A PPLICATION of existing social science knowledge to the amelioration of problems of human relations is hampered by existing habits of thought and action. Curiously enough this resistance is directly proportional to the soundness of this social science knowledge; the principles of human relations inductively derived from empirical research and observation of human behavior are less likely to be accepted by intelligent persons than are prevalent panaceas and superstitions.

At least eight social obstacles* to the acceptance of existing social science knowledge of a sound nature may be noted: the subject matter of social science (crime, sex, politics, wealth, etc.) arouses emotional reactions and diverts attention from an analysis of the qualities of the objects observed to an expression of how we feel about these objects; a normative set or a value-judgment rather than an impersonal approach to problems of social relations is traditional; the observer is himself a part of the social situation or the social relationships he tries to observe; much significant sociological information has a confidential and privileged character; widespread conspiracies of silence exist and prevent effective decision making about acute problems; unpleasant consequences to minority groups usually follow the application of sound principles of human relationship; much of the subject matter of social science is purely verbal or language behavior and hence seems intangible; and an understanding of the problems of human relations requires concentrated, consistent and sustained mental concentration of a new language which few are willing to learn.

Let us now consider in more detail each of these obstacles.

1. THE SUBJECT MATTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IS EMOTION-ARousing

Thoughtful leaders of modern communities express concern about such problems of human relations as criminal behavior, juvenile delinquency, divorce, prostitution, maladjustment of sex relations, injustice to weaker members of the community such as orphan children and working women and minority race groups, strikes and lockouts, monopoly, cut-throat competition, political corruption and spoils. Now it is a common property of all these problems of human relations that the normal and first response to them is an emotional response rather than an intellectual and an impersonal reaction. Confronted with any one of these problems it is difficult to make impersonal judgments and to take a detached point of view.

Conventional morality and orthodox religion insist upon an attitudinal stance with respect to all these problems and condemn an objective approach. Thus the social climate in which we see these problems tends to reinforce a natural tendency to respond to them with anger, fear, scorn, greed, loathing, pity, affection, sympathy, loyalty, reverence or awe, as the case may be. A curiosity response which seeks to observe, describe and record, rather than to express how the observer feels about the problem, is an unconventional response and excites suspicion and disapproval. A. G. Keller, in stating the contrast between the attitude of the natural science observer towards his subject matter and the social scientist towards his subject matter says, “A man can count the legs of a fly and not have his heart wrung by finding them too many or too few!”

Thus it is that emotion-arousing subject matter diverts attention from the characteristics of the subject matter to a preoccupation with how one feels about this subject matter. And the impartial social observer comes to be regarded as hard-hearted, callous and cynical. As a matter of fact, a cynic is usually merely a bad name that a neurotic calls a realist whom he does not like; and a neurotic is a person whose habits of response tend toward substitute response systems, rather than toward direct response to direct stimuli; and such response systems have self as the center of reference. In the neurotic person, responsibility for his acts and decisions is avoided by

* Individual obstacles in the pathological mechanisms of abnormal psychology are not specifically treated herein, nor autonomic response systems.
escape into lengthy explanations in which words are used which have no verifiable fact-referents.

2. THE NORMATIVE SET AND VALUE-JUDGMENT APPROACH

Emotion-arousing subject matter tends to develop habits of response which either consciously or unconsciously attach "praise" and "blame" to purely natural situations in the community of human relationships. "Who is to blame?" we inquire, and not, "What is the cause?" Use of the pronoun "who" indicates a personal and anthropomorphic explanation based on self-reference. Use of the verb "blame" clinches the matter as one of bad motivation, and thus adroitly shifts responsibility to another. Whereas to ask, "What is the cause?" is to use a less emotional expression, in which the interrogative pronoun "What" refers to a thing and is substituted for a personal pronoun, and calls for selection from an indefinite number of factors. Finally, the noun "cause" is entirely devoid of personal implications, hence is neutral, seems colorless, and is not interesting to most persons.

The value-judgment approach is natural for the masses of people and is the normative approach of the "reformer." But for purposes of systematic and sound knowledge of human relations these uses of language are misleading, since they merely reveal the feelings of the speaker in reacting to the problem and do not describe the problem in transmissible and recordable terms. Although the statements made may be expressed in the grammatical form of assertions of fact they deceive both the speaker and the hearer as to what is really taking place, since value-judgments are expressions of desire, of what is wished for or disapproved, and contain terms which do not describe the qualities of the thing or situation under observation.

But unfortunately normative statements have their own psychological utilities. They provide a simple principle of classification (all things are put into dichotomies) as a substitute for the bewildering variations of real experience. Thus anything is "good" or "bad"; we are favorable to it, or we disapprove it. In an increasingly complex social world the normative categories simplify the adjustment process by reducing the number of verbal signs required in thought or in conversation. They also save the fatigue of critical analysis and close observation to details. They seem to provide rules which can be relied upon to promote a sense of security in a threatening world. For the slightly more sophisticated, they seem to protect one from the seeming uncertainties of the calculus of probability, with its realistic admission that there can be no absolute precision in predicting events. To try to think through all of these principles is very confusing to the average layman.

3. THE SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL OBSERVER IS HIMSELF A PART OF THE SOCIAL PROCESS HE TRIES TO OBSERVE

The student of human relations has few tools of objective observation which are mechanical instruments of precise measurement. He has to resort to words to describe language behavior, and to these words his whole organism is often strongly conditioned from early childhood. Participation in the give and take of the surrounding system of communication rests upon habit patterns that are well established, and with these go an attitude structure which tends to set the approach to screen out those social stimuli which are displeasing. Thus are unpleasant consequences ruled out and painful adjustments avoided. And since each of us as has as many roles as the numerous groups with different ends, to which we belong, internal tensions and conflicts are resolved by subdivision of personality into separate compartments, and this prevents a wholesome integration of our selves.

Since the days of the Greek philosophers men have sought to escape the suffocating and all surrounding social climate of conventional morality and tradition by finding refuge of a sort and a certain degree of detachment about human relations which comes from the study of archaeology, history, and ethnology. In the study of the cultures of other times and of different places some appreciation is gained of the recurrence of problems of human relations and of the relativity of the norms used to judge the importance of these problems in any given time and place. Unfortunately this escape into detachment is usually a mere translation from one folk language into another, either as between different periods or different regions. It all remains on the same plane of meaning—nominal meaning. No real emancipation from the folk pattern is achieved. No penetration by aid of semiotic analysis or by social-psychological study is effected. One is
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still bound by nominal relationships—by the names given to relationships. It is still assumed implicitly that, since certain words customarily stand for real things, there must be somewhere an existing thing for which every noun stands. The question whether there are terms which merely represent other linguistic forms and never can be shown to stand for an existing thing, is a question seldom raised and seldom faced. Only in recent times has the idea of an operational definition been grasped: the principle that a concept of human relations may be defined in terms of the operations performed in measuring it. Take the concept of "morale," certainly a social concept of some importance in the human relations of both war and peace; it has been only recently that psychometrics and sociometrics have given us a measure of this factor in human relations; and these measures used to implement social policy.

4. THE CONFIDENTIAL AND PREVILEGED CHARACTER OF MUCH SOCIOLOGICAL INFORMATION

Much sociological information is based upon observations and inferences about particular personal relationships in specific social situations. There are recognizable mechanisms and patterns of individual behavior in social situations which involve ascendance or submission, shyness or boasting, escape into verbal phantasy or courage in facing unpleasant facts, which is learned by long experience in participant observing of social organization. Those who have had extensive practice in committee work, conference procedure and group pressure tactics, develop an insight into human motives and behavior, which is difficult to reduce to measured and quantitative terms but which may none-the-less supply a very effective understanding of what is going on. This shrewdness has much more depth than a superficial "being in the know." Much of this experience involves recognition of "the psychological moment" promptly as it appears; and there is also quite probably an element of good luck in being "on the spot at the right moment." The most effective use of such empirical social knowledge is to exercise it as a "wise counselor" rather than as an "expert," which often is offensive to others, since every man believes that he alone is a good judge of character and can read the signs of the social times with insight and sureness.

Thus the sociologist who is an active participant in the life of the community and not "an armchair theorist" accumulates a considerable volume of information about specific leaders, their weaknesses and their strengths, which has to be kept confidential since it can be very "dangerous knowledge" to him. In fact, the type of participant observer described can, if he is indiscreet, i.e. voluble and talkative, actually "know too much" for his own good. Now this confidential and privileged character of some sociological information makes scientific (objective, public) formulations of knowledge difficult, despite the fact that such information may be of real strategic importance. In sound social administration and executive leadership, however, "secret" knowledge is essential to the smooth operation of the social organization. The good executive has to "keep his own counsel" and confides in no one. The essential point is to keep it secret that you have a secret, otherwise such a leader is open to attack, raids and reprisals. Now this kind of social knowledge is far from being scientific, since it is not transmitted or recorded, and yet it may be very effective. Herein we have another obstacle to development of a genuine science of human relationships, since science is essentially public, transmissible and recordable. When an effort is made to objectify such information by the device of anonymity, it tends to lose its authority. Perhaps this dilemma never can be resolved.

5. CONSPIRACIES OF SILENCE

Conspiracies of silence complete the picture and complicate the process of making a decision about acceptance or rejection of the known principles of social science as a rationale for individual and group action, and often take the edge off rational effort.

There are "conventions of good taste" which prevent asking questions that may be embarrassing to another person because such questions are interpreted as prying into his personal affairs. In sociological questionnaires the inquiry is worded to avoid being unduly inquisitorial. Solenberger found in a study of homeless men that the question, "Are you married?" brought answers that seemed to be in smaller proportion than seemed reasonable. When he rephrased the question, "Where is your wife now living?" he obtained a larger proportion of married men in the group investigated. Good taste prevents interference in the affairs of a neighbor or a relative when the evidence clearly
points to the fact that a promising child is being badly spoiled. Conventions for the protection of personal privacy take the forms of rights; freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of religious worship. These have been won at great cost. But their anti-social consequences have seldom been frankly faced.

Often fear of reprisals from powerful and entrenched interests curbs the impulse to expose the existence of undercover political corruption, criminal rackets or even of unethical practices, not so much with the idea of personal safety, as from the knowledge that such an exposure would jeopardize further inquiry and fact gathering. People are hesitant about "stirring up a mare's nest."

Conventions of line organization require reporting only to those next above, not to go over the head of immediate superiors, to be loyal to the organization and its leaders, and can be carried so far as to block new ideas, useful criticism and to thwart self-expression. Such conventions often stand in the way of sociological research and application of existing knowledge about social inventions.

6. UNPLEASANT CONSEQUENCES TO MINORITY GROUPS WHEN SOCIAL SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE IS APPLIED

Acceptance of the methods of social science and application of existing sound knowledge entails disagreeable results. The reason is that these methods and principles supply a rationale for thought and activity which is unpopular with special interest groups.

Economics provides logical statements and reasons why: progressive income and inheritance taxes are a dependable basis of public revenue, and this provokes the wealthy classes; regulation of competition and control of monopoly promote the elasticity and productive capacity of the economic system, and this exasperates certain predatory business interests; responsible leadership in collective bargaining arouses the enmity of inexperienced or racketeering labor leaders; free trade seems to clip the wings of predacious commercial interests who wish to use high tariffs only to protect uneconomic infant industries; wages are not only income but are costs in some other price structure, but any regulation of wages in an inflationary period arouses the resentment of organized labor; etc., etc.

Political scientists have shown the reasons why a merit system in the selection of public servants may provide competence in performance and elasticity in government functions, but this encounters the opposition of political spoilsmen on the one hand and on the other the enmity of entrenched bureaucrats; periodic checks on the quality of food commodities, the safety of buildings and plumbing, the adequacy of fire protection devices, by an adequate and competent staff of inspectors meets the opposition of taxpayers leagues and the hostility of "fixers"; new laws do not eradicate social evils permanently and in short order, but depend on a wide base of public acceptance and conformity to achieve results, which invites the scorn of starry-eyed social reformers and the grumbling of an expectant public; etc., etc.

Sociologists provide logical reasons why: new laws and social inventions to improve social organization do not so much supplant antiquated social machinery as they add to the total of existing regulations, which excites the disbelief and animosity of eager reformers and irritates the public who were given to expect quick relief and a simplification of the pressures of regulatory measures; class prejudice and race prejudice rest upon the insecure foundation of a myth of desired superiority rather than upon the realities of proven inferiority, and this undermines cherished beliefs, shakes the very foundations of the social status system, and is resented as "dangerous" teaching; poverty and crime are not so much what we think they are, as that they are what we think, since in the case of poverty, the higher the standard of living the more ways there are of being poor; and in the case of crime, what for the most part is regarded as crime is a matter of the conventions of a given time and place. Such statements seem to strike at the rock of ages and tend to enrage the orthodoxy, who see in them a threat to the security of their fondest fancies. Etc., etc.

7. MUCH OF THE SUBJECT MATTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE CONSISTS OF VERBAL BEHAVIOR—INTANGIBLE AND TRITE

Attention to the immediate subject matter of social science reveals the fact that much of it consists of language behavior, oral or written. There is the oratory of the demagogue; debate which resorts to the dialectic of concepts to win a point rather than to clarify an issue; controversies
over panaceas and pure phantasies, ideological doctrines of a social, political or religious nature; fruitless discussions in committees and in conferences; voting behavior in which many mark a ballot without adequate knowledge of the relative fitness of different candidates for office; editorials in newspapers; journals of opinion, tracts and pamphlets; volumes of advertising matter; etc., etc.

Compared with this the subject matter of physical science, atoms, organisms, and stars, exists independently of language, and in its own right, and with a hard material integrity. It is no wonder then that the corporeal achievements of chemistry and physics tend to blind the masses to the real fact that scientific method rather than the machinery of the laboratory is the greatest value of science.

8. CONCENTRATED AND CONTINUOUS MENTAL EFFORT IS REQUIRED TO KNOW THAT SUCH CONCEPTS AS INTANGIBILITY, RELATIVITY AND PROBABILITY ARE BASIC TO SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

Continuous mental effort and close attention to detail are necessary to scientific understanding of the problems of human relationship; this is the case because the regularities are hidden in intangibility and relativity, and the predictions are in terms of probability.

Unless embodied in a new language of social concepts, the regularities of human relationship are lost within the intangibility of phenomena whose points of reference in space and time are in continual movement so that they elude our grasp and fade away. What is "morale," "public opinion," and "inflation"? To observe, describe, and record these phenomena of human relationship, the folk language of common terms is wholly inadequate. But to gain acceptance of the dependability and utility of operationally defining these social phenomena is to educate the layman in the validity of such systematic methods of study as are afforded by the use of psychometric and sociometric scales, public opinion polls, and the careful application of statistical research. Here we get involved in a special vocabulary of new and strange terms which excite distrust, despite the fact that the public is willing to accept on faith such other terms as isotopes, neutrons, genes carbon rings, etc.

Now the use of psychometric and sociometric scales have given us some population norms. We can tell, for instance, how much below or above the population norm of morale, a given unemployed person is. We can describe the different opinions on a social issue like price control held by rural and by urban people. And the results of a given election have been predicted within an error of 0.7 of 1 percent from a polled stratified sample weeks in advance of the event. Nevertheless these norms are always relative to a given population in time and place. As yet no universals have been discovered in empirical social science. We are still dismayed by the activities of Russians and Japanese, although we are able to predict the behavior of Anglo-Americans with increasing precision.

This state of affairs irritates the concrete-thinking and practical-minded person no end. He has lived with the habit of mental-effort-saving which relies on dogmatic answers to all questions. Why is not social science knowledge as authoritative as he incorrectly assumes all physical science knowledge to be? Well, we know that real scientists make no such claim, and are in fact most modest, considering their brilliant achievements. But the highly technical character and the great volume of scientific knowledge elicits, as it should, a popular respect, because these attributes implement effective procedures in preventing the spread of disease, in controlling insect pests, in producing stronger alloys, and in the facilitation of mechanical means of communication and of transportation.

By contrast, the knowledge of the social sciences deals with the presumably familiar problems of human relationship, for which the man of the street feels a peculiar penchant. When, therefore, he is told that real understanding of these assumedly obvious relationships requires thinking in terms of a new and specialized language equipped to deal realistically with a world of really intangible relationships, relationships that always seemed to him self-evident, he is inclined to be sceptical of this new language and consign it to the limbo of speculative thought. To be told that a principle of relativity runs through the structure of social knowledge does not seem to provide a stable basis for the determination of social policy, and disappoints all who desire a "settled basis of thought," "solutions" for the acute problems of human relationship, and "proof" of the validity of desired goals of effort. The fact that human problems are recurrent through-
out recorded history despite some differences in culture, and that amelioration of these problems rather than their solution, is about all that the present stage of social knowledge can honestly promise, does not satisfy the natural desire for a permanent security in human relations.

Finally, the acceptance and application of existing social science knowledge, demands some understanding of, or at least willingness to acquiesce in the validity of the principle of probability. Take the case of public opinion polls. Most persons can not believe that these polls based upon interviews with almost mythical persons, because so few individuals have ever known someone who was actually interviewed, do nevertheless collect information which yields surprisingly accurate predictions of election events that occur weeks later. The average congressman is also sceptical or more often prejudiced against such polls, so that he responds to the insistent pressures of special interest groups and lobbies (which represent minorities only) and decides to do away quickly with rationing and price controls, when the facts are that frequent public opinion polls have shown repeatedly that a large majority (70 per cent and over) of the public were willing to comply with such controls and expected gradual relief from them rather than sudden lifting. The result of this failure to base public policy on sound social knowledge scientifically obtained, is the deplorable situation in which the nation finds itself today.

Now what has all this to do with probability? Simply that the modern public opinion poll (the use of which is, by the way, possible only in democratic countries) is based upon interviewing persons who represent all groups of society within the prevailing range of education, income, occupation, and other social stratification factors. This representation is made dependable by stratified random sampling; and in random sampling, the principles of probability govern the selection of interviewees. Consequently a very small number of properly chosen interviewees will yield dependable results, the reliability of which may be calculated in advance by relatively simple application of the principle of probability; and this assertion is not merely sound in a theoretical sense; it has been proved true by the most stringent test of verification—prediction of results which do happen.

Other applications of the theory of probability are made in sampling studies of other problems of human relationship, and somewhat more technical applications are basic to the whole development of psychometric and sociometric scales used to measure attitudes, opinions, morale, individual adjustment, intelligence, manual dexterity, personality traits and a host of similar instruments of scientific observation which in application remove specific social factors from the limbo of the intangible. Beyond this, there is the whole system of study known as experimental designs, which is beginning to show the way to isolating specific cause and effect relationships from the tangled web of human relationships, and here again the theory of probability plays a decisive role.

9. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

These eight obstacles to the acceptance of existing social science knowledge by no means exhaust the list of barriers to applied sociology; but they may serve to indicate briefly the nature of the complications which are inherent in such complicated phenomena as social relationships, in contrast to the tangibility and externality of purely physical phenomena.