."

Meanwhile, in late spring 1937, Parsons received a further boost in the form of an offer of a professorship at the University of Wisconsin.[25] As he later recounted, Parsons (1970: 832) brought this news directly to Henderson, who relayed it to Conant, telling the president that Parsons "cannot be spared" and that "there is probably nobody who could replace him" (Henderson 1937). The Department of Sociology also sent a statement indicating support for Parsons's advancement (Harvard Department of Sociology 1937). Conant therefore told Parsons that he would be promoted to the second three-year term of an assistant professorship and subsequently advanced to associate rank, with permanency.

What should be kept in mind is that, in 1935 and 1936, Sorokin could hardly have dreamed that Parsons would soon emerge as a serious intellectual and professional rival, both at Harvard and in sociology more generally. Parsons was a former junior economist, whose Dr. Phil. from the University of Heidel-

[25] This was occasioned by the retirement of Edward A. Ross, a prominent sociologist who had gained a reputation in the late 1890s through a series of articles on "social control." Ross had been fired from Stanford University due to his economic and political views in what became an important case of academic freedom. In 1900, largely through the efforts of Frank W. Taussig, Ross gave guest lectures at Harvard in Economics. But President Charles William Eliot decided to hire Carver instead. In the early 1900s, Ross was considered a progressive, as reflected in his critique of what would later be called "white collar crime," as well as an invitation to dine at the White House with President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1937 Parsons sent Ross a copy of *The Structure of Social Action*, for which Ross thanked Parsons but added that he felt less effort should be spent in defining sociology and more in carrying out actual sociological analysis. Ross had been an early supporter of Sorokin, but he did not approve of Sorokin's major work, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (see: Nichols 1996).

berg was not equivalent to a Ph.D. Sorokin had both a master's degree in jurisprudence and a doctorate in sociology. Prior to coming to the U.S. in 1923, Sorokin had published numerous works in Russia that made him a prominent sociologist there (Johnston, Mandelbaum and Pokrovsky 1994; Nichols 2012). He was also a large figure in politics, as a leading representative of the leftist Social Revolutionary party, a member of the legislature and a personal secretary to prime minister Alexander Kerensky in the short-lived, democratic Provisional Government of 1917.[26] After the Bolshevik seizure of power, Sorokin briefly chaired a small department of sociology at the University of Saint Petersburg.

Subsequently, after accepting voluntary banishment and obtaining a professorship at Minnesota in 1924, Sorokin published influential works on stratification and mobility, on rural and urban sociology (with Carle C. Zimmerman), and on sociological theories. a study of revolution (Sorokin 1925) also helped to distinguish him. In addition, there was the three-volume sourcebook in rural sociology (1928-1930, with Zimmerman and C.J. Galpin). These works tended toward the encyclopedic, with a world-history perspective, and they featured enormous quantities of empirical data. Sorokin (1963) also evidently regarded himself as unique, and he interpreted Lowell's job offer as evidence that Harvard considered him the best sociologist to be found anywhere. Jessie Bernard tended to agree, recalling that "sociologists finally got respectability when Sorokin went to Harvard" (Howery 1984: 6).

Sorokin's *Theories* may be considered a claim to pre-eminence. Its final chapter concluded with a proclamation about sociology's distinctive subject-matter:

> Sociology has been, is, and either will be a science of the general characteristics of all classes of social phenomena, with the relationships and correlations between them; or there will be no sociology. (Sorokin 1928: 761)

Importantly, Sorokin had told Lowell that he aspired to make subsequent works better than his earlier publications (Nichols 1992). Funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, via the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences, enabled him to hire researchers who gathered data on dialectical fluctuations of opposed "culture mentalities" over two and half millennia. The result was *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937–1941), Sorokin's major and largely career-defining study of changes in the arts, philosophy, religion, science, law. ethics

[26] See Sorokin's autobiographical memoir, *Leaves from a Russian Diary* (Dutton, 1924).

and social relations (including wars and revolutions). *Dynamics* also called for a new "Integral" approach that combined sensory and rational knowledge with intuitive knowledge ("the truth of faith").[27]

The work began in a manner similar to Sorokin's earlier publications, by stating a scientific problem, namely, the integration of culture, reviewing professional literature and introducing a conceptual framework and a methodology (the "logico-meaningful" method). But it became something very different, by combining historical data with epistemology, far-reaching criticism of European and American culture and institutions, and predictions of future trends. *Dynamics* offered analysis on an epic scale, like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and its voice was "prophetic" (Johnston 1999) in the manner of the politicized Russian intelligentsia (Nichols 2012). It was in part a polemic against the idea of cumulative, linear progress. Sociology itself was a target of the critique, as part of "Sensate" culture in its period of decline. The work was thus a violation of "normal science" (Kuhn 1962) and an attempt at a "paradigm shift."

The year 1937 proved to be the turning point in the Sorokin-Parsons relationship at Harvard, and in the discipline more generally, as their professional fortunes began to diverge.[28] The gap between them at the university had already narrowed as a result of Parsons's promotion and the promise of associate rank, while *Structure* had elevated Parsons's stature in the field of sociology. The first three volumes of *Dynamics*, meanwhile, ignited a firestorm of criticism and combative responses from Sorokin. Much of the debate focused on Sorokin's claims that western culture was in decline, that it was self-destructing in an epochal intellectual and moral crisis that included unprecedented levels of violence, and that it would eventually turn in a more spiritual direction (Nichols, 1989). Critics included Brinton (1937), a key protégé of Henderson and a Senior Fellow, who attacked the work (in Conant-like terms) as "socio-astrology."[29] Importantly, the annual *Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard* (Harvard 1937) endorsed Parsons's *Structure* as "an important contribution to sociological theory," while offering only faint praise for *Dynamics* as "thought-provoking" (Buxton 1998). Henderson also began suggesting that Parsons be appointed as the chair of Sociology (Wilson 1939).

[27] On Sorokin's Integralism, see the following: (Jeffries 1999; Nichols 2011; Rhodes 2017).

[28] In the same year, Gordon W. Allport published *Personality: a Psychological Interpretation*, which gained him a place of prominence within the discipline. See (Nicholson 2003).

[29] Henderson also arranged for Brinton's induction into the prestigious Saturday Club, whose founders included the famous author Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Academic ecology was likewise a significant factor in events. From 1932 to 1937, Sociology hosted prominent visitors who stayed for a semester and offered two courses (Johnston 1995). This put Parsons into direct contact with established figures who might contribute to the development of his own thinking or otherwise advance his career: Howard P. Becker (Smith College), E.W. Bakke (Yale), Corrado Gini (Italy), Leopold von Wiese (Germany), Read Bain (Ohio University), and W.I Thomas (formerly of Chicago). Robert Park, the leader of the "Chicago school of sociology," taught in a summer session. One result might have been the invitation to Parsons to give public lectures at Chicago in summer 1937, the occasion when he likely met Edward Shils, who would later become an important collaborator. Thus, Harvard's location at the pinnacle of American higher education provided connections that Parsons would likely not have made elsewhere, and these facilitated his further rise.

Phase Three, 1939–1946: Reversal of Status

As soon as his tenure took effect, Parsons began to move against Sorokin. In fall 1939, he sent Conant a letter requesting an in-person meeting (Parsons 1939b).

> When I discussed with you the possibility of my going to Wisconsin, we touched on various aspects of the problem of the place of sociology in Harvard University and of the organization of a department of sociology. … there are a number of points in which I feel that the state of affairs in the department is very far from being satisfactory. Now that I am formally a member of the department on a permanent appointment, I naturally feel a new kind of concern …
>
> In view of the situation and of my new status … I should very much like to have the opportunity to talk it over thoroughly with you to see how far your own attitude … agrees with mine and whether there might be a possibility of undertaking to change some of the more unsatisfactory aspects of the situation.

In reply, Conant's secretary expressed the president's thanks and indicated that an appointment would shortly be arranged. From this point on, Parsons hardly needed Sorokin's support, other than in such routine matters as approving his teaching schedule, and he might have assumed that he had become Sorokin's likely successor as chair.

A couple of months earlier, Parsons had sent a lengthy letter to his history colleague, Brinton, in which he defended sociology against Brinton's (1939) recent critique in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. He did, however, concur

with Brinton's indictment of some varieties of sociologists, including what Parsons termed "the Sorokin type." Importantly, the letter also indicates that Parsons had developed a strong self-concept as a member of a rising generation that was destined to surpass its predecessors. Parsons admitted that the state of sociology was problematic, but he argued that the outlook was bright, largely because of "an extremely significant minority who are coming to set the tone more and more" (Parsons 1939a), and who drew on the work of Weber, Pareto and Emile Durkheim. Indeed, "there is a growing number of sociologists particularly of the younger generation who are well acquainted with it." One might reasonably suppose that the unstated reference was largely to Parsons's own students.

Against Brinton's assertion that sociologists could not agree on anything, Parsons cited his own research: "I spent the major effort of an eight-hundred-page book in proving that three such sociologists … converged on the outlines of nothing less important than a generalized theoretical system, a thing which … has appeared in the other sciences only after a relatively mature stage of their development" (Parsons 1939). Thus, remarkably, a mere five years after pleading to be considered for an assistant professorship, Parsons portrayed himself in a prominent — even charismatic –– role within an ascendant generation. He seemed to regard himself as on the cutting edge of a more scientific sociology, based on an awareness of an epochal intellectual movement (see Holmwood 1996), and also to believe that he had surpassed Sorokin.

Parsons (1940) also criticized Sorokin's work in print for the first time, while presenting an "analytical" approach to stratification that would become part of his emerging "structural-functional" model. He dismissed — briefly, but pointedly — the framework in *Social Mobility* (Sorokin, 1927) as, inadequate. Indeed, Parsons (1940:841) went so far as to assert that the model of "horizontal and vertical mobility in social space" that Sorokin presented was "a dangerous usage," a simplistic, two-dimensional spatial analogy. Interestingly, *Mobility*, which focused on occupational, economic and political types of stratification, was perhaps Sorokin's most widely accepted work within the U.S. Influenced perhaps by Weber's treatment of class, status and power, Parsons proposed what might be called an "intersectional," six-dimensional conceptual space in which individuals are ranked according to underlying "value orientations" that vary widely across social systems. The approach included "sex roles," an issue not examined by Sorokin. It focused on the ranking of "actors," not organized groups.

Meanwhile Parsons began to rise administratively (Buxton 1998), via an appointment as head of the Area of Concentration in Social Science, in Harvard's new program of "Area" studies (interdisciplinary majors). This "interstitial" group (Isaac, 2014) like the earlier Committee on Sociology and Social Ethics,

developed a blueprint, this time for what became the Department of Social Relations.[30] The Conant administration's support signaled a willingness to think "outside the box" of academic departments. Parsons also considered disciplinary boundaries to be permeable, as indicated, for instance, in two articles he had published on "sociological elements in economic thought" (Parsons 1935c, 1935d). His continuing rise was also reflected in his election as the 1941–1942 president of the Eastern Sociological Society, at whose conference he spoke on "sociological aspects of the Fascist movements."

During this period, Sorokin further developed and publicly promoted the socio-historical diagnosis of *Dynamics*, which he believed was being confirmed by global events, especially the Second World War. At the 1940 conference of the American Sociological Society, a few months after Paris had fallen to German armies, he delivered a paper entitled, "The Nature of the Challenge," in which he asserted that sociology was failing to address the most urgent issues of the times. This public attack on his own discipline, which received coverage in mass media (Nichols 1989), was a further offense against "normal science," and it provoked condemnations from peers. Sorokin (1941b) issued an additional dissent, "Declaration of the Independence of the Social Sciences," which asserted that the natural and social sciences operate on the basis of different "referential principles."

Meanwhile, he published the fourth volume of *Dynamics* (Sorokin 1941c), a theoretical treatise that explained the trends documented in the first three volumes in terms of "the principle of limit" and the idea of "immanent causation." Robert MacIver, whom Sorokin had tried to bring to Harvard, denounced what he regarded as the book's hubris in claiming to know the secret of history. In the same year, at the invitation of president emeritus A. Lawrence Lowell, Sorokin delivered lectures at the Boston Public Library, sponsored by the Lowell Institute, on "the twilight of Sensate culture." These were published as *The Crisis of Our Age* (Sorokin 1941a), and Sorokin thus assumed the role of "public sociologist," a role he had actually played a quarter-century earlier, during the revolutionary period in Russia (Nichols 1999). As Barry Johnston (1999: 30) has said, a new sense of urgency "moved Sorokin to the borders of the academic community and into the public arena. Sorokin became a prophetic sociologist." But this approach, tolerated and supported by Lowell, clashed with the "hard science" view of the Conant administration. Importantly, many on the Harvard faculty shared that "tough-minded" outlook, as it was dubbed by William James. Examples include the "operationalization" of physicist Percy Bridgman, as well as quantitative economics

[30] The relationship between Area Studies and Social Relations is confirmed in the correspondence of Parsons and his collaborators.

(e.g., Wassily Leontieff's input-output model), and much work in psychology (e.g., Edwin Boring's experimentalism, Karl Lashley's behaviorism and the psychoacoustics of S.S. Stevens).

In the early 1940s, Sorokin and Parsons seem not to have had much personal contact other than at department meetings or those of doctoral committees and via limited, sometimes testy correspondence.[31] When the U.S. entered World War II, operations at Harvard shrank dramatically as large proportions of students and faculty departed. The resulting vacuum was partly filled by women students from nearby Radcliffe College who gained full access to courses for the first time (Nichols 1997). One of these, Louisa Pinkham, who would provide influential testimony in the landmark desegregation case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education,* became the first female doctoral fellow and a teaching assistant to Parsons (Nichols 2019b).

But this also became a time of highly consequential, behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Of particular importance was the unofficial effort to reorganize the social sciences led by Parsons in close collaboration with social psychologist Gordon W. Allport, an interdepartmental member of Sociology and the chair of Psychology.[32] There were informal meetings, by invitation only, and the activists were careful to keep Sorokin (as well as Edwin Boring, the former chair of Psychology) in the dark.[33] Lawrence Henderson had died suddenly in 1942.

[31] There was, for instance, an unpleasant exchange of notes regarding the issue of offering a fellowship to Marion Levy, which Parsons wished to do but which Sorokin opposed. Levy subsequently became a significant figure in the rise of functional analysis, and he had a successful career at Princeton University. He later contributed to a festschrift in honor of Sorokin.

[32] Allport earned an A.B. at Harvard in 1919, with a major in psychology and a minor in social ethics. He subsequently earned a Harvard Ph.D. in psychology in 1922, served as an instructor in the Department of Social Ethics for two years (1924–1926), spent four years at Dartmouth College, and returned, in 1930, at the rank of associate professor. Sorokin tried to get Allport in Sociology on a half-time basis, but Allport declined and then became one of numerous "interdepartmental" members of the unit. Allport subsequently became chair of the Department of Psychology, president of the American Psychological Association, and editor of the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. He and Sorokin remained on generally good terms, and Allport contributed a chapter to one of Sorokin's edited volumes on altruism. In contrast to many of the Harvard faculty discussed in this paper, Allport was also deeply religious, having embraced Anglo-Catholicism as an adult, and this might help account for his receptiveness toward Sorokin's writings on religion and spirituality.

[33] Edwin Garrigues Boring (1886–1968), best remembered as a historian of experimental psychology, earned a doctorate at Cornell University in 1914 and came to Harvard in 1922 at the rank of associate professor. From 1924 to 1949 he directed Harvard's Psychological Laboratory, and he served as president of the American

But Parsons gained another sponsor: social historian Paul H. Buck, who had won a Pulitzer Prize for *The Road to Reunion* (Buck 1937), and who had recently become Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

The reformers (Allport Committee 1943) sent Buck a lengthy memorandum recommending that psychology, sociology and anthropology be redefined as "basic" social sciences on which others were built. This amounted to a reversal of the previous hierarchy, in which economics departments—including Harvard's—often nurtured sociology programs (Young, 2009). Parsons and his collaborators predicted that existing departmental arrangements would soon be revealed as "complete anachronisms." They also argued that failure to take immediate bold action might cost Harvard its position of leadership in the social sciences.

Four of the five signers (all but Allport) may be considered members of a rising generation: Parsons, cultural anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, psychiatrist Henry Murray and psychologist O. Hobart Mowrer. Buck likewise belonged to the same scholarly generation. Interestingly, like Parsons, Buck had been an instructor for nearly a decade. He and Parsons became assistant professors in 1936; they published important works in 1937; and they became associate professors in 1939. Parsons referred to the dean as "Paul" in correspondence. Meanwhile, largely due to Conant's frequent wartime absences, Buck was about to become Harvard's first provost (from 1945 to 1953). Whereas Henderson had been an influential adviser, Buck exercised considerable executive power, and he designated the reformers as an informal committee that would report directly to himself (Johnston 1995). Thus, as Lowell had moved against Social Ethics, Buck would move against Sociology, with a concern also for conditions in both Psychology and Anthropology.[34] It is worth emphasizing that Parsons and his allies, while proposing a vehicle for their own advancement, were arguably offering Buck an opportunity to gain recognition as a far-sighted and innovative administrator.

Psychological Association in 1928. Boring also served as the first chair of the Department of Psychology, beginning in 1934, when that unit was separated from the Department of Philosophy. Although he was instrumental in hiring Gordon Allport, and although they were always on relatively cordial terms, Boring held a "hard-science" view that was at odds with Allport's humanistic and personalistic approach. This, along with Boring's support of physical psychology in preference to social psychology, was an important reason why Allport sought a reorganization of the social sciences, and why Boring was not included in the planning.

[34] The most serious internal conflict was in Psychology, where both Allport and Murray felt alienated as a result of the dominance of a hard-science and biological emphasis. See (Johnston 1995; Nichols 1998).

In spring 1944, Parsons received another job offer, from Northwestern University, and again he threatened to leave, telling Buck that Northwestern would give him "a very free hand" to build a program. In response, Buck expedited Parsons's promotion to "full" professor, and promised to appoint him as the new chair of Sociology. Asked for his views, Sorokin (1944) told the dean that he was glad to be relieved of administrative duties, that both Parsons and Zimmerman deserved promotion, and that he "slightly preferred" Zimmerman as chair. But it seems to have been the case that Zimmerman's perceived failure to live up to Harvard's standards was an important factor in discrediting Sorokin leadership within the university.[35]

Shortly after receiving official word of his appointment as chair, Parsons (1944b) dismissed the departmental secretary, Marjorie Noble, who had worked closely with Sorokin (Johnston 1995).[36] He also repeated the suggestion of the Allport committee that Sorokin be given a new, extra-departmental appointment in the philosophy of history. Rising rapidly, Parsons was forty-two years old, coincidentally the same age Sorokin had been when he became department chair. Parsons held the same academic rank as Sorokin, and he was now Sorokin's supervisor. Sorokin, at age fifty-five, was in decline, partly due to the widespread rejection of *Dynamics,* as well as *The Crisis of Our* Age. Thus, to the Conant-Buck administration, Parsons represented the future while Sorokin represented a past that was at least partially discredited.

[35] Carle Clark Zimmerman (1897-1983), a rural sociologist and a sociologist of the family, earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Missouri, an M.A. at North Carolina State University, and a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. He became prominent as Sorokin's coauthor on *Principles of Rural-Urban Sociology* (1929) and the related three-volume *Systematic Sourcebook in Rural Sociology* (with Sorokin and C.J. Galpin). Zimmerman joined the Department of Sociology at Harvard in its second year, and he received tenure shortly thereafter. He also became Sorokin's next-door neighbor in the town of Winchester, and he later eulogized Sorokin as "the world's greatest sociologist." Zimmerman's best remembered writings are *The Changing Community* (Harper, 1938) and *Family and Civilization* (with Lucius F. Cervantes, Harper, 1947). In a memoir, he spoke of a "Sorokin-Zimmerman school of sociology" at Minnesota and Harvard. See C.C. Zimmerman, "My sociological career," *Revue international de Sociologie* 9, 103-105. See also (Lynn Smith 1983), as well as the essays in Zimmerman's honor in that issue.

[36] Sorokin wrote a letter to Buck protesting the firing and pleading that Ms. Noble be retained in another capacity, pointing out that he had retained a secretary from Social Ethics who was deeply loyal to the former chair of that unit. Interestingly, Noble (1944) sent Parsons a note that stated, for the record, that she was not resigning, as he seemed to suggest, but was being discharged. By permitting the firing, Buck seemed to indicate that, like Parsons, he wanted to make a fresh start with Sociology and also to give Parsons a free hand in running the unit.

During this period, Parsons's upward mobility was reflected also in activities that extended beyond Harvard. In 1940 he became a member of the university's Faculty Defense Group, serving as vice-chair of its Committee on National Morale. Subsequently, Parsons delivered lectures in the Civil Affairs Training Program of the U.S. Army, via the School for Overseas Administration at Harvard. Addressing members of the military, government employees and other professionals, Parsons spoke about social institutions in both China and Japan (Buxton and Nichols 2000).

Soon after the war ended, Buck implemented the departmental reorganization, by appointing a committee for this purpose and shepherding its predictable recommendation through a vote of the college faculty. As Lowell had entrusted the development of sociology to Sorokin, Buck now entrusted a broadened field of social science to Parsons. In fall 1946, a new Department of Social Relations opened, combining sociology with social and clinical psychology and with cultural anthropology (Nichols 1998; Johnston 1998). Thus, largely as a result of Parsons's initiative, his good fortune in attracting influential sponsors, his ability to form effective alliances, and his prophetic vision of the "convergence" of social disciplines, the department Sorokin had chaired for thirteen years disappeared, becoming merely one of four "wings" of the new, dramatically enlarged unit (see Homans 1984). Parsons (1944) had told Buck that the sociology experiment had been "badly bungled," that Sorokin "should never have been chosen to lead," and that Zimmerman should not have received tenure. He wanted to start over, and he wanted control. The younger generation's moment had arrived.

Phase Four, 1947–1956: Eclipse, Pre-Eminence and Intergenerational Conflict

One result was what became known locally as "the second Russian Revolution." Sorokin was furious, and he gave vent to his anger not only by denouncing Social Relations as an unintegrated hodge-podge but also by criticizing Parsons harshly in his courses. There was a particularly unpleasant scene at a dinner of a Visiting Committee whose function was to offer the administration advice about the department. Sorokin took the floor and launched into a harangue against the new unit, causing much confusion and embarrassment. The situation became so enflamed that Buck privately threatened to seek disciplinary action.

An unexpected event in 1948 reduced tensions. Sorokin received an offer of one hundred thousand dollars (about ten years' salary for an associate professor) from business executive and philanthropist Eli Lilly to pursue research on altruism (Sorokin 1963; Johnston 1995). Conant suggested that

Sorokin incorporate as a means of administering the funds, and Sorokin launched the Harvard Center for Research in Altruistic Creativity and Integration (see Sorokin 1959b) based on a programmatic statement in *The Reconstruction of Humanity* (Sorokin 1948). Sorokin's teaching was adjusted to half-time, and he stopped attending Social Relations meetings. Thus, as Parsons had escaped into Area Studies, Sorokin escaped into his Center—almost as though Parsons's wish that he vanish into the philosophy of history had come true.

In 1949, Parsons reached another professional high point as president of the American Sociological Society, at whose conference he delivered an address on the future of sociological theory (Parsons 1950). This might be seen as a further claim to the status of visionary for the discipline. Interestingly, Parsons identified himself, as well as his listeners, in terms of successive generations in the development of a truly scientific sociology.

> One would not hesitate to label *all* the theoretical endeavors before the generation of Durkheim and Max Weber as proto-sociology. With these figures as the outstanding ones, but with several others including a number of Americans … in a somewhat less prominent role, I feel that the real job of founding was done in the generation from about 1890 to 1920. We belong to the second generation, which already has foundations on which to build (Parsons 1950: 4).

Noteworthy here is the tacit assumption that later generations would inevitably surpass the achievements of their predecessors. It is also significant that Parsons apparently thought of "building" sociology primarily in terms of developing general theory, rather than via the cumulation of empirical research. This might partly explain why he did not include "settlement house sociology" or the studies of W.E.B. DuBois and the "Atlanta School," as well as much empirical work done at Columbia, Chicago, Minnesota and elsewhere.

In fall 1949, Parsons coordinated an ambitious special seminar at Harvard devoted to defining the fundamentals of social science, thus continuing the work of articulating a distinctive conceptual scheme that he had begun in *The Structure of Social Action*. This was also, as Parsons (1970: 843) later acknowledged, an effort to theorize the foundations of the Social Relations experiment, building on the initial memorandum sent to Buck in 1943. All members of the department were invited to participate, in two separate groups. They were joined by sociologist Edward A. Shils of Chicago and psychologist Edward Tolman of the University of California, whose participation was made possible by a modest grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Audio recordings, later transcribed, were

made of deliberations within the smaller, "insider" group that collaborated closely with Parsons (see Homans 1984; Nichols 2022).

Two years later, a second major work, *The Social System* (Parsons 1951), appeared, and it proved influential in promoting what might be called a Durkheimian structural-functional model with some Weberian features. *System* is the work with which Parsons is most frequently identified, to an extent that some regard as excessive, even a "caricature" (Owens 2010), partly because this ignores Parsons's later works on social change (Staubmann 2021).

Parsons chaired Social Relations for an entire decade (Johnston 1998; Nichols 1998).[37] Since this department was widely considered the most ambitious project in American social science (Schmidt 2022), Parsons thereby acquired a unique status as its head and founding visionary (Parsons 1956). Social psychologist Jerome Bruner felt that Parsons seemed to be in an "auto-intoxicative state" during this period (Nichols 1998), tending to view his writings and professional activities as of historical import. Meanwhile, although he did not organize another "Adams House group," Parsons continued to work closely with selected graduate students (e.g., Neil Smelser, Robert Bellah, Renee Fox) whose professional success helped sustain his high status. Some published affectionate memoirs (e.g., Fox,1997; Gould 2021; Lidz 2021). Another indicator of Parsons's prominence was his selection as the 1953–1954 Marshall Lecturer at Cambridge University, where he spoke of the integration of economic and sociological theory.

Although Sorokin and Parsons had both found ecological niches that allowed them to pursue separate career paths, the tensions between them did not completely subside. In 1951, *Toward a General Theory of Action* (edited by Parsons and Shils), a product of the 1949 Carnegie Seminar, appeared in print, and Sorokin criticized it in the university newspaper (Harvard Crimson 1951a) for not citing his recent treatise, *Society, Culture and Personality* (1947). This led to a pro-forma apology from Parsons for the "oversight" (Harvard Crimson

[37] In the late 1940s and 1950s, women gained access and stature at Harvard. In 1947, Harvard and Radcliffe entered into a closer working arrangement, known locally as "the non-merger merger," and this allowed women to take courses at Harvard, though they continued to receive diplomas from Radcliffe. Florence Kluckhohn, a cultural anthropologist who had a cordial working relationship with Parsons, became a lecturer in Social Relations in the late 1940s. From 1950 to 1958, Eleanor Maccoby was an instructor and lecturer in Social Relations, prior to moving on to a distinguished career at Stanford University. It was not until 1986, however, that a woman, Theda Skocpol, received tenure in Sociology. Harvard and Radcliffe subsequently entered into a near-total merger, and what was Radcliffe College is today the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

1951b). *Toward a General Theory of Action* can be regarded as the programmatic statement of the "Parsons School" (Tiryakian 1979), and thus more encompassing than Parsons's better known *Social System*. Like the earlier *Structure of Social Action*, it assumed a "prophetic" stance that proclaimed a future resulting from increasing "convergence," this time between entire social sciences, rather than individual thinkers. To a significant degree, Parsons based his career on this idea and this vision.

The extent to which Parsons believed in the conceptual scheme of the "interpenetrating systems of action" as a basis for the advancement of sociology and related fields is reflected in an incident reported by George Homans. At a Social Relations meeting in the early 1950s, Parsons placed *Toward a General Theory of Action* before the faculty, "urging us all to read it and implying … that it ought to be adopted as the official doctrine of the department" (Homans 1984: 303). But Homans, who had participated in what might be called the "outsider" discussion group in the 1949 Carnegie Seminar (see: Nichols 2021) objected, and the matter was dropped. The incident shows that, in addition to being a self-described "incurable theorist," Parsons was also an academic entrepreneur (see Buxton, 1985) intent on practical results.

Another unpleasant incident occurred in 1953, when Sorokin directed his teaching assistant, Edward A. Tiryakian, to place copies of a mimeographed comparison of his and Parsons's theories under the doors of all faculty offices in Social Relations. Sorokin submitted this analysis to the *American Sociological Review*, which rejected it, apparently because the editor and members of the editorial board saw it as an unacceptable accusation of plagiarism. Sorokin also sent copies to selected sociologists around the U.S. It seems clear that Sorokin felt that Parsons had been elevated beyond his actual merits, and he attempted to challenge this, though unsuccessfully, from a position that lacked credibility. One suspects that Sorokin felt increasingly devalued, and he might also have been reacting to the recent loss of the ASS presidential election to Florian Znaniecki. Such emotions, accompanying declining stature, are an important aspect of intergenerational relations and the dynamics of stratification.

Sorokin meanwhile introduced an undergraduate course on solidarity, and he produced a series of works on altruism, among which *The Ways and Power of Love* (Sorokin 1954) is especially noteworthy. But he remained bitter, and he published a wide-ranging, sometimes satirical, critique of his field, *Fads and Foibles in Sociology* (Sorokin 1956). The path forward, Sorokin claimed, was "the royal road of Integralism," that is, his own synthetic, historical and culturally oriented approach. a reviewer at Chicago condemned *Fads* as "a pitiable climax to a distinguished career" (Horton 1956). Sorokin's teaching ended in 1954, and he retired from Harvard five years later, when Parsons was widely considered

the top sociologist in the U.S. The reversal of their statuses, and that of the generations they represented, seemed to be final.

Although Parsons may have attained a relatively unique prominence in this period, it would be a mistake to overstate the impact of his approach to "the sciences of action" and the degree of consensus it generated. For instance, Ellsworth Faris (1953), who had chaired the Chicago department during its period of greatest influence, criticized *The Social System* for ignoring earlier work in U.S. sociology, including its shared vocabulary.[38] S.D. Clark (1952), in the *American Journal of* Sociology, characterized much of *System* as "unintelligible" and its general theory as "unworkable." Howard P. Becker (1952), in a *Social* Forces review, assessed the work as "important," but complained about its "jargon" and "bad writing" and questioned its advocacy of "neoclassical economic equilibrium theory." a few years earlier, Merton — otherwise the most loyal of former students — had publicly disputed Parsons's presentation on general theory at the 1948 ASS conference (Parsons 1948; Merton 1948).

Between the appearance of *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) and of *The Social System* (1951), Parsons published only one book, *Essays in Sociological Theory: Pure and Applied* (Parsons 1949). Sorokin meanwhile brought out nine volumes that included not only works deriving from *Dynamics* but also *Man and Society in Calamity* (Sorokin 1942), *Russia and the United States* (Sorokin,1945), and *Altruistic Love* (Sorokin 1950). This exceeded the number of books he published in the 1920s and 1930s. But *Dynamics* had resulted in Sorokin acquiring, to some extent, a "spoiled identity" (Goffman 1962) that was actually intensified by the research on altruism, which many considered more moralistic than scientific. Meanwhile, the inexorable process of generational succession worked in Parsons's favor. After 1956, however, Parsons's stature became increasingly based on prestige, as executive and managerial responsibilities passed to others (see Nichols 1998).

[38] In general, sociologists at Chicago eschewed functional analysis in favor of other approaches with deep local roots, including formal sociology, interactionism and symbolic interactionism (largely grounded in pragmatism), as well as social disorganization theory—all based on some concept of process, rather than structure. The ecological approach of the 1930s, with its "natural areas" of cities, might be regarded as somewhat functionalist (i.e., the areas are a division of labor). The big exception is the coursework of social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner, who came to Chicago in 1935 from Harvard (where he helped Kingsley Davis develop as an early functionalist). Indeed, via Warner, functional analysis was taught at Chicago before becoming prominent at Harvard or Columbia. This is all the truer if we consider also the courses of anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who was in Chicago from 1933 to 1938. Chicago's "process" orientation remains prominent in recent works by Andrew Abbott.

Phase Five, 1957–1968: Lingering Animosity, Reconciliation and Partial Reversal

Sorokin, however, had kept in touch with Merton, whom he always referred to as his "most brilliant student." In personal letters, he inquired about Merton's always fragile health, and congratulated him on the birth of his children, as well as on his appointment at Columbia University and the publication of his 1949 work, *Social Theory and Social Structure.* In other notes, he shared news about Harvard and about his own research and writing. In 1957, the year Merton served as president of the American Sociological Society, Sorokin sent him a copy of the new, one-volume edition of *Dynamics*, and this elicited an unusually effusive response:

> Dear Pitirim,
> The generosity of your inscription … I shall never forget. … I owe so very much to you that I can never repay. It was your being at Harvard that led me to Harvard. … your wide-ranging scholarship, unmatched among sociologists of the time … If I have tried to be critical, here and there, of what you have written, I have done so only because it was from you that I first learned the importance of trying to be critical (Merton 1957a).

In reply, Sorokin (1957) said, "I have always had a warm place in my heart for you," and that, "I am glad that we have now brought this mutual affection out." He also praised Merton as "probably the most influential leader" in U.S. sociology, especially among younger generations. Other letters suggest that Sorokin had a much higher regard for Merton's work than for that of Parsons.

A few years later, Merton took steps toward re-integrating Sorokin into the profession and reducing tensions with Parsons. In 1962, he arranged for Sorokin to participate in a session he chaired at the annual ASA conference.[39] The following year, partly due to Merton's efforts, Sorokin received the Eastern Sociological Society Merit Award (for lifetime contributions).

At about the same time, Merton became a key activist in a group that worked to get Sorokin onto the 1963 ASA ballot for president (Johnston 1987), ultimately leading to a landslide victory. Parsons was then secretary of ASA, and he had threatened to resign if Sorokin were elected president. However, he stayed, and he visited Sorokin's home to confer about the program of the 1965 conference, for which Sorokin chose the theme of social change. Thus, as they

[39] Merton's presidential address accords with his doctoral studies at Harvard. See: (Merton 1957b).

had collaborated in the 1930-1931 academic year in order to launch a department of sociology, Sorokin and Parsons again set aside personal differences.

Meanwhile, Sorokin had regained stature as "an elder statesman" (Johnston 1995) in other ways. In 1961, he was elected the inaugural president of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations that included such respected scholars as the historian Arnold J. Toynbee. Sorokin's theory of "immanent change" was also included in the two-volume collection, *Theories of Society* that Parsons helped edit (Parsons et al. 1961).

Shortly thereafter, two festschrift volumes in his honor appeared: *Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review* (Allen 1963), and *Sociological Theory, Values and Sociocultural Change* (Tiryakian 1963). Merton and Bernard Barber (1963), who had also studied with both Sorokin and Parsons, contributed a respectfully critical chapter on Sorokin's sociology of science to the Allen volume, and they both also wrote individual papers for the Tiryakian collection.

Parsons likewise participated, contributing a chapter to the Tiryakian set. Interestingly, he presented an analysis of religion in contemporary society that was sharply at odds with Sorokin's view, thereby, in effect, reaffirming their intellectual rivalry. Indeed, he acknowledged (Parsons 1963: 33) that he and Sorokin were "probably defined predominantly as antagonists" within the field of sociology. Robert Merton (1959) again played a mediating role, by responding to a draft and assuring Parsons that the tone was "just right."

Parsons contended, politely but firmly, that Sorokin's analysis of the decline of religion was simplistic and inaccurate. Far from vanishing, fundamental values of Christianity such as individualism and equality had spread from church groups to the secular realm and had become part of modern law, government and education. If other-worldly spirituality had decreased, as Sorokin claimed, this was largely because it had been replaced by an equivalent, "inner-worldly" religiosity arising out of Protestantism, as Max Weber had maintained (Parsons 1963: 35). There was continuity, not reversal, and no epochal crisis of morality. Indeed, Parsons likely believed that ethical standards were actually improving, due to such developments as the emergence of modern professions with their codes of conduct. In this way, Parsons presented an optimistic reading in which an evolving Christianity promoted modernization and progress.

Festschrifts are a significant institutionalized means of affirming the value of those who are honored, often by former students who have advanced in a field, and they are thus part of the intergenerational dynamics of stratification. Authors in the Tiryakian volume were all social scientists in the U.S., though two had earlier European training. In addition to Parsons, Merton and Bernard Barber, these included Elinor Barber, Arthur K. Davis, Walter Firey, Georges Gurvitch, Florence R. Kluckhohn, Charles P. Loomis, Wilbert E. Moore, Thomas

O'Dea, Nicholas S. Timasheff, Logan Wilson and Sorokin's oldest friend, Carle C. Zimmerman. The Allen volume likewise included U.S. social scientists (Bernard Barber, Joseph B. Ford, Alex Inkeles, David Mace, Robert K. Merton, Mary Moore, Matilda White Riley, T. Lynn Smith), but it also featured international scholars (Othmar Anderle [Germany], Gosta Carlsson [Sweden], F. R. Cowell [England], Corrado Gini [Italy], K. M. Munshi [India], Lucio Mendietta y Nunez [Mexico], Arnold J. Toynbee [England], Alexandre Vexliard [France]). Internationalism had always been one of Sorokin's strengths. The participation of several women is noteworthy as an indication of increasing inclusiveness and equality, and perhaps also as a hint of the more recent "feminization" of the discipline, especially among younger generations.

In his 1965 ASA presidential address, "Sociology of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," Sorokin refrained from attacking Parsons directly. He did, however, criticize "recent abstract theories," and it is reasonable to assume that the audience (including members of younger generations) would likely have concluded that Sorokin had Parsons in mind:

> Many of the recent abstract theories suffer from an "ascetic detachment" from empirical sociocultural realities. Representing a peculiar mixture of "ghostly" social-system models … mechanistic analogies of "equilibrium," "inertia," "thermodynamic laws," "cybernetic feed-back" or "homeostasis," and speculative "prerequisites" for systems' self-preservation, these abstract schemas … form networks so large that practically all "empirical fish" slip through …
>
> Besides, these schemas are constructed in such a "static" way that they fail to register most of the changes in the fished sociocultural "waters." As a result … they do not enhance our grasp of the empirical realities (Sorokin 1965: 842).

This address, in which Sorokin also sketched out the fundamentals of his own "Integral" approach, was, in effect, another claim of pre-eminence in general theory.

Parsons presumably listened politely, and by doing so he helped to re-integrate Sorokin into the professional community of U.S. sociologists. Having largely eclipsed Sorokin, Parsons could afford to be generous to a former rival who no longer posed a threat. Indeed, he would become the 1967 president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (which created a Parsons Award). But he was nearing retirement at Harvard, where the Department of Social Relations would soon be disbanded, and a Department of Sociology restored (in 1970), with Parsons's long-time critic, George Homans, as its chair.

In 1966 Sorokin published *Sociological Theories of Today*, which, together with the 1928 *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, covered a century of thought. There he presented the two-column comparison of his system and that of Parsons which he had drafted in 1953. In the accompanying commentary he characterized Parsons as rather unoriginal, on the grounds that the earlier voluntaristic theory of action resembled Znaniecki's work, while the later "systems" approach closely resembled Sorokin's own model. But he did support the "systems" approach that included both his and Parsons's work.

When Sorokin died in early 1968, Parsons chaired a committee at Harvard that composed a memorial minute. Putting aside the hard feelings of the past, Parsons and his colleagues lauded Sorokin as a significant and influential thinker.

Parsons's rise had been unlikely, and his stature may never be attained again. But younger sociologists, especially "the disobedient generation" (Sica and Turner 2005), had been turning away from his "structural-functional" approach and increasingly turning toward varieties of conflict theory. Even some who saw value in functional analysis felt that Merton's *Social Theory and Social Structure* was far preferable to Parsons's formulations (Owens 2010). An early frontal assault on Parsonian "grand theory" appeared in *The Sociological Imagination* by C. Wright Mills (1959), which advocated an alternative emphasis on "history and biography." Shortly thereafter, Dennis Wrong (1961) criticized the allegedly "over-socialized" model of human beings in Parsons's work. Ralf Dahrendorf (1964) challenged sociologists to get "out of the utopia" of Parsons's portrait of cooperation and equilibrium. George Homans, in a 1964 ASA presidential address, urged listeners to "bring people back in" to sociological analysis. In 1970, Alvin Gouldner attacked Parsons for alleged detachment from contemporary social problems. Meanwhile, at the 1969 ASA conference, a breakaway group displayed buttons proclaiming, "Sorokin lives!" and the association subsequently created a Sorokin Award for research on social change. From this point on, Parsons found himself a target of constant criticism, though some members of earlier generations, especially those he had taught and mentored, defended and honored him (e.g., Loubser et al. 1976). The former Sorokin-Parsons rivalry was thus replaced by a larger intergenerational rupture which foreshadowed internal conflicts that persist to the present day.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to blend historical narrative and conceptual analysis in tracing the fluctuating statuses of Pitirim A. Sorokin and Talcott Parsons during the period from 1929 to 1968. I argued, in particular, that the frame of cooperative and competitive intergenerational relations in science illumines key events and outcomes. I also emphasized Harvard University as

a context that shaped these dynamics via the conscious decisions of members of the faculty and administrators, especially deans and presidents, in accord with organizational culture. Others have argued (Buxton and Turner 1992) that Harvard's advancement of Parsons also served the vested interests of elites such as the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations, as well as those of the U.S. foreign policy establishment — an issue not considered here.

The analysis showed how advancing in science requires establishing and maintaining credibility with powerful audiences. In the case of Sorokin and Parsons, some key evaluators were professional sociologists, but others were not. Those that were not sociologists, however, enjoyed credibility within the world of Harvard, and their recommendations carried much weight with the administrators who made important decisions. This was especially true of some who had been named "interdepartmental" members of Sociology as a means of bolstering the staffing and course offerings of the department. Among these, Lawrence J. Henderson, a uniquely influential figure, played the most important role in advancing Parsons. Sorokin lost credibility with Harvard administrators both because of internal complaints about the management of Sociology, and also because of peer criticisms of his major work for its perceived violation of "normal science" and its prophetic stance.

In some respects, the Sorokin-Parsons case is very different from contemporary realities, and yet in others it is quite comparable. To begin with, the position of Harvard is probably not as pre-eminent as it was in the 1930s when the university held a grand celebration of its tercentennial. Parsons's early vulnerability was due, in significant measure, to what has been called Harvard's "Olympus complex" (Johnston 1995), that is, the attitude that "only the very best are good enough." He would have been far more secure at most other universities, even Chicago and Columbia that had prestigious sociology programs. Of course, Harvard's "Olympus complex" took different forms in the policies of A. Lawrence Lowell and of James B. Conant. In particular, the intensity and harshness of Conant's approach seem to have been influenced by his experience as a laboratory chemist in competing against peers in Germany, a contest that also had important military aspects. Meanwhile, Europe's intellectual eminence in many fields, prior to World War II, benefited Parsons as an interpreter of European works. Harvard's "Pareto circle" was another significant idiosyncratic feature of the historical case.

Today, university presidents in the U.S. would not play such crucial roles as did both Lowell and Conant, due especially to the emergence of academic vice-presidents and provosts who handle personnel matters. It also seems unlikely that a figure like Lawrence J. Henderson could develop a comparable career path with such great influence over key decision makers, partly because

Harvard in the 1930s was a much smaller place than are contemporary universities. In that era it was possible to know a significant proportion of the faculty of the medical school, as well as those in the college of arts and sciences and others in the graduate school of management.

Other aspects of the case, however, remain relevant. Younger generations still have to gain the approval of earlier generations in order to obtain places in academia, and department chairs and college deans are central decision makers. Publications remain a key criterion—indeed, to the point where those seeking entry level positions in sociology may not even be interviewed unless they have published as graduate students. Most importantly, the logic of generational succession remains inexorable, as later generations displace their earlier counterparts, sometimes gently and sometimes more harshly.

In recent decades there has been much repudiation of earlier work as well as negative redefinitions of earlier figures who once held places of honor. Interestingly, members of newer generations sometimes choose to identify with more distant counterparts, such as Harriet Martineau or Jane Addams and "the women founders," as well as W.E.B. DuBois and the "Atlanta school," rather than with more proximate generations. But this aspect of "reference groups in science" lies beyond the scope of the present discussion, which has focused on successive generations engaged in cooperative-competitive interaction.

There is more to the story of Sorokin, Parsons and Harvard than could be told in this paper, especially many background events that created the context in which Sorokin and Parsons pursued their careers. But perhaps enough has been said to indicate the fruitfulness of an intergenerational frame, and to suggest other directions in which this might be applied.

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The following abbreviations are used:

FASP: Correspondence of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library

HPP: Correspondence of the President of Harvard University, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library

LJHP: Faculty Papers of Lawrence J. Henderson, Baker Library, Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration.

RKMP: Faculty Papers of Robert K. Merton, Butler Library, Columbia University.

TPP: Faculty Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library.

RDS: Records of the Department of Sociology, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library

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СОРОКИН, ПАРСОНС И ГАРВАРД: СОПЕРНИЧЕСТВО, ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ СТАТУСА И СТРАТИФИКАЦИЯ В НАУКЕ

Лоуренс Т. Николс (ltnichols@retiree.wvu.edu)

Университет Западной Вирджинии, Ньюингтон, США

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Аннотация. Рассматриваются длительные, сложные и порой конфликтные профессиональные и личные отношения между Питиримом Сорокиным и Талкоттом Парсонсом. Они выступают как представители последовательных поколений в социальной науке. Два самых выдающихся и влиятельных американских социолога XX в. в течение тридцати лет одновременно работали в Гарвардском университете, где боролись за лидерство как на организационном уровне, так и в области социологии в целом. Статья сочетает повествование и концептуальный анализ, излагая ряд событий, которые ранее не были полностью описаны, и рассматривая их в широких рамках с точки зрения нескольких этапов. Особое внимание уделяется Гарварду как контексту, включая его организационную культуру и преобладающее понимание науки, а также ключевым лицам, которые принимали решения, и влиятельным фигурам, которые поддерживали карьеру Сорокина и Парсонса или препятствовали ей. Анализ имеет значение для понимания процессов стратификации во времени в социологии и других науках, особенно на организационном уровне.

Ключевые слова: межпоколенческие отношения, стратификация в науке, Питирим Сорокин, Талкотт Парсонс, Гарвардский университет.