

## Chapter VIII

# THE RHETORIC OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

ONE OF THE serious problems of our age is the question of how scientific information, which is largely the product of special tools of investigation, shall be communicated to the non-specialist world. A few sciences operate in fields of theory so abstract that they can create their own symbology, and most of what they transmit to the public will be in the form of highly generalized translation. But there are other sciences whose very success depends upon some public understanding of what they are trying to solve, and these are faced with peculiar problems of communication. None are in so difficult a position as social science. The social sciences have been, since their institution, jealous of their status as science, and that is perhaps understandable. But their data is the everyday life of man in society, and naturally if there is an area of scientific discovery upon which the general public should be posted, it is just this one of the laws of social phenomena. Caught between this desire to remain scientific and the necessity of public expression, most social scientists are in a dilemma. They have not devised (and possibly they cannot devise) their own symbology to rival that of the mathematician and physicist. On the other hand, they have not set themselves to learn the principles of sound rhetorical exposition. The result is that the publications of social scientists contain a large amount of conspicuously poor writing, which is now under growing attack.<sup>1</sup> Some of these attacks have been perceptive

1. E. g., Samuel T. Williamson, "How to Write Like a Social Scientist," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXX, No. 40 (October 4, 1947), 17.

as well as witty; but I feel that no one has yet made the point which most needs making, which is that the social scientists will never write much better until they make terms with some of the traditional rules of rhetoric.

I propose in the study which follows to ignore the isolated small faults and instead to analyze the sources of pervasive vices. I shall put the inquiry in the form of a series of questions, which lead to cardinal principles of conception and of choice.

### I

*Does the writing of social scientists suffer from a primary equivocation?* The charge against social science writing which would be most widely granted is that it fails to convince us that it deals clearly with realities. This impression may lead to the question of whether the social scientist knows what he is talking about. Now this is a serious, not a frivolous, question, involving matters of logic and epistemology; it is a question, furthermore, that one finds the social scientists constantly putting to themselves and answering in a variety of ways. Any field of study is liable to a similar interrogation; in this instance it merely asks whether those who interpret social behavior in scientific terms are aware of the kind of data they are handling. Are they dealing with facts, or concepts, or evaluations, or all three? The answer given to this question will have a definite bearing upon their problem of expression, and let us see how this can happen in a concrete instance.

We have had much to say in preceding chapters about the distinction between positive and dialectical terms; and nowhere has the ignoring of this distinction had worse results than in the literature of social science. We have seen, to review briefly, that the positive term designates something existing simply in the objective world: the chair, the tree, the farm. Arguments over positive terms are not arguments in the true sense, since the point at issue is capable of immediate and public settlement; just as one might settle an "argument" over the

width of a room by bringing in a publicly-agreed-upon yardstick. Consequently a rhetoric of positive terms is a rhetoric of simple description, which requires only powers of accurate observation and reporting.

It is otherwise with dialectical terms. These are terms standing for concepts, which are defined by their negatives or their privations. "Justice" is a dialectical term which is defined by "injustice"; "social improvement" is made meaningful by the use of "privation of social improvement." To say that a family has an income of \$800.00 a year is positive; to say that the same family is underprivileged is dialectical. It can be underprivileged only with reference to families which have more privileges. So it goes with the whole range of terms which reflect judgments of value; "unjust," "poor," "underpaid," "undesirable" are all terms which depend on something more than the external world for their significance.

Now here is where the social scientist crosses a divide that he seldom acknowledges and often seems unaware of. One cannot use the dialectical term in the same manner as one uses the positive term because the dialectical term always leaves one committed to something. It is a truth easily seen that all dialectical terms make presumptions from the plain fact that they are "positional" terms. A writer no sooner employs one than he is engaged in an argument. To say that the universe is purposeless is to join in argument with all who say it is purposeful. To say that a certain social condition is inequitable is to ally oneself with the reformers and against the standpaters. In all such cases the presumption has to do with the scope of the term and with its relationship to its opposite, and these can be worked out only through the dialectical method we have analyzed in other chapters. When the reader of social science comes to such terms, he is baffled because he has not been warned of the presumptions on which they rest. Or, to be more exact, he has not been prepared for presumptions at all. He finds himself reading at a level where the facts have been subsumed, and where the exposition is a process of ad-

justing categories. The writer has passed with indifference from what is objectively true to what is morally or imaginatively true. The reader's uneasiness comes from a feeling that the categories themselves are the things which should have been examined. Just here, however, may lie the crux of the difficulty.

It begins to look as though the social scientist working with his regular habits is actually a dialectician without a dialectical basis. His dilemma is that he can neither use his terms with the simple directness of the natural scientist pointing to physical factors, nor with the assurance of a philosopher who has some source for their meaning in the system from which he begins his deduction. Or, the social scientist is trying to characterize the world positively in terms which can be made good only dialectically. He can never make them good dialectically as long as he is by theory entirely committed to empiricism. This explains why to the ordinary beholder there seem to be so many smuggled assumptions in the literature of social science. It will explain, moreover, why so much of its expression is characterized by diffuseness and by that verbosity which is certain to afflict a dialectic without a metaphysic or an ontology. This uncertainty of the social scientist about the nature of his datum often leads him to treat empirical situations as if they carried moral sanction, and then to turn around and treat some point of contemporary mores—which is by definition a "moral" question—as if it had only empirical aspects. In direct consequence, when the social scientist should be writing "positively," like a crack newspaper reporter, one finds him writing like Hegel, and, when the stage of his exposition might warrant his writing more or less like Hegel, one finds him employing dialectical terms as if they had positive designations.

Paradoxically, his very reverence for facts may tend to make him sound like Hegel or some other master of categorical thinking. Anyone sampling the literature of social science can not fail to be impressed with the proportion of space given to

definition. Indeed, one of the most convincing claims of the science is that our present-day knowledge of man is defective because our definitions are simplistic. His behavior is much more varied than the unscientific suppose; and therefore a central objective of social study is definition, which will take this variety into account and supplant our present "prejudiced" definitions. With this in mind, the social scientist toils in library or office to prepare the best definitions he can of human nature, of society, and of psychosocial environment.

The danger for him in this laudable endeavor seems twofold. First, one must remark that the language of definition is inevitably the language of generality because only the generalizable is definable. Singulars and individuals can be described but not defined; e.g., one can define man, but one can only describe Abraham Lincoln. The greater, then, his solicitude for the factual and the concrete, the more irresistibly is he borne in the direction of abstract language, which alone will encompass his collected facts. His dissertations on human society begin with obeisance to facts, but the logic of his being a scientist condemns him to abstraction. He is forced toward the position of the proverbial revolutionary, who loves mankind but has little charity for those particular specimens of it with whom he must associate.

In the second place and more importantly, the definition of non-empirical terms is itself a dialectical process. All such definition takes the form of an argument which must prove that the *definiendum* is one thing and not another thing. The limits of the definition are thus the boundary between the things and the not-thing. Someone might inquire at this stage of our account whether the natural scientists, who must also define, are not equally liable under this point of the argument. The distinction is that definitions in natural science have a different ontological basis. The properties about which they generalize exist not in logical connection but in empirical connection, as when "mammal," "vertebrate," and "quadruped" are used to distinguish the genus *Felis*. The doctrine of "nat-

ural kinds" thus remains an empirical classification, as does the traditional classification of elements.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the genus *Felis* has a reality in the form of compressent positive attributes which "slum" cannot have. The establishment of the genus is not a matter of negating or depriving other classes, but of naming what is there. On the other hand one could never arrive positivistically at a definition of "slum" because its meaning is contingent upon judgment (and theoretically our standard of living might move up to where Westchester, Grosse Point, and Winnetka are regarded as slums). Thus "slum" no more exists objectively than does "bad weather." There are collections of sticks and stones which the dialectician may call "slums," just as there are processions of the elements which he may call "bad." But these are positive things only in a reductionist equation. Of course, the natural scientist works always with reductionist equations; but the social scientist, unless he is an extreme materialist, must work with the full equation.

It is a grave imputation, but at the heart of the social scientist's unsatisfactory expression lies this equivocation. Remedy here can come only with a clearer defining of province and of responsibility.

## II

*Is social science writing marred by "pedantic empiricism"?* The natural desire of everyone to carry away something from his reading encounters in this literature curious obstacles. Its authors often seem unduly coy about their conclusions. After the reader has been escorted on an extensive tour of facts and definitions, he is likely to be told that little can be affirmed at this stage of the inquiry. So it is that, however much we read, we are made to feel that what we are reading is preliminary.

2. See Bertrand Russell, "The Postulate of Natural Kinds or of Limited Variety," *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1948), pp. 438-44.

We come almost to look for a formula at the close of a social science monograph which takes an excessively modest view of its achievement while expressing the hope that someone else may come along and do something with the data there offered. Burgess and Cottrell's *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage* provides an illustration. After presenting their case, the authors say: "In this study, as in many others, the most significant contribution is not to be found in any one finding but in the degree to which the study opens up a new field to further research."<sup>3</sup> Again, from an article appearing in *Social Forces*: "The findings here mentioned are merely suggestive; and they are offered in no sense as proof of our hypothesis of folk-urban personality differences. The implementation of the analysis given here would demand a field project incorporating the type of methodological consciousness advocated above. Thus we need to utilize standard projective devices, but must be prepared to develop, in terms of situational demands, additional analytic instruments."<sup>4</sup> And Herman C. Beyle in a chapter on the data and method of political science, which constitute the underpinning of his whole study, can only say that "the foregoing comments on the data and technology of political science have been offered as most tentative statements intended to provide a background for the testing and application of the technique here proposed, that of attribute-cluster-bloc identification and analysis."<sup>5</sup> "Most tentative" becomes a sort of leitmotiv. Everything sounds like a prolegomenon to the real thing. Exclamations that social scientists are taking in one another's washing or are only trying to make work for themselves are inspired by this kind of performance. But, even after one has made allowance for the fact that

3. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939), p. 349.

4. Melvin Seeman, "An Evaluation of Current Approaches to Personality Differences in Folk and Urban Societies," *Social Forces*, XXV (December, 1946), 165.

5. *Identification and Analysis of Attribute-Cluster-Blocs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 214.

social science is not one of the exact sciences and that its disciplines work in a field where induction is far from complete, their fear of commitment still seems obsessive. They could at least have the courage of the facts which they have accumulated. Virtually everyone who is seeking scientific enlightenment on this level knows that conclusions are given in the light of evidence available, and that hypothesis always extends some distance beyond what is directly observable. Indeed, everyone makes use of the method of scientific investigation, as T. H. Huxley liked to assure his audiences, but not everyone finds necessary such an armor of qualifications as is likely to appear here: "On the basis of available evidence, it is not unreasonable to suppose"; "It may not be improbable in view of these findings"; "The present survey would seem to indicate." All these rhetorical contortions are forms of needless hedging.

It would be a different matter if such formulas of reservation made the conclusion more precise. But in the majority of cases it could be shown that the conclusion is obvious enough in terms of the discussion itself, and they serve only to make it sound timid. These scholars move to a tune of "induction never ends," and their scholarship often turns into a pedantic empiricism. They seem to be waiting for the fact that will bring with it the revelation. But that fact will never arrive; experience does not tell us what we are experiencing, and at some point they are going to have to give names to their findings—even at the expense of becoming dialecticians.

If the needlessly hedged statement is one result of pedantic empiricism, another occurs in what might be called "pedantic analysis." This is analysis for analysis' sake, with no real thought of relevance or application or, indeed, of a resynthesis which might redeem the whole undertaking. Just as it is assumed that an endless collection of data will necessarily yield fruits, so it is assumed that a remorseless partitioning will illuminate. But analysis can be carried so far that it seems to lose all bearing upon points at issue. The writer shows himself a sort of *virtuoso* at analysis, and one feels that his real interest

lies in demonstrating how thoroughly a method can be followed. Let us look, for example, at a passage from an article entitled "Courtship as a Social Institution in the United States, 1930-1945." The author has said that activities of courtship show different patterns and that sometimes the patterns need to be harmonized:

To be compatible, patterns should be adapted to the following components: (1) the *hominid component*, which is the biological human being; (2) the *social component*, which includes the potentials for social relations as they are affected by "the number of human beings in the situation, their distribution in space, their ages, their sex, their native ability to interstimulate and interact, the interference of environmental hindrances or helps, and the presence and amount of certain types of social equipment"; (3) the *environmental component*, or all the "natural" features of the situation except the hominid, the social, the psychological and artifactual components; it includes topography, physiography, flora, fauna, weather, geology, soil, etc.; (4) the *psychological component*, defined as the principles involving the acquisition and performance of human customs not adequately explained on purely biological principles; (5) the *artifactual component*, which consists collectively of the material results and adjuncts of human customary activities.<sup>6</sup>

It is not always safe for the layman to generalize about the value of specific sociological findings, but I am inclined to think that this is verbiage, resulting from analysis pushed beyond any useful purpose. There is a real if obscure relationship between the vitality of what one is saying and the palatability of one's rhetoric. No rhythm, no *tournaire* of phrase, no architecture of the sentences could make this a good piece of writing; for its content lies on the outer fringe of significance. It is the nature of such pedantry to habit itself in a harsh and crabbed style.

6. Donald L. Taylor, "Courtship as a Social Institution in the United States, 1930-1945," *Social Forces*, XXV (October, 1946), 68.

The primary step in literary composition is *invention*, or the discovering of something to talk about. No writer is finally able to make good the claim that his subject matter is one thing and his style of expression another; the subject matter enters into the expression inevitably and extensively, although sometimes in ways too subtle for elucidation. What of the invention of this passage? If we take the word in its etymological sense of "finding," are not these distinctions "findings" for findings' sake? Analysis carried to such a humorless extreme reflects discredit upon the very principle of division which was employed.

It may appear contradictory to call the social scientist a "tendentious dialectician" and a "pedantic empiricist" at the same time. But the contradiction is inherent in his situation and merely expresses the equivocation found earlier. In all likelihood the empiricism is an attempt to compensate for the dialectic. If a writer feels guilty about his dialectic exercises (his definitions), he may seek to counterweight them with long empirical inquiries. The object of the empirical analysis is primarily to give the work a scientific aspect and only secondarily to prove something. In fact, this is almost the pattern of inferior social science literature.

### III

*Does social science writing suffer from a melioristic bias?* This question directs our attention to the matter of vocabulary. There is danger in criticizing any writer's vocabulary through application of simple principles, because demands vary widely. For some purposes a small vocabulary of denotative terms will be satisfactory. Other purposes cannot be adequately met without a large and learned vocabulary which may, incidentally, sound pretentious. Our question then becomes whether the ends of social science are being well served by the means employed. For example, social scientists are often charged with addiction to polysyllabic vocabulary. Other

men of learning show the same addiction, but there are special reasons for weighing critically the polysyllabic diction of social scientists.

Of course, when one faces the issue concretely, one discovers that there is no single standard by which a word is classified "big." Some words are called "big" because they actually have four or five syllables and hence are measurably so; other words of one or two syllables are called "big" because, coming out of technical or scientific vocabularies, they are unfamiliar to the average man,<sup>7</sup> others, actually no longer, are called "big" because of the company they keep; that is to say, they are words of learned or dignified association. Sometimes a word seems big when it is simply too pretentious for the kind of thing it is describing. Readers of H. L. Mencken will recall that he obtained many of his best satirical effects by describing what was essentially picaresque or tawdry in a vocabulary of grandiloquence.

A cursory inspection will show that social scientists are given to words which are "big" in yet another respect: they have a Latin origin. Even in an analysis of simple phenomenon the reader comes to expect a parade of terms which seem to go by on stilts, as if it were important to keep from touching the ground. Without raising questions of semantic theory, one inclines to wonder about their relationship to their referents. In course of time one may come to suspect that the words employed are not dictated by the subject matter, but by some active principle out of sociological theory. To see whether that suspicion has a foundation, let us try a test on a specimen of this language.

The passage which will be used is fairly representative of the ordinary social science prose to be encountered in articles and reports. The subject is expressed in the title "Social Nearness among Welfare Institutions":

7. For example: "id," "ion," "alga."

It was noticed in the preceding sections that the social welfare organizational milieu presents an interdependence, a formal solidarity, a coerced feeling of unity. However divergent the specific objectives of each organization, theoretically they all have a common purpose, the care of the so-called underprivileged. Whether they execute what they profess or not is a different question and one which does not fall within the confines of these pages.<sup>8</sup>

There occur in this short excerpt about a dozen words of Latin origin for which equivalents of Anglo-Saxon (or old English, if the name is preferred) origin are available, and this without giving up presumably operational terms like "organizational" and "milieu."<sup>9</sup> In place of "noticed," why not "seen"? In place of "divergent," why not "unlike"? In place of "objective," why not "goal"? Instead of "execute what they profess," why not "do what they say"? Did these terms not suggest themselves to the writer, or were they deliberately passed by?

It might be arbitrary to insist that any one of these substitutes is better than the original, but the piling-up of such terms causes language to take on a special aspect. There are, of course, margins within which preference in terminology means little, but a preference for Latinate terms as marked as this must be, to employ one of their customary expressions, "significant."

That significance lies in the kind of attitude that social scientists must have in order to practice social science. It seems beyond dispute that all social science rests upon the assumption that man and society are improvable. That is its origin and its guiding impulse. The man who does not feel that social behavior and social institutions can be bettered through the application of scientific laws, or through some philosophy finding its basic support in them, is surely out of place in

8. Samuel H. Jameson, "Social Nearness among Welfare Institutions," *Sociology and Social Research*, XV (March-April, 1931), 322.

9. The natural scientists, too, use many Latinate terms, but these are chiefly "name" words, for which there are no real substitutes:

sociology. There would really be nothing for him to do. He could only sit on the sidelines and speculate dourly, like Nietzsche, or ironically, like Santayana. The very profession which the true social scientist adopts compels him to be a kind of a priori optimist. This is why a large part of social science writing displays a *melioristic bias*. It is under compulsion, often unconsciously felt, I am sure, to picture things a little better than they are. Such expression provides a kind of proof that its theories are "working."

An indubitable connection exists between the melioristic bias and a Latinate vocabulary. Even a moderate sensitivity to the overtones of language will tell one that diction of Latin derivation tends to be euphemistic. For this there seem to be both extrinsic and intrinsic causes. It is a commonplace of historical knowledge that after the Norman Conquest the Anglo-Saxons were forced into a servile role. They were sent into the fields to do chores for the Norman overlords, and Anglo-Saxon names have clung to the things with which they worked. Thus to the Anglo-Saxon in the field the animal was "cow"; to the Norman, when the same animal was served at his table, it was "beef" (L. *bos*, *bovis*). So "calf" is translated "veal"; "thegn" becomes "servant"; "folk" becomes "people," and so on. This distinction of common and elegant terms persists in an area of our vocabulary today. Another circumstance was that Latin for centuries constituted the language of learning and of the professions throughout Europe, and from the fourteenth century onward, there occurred a large amount of "learned borrowing."<sup>10</sup> This reflects the fact that those cultures which carried civility and *politesse* to highest perfection drew from a Latin source. Finally, I would suggest that the greater number of syllables in many Latinate terms is a factor in the effect. Whatever the complete explanation, the truth remains that to give a thing a Latinate name is to couple

10. See J. B. Greenough and G. L. Kittredge, *Words and Their Ways in English Speech* (New York, 1931), pp. 94-99.

it with social prestige and with the world of ideas, whereas to give it a name out of Anglo-Saxon is to forgo such dignifying associations. Thus "combat" sounds more dignified than "fight"; "labor" has resonances which "work" does not have; "impecunious" seems to indicate a more hopeful condition than "needy" or "penniless"; "involuntary separation" sounds less painful than "getting fired." The list could be extended indefinitely. With exceptions too few to make a difference, the Anglo-Saxon word is plain and workaday, whereas the word of Latin derivation seems to invest whatever it describes with a certain upward tendency. Of course, the Anglo-Saxon word has its potencies, but they are not those of the other. It seems to cling to the brute empirical fact, while its Latinate counterpart seems at once to become ideological, with perhaps a slight aura of hortation about it. Whenever one hears the average man condemning a piece of discourse as "flowery," it is most likely that he is pointing, with the only term at his command, to an excess of Latinate diction.

In the same connection, let us remember that the last few years have seen much newspaper wit at the expense of the language of government bureaucracy, which is even more responsive to the melioristic bias. The bureaucrat lives in a world where nothing is incorrigible; the solution to every contemporary difficulty waits only for the devising of some appropriate administrative machinery. Compared with him, the social scientist is a realist, for social science at least begins by admitting that many situations leave something to be desired. The bureaucrat's world is prim and proper and aseptic, and his language reflects it (perhaps one could say that the discourse of the bureaucrat is social science "politicized"). At any rate, here we might profitably look at a specimen of bureaucratic parlance from Masterson and Phillips' *Federal Prose*, a recently published burlesque of official language. The authors posed for themselves as one exercise the problem of how a bureaucrat would express the ancient adage "Too many cooks spoil the broth." Their translation is a caricature, but, like

caricature, it brings out the dominant features of the subject: "Undue multiplicity of personnel assigned either concurrently or consecutively to a single function involves deterioration of quality in the resultant product as compared with the product of the labor of an exact sufficiency of personnel."<sup>11</sup> One notices, first of all, the leap into polysyllabic diction, along with the total disappearance of those homely entities "cooks" and "broth." "Personnel," for example, is an abstract dignifier, and "resultant product" is safe, since it does not leave the writer on record as affirming that the concoction in question actually is broth. He is further protected by the expunging of "spoil," with its positive assertion, and he can hide behind the relativity of "deterioration of quality . . . as compared with. . ."

Such language, when used to express the phenomenology of social and political behavior, gives a curious impression of being foreign to its subject matter. The impression of foreignness may be explained as follows. In all writing which has come to be regarded as wisdom about the human being, there is an undertone of the sardonic. Man at his best is a sort of caricature of himself, and even when we are eulogizing him for his finer attributes, there has to be a minor theme of deprecation, much as a vein of comedy weaves in and out of a great tragedy. The "great" actions of history appear either sublime or ridiculous, depending on one's standpoint, and it may be the part of sagacity to regard them as both at the same time. This note of the sardonic is found in biblical wisdom, in Plato's realism of situations, and even in Aristotle's dry categorizing. It appears in the *Federalist* papers,<sup>12</sup> as the authors, while debating political theory in high terms, kept a cagey eye upon economic man. Man is neither an angel nor any kind of disembodied spirit, and the attempt to treat him as such

only arouses our sense of the ridiculous. The comic animal must be there before we can grant that the representation is "true." The typical social science report, even when it discusses situations in which baseness and irrationality figure prominently, does not get in this ingredient. Every social fact may be serious, but not every social action is serious because action is not fully explainable without motive. It is this abstract man which causes some of us to wonder about the predications of an unhumanistic social science.

The remedy might be to employ, except where the necessity of conceptualizing makes it difficult, something nearer the language of the biblical parable (one shudders to think how our bureaucrat would render "A sower went forth to sow"), or the language of the best British journalism. I have often felt that writers on social science might learn a valuable lesson from the limpid prose of the *Manchester Guardian*. There one usually finds statement without eulogistic or dyslogistic tendency, adequacy without turgidity. It is perhaps the nearest thing we have in practice to that supposititious reality, objective language. There is some truth in the observation of John Peale Bishop that, whereas American English is more vigorous, English English is far more accurate. A good reportorial medium will be, to a considerable extent, an English English, and it will reflect something of the English genius for fact.

To sum up, the melioristic bias is a deflection toward language which glosses over reality without necessarily giving us a philosophic vocabulary. One could go so far as to say that such language is comparatively lacking in responsibility. It is the language that one expects from those who have become insulated or daintified. It carries a slight suggestion of denial of evil, which in lay circles, as in some ecclesiastical ones, is among the greatest heresies. Perhaps the sociologist would inspire more confidence as a social physician if his language had more of the candor described above, and almost certainly he would get a better understanding of his diagnosis.

11. James R. Masterson and Wendell Brooks Phillips, *Federal Prose: How to Write in and/or for Washington* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 10.

12. Cf., for example, Madison in No. 10.



## IV

*Do the social scientists lose more than they gain by a distrust of metaphor?* Dr. Johnson once remarked of Swift, "The rogue never hazards a metaphor," and that may well be the reaction of anyone who has plowed through the drab pages of a contemporary sociologist. It has long been suspected that sociologists and poets have little confidence in one another, and here their respective procedures come into complete contrast. The poet works mainly with metaphor, and the sociologist will have none of it. Which is right? Or, if each is doing instinctively the thing that is right for him, must we affirm that the works they produce are of very unequal importance?

One can readily see how the social scientist might be guided by the simple impression that, since metaphor characterizes the language of poetry, it has, for that very reason, no place in the language of science. Or, if he should become more analytical, he might conclude that metaphor, through its very operation of analogy or transference, implies the existence of a realm which positivistic study denies. To use metaphor, then, would be to pass over to the enemy. But he would be a very limited kind of sociologist, a sort of doctrinaire mechanist, not fully posted on all the resources open to scientific inquiry.

There are two more or less familiar theories of the nature of metaphor. One holds that metaphor is mere decoration. It is like the colored lights and gewgaws one hangs on a Christmas tree; the tree is an integral tree without them, but they do add sparkle and novelty and so are good things for such occasions. So the metaphors used in language are pleasurable accessories, which give it a certain charm and lift but which are supererogatory when one comes down to the business of understanding what is said. This theory has been fully discredited not only by those who have analyzed the language of poetry, but also by those who have gone furthest into the psychology of language itself and have explored the "meaning of meaning."

A second theory holds that metaphor is a useful concession to our feeble imagination. We are all children of Adam to the extent that we crave material embodiments. Even the most highly trained of us are wearied by long continuance of abstract communication; we want the thing brought down to earth so that we can see it. For the same reason that principles have to be put into fables for children, the abstract conceptions of modern science require figures for their popular expression. Thus the universe of Einstein is represented as "like" the surface of an orange; or the theory of entropy is illustrated by the figure of a desert on which Arabs are riding their camels hither and thither. From the standpoint of rhetoric, this theory has some validity. Visualization is an aid to seeing relationships, and there are rhetorical situations which demand some kind of picturization. Many skilled expositors will follow an abstract proposition with some easy figure which lets us down to earth or enables us to get a bearing. There is some value, then, in the "incarnation" of concepts. On this ground alone one could defend the use of metaphors in communication.<sup>13</sup>

There is yet another theory, now receiving serious attention, that metaphor is itself a means of discovery. Of course, metaphor is intended here in the broadest sense, requiring only some form of parallelism.<sup>14</sup> But when its essential nature is understood, it is hard to resist the thought that metaphor is one of the most important heuristic devices, leading us from a known to an unknown, but subsequently verifiable, fact of principle. Thus George de Santillana, writing on "Aspects of Scientific Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century," can de-

13. It is possible that there exists also a concrete understanding, which differs qualitatively from abstract or scientific understanding and is needed to supplement it, particularly when we are dealing with moral phenomena (see Andrew Bongiorno, "Poetry as an Educational Instrument," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, XXXIII [Autumn, 1947], 508-9).

14. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1410 b: "... for when the poet calls old age 'stubble,' he produces in us a knowledge and information by means of a common genus, for both are past their prime."

clare, "There is never a 'strict induction' but contains a considerable amount of deduction, starting from points chosen analogically."<sup>15</sup> In other words, analogy formulates and to some extent directs the inquiry. Any investigation must start from certain minimal likenesses, and that may conceal the truth that some analogy lies at the heart of all assertion. Even Bertrand Russell is compelled to accept analogy as one of the postulates required to validate the scientific method because it provides the antecedent probability necessary to justify an induction.<sup>16</sup>

We might go so far as to admit the point of George Lundberg, who has given attention to the underlying theory of social science, that artists and philosophers make only "allegations" about the world, which scientists must put to the test.<sup>17</sup> For the inquiry may go from allegation to allegation, through a series of metaphorical constructs. This in no wise diminishes the role of metaphor but rather recognizes the role it has always had. If we should speak, for example of the "dance of life," we would be using a metaphor of considerable illuminating power, in that it rests upon a number of resemblances, some of which are hidden or profound. If we push it vigorously, we may be surprised at some of the insights which will turn up. Our naïve question, "What is it like?" which we ask of anything we are confronting for the first time, is the intellect's cry for help. Unless it is like something in some measure, we shall never get to understand it.

The usual student of literature is prone to feel that there is more social psychology in *Hamlet* than in a dozen volumes on the theory of the subject. Hamlet is a category, a kind of concrete universal; why would he yield less as a factor in an analysis than some operational definition? At least one social psychologist has felt no hesitation about employing this kind

15. *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), II, No. 8, 7.

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 487.

17. *Foundations of Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 383.

of factor, the only difference being that his is Babbitt, of more recent creation. Ellsworth Farris, in developing a thesis that every person has several selves, presents his meaning as follows:

Moreover, whatever the list of personalities or roles may be, there is always room for one more, and indeed for many more. When war comes, Babbitt will probably be a member of the committee for public defense. He may become a member of a law enforcement league yet to be formed. He may divorce his wife or elope with his stenographer or misuse the mails and become a Federal prisoner in Leavenworth. Each experience will mean a new role with new personal attitudes and a new axiological conception of himself.<sup>18</sup>

This is none the less illuminating because Babbitt is not the product of a controlled scientific induction. He is a sort of "alleged" symbol which works very well in a psychological equation. Surely, it is enlightening to know that some men are like Babbitt and others like Hamlet, or that we all have our Babbitt and Hamlet phases. But here we should be primarily interested in the fact that the Lynds' *Middletown* (1929) followed rather than preceded Lewis's *Main Street* (1920). In the best of literary and sociological worlds, *Main Street* directs attention to Middletown, and *Middletown* reduces Main Street to an operable entity.

The task of taking language away from poetry is a larger operation than appears at first, and in the eyes of some students an impossible one, even if it were desirable. We are all like Emerson's scholar in that the ordinary affairs of life come to us business and go from us poetry—at least as soon as we start expressing them in speech. Many words which we think of as prosaic literalisms can be shown to have their origin in long-forgotten comparisons. The word "dependent" analogizes

18. "The Nature of Human Nature," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXII (July, 1926), 17.

the action of hanging from; "contact" analogizes a relationship. "Discoverer" and "detect" stand for the literal operation of taking off a covering, hence exposing to view. A "profound study" apparently goes back to our perception of physical depth. In this way the meaning which we attach to these words is transferred from their analogues; and, of course, the process is more obvious in language that is more consciously metaphorical. It thus becomes plain that somewhere one has to come to terms with metaphor anyhow, and there is a way to turn the necessity into a victory.

## V

*Is the expression of social science affected by a caste spirit?* The fact that social scientists are, in general, dedicated to the removal of caste, or at least to a refutation of caste presumptions, unfortunately does not prevent their becoming a caste. Circumstances exist all the while to make them an *élite*. For one thing, the scientific method of procedure sets them off pretty severely from the average man, with his common-sense approach to social problems. Not only is he likely to be nonplussed by techniques and terminologies, he is also likely to be repelled by what scientists consider one of their greatest virtues—their detachment. Finally, it has to be admitted that social scientists' extensive patronage by universities, foundations, and governments serves to give them a protected status while they work. Every other group so situated has tended to create a jargon, and thus far the social scientists have not been an exception. Their jargon is a product partly of imitation and partly of defense-mindedness.

Naturally one of the first steps in entering a profession is to master the professional language. A display of familiarity with the language is popularly taken as a sign of orthodoxy and acceptance; and thus there arises a temptation to use the special nomenclature freely even when one has doubts about its aptness. This condition affects especially the young ones

who are seeking recognition and establishment—the graduate students and the instructors—in general, the probationers in the field. Departure from orthodoxy can be interpreted as a sign of ignorance or as a sign of independence, and, in the case of those who have not passed probation, we usually interpret it as the former. Accordingly, there is a degree of risk involved in changing the pattern of speech laid down by one's colleagues. So the problem of what one has to do to show that one belongs can be a problem of style. It is entirely possible that many young social scientists do not write so well as they could because of this inhibition. They are in the position of having to satisfy teachers and critics, and they produce what is expected or what they think is expected. In this way a natural gift for the direct phrase and the lucid arrangement can be swallowed up in tortuosities. The pattern can be broken only by some gifted revolutionary or by someone invested with all the honors of the guild.

It is, moreover, true, as Harold Laski has pointed out, that every profession builds up a distrust of innovation, and especially of innovation from the outside.<sup>19</sup> It requires an unusual degree of humility to see that the solution to our problem may have to come from someone outside our number, perhaps from some naive person whose advantage is that he can see the matter only in broad outline. Professions and bureaucracies are on guard against this sort of person, and one of the barriers they unconsciously set up is just this one of jargon. If certain government policies were announced in the language of the barbershop, their absurdity might become overwhelmingly apparent. If certain projects in social science research (or in language and literature research, for that matter) were explained in the language of the daily news report, their futility might become embarrassingly clear. One can only surmise how an experienced political reporter would phrase the find-

19. "The Limitations of the Expert," *Harper's*, CLXII (December, 1930), 102-3.

ings in Beyle's *Identification and Analysis of Attribute-Cluster-Blocs*, but one has a notion that his account would sound very little like the original. Would it be unfair? The reply that such language would destroy essential meanings in the original would have to be weighed along with the alternative possibility that the language was used in the first place because it was euphemistic, in the sense we have outlined, or protective. A user of such language may feel safe because the definition of terms is, in a way, his possession. And so technical language, of terms is, in a way, his possession. And so technical language, as sometimes employed, may be Pickwickian, inasmuch as it serves not just scientifically but also pragmatically. The average citizen, faced with sociological explanations and bureaucratic communique, may feel as poor culprits used to feel when confronted with law Latin.

## VI

The rhetorical obligation of the scientists has been apply expressed by T. Swann Harding in a discussion of the general character of scientific writing. "Scientists," he says, "gain nothing by showing off, and the simpler they can make their reports the better. Even their technical reports can be made very much simpler without loss of accuracy or precision. Nor is there really any valid substitute for a good working knowledge of English composition and rhetoric."<sup>20</sup> The last statement is true with certain qualifications, which ought to be made explicit. In a final estimate of the problem it has to be recognized that social science writing cannot be judged altogether by literary standards. It is expression with a definite assignment of duty; and those who have made a comparative study of methods and styles know that every formula of expression incurs its penalty. It is a rule in the realm of writing that one pays for the choice one makes. The payment is exacted when the form of expression becomes too exclusively what it is. In course of use a defined style becomes its own enemy.

20. "The Sad Estate of Scientific Publication," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLVII (January, 1942), 600.

If one's writing is abstract, it will accommodate ideas, but it will fatigue the reader. If it is concrete, it will divert and reheve; but it may become cloying, and it will have difficulty in encompassing ideas. If it is spare, it will come to seem abrupt; if it practices a degree of circumlocution, it will first seem elegant but will come to seem inflated. The lucid style is suspected of oversimplifying. And so the dilemma goes.

Now the social scientist has to write about a kind of thing, and, notwithstanding his uncertain allocation of facts and concepts, he may as well accept his penalty at the beginning. He can never make it a primary goal to be "pleasing," and for this reason the purely literary performance is not for him. Dramatic presentation, a leading source of interest in all literary production, is largely, if not entirely, out of his reach. The only kind of writing that gets people emotionally involved contains some form of dramatic conflict, which requires a dichotomy of opposites. Yet the only dichotomy that social science (as a science) contemplates is that of the norm and the deviate, and these two are supposed to exist in an empirical rather than in a moral context, and the injunction is implicit that all we shall do is observe. The work, then, is going to be either purely descriptive, or critical with reference to the norm-deviate opposition. Not many people are going to develop a sense of poignant concern over such presentations. To a certain extent *Middletown* did catch the popular imagination, but the contrast developed here was between what the American observer was through the eyes of detached social scientists and his picture of himself, with its compound of self-esteem, aspiration, and social mythology. The community empirically found was put on the stage to challenge the community sentimentally and otherwise conceived. The same will hardly hold for the typical case of scientific norm and empirically discovered deviate, for no such ideas are involved in the contrast. *Recent Social Trends in the United States*,<sup>21</sup> for example, the monumental report of President Hoover's Research Com-

21. (2 vols.; New York, 1933.)

mittee on Social Trends, could not look to this kind of interest for its appeal. Unless, therefore, we regard metaphor as a means of dramatic presentation, this resource is not ordinarily open to social science.

Yet within the purpose which the social scientist sets himself there is a considerable range of rhetorical possibility, which he ignores at needless expense. Rhetoric is, among other things, a process of coordination and subordination which is very close to the essential thought process. That is to say, in any coherent piece of discourse there occur promotion and demotion of thoughts, and this is accomplished not solely through logical outlining and subsumation. It involves matters of sequence, of quantity, and some understanding of the rhetorical aspects of grammatical categories. These are means to clear and effective expression, and the failure to see and use them as means can produce a condition in which means and ends seem not discriminated, or even a subversion in which means seem to manipulate ends. That condition is one which social science, along with every other instrumentality of education, should be combating in the interest of a reasonable world.

## Chapter IX

### ULTIMATE TERMS IN CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC

WE HAVE shown that rhetorical force must be conceived as a power transmitted through the links of a chain that extends upward toward some ultimate source. The higher links of that chain must always be of unique interest to the student of rhetoric, pointing, as they do, to some prime mover of human impulse. Here I propose to turn away from general considerations and to make an empirical study of the terms on these higher levels of force which are seen to be operating in our age.

We shall define term simply here as a name capable of entering into a proposition. In our treatment of rhetorical sources, we have regarded the full predication consisting of a proposition as the true validator. But a single term is an incipient proposition, awaiting only the necessary coupling with another term; and it cannot be denied that single names set up expectancies of propositional embodiment. This causes everyone to realize the critical nature of the process, of naming. Given the name "patriot," for example, we might expect to see coupled with it "Brutus," or "Washington," or "Parnell"; given the term "hot," we might expect to see "sun," "stove," and so on. In sum, single terms have their potencies, this being part of the phenomenon of names, and we shall here present a few of the most noteworthy in our time, with some remarks upon their etiology.

Naturally this survey will include the "bad" terms as well

*The ETHICS of*  
**Rhetoric**

By RICHARD M. WEAVER

1953

REGNERY/GATEWAY, INC.  
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA