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Social and Cultural Dynamics

VOLUME TWO

Fluctuation of Systems of Truth, Ethics, and Law

BY PITIRIM A. SOROKIN

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SOROKIN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS, VOLUME TWO

W. P. I

PREFACE

Are there different systems of truth — the truth of faith, the truth of reason, the truth of the senses — and do they fluctuate in their influence and acceptability in the course of time? During which periods in the history of the Graeco-Roman and Western cultures from 600 B.C. to the present has each of these systems risen to importance or suffered decline? What is the dominant contemporary system of truth and how has it come to be dominant?

What has been the movement of discoveries in the natural sciences and of technological invention from 600 B.C. to the present? Which periods have been particularly fertile and which sterile in these respects, and why? Is the movement of discoveries and inventions connected with the rise and fall of the main systems of truth?

Have the main categories of human thought and the "first principles" of science, philosophy, and religion been fluctuating in acceptability and prestige during these twenty-five hundred years; and, if they have, which periods are marked by the domination of which of these categories and principles, and in what form? What is the reason for such dominance? How have the content and meaning of such categories as Causality, Space, Time, and Number been changing, and in which direction is the modification? Have concepts such as Idealism and Materialism, Eternalism and Temporalism, Being and Becoming, Realism and Nominalism, Universalism and Singularism, Determinism and Indeterminism, and many others that lie at the foundation of scientific, philosophical, and other theories, varied in their influence. now one, say Idealism, rising, now its opposite, Materialism, becoming dominant? And if they have varied in influence, when exactly did this take place and why? Have other general scientific and philosophical theories, such as cosmogonic hypotheses, Atomism, Vitalism, Mechanism, also been fluctuating with regard to their acceptability?

Do the main ethical systems, such as that of Absolute Principles, of Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Eudaemonism, fluctuate also in their comparative prestige and currency? If they do, when during the twenty-five hundred years under consideration was each of these systems dominant, and why? Similarly, do the moral codes and mores as they are incorporated in law, particularly in criminal law, also change?

These are the problems dealt with as the first object of this volume. The existence and the nature of long-time fluctuations are studied in the fields of the philosophy, religion, science, ethics, and law of the Graeco-Roman and Western cultures from about the year 600 B.C. Do such waves or fluctuations indeed occur? Which periods during these twenty-five hundred years have been marked by the rise or decline of the various main systems of truth, main competitive principles of science, philosophy, religion, ethics, and law? Is there in these fluctuations any steady tendency toward the disappearance of one of the currents, say of the truth of faith, or idealism, and toward an increase of some other, say of the truth of the senses, or materialism? Or does each of the competitive principles simply fluctuate, now rising, now declining, without any linear trend? Are these fluctuations periodical? The elucidation of these problems is the first task of the present volume.

The second object is to inquire, in conformity with the central idea of the entire work, whether the fluctuations in one compartment of the Graeco-Roman and Western cultures during the centuries involved are connected with fluctuations in their other compartments. Is a change in the system of truth always followed by changes in all the essential principles and theories of science, philosophy, religion, and ethics? Is it followed by analogous transformation in law; in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature (see Volume One); in the forms of social relationship, political and economic organization, and in the movement of wars and internal disturbances (see Volume Three)? Is culture a unified system in which a change in one compartment is accompanied by change in all the others? If it is, are all the modifications in all the compartments synchronous? Are they closely bound together? Or do they occur nonsynchronously? If they do not coincide in time, which compartment leads in the change and which lags behind? there any uniformity in the time and order of change in the various compartments of culture? What are the reasons for, and factors bringing about (ratio sive causa), all these fluctuations? These problems constitute the second task with which the present volume is concerned. And to this extent it deals with the sociology of cultural change, particularly in the fields of philosophy, religion, science, ethics, and law.

In the third place the volume inquires how all these fluctuations are related to the central idea of the whole work, namely, to the fluctuations of Ideational, Mixed, and Sensate types of culture. It aims to show that most of the fluctuations in all the main compartments of culture are but manifestations and component parts of deeper, all-embracing trans-

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formations of culture from one type to the others. When a culture passes from, say, the Ideational to the Sensate type, or vice versa, all its art, philosophy, religion, science, ethics, and law undergo the same profound transformation. From this standpoint the volume attempts to demonstrate that what a given society regards as true or false, scientific or unscientific, right or wrong, lawful or unlawful, beautiful or ugly, is conditioned fundamentally by the nature of the dominant culture. In the Ideational culture, Ideational science, philosophy, religion, law, ethics, and art triumph, and their Sensate forms are rejected as false, wrong, unlawful, sinful, heretical, and blasphemous. Contrariwise, in a dominant Sensate culture — such as we are now living in — Sensate forms of science, philosophy, religion, ethics, law, and art become dominant; and their Ideational forms are branded as superstition, prejudice, ignorance, and the like. In this aspect the volume represents a treatise in Wissenssoziologie, considered in its basic forms and principles.

The method, the material, the qualifications and reservations, remain the same here as in Volume One, to which the reader is referred for a discussion of them.

The importance of all these matters is evident. I have tried to avoid dealing with them flippantly, casually, fragmentarily, or in spectacular fashion. This volume, and the entire work of which it is a part, contributes something, I hope, to an understanding of the fundamental problems of social thought.

PITIRIM A. SOROKIN

Cambridge — Winchester

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PART ONE

FLUCTUATION OF IDEATIONAL, IDEALISTIC, AND SENSATE SYSTEMS OF TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE (WISSENSSOZIOLOGIE)

Chapter One. Fluctuation of Ideational, Idealistic, and Sensate Systems of Truth and Knowledge (Quantitative)

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I. Ideational, Idealistic, and Sensate systems of truth. Logically Ideational, Idealistic, and Sensate mentalities, to be consistent with their major premises, must have different systems of truth: Ideational, the truth of faith: Idealistic, the truth of reason, organically unified with truth of faith and truth of senses; Sensate, the truth of senses. Factually, all these and many Mixed systems of truth have functioned in the mental history of mankind. So-called "scientific system of truth" is largely the truth of senses; as such, it has not been either a unique or even predominant system of truth. These systems of truth are profoundly different in their nature. subject matter, interests, method, and evidence. II. Fluctuation of the main systems of truth: empiricism, religious and Idealistic rationalism, mysticism, skepticism, fideism in the Graeco-Roman and European cultures from 580 B.C. to A.D. 1020. Are the foregoing propositions corroborated by the relevant facts? Have the main systems of truth fluctuated in influence? Have the periods of domination of Ideational culture been those of truth of faith; of Idealistic culture, those of truth of reason; of Sensate culture, those of truth of senses? Translating these systems of truth into the respective categories of: religious rationalism, Idealistic rationalism, empiricism, criticism, mysticism, fideism, and skepticism, the chapter traces quantitatively the fluctuation of the influence of each of these systems of truth from 580 B.C. to A.D. 1020. Methodological and explanatory preliminaries. Reservations and qualifications. III. Main results. During this period each of these systems of truth has been dominant. Why? Mental spectrum of each period. Comparative power of each of these systems of truth. Truth of faith and atheism. Predominant system of truth of the present time. IV. Corroboration of the propositions in social space. v. Summary.

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PART ONE

Fluctuation of Ideational, Idealistic, and Sensate Systems of Truth and Knowledge (Wissenssoziologie)