SOCIAL & CULTURAL DYNAMICS

A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law and Social Relationships

Revised and abridged in one volume by the author

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extending horizons books — Porter Sargent Publisher — Boston
FOREWORD

Some twenty years have passed since the original publication of Social and Cultural Dynamics in four volumes. During this period, numerous popularizations of the work have appeared in the form of articles, doctoral theses, chapters in texts on sociological theories, and books like my own Crisis of Our Age (so far translated into eight languages), F. R. Cowell's History, Civilization and Culture: An Introduction to the Historical and Social Philosophy of P. A. Sorokin, Winston C. P. Fan's Introduction to P. A. Sorokin's Theories (in Chinese), Jacques J. Maquet's Sociologie de la Connaissance (The Sociology of Knowledge in American edition), Johanne Gjermoe's P. A. Sorokin's Social and Historical Philosophy (in Norwegian), among others. However admirable these popularizations, they in no way suffice as an authentic abridged version of the Dynamics. None of these works reproduces verbatim the text, the order of chapters of Dynamics; neither do they outline all of the important theories developed in it.

During these twenty years I have been urged by several scholars and readers to prepare a one-volume abridgement of this work which, by cutting out all the secondary paragraphs, pages and chapters of the original text, would reproduce verbatim all its important parts in exactly the same order and phrasing in which they were originally given in the four volumes. In the friendly opinion of these scholars and readers such an abridgement would make the Dynamics accessible to a large circle of scholars and intelligent readers who would otherwise have neither the time to study nor the means to purchase the bulky four-volume edition. When Extending Horizons Books of Boston in February, 1957, and the Instituto de Estudios Políticos of Madrid offered to bring out such an edition respectively in English and Spanish, I accepted and this one-volume edition upon which I immediately set to work, is the result of my abridgement.

The condensation of Dynamics to one-fourth of its original size is effected by cutting out: (1) all the paragraphs and pages of secondary importance; (2) practically all the numerous foot-notes; (3) references and extensive bibliography; (4) all the appendices and the sources on which the statistical tables and their respective conclusions.
PRINCIPLE OF IMMANENT CHANGE OF SOCIOCULTURAL SYSTEMS AND CONGERIES

Since we never reckon that we understand a thing till we can give an account of its "how and why," it is clear that we must look into the "how and why" of things coming into existence and passing out of it.

—Aristotle. The Physics, 194b.

I. THREE HYPOTHESES ON THE "WHY" OF SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE

We know that viewed in their empirical aspect, all sociocultural phenomena change incessantly, without any exception whatsoever. The question arises: Why do they change but do not remain unchangeable? Why this relentless becoming instead of everlasting permanency?

The general answer to this question is easy: not only sociocultural phenomena but all empirical phenomena—inorganic, organic, and sociocultural—are subject to change in the course of their empirical existence. To be in an incessant flux, as Heraclitus said, is their destiny. Therefore a mere reference to this universal uniformity of empirical reality is sufficient to answer the above question in its general form.

Granting this, the question arises: Where shall we look for the roots of change of sociocultural phenomena and how shall we interpret it? Shall we look for the "causes" of the change of a given sociocultural phenomenon in the phenomenon itself, or in some "forces" or "factors" external to it?

The question may sound "metaphysical," and yet it is not. We shall see that it is of primary methodological and scientific importance. The character of the answer to it determines the very character of almost all "causal," "factorial" and many other analyses of the social science.

Logically, three answers are possible to the question and all three have been used in social science. The first solution of it is the "externalistic theory of change." Such a theory looks for the reasons ("causes," "factors," or "forces") of change of any sociocultural sys-
tem in some "variables" that lie outside of the sociocultural system itself. Explicitly or implicitly, this standpoint is the predominant theory at the present time.

Take almost any historical, sociological, economic or other work dealing with a study of the change of any social and cultural phenomenon. When the investigators set forth the problem of what are the "factors," "reasons," "variables" responsible for the change, they almost invariably take variables or factors external to the phenomenon studied, and through the change of this external factor(s) explain the change of the phenomenon under investigation. If an author sets forth a problem of why the family has changed during, say, the last hundred years, he turns for the explanation to such variables as the change of industrial conditions, or density of the population, or the state laws, or the biological factors, up to sun spots and climatic conditions. The family itself is assumed to be something purely passive, devoid of any capacity of change by itself, and pushed by this or that external force along the line of change. Without such a "factor" it seemingly is destined to remain changeless and "stationary." The same method is followed when an investigator deals with the factors of change of the State, of economic, political, and social institutions, of art, science, philosophy, law and ethics, and of practically any social and cultural phenomenon. The predominant mode of explanation of change is externalistic. In quantitative and statistical studies, the factor, "the independent variable," is in most cases a variable external to the dependent variable. Exceptions certainly exist, and we shall see them, but the dominant procedure is externalistic. This concerns practically all the social, and, in a considerable degree, the biological sciences. Its general manifestation is the triumph of the so-called "environmental" theory, especially in explanation and interpretation of human affairs.

Broadly viewed, "environmentalism" is a theory and method of externalistic explanations of any change through "environmental forces" that lie outside, but not within, the unit studied. These external — environmental — forces are assumed to be shaping, controlling, modifying, changing, pushing, pulling, creating and destroying the phenomenon studied. The unit itself is assumed to be a merely passive focal point of the application of these forces and factors. It is supposed to have no forces of change of its own. This externalistic environmentalism now pervades social sciences. Almost everything and every change is explained environmentally, from crime and religion up to the business cycle and pure genius.

Another variety of this externalism is given in widely spread
mechanistic and behavioristic interpretations of mental and sociocultural phenomena. The very nature of the mechanistic theory of sociocultural change consists in an extreme form of the externalistic interpretation. What is curious — but typical of the contemporary mentality — is that the second part of the Descartian and Newtonian law of inertia, namely, that if a material body is in the state of motion it has to move rectilinearly and uniformly (just because it is in the state of motion), has been neglected: the mechanistic interpretation of sociocultural change usually assumes that any sociocultural phenomenon is in a state of rest or static equilibrium, and remains in the state of rest until some “external force” thrusts it out of its place and keeps it moving and changing. Otherwise, the phenomenon is assumed to have no proprium motum and must be in a state of inertia, or “being at rest.” Somewhat similar is the externalism of the behavioristic theories of any psycho-sociocultural change; and not only of the behavioristic but also of the predominant psychological theories of the present time. Their fundamental principle is “stimulus response.” Without a stimulus — and the stimulus is almost invariably something external to man or organism or any sociocultural phenomenon — man or any sociocultural system is assumed to be incapable of giving any “response,” exerting any activity, or experiencing any change or transformation. Implicitly, this formula of stimulus response is to a considerable degree externalistic, and in the work of many a psychologist and social scientist it is such explicitly.

A further variety of this externalism is a wide current of “reform” and “reconstructive” movements, which look for the “roots of evil” and for “the patented cure” of any social and cultural phenomenon in “the environment and factors” external to the person or social institution or cultural unit under consideration. The wrongdoing and cure of a criminal are widely regarded as due to his milieu and not inherent in the criminal himself. A root of defectiveness in a social institution — be it the family, the political or economic organization — is again looked for, not in the institution itself but in its environmental forces. A modification of these conditions is expected to produce automatically the desirable change of the system itself.

This concise characterization shows the nature of the externalistic theory of change, its varieties, and its contemporary popularity. It demonstrates also that the question raised is not merely “academic.” We see how the externalistic postulate determines the essential character of all the “causal and factorial” research in all the fields of the social sciences; how it shapes the “techniques and procedures” of the research; how it pervades the practical policies and activities in the
field of reformistic and reconstructive social movements; how it influences the theoretical and practical mentality and activity of its partisans in their daily affairs, as well as in special sociocultural conditions.

The second solution of the problem is opposite; it may be styled the **immanent theory of sociocultural change**. In regard to any sociocultural system, it claims that it changes by virtue of its own forces and properties. **It cannot help changing, even if all its external conditions are constant.** The change is thus immanent in any sociocultural system, inherent in it, and inalienable from it. It bears in itself the seeds of its change. If the external conditions of family, State, economic organization, political party, or any social system are assumed to be constant; if the same is assumed for any integrated system of art or science, philosophy, religion, or law, each of these social and cultural systems does not remain the same, but is immanently destined to change by virtue of its own existence and functioning. Some of its properties will disappear; some new ones will emerge; certain traits will be growing; certain others decreasing. Rapidly or slowly, the system will undergo a transformation. Such, in brief, is the essential nature of this theory.

One can easily see that it is opposite to the externalistic hypothesis. Once assumed, it leads (for a consistent mind) to a series of conclusions in the study of almost all social and cultural problems quite different from those of the externalistic postulate. In a study of a transformation of any sociocultural system, the partisan of the immanent theory of change will look for the reasons or factors of the change first of all in the internal properties (actual and potential) of the system itself, and not in merely its external conditions. He will not try to find some external factor through whose "pushing," "pulling," or "pressing," he could explain the change. He may consider any such factor as subsidiary; but in most cases he will not ascribe to it the whole of the change and its essential forms. In reformistic and reconstructive schemes for the "improvement" of this or that sociocultural evil, he would not rely exclusively or even mainly upon a mere rearrangement of the external conditions. Like a doctor, he would study first of all the system itself and its immanent properties, and this study would give him a real basis for his diagnosis. If he sees that the system is, speaking figuratively, similar to the organism of an eighty-year-old man, he will declare all the attempts to turn it into an organism of a twenty-year-old youth futile, no matter what rearrangement of external conditions is made. His reason will be that, on the basis of valid experience, an eighty-year-old organism cannot be changed into a youthful system. If the immanent properties of the system have potentialities of a more cheerful nature, he
will expect that, in some way, when the time comes, they will be mani-
ifested. And his prescription— which does not neglect the external
conditions— will, as a rule, put an emphasis on the inner potentiality
and efforts of the system itself. He would not invest much hope in a
purely mechanical rearrangement of the external circumstances. To
sum up, once assumed, the principle of immanent change of socio-
cultural systems leads to an immense amount of research and practical
activity in procedures, techniques, and policies profoundly different
from the principle of the externalistic theory of change. Such is the
second theory in the field.

Finally, there has been the third— intermediary or integral — an-
swer to the problem. It attempts to view a change of any socio-
cultural phenomenon as the result of the combined external and
internal forces. Often it assumes an eclectic character, putting both
factors side by side without any serious attempts to indicate what is
the specific role of the immanent and of the external forces. In few
instances, however, is the synthetic or integral character of the principle
carried through and put into actual operation. In such cases — and
only in these — the integral character of the principle is realized and
its nature is not disfigured. Such are the three main answers to the
problem put. Which of these is most valid?

My answer is in favor of the principle of immanent change of each
sociocultural system supported by the externalistic principle, within
certain conditions and limits. The main reasons for such a stand-
point are as follows:

First, the principle of immanent change of a sociocultural system
is supported by empirical observation. We do not know any empirical
sociocultural system or phenomenon which does not change in the course
of its existence or in the course of time. In the whole empirical socio-
cultural world there has existed hardly any system which has remained
unchanged. This observation is incontestable. The objection possible
is that though change is unquestionable, it remains unknown to what it
is due: to purely immanent forces of the system or to an incessant in-
fluencing of it by a set of external factors. The objection is valid.
Therefore, for the solution of the problem, we must turn to other
empirical and logical evidences.

Such a combined— logico-empirical — evidence can be formulated
in the following proposition: Any system which is, during its existence,
a going concern, which works and acts and does not remain in a state
of rest, in the literary sense of the word, cannot help changing just
because it performs some activity, some work, as long as it exists.
Only a system which is in an absolute vacuum at the state of rest and
is not functioning can escape change under these conditions. One can
take the best automobile engine, put in it the best oil, and keep other conditions constant; and yet, if it runs and works, sooner or later it will change, and after a due time it would be worn out. In our case, we agreed to keep it in the constant but best possible external milieu. Its change, therefore, is due to the fact that it runs, works, operates, acts.

The change is an immanent consequence of the system's being a going concern. Its functioning makes change inevitable. The same can be said of any other mechanical system, if it is a going concern. Still more valid is the proposition for organic systems. One of the most fundamental properties of a living organism is its activity - external or internal — its motility, its work, its dynamic nature. In other words, an organic system is a going concern by its very nature. As such, as long as it lives, it works, acts, operates. As long as it does that, it cannot help changing. "Life can never be in equilibrium."

"Complete equilibrium is never attained (by an organism) and would be fatal if it were attained, as it would mean stagnation, atrophy, and death." Regardless of any milieu, man cannot help undergoing an incessant change during his existence, in passing from childhood to maturity and then to old age and death. Only perhaps freezing or putting man into semi-dead anabolic conditions can greatly slow up the tempo of change. But such conditions mean turning the man from a living and going concern into a kind of mummy. Such a possibility corroborates and does not disprove the proposition.

Since any sociocultural system is composed of human beings as one of its components, and since any organism, so long as it exists, cannot help changing, the sociocultural system is a "going concern" and cannot help changing so long as it exists, regardless of its external conditions, even when they are absolutely constant. The very performance of any activity, any reaction or response, to a given environment, changes the system and makes it react differently a second time, and then a third time, and subsequent times. Other components of any sociocultural system are meanings and vehicles. These also bear in themselves the seeds of their, and of the system's, change. All the meanings that contain in themselves some potential contradiction — and according to Hegel, all meanings have it (see further) — sooner or later make it explicit and germinate their own change for elimination of it. In this sense, they also change immanently, as meanings grounded in empirical reality, as thought of by empirical human beings. All the vehicles qua vehicles are also going concerns: functioning as vehicles they work, are used, operated with, often worn out in their functioning. Therefore, they cannot help changing too.

These logico-experiential considerations are sufficient in order to
make the principle of immanent change of the sociocultural phenomena valid. If a partisan of an externalistic principle protests that any such system or organism does not exist in a vacuum, but in a certain environment to which it incessantly reacts, and through which, therefore, it is changed, the answer is that the existence of the environment of a given system is one thing, and imputation to that environment of the whole or the main part of the change of the system is quite another thing. If of two variables — no matter what they are — one is changing while the other remains constant, no logician or statistician would ascribe the change of the first variable to the other — the constant one. If A varies, while B remains constant (except if B is God or Prime Mover), elementary inductive logic forbids us to see in B the cause of the variation of A. If the milieu of any system that is a going concern remains constant, while the system changes, the milieu cannot be regarded as the cause or the source of the change of the system. If the simplest microorganism (for instance, paramecium caudatum) in Metchnikov's and Jenning's experiments reacts to a stimulus A, in a certain way for the first time, and if it reacts to the same stimulus in the same conditions differently the second time, the change evidently is due neither exclusively nor mainly to the environment nor to A, but to the immanent property of the organism to change by virtue of its very existence and therefore its activity. Even the very capacity to react or respond to the stimulus is a capacity immanent in the organism.

All this means that the problem of why a sociocultural system changes is falsely set forth. Its change is neither a mystery nor a problem difficult to explain. Much more difficult would it be to understand a case of unchangeableness of any sociocultural system — if such a case had ever occurred.

In view of a wide popularity of the externalistic theories nowadays, it is advisable to go deeper in the examination of their shortcomings. Their first defect is that they are useless, because, at the best, any consistent externalistic theory of change does not solve the problem but merely postpones the solution, and then comes either to a mystery, in a bad sense of this term, or to the logical absurdity of pulling the proverbial rabbit out of mere nothing. Suppose we assume that change is not immanent in sociocultural systems. For an example, let us take the family (A). According to the externalistic theory for an explanation of why the American family has changed during the last fifty years, we have to take some factor external to it: say, change of industrial conditions (B). When such an explanation is given, we may ask: But why have the industrial conditions changed? According to the consistent externalism, we have to take some external factor
to explain the change of B. Let it be (C), say, a change in the density and mass of the population, or in the climatic conditions, or in the sun spots or what not. Being given C, we can put the same question in regard to it: why has C changed? And so on, \textit{ad infinitum}. This is what I mean by the postponement of the solution.

Second, if a consistent externalist continues to claim that in the process of this regression he somehow can find a solution, we shall drive him into one of the four blind alleys. A. Either to the endless regression, from A to B, B to C, C to N and so on endlessly, none of which can change itself or can be a source of change for the others. The whole regression is endless and fruitless and cannot give either change or an end in this hopeless hunt for a self-starting agent in the endless regressive movement from factor to factor. Or, B, to the ultimate Prime Mover, be it God, or any other ultimate principle, itself either unmoved (as in Plato-Aristotle’s theory) or self-moving (as in some other theories). If, in the search for the ultimate source of change in metaphysics, such a solution may or may not be adequate; in the study of the empirical and sociocultural phenomena such a solution does not solve the problem at all. For the externalistic theories of change do not invoke here the ultimate Prime Mover which itself is not and cannot be empirical, but take one of the empirical “variables” as the factor of change.

Or, C, to an ascription of immanent change to some of the sociocultural or generally empirical systems; for instance, to climate, to “means and modes of production” of Marxism, to a “demographic factor,” and so on. But such a solution means an abandonment of the externalistic theory and self-contradiction, for it signifies that, contrary to the externalistic thesis, some of the sociocultural or empirical systems bear in themselves the reason of their change and can be self-starters and movers of other systems or variables. Such a thesis is but a variety of an immanent principle of change. In addition, such an escape is burdened with several other sins. It has to demonstrate why some of the sociocultural systems, for instance, the family, religion, or science, cannot change themselves, while some others, for instance, means and instruments of production, density of the population, mores, art, or sun spots, can do that. Farther on, most of the externalistic factorial theories in their “explanations” of the why of change usually move from the sociocultural to the biological (demographic and other biological) factors, and from these to the inorganic (climatic, geographic, atomic, etc.) factors. They regard such a regression as particularly scientific because it “explains” sociocultural phenomena by biological, and the biological phenomena by the physico-chemical. Whatever is the validity of such an assumption in the study
of other problems, in this problem the procedure and respective dogma are certainly wrong. The reason is that observationally and logically, the most dynamic or changeable phenomena are exactly the sociocultural; then come the biological; then the physicochemical.

The criticized procedure thus amounts to an "explanation" of the most "self-moving" sociocultural phenomena by the less dynamic biological, and by the least "self-moving" physicochemical variables.

Finally, D, the fourth blind alley, into which such an externalist may try to run for salvation, is the logical absurdity of producing something (change) out of nothing (from the systems which are devoid of immanent change, according to the externalistic theories). If the sociocultural systems are devoid of change; if the same is true of the biological and inorganic phenomena; if neither the line of infinite regression, nor a postulating of the ultimate Prime Mover, nor an arbitrary ascription of immanent change to something is assumed, then the only source of change that is left to the externalist is "nothing." But a long time ago Melissus said: "For if it [change] comes into being, before it came into being, it must have been nothing; if, then, it was nothing, nothing could ever come out of nothing."

Such, then, are the four blind alleys into which the consistent externalistic principle leads. None of them solves or can solve the problem.

For all these reasons, the principle of an exclusive and consistent externalism is untenable. In contrast to it, the principle of immanent change of a sociocultural system is free from these logical and factual errors. Therefore, with an adequate limitation and subsidiary admission of the externalistic principle, it is much more valid than the externalistic hypothesis.

_The endorsement of the immanent principle of change does not hinder a recognition of the role of the external forces in the change of the sociocultural system._ Any sociocultural system lives and functions amidst other sociocultural systems. If each of these bears in itself the seeds of its own change, their interaction leads to this change still more. If a system A contains in itself the reason for its change and so do the systems B and C and N, then the interaction of A with B or C or many of these systems, facilitates the change of A and B and of each interacting system still more.

_The above is sufficient to answer the problem of Dynamics: why a whole integrated culture as a constellation of many cultural subsystems changes and passes from one state to another. The answer is: it and its subsystems—be they painting, sculpture, architecture, music, science, philosophy, law, religion, mores, forms of social, political, and_