

Review of Christian Smith's
To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods,
Motivations, Failure, and Evil,
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Critical Realism has emerged in the past few decades a formidable force within the philosophy of science. First devised by the late philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014), Critical Realism simply summarized seeks a certain restoration of coherent integrality to realist theory without degenerating into positivism but yet also rejecting the subjectivity of idealism. The possibilities for a possible engagement of Critical Realism and Biocosmological concerns show considerable potential when properly done. Christian Smith has sought to devise Critical Realism for providing a coherent worldview for guiding the research in the social and human sciences, and his latest book *To Flourish or Destruct* is where he makes his decisive outline. It's a sequel of sorts to his earlier 2010 work *What is a person?* The specific target of critique of Christian Smith concerns the theoretical inclination he labels "social situationism" which seems to prevail within mainstream North American social science. Demonstrated through the diverse theories of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, as well as other leading intellectual lights of the social sciences; "social situationism" is principally defined as the tendency to define human persons as mere byproducts of their social and cultural environments. By contrast, Christian Smith presents a theory that considers human actions and motivations as complex constellations of various desires, motives, and processes. While people are indeed influenced by their wider social environments, they are not entirely determined by such either. Of particular interest for Biocosmological concerns is the element of Christian Smith's theories concerning his admittedly "Neo-Aristotelian" conception of human flourishing, or *eudaimonia*. Unlike the standard theories of human motivations and flourishing that relate more towards sensual pleasure (in more explicitly Biocosmological terminology one can describe them as representing the "Sensate" dynamic), Smith proposes a more integralistic account of human flourishing as being built on six foundational points:

- 1) Bodily Survival, Security, and Pleasure;
- 2) Knowledge of Reality;
- 3) Identity Coherence and Affirmation;
- 4) Exercising Purposive Agency
- 5) Moral Affirmation
- 6) Social Belonging and Love [Smith, pp. 181-182]

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Smith himself explains that “[t]his approach links a social scientific concern with human motivations with the *eudaimonian*, virtues-based approach to moral life most often associated with the Neo-Aristotelian tradition of ethics...” [Smith, p. 182]. It can be certainly detected from this approach that proper attention is given to the aspects of the human reality that go beyond the purely Sensate elements, including Ideational and potentially Idealistic as well. This is opposed to giving only priority to one dynamic over the others.

A glaring omission on the part of Smith that may trouble Biocosmologists is the lack of any reference to Pitirim Sorokin. Pitirim Sorokin’s work remains vitally important for any in-depth work in the human sciences, as well as any serious considerations for vibrancy to “Neo-Aristotelian” based scholarship. It remains an unfortunate fact that Pitirim Sorokin is highly neglected in English-speaking social science, or too often in a dismissal tone if even addressed at all. A proper incorporation of Sorokin’s body of scholarship would be of great assistance to Christian Smith’s project. Yet despite this flaw, Christian Smith’s work does demonstrate that a new Neo-Aristotelian body of scholarship is further developing in the English-speaking world, even if it remains outside the mainstream. Smith gives an analogy to the engagement with Aristotle in the medieval universities to how Neo-Aristotelian theory can be beneficial to the contemporary world [Smith, p. 201].