

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### THE FOLKWAYS OF A SCIENTIFIC SOCIOLOGY

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#### ABSTRACT

As sociology becomes more scientific, the customs and procedures of sociologists as scientists will change and will become more like the habits of scientists in the field of natural science. In particular, it is noted that much greater emphasis will be put on verification and proof, while other related activities, such as those of education, literature, journalism, ethics, religion, politics, leadership, and propaganda, now so intertwined with sociological writing, will be sharply differentiated. Etc.

For long it has been a practice of sociologists to study the habits and manners of peoples. Therefore, it should be permissible to examine the habits and manners of sociologists, if the subject were sufficiently significant. It becomes significant, perhaps, and certainly intriguing, when one thinks, not of the habits of present-day sociology, but rather of the practices of a sociology of the future, when it has become more truly scientific than is the case today. Naturally we cannot make precise predictions, but certain inferences can be drawn; and then it should be remembered that one of the customs of long standing among us is that a president of a scientific society in his presidential address is not expected to be bound so rigidly by the restrictions of data, nor is his imagination to be so disciplined as would be the case if he were presenting the results of a piece of scientific research. I shall draw rather more largely than usual on this freedom which I understand is allowed me.

One of the processes that will shape the sociology of the future is that of differentiation, described at such length by Herbert Spencer. It is, I know, not the fashion to quote Spencer these days. But irrespective of our intellectual styles, division of labor and differentiation continue to be powerful processes despite frequent exceptions. Historically, the growth of the sciences has occurred by a process of differentiation. Indeed, it is customary to note that philosophy was the mother of the sciences and that sociology and psychology are the latest to be separated from her, if, indeed, the separation may be said to have been completed.

No doubt this differentiation of subject matter will continue, yet the reverse process has undoubtedly been operative, particularly in the United States, during the last decade. The reason is that this differentiating process has reached a stage where a particular science is quite inadequate to deal in any realistic manner with many practical problems, any one of which falls in the several different fields of the various

social sciences. So that the dividing lines between the social sciences have been breaking down under the impact of certain researches, particularly in the practical world of social life and the many problems which it presents.

But it is another differentiating process which will be of special significance for the future of sociology, a differentiation not so much of subject matter but rather of methods. In short, the more strictly scientific methods will be differentiated from methods that more properly belong to activities other than those of science. I refer to such activities as are found, for instance, in ethics, religion, commerce, education, journalism, literature, and propaganda. Sociology as a science is not interested in making the world a better place in which to live, in encouraging beliefs, in spreading information, in dispensing news, in setting forth impressions of life, in leading the multitudes, or in guiding the ship of state. Science is interested directly in one thing only, to wit, discovering new knowledge.

As a human being, I, of course, want to seek for knowledge that will be of benefit to mankind. Similarly, as a human being, I may want to spread this new knowledge far and wide, or to affect the beliefs of people, or to write my interpretations of life and events. These activities may be just as important or more so, perhaps, than discovering new knowledge. Indeed, it is hard to rank them in values, since they are ~III invaluable. But in so far as I function in these respects, however worthy they may be, I am not engaged in scientific activities.

The differentiating process will split off these various non-scientific procedures that are now so intertwined in the so-called scientific pursuits of the social scientists. When this is done, the sociologists will have abandoned some of their existing habits and will have developed some new ones instead.

One of these new habits will be the writing of wholly colorless articles and the abandonment of the present habit of trying to make the results of science into literature, the precedents set in this regard by Huxley and William James being considered a bad legacy for the apprentices of science. It will not be necessary, then, to end articles with an eloquent appeal or a scintillating conclusion. It will be possible also to begin articles without referring to Plato, Aristotle, or any other of the much-praised Greeks. Clarity and accuracy will be the only virtues of exposition. The expression of emotion will be bad form. The audience for these articles will be the scientific guild; and no attempt will be made to make these articles readable for shop girls or the high-school youth. Articles will always be accompanied by the supporting data. Hence the text will be shorter and the tables and records longer. It will cost more to print them. Only part of the article will be read; the remainder will be for reference.

This specialization in the exposition of science does not mean that there will be any diminution in the popularization of science. There will be numerous articles and books which will show the human significance of these discoveries and measurements, publications which will dramatize science, which will re-write scientific results in terms of

slang, which will put in them an ethical punch. The scientist himself may engage in such types of writing; but if so it will be in the capacity of another self, not as the functioning of his scientific self.

And so there will be a new type of social science journal, not now in existence, save perhaps in one instance, which will devote itself to the publication of scientific results for a scientific audience. The articles in the new social science journals will be in some ways greatly expanded social science abstracts; that is, an abstract in the sense that the scientific essentials will be abstracted from the irrelevant interpretation, popularization, and emotionalism. And so readers will go to the sociological journals in the future for one thing only, to learn new knowledge. They will not expect, as they do now, a gratification of their aesthetic sense, ethical edification, or entertainment, or stimuli for the projection of their personality.

In the future era of scientific sociology there will be a marked decline in the prestige of intellectuality as such, as compared with its vogue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But this decline in the prestige of intellectuality will be only among the scientists themselves. For the difference between scientific activities and intellectual activities will be more sharply drawn. All scientists are intellectual, of course, but only a very few intellectuals are scientists. The difference is very well noted in the comparison of two addresses by Renan and by Pasteur, at the time of Pasteur's reception into the Académie Française. Renan's was a great intellect, which shone in full brilliance in his address of welcome, an address of wit and charm, of lights and shades, abounding in intellectual subtleties, scholarly references, and touching at times the profound. Pasteur, the scientist, in his address of acceptance, was not at home in the display of intellect as such. His was a simple, straightforward, and by comparison dull presentation. This does not mean, of course, that scientists may not be great intellects. Quite the contrary. Intellectual play or display may be the recreation of the future social scientist but hardly his main work. This disciplining of the mental processes is too strict in scientific work to permit intellectualism to flourish in the laboratory. Intellectual processes—as contrasted with scientific thought—are combined usually with feelings, though of course always in logical form. Impressions are followed more freely in intellectual life, wherever associations lead. But in the scientific work of proof, of establishing real enduring knowledge, thinking must be freed from the bias of emotion. There must be eliminated all the associations that disturb the closeness of the connection between the thinking and the data.

Of course the disciplining of thought is not so apparent in one of the steps in scientific work, viz., the originating of ideas, or in the slang equivalent, "the getting of hunches." There imagination and free association are the greatest aid to the scientist. It is for this reason that one says, and quite truly but rather crudely, that there is something of the artist in every great scientist. So intellectualism is the proper atmosphere for the birth of ideas. Getting the idea is often said to be the first step in the scientific process, but more often it does not lead to the new step—it only leads to the production of literature. But it must be remembered that getting 'an idea is not establishing real knowledge. An idea of value to science must be formulated in

some sort of form capable of demonstration or proof; then must follow the proof or verification. An unrestricted propagation of ideas will not produce science. The shaman, or "medicine man," of the American Indians was not a scientist and did not produce scientific medicine, although he was very fertile in the production of ideas. The originating of ideas is a necessary step in the scientific work, but ideas must be formulated and tested by reality.

With the decline in intellectualism it will be less easy to get fame as a theorist, and, with the rise of science, reputations will be built upon proofs, records, and measurement. But at times, fortunately gone by, in some of our social disciplines a man had rather have been called a theorist than a scientist, a most peculiar twist in values, for in the natural science it is rather a matter of shame to be labeled as only having set forth a theory. The publication of guesses, hypotheses, or hunches in this future era will be taboo. There will be no virtue in a merely stimulating article. The sine qua non of scientific publication will be verification and evidence. Verification in this future state of scientific sociology will amount almost to a fetish. There will inevitably be a great many unimportant and uninteresting things verified. Thus science will utilize the dull and uninteresting person, just as logic utilizes the paranoiac, as social philosophy utilizes the fanatic, and as intellectualism utilizes the daydreamer. For science will rest on a base of a great deal of long, careful, painstaking work. And many stupid persons can be careful, patient, methodical. It must always be remembered that science grows by accretion, by the accumulation of little bits and pieces of new knowledge. Occasionally one of these little pieces of new knowledge becomes of very great significance, and it is then called a great discovery or a great invention. But one cannot predict when these very significant pieces of new knowledge will be discovered. The accumulative nature of the growth of science is usually not appreciated because of the prevailing opinion, influenced in part by the Comtean postulates, that the stage of proof and verification in the development of science must be preceded by a long period of theory. Such a sequence is true enough in the case of the verification of a particular hypothesis but not necessarily so of the development of a science. The growth of science is rather the accumulation bit by bit of new and lasting knowledge. The accumulation of these new discoveries calls for an organization of workers, not all of whom will be stupid, however, for brains are useful in science as in every other form of enterprise, and there will be geniuses in science as truly as in scholarship.

In this future state everyone will be a statistician, that is, nearly everyone. The universities will all have statistical laboratories, and the individual workers will have plenty of machines, all of them electric. Indeed, there are likely to be more machines than thinkers. For some time, perhaps a very long time, however, a goodly portion of research in sociology will, make no use of statistics. It is obvious, however, that quantitative sociology is bound to have an enormous growth, not only because of its undoubtedly great usefulness, but also because we have the wealth to collect the statistics and the organization to provide for their analyses. While all sociologists will be statisticians, statistics as a recognized field of knowledge will disappear, and there will be no professors of statistics. Statistics will disappear as a distinct field of

knowledge because it will be almost universal, not only in sociology and in economics, but perhaps in social psychology and in political science also. All of the journals in the different social sciences will publish statistical articles. With the growth of statistical research, it will become more and more apparent that statistical method as such cannot be divorced well from the data. Hence, statistics will be identified with the subject matter in each social science rather than be set apart as a special discipline. Indeed, this tendency is making great headway in the United States at the present time—much more so than in Europe.

In the past the great names in sociology have been social theorists and social philosophers. But this will not be the case in the future. For social theory and social philosophy will decline, that is, in the field of scientific sociology. Social theory will have no place in a scientific sociology, for it is not built upon sufficient data. Of course, certain syntheses of broad researches may be called theory, a new meaning for an old term. But such syntheses will be based on evidence. Social theory in good part is a product of wishful thinking, taking form in the zeitgeist in which it is developed. But so were the superstitions of the primitive cultures, such as, for instance, the theories as to the origins of the world and how it was peopled. Many of the great social theories will collapse, just as the theory of supernatural beings once collapsed. For it is possible for a great body of intellectual ideas of a people to have no abiding truth in them. A scientific sociology will be quite sharply separated from social philosophy, for it will be recognized how much social philosophy is a rationalization of wishes. Social philosophers will continue to exist, however, and serve a very useful purpose in such fields as ethics and among publicists and statesmen.

One of the qualities most sought after by scientific sociologists will be patience, which will be accorded rank as one of the major virtues. Fame, publicity, and emotional gratification will appear always as temptresses, but the scientists will be loyal to patience. Although the dynamic qualities of human nature are furnishing him with the drive to make his goal, nevertheless, without caution and suspended judgment, they will prevent him from attaining that goal. Brilliance and originality will always be admired, but in a scientific sociology they will never be admired alone, that is, without the accompanying proof and measurement that comes with perseverance and patience.

This insistence upon “suspended judgment” is not compatible with action, which tends to follow directly out of emotion. The caution of the scientific mind in reaching a decision is illustrated by the conversation of the scientist and his traveling companion as they look out of the train window at a herd of sheep. To the remark that the sheep had been sheared, the scientist replied, “They seem to be on this side.” Such extreme caution and insistence on “suspended judgment” is not compatible with executive ability. It is, though, a desirable quality in judicial ability, although judicial decision is more often hasty than is scientific conclusion. The scientific sociologists will not, therefore, be statesmen, leaders, or executives. And if they ever seem to guide the course of evolution—which neither they nor anyone

else ever can do—it will be indirectly, by furnishing the information necessary for such supreme direction to some sterling executive who will appear to do the actual guiding. In some rare cases a person may be both an executive and a scientist just as a person may be both a scientist and an artist. But, if so, the guiding of the ship of state will be done by only one of his two personalities, the executive one. This differentiation of the scientist from the administrator has already gone far in this country, farther than in Europe, and it is noticeable in our universities.

While the sociologist as scientist will not hold office or lead movements, this does not mean that he will be an armchair sociologist or that he will necessarily live a secluded life. On the contrary, the scientific sociologist must become more and more realistic, and he must learn to know his data by the closest of connections with the sources, wherever they may be, in social movements or amid social problems. He will be found with the staff of the courts, in the factory, at the headquarters of the political party, in the community centers. He will be wherever data on significant social problems are to be found. But he will be there as a student to discover new knowledge and relationships rather than as a practical worker. The executive, the leader, the social worker will be the group to put to use the information which the scientific sociologist furnishes. For, as some wag has said, “making butter is different from spreading it.”

In the future the subject matter of the social worker and of the sociologist will be the same, in large part, except that the field of the sociologist will be larger and will encompass that of the social worker. The interests of the social worker and of the sociologist will also have more in common. For a large group of sociologists will deal with the practical problem of human betterment. And to a certain extent the motivation of the social worker and of the sociologist as a human being will tend to be the same. For the social scientist, being human, will be interested in making the world a better place to live in; at least, most of them will. But they will go about it in different ways. The sociologist will, of course, work on the problems that tend to make sociology an organized systematic body of knowledge, but also he will choose for his researches the study of those problems the solution of which will benefit the human race and its culture, particularly those problems that present the greatest acuteness. But the scientific sociologist will attack these problems once chosen with the sole idea of discovering new knowledge, whereas the social worker will be interested in applying the new knowledge thus discovered for the alleviation of the ills of mankind, either as a social engineer, or as a leader of a movement, or as the executive of institutions. But with the rising standard of living which will come with a lowered birth rate, with the many new inventions that are inevitable, and with our wonderful natural resources, the nature of the problems of the social worker will tend not to be set off as a class dealing with poverty but rather with social problems in general. The social worker and some of the sociologists will thus work together at the same place, the one interested in discovery and the other interested in practical achievement. The two functions may indeed find existence in the same person.

The sociologist and the social engineer will both require much more scientific discipline than does the natural scientist and the mechanical engineer. One reason is

the greater temptation to distort conclusions in the interest of emotional values. Furthermore, the social engineer will not be able to restrict himself to the application of proved knowledge. For social problems will be so urgent that one cannot wait on the "suspended judgment" of the scientist. Something will have to be done. We must vote on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, whether our information is complete or not. Social problems call for action as well as knowledge. Now, knowledge is usually a matter of probability. Hence action will often be based upon approximate knowledge, when, for instance, the probability appears greater than fifty-fifty. Fair success in using approximate knowledge in important issues will, of course, bring social approval. This means that high standards of science will always be hard to maintain in the social sciences. Also, unless social values change greatly from what they are today, the leader and the executive will command greater prestige than the scientist who discovers new knowledge for the leader and executive to use. There will always thus be a great mongering with proximate information. But there will also be social engineers who, like physicians in general, are not scientists, but who apply reliable scientific procedures and relatively exact knowledge. But the scientist's work will be differentiated from that of the handling of proximate information and the applying of exact information already known according to formula.

A great deal of research will be done outside of universities, an increasingly large proportion. A smaller and smaller proportion of research will be done single-handed by the lone researcher. This is regretted by some schizophrenic persons who believe that one cannot think if one works in an organization. The fact that a clerk's life is a routine and that the punching of adding-machines is mechanical is not evidence that somewhere in the organization there are not persons who think. All governments, national, state, and city, may be expected to increase their research functions greatly. But so also will trade unions, employers' associations, leagues and civic bodies, political parties, industries, and social-work organizations. Increasing wealth will make such social research possible, and, second, its effectiveness will be increasingly demonstrated. These various organizations with special interests will all be doing research with a specific purpose to prove a particular hypothesis or to gain a desired end, but their research staff will be dictated to only in the choice of the problem or hypothesis. They will be free to abide wholly by the evidence. To do this they must be sharply distinguished from the executive or policy-making branch. This differentiating process, which will mark off science in sociology, leaves us without a wholly attractive or ideal picture of science and scientists. But a forecaster is not interested in whether what he sees is beautiful or not. His idea is to predict solely what will happen. But of course I realize that according to the folk ways of America in the first part of the twentieth century, all addresses, like the moving-pictures, theaters, and short stories, are supposed to have happy endings—particularly presidential addresses.

The happy ending for a scientific sociology will be its achievement. It will be necessary to crush out emotion and to discipline the mind so strongly that the fanciful pleasures of intellectuality will have to be eschewed in the verification process; it will

be desirable to taboo our ethics and values (except in choosing problems); and it will be inevitable that we shall have to spend most of our time doing hard, dull, tedious, and routine tasks. Still the result will be pure gold and worth the trouble. While science will separate itself from education, propaganda, ethics, journalism, literature, religion, and from executive leadership, all these excellent social activities will not cease, of course. Social life will be thus just as rich. And, finally, it is not necessary for a scientist to be a scientist all of the time. He can temporarily shut the door to his laboratory and open for a while his door to the beauty of the stars, to the romance of life, to the service of his fellow-men, to the leadership of the cause, to the applause of his audience, or to adventure in the great out of doors. But when he returns to his laboratory he will leave these behind; although there is a beauty, a romance, a service, a leadership, and an adventure of a kind to be found sometimes in the laboratory.