FALLACY

The Counterfeit of Argument

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way solution is an unwarranted attempt to cut through a complex problem.

EXAMPLE. Paul: "Is Henry intelligent?"
Peter: "Sure he is."

COMMENT. In casual conversation people don’t insist on precision. But what can asking for or conceding Henry’s intelligences mean? Men are not sharply divided into the intelligent and the unintelligent. Paul and Peter probably know this and in context understand each other well enough.

EXAMPLE. The Communist Manifesto: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."
"Workers of the world, unite!"

COMMENT. Proletarians! Lives, property, freedom may be lost. The world may be less than "won." But let no one underestimate the power of a slogan.

7 · The False Dilemma

Everybody, unfortunately, has experience with true dilemmas, that is, when one is forced to choose between undesirable alternatives. To have this operation is dangerous; to delay is to risk illness or even death. To study tonight is to give up the party; not to study is to risk flunking the test. To go to the party and study is to give up all sleep. In a false dilemma, the speaker represents the situation as offering only undesirable alternatives when the facts do not warrant it. One of the given alternatives may actually be neutral or even desirable, or, more frequently, an unstated alternative exists which is at least neutral. In other words, the false dilemma turns out to be no dilemma at all. The all-or-nothing fallacy and the false dilemma are related since each involves ignoring alternative positions. The relation of dilemmas to the rules of classification is explained on page 39.

EXAMPLE. There is a famous Greek dilemma. One of the sophists advertised that any pupil of his would win his first case at law or not have to pay for the course of instruction. A pupil completed the course, announced that he did not expect to practice law, and refused to pay the sophist for the course. The sophist sued, and the pupil entered the following plea: "If I lose this case, according to the agreement I do not have to pay, as it is my first case. If I win it, I do not have to pay by the judgment of the court." The sophist replied: "On the contrary, if you win this case, you have to pay, according to the agreement. If you lose it, you must also pay, according to the judgment of the court."

COMMENT. It is not known how the case was decided.

EXAMPLE. A farmer can never expect to make much money. Either the farmer raises a bumper crop and finds that the price is low, or the price is all right, but he finds he has only a meager crop to dispose of.

COMMENT. This dilemma is false since it overlooks the possibility of government subsidies and price supports as well as other factors. Refuting a false dilemma by pointing out an additional possibility which is not undesirable is called going around or between the horns of the dilemma.

EXAMPLE. Abbé Sieyès, a figure in the French Revolution, posed this famous dilemma concerning a bicameral legislature, "If the second chamber agrees with the first, it is superfluous; if it disagrees it is pernicious."

COMMENT. This is a false dilemma since disagreement of the second chamber is not necessarily "pernicious." One may question either of the assumptions of a dilemma, namely, that the alternatives are exhausted or that all the alternatives are alike undesirable. Refuting a false dilemma by pointing out that one of the alternatives is not undesirable is called taking the dilemma by the horns.

TROUBLE WITH CONSTRUCTIONS

The previous section, starting with the supposition that the evidence was fairly well in hand, was concerned with the problem of knowing what could reasonably be asserted about it. There was no question as to what the situation involved, and it was assumed that the classifications and general notions were serviceable. All cows are brown—the problem was the handling of all, rather than
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cows or brown. Does the evidence warrant saying all or only some? The notions cows and brown were assumed to be clear and intelligible. In this section the interest centers on the formation of the notions themselves, rather than how they are related together in propositions. The most difficult problems in managing the materials of argument arise in the forming of notions and classifications and the like. We shall use the term constructions to cover all notions and abstractions. All abstract thinking proceeds by selecting aspects of the situation and making constructions out of them.

Some constructions are relatively easy to understand—cows, for instance—a three-year old can form the notion of a cow. The names such simple constructions bear are well known terms in the common speech. Every user of the language can learn the proper construction and hence the correct use of the name. The class name "child" represents a construction made up from certain things in the world, children, markedly distinguished from other things: babies, adults, and, for that matter, elephants. The construction reflects the situation in the world in a rather obvious way. A speaker, if pressed, can give at least rough conditions for a proper use of the term.

class name means construction stands for situation

As the class name is often a familiar term in the common language and the situation is the state of affairs in whatever aspect of the world is under discussion, the only subjective part is the construction, though, perhaps, since the speakers communicate the construction, this part should be called "inter-subjective."

All constructions involve at least implicit classification—babies are grouped under the heading "babies" and children under "children." Now speakers are constantly making new classifications. For this reason some constructions do not have a traditional name in the language, and a name must be made up for them. It may be a new word or a whole new phrase made up of old words, but whatever it is, it often names a construction that stands for characteristics of the situation not previously remarked. Since all writing and speaking of point proceeds by drawing attention to fresh groupings of things, it is evident that anybody who wants to make a contribution in discussion must understand the elements of classifying if his constructions are to be intelligible.

TROUBLE WITH CONSTRUCTIONS

Suppose a boy gets from his uncle a bag containing a hundred marbles. And suppose this boy has a little sister who wants to play with the marbles. The little girl begins to sort them. First she arranges them by color, green with green, red with red. Then she sorts them within the colors, clear glass with clear, cloudy with cloudy. There are some hard to classify: opaque agates, little dull clay balls, marbles of mixed colors. She has disappointments. Though she is very fond of purple, there are no purple marbles. And some of the prettiest blues have little chips and flaws.

The boy says his sister is silly. This is the way marbles should be sorted. He first pretends to shoot with each one, then sets aside one of the "aggies" and two of the chipped "migs" as "shooters." The rest he arranges in several orders, regardless of color or marbling. The least mig, he tells his sister, is worth ten of the "dough babies," but the best migs are worth ten of the worst, and the aggies are worth at least ten of the best migs. A good shooter is worth the lot; in fact, it is beyond price, but he won't know if there are any good shooters until he has tried some out in competition. His sister doesn't understand anything he is talking about and decides it is really boys who are silly.

Here are only a hundred marbles. Yet it is at once evident that there are a great number of ways to classify them. If they are sorted as to color, there will be empty classes, purple for instance. If "cloudiness" (marbling) is the criterion, then the clay marbles present difficulty; they are not marbled, but they are not transparent, either. If cost is to be the consideration, then there are two obvious ways to put them in order: monetary value, for agates are relatively expensive, or trade value, which seems to depend on the fashion or taste of certain boys in the neighborhood—one marble "costs" ten others. And so on, indefinitely.

The situation is present. It would be a truly "silly" error to assume, because the marbles are classifiable as to color, that there must be somewhere a purple marble. And maybe there will not turn out to be a first-class shooter in the bag. So the situation puts a limit to the number and kinds of constructions. And the names ("shooter," "pretty ones") or the descriptions ("worth ten of") must mean the constructions. This is all we intend by these terms, and there is no metaphysical commitment in the notion of the "situation."

Even in the simple cases of classification, there can be trouble.
It will be seen that difficulty can arise over where to put marginal cases. When this happens, the classification may carelessly omit them altogether—they get left out. Sometimes the classification seems to require putting the same object under two coordinate headings. In this event, the classification does not function in respect to that object, for the general function of a classification is to separate.

From these considerations, since the time of the early Greeks certain criteria of classification have been enforced. They can be expressed simply, and we shall try to state them in a set of rules. The fallacy of violating any of the rules falls under the general head of "faulty classification."

Rule 1. The classification must be exhaustive. (The dough buns must not be left out, simply because they don't fit the division of clear or cloudy.)

Rule 2. The classification must be exclusive. (Cross-classification are permissible—cloudy-red marbles—but there must be what is sometimes called a fundamental division, which prevents putting something under two coordinate headings.)

Rule 3. The classification must be adequate to the purpose for which it is designed. (The little girl's classification of the marbles into colors, etc., though perhaps suitable to the purpose of the little girl, is not adequate to the game of migs.)

Rule 4. The divisions of the classification must be precise enough to avoid serious marginal cases. (If boys don't usually agree on, say, which marbles are shooters, then this construction is vague.)

8. Faulty Classification

The violation of each of the four rules gives a different fallacy. Some of the rules, however, are more complicated than others and will be treated here at greater length. There are many ways in which a construction can be vague (Rule 4), and it will be useful to distinguish several of them in the discussion. Similarly, the third rule is related to some misconceptions about the nature of classification, and we shall also wish to discuss these at length. The fallacies of non-exhaustive or non-exclusive classifications should be relatively easy to understand, and one or two examples will probably suffice. So under the present heading, though all violations of the rules are properly regarded as "faulty classifications," we shall take up only the failures to be exhaustive and exclusive.

(a) Non-exhaustive Classification (Rule 1)

To criticize a classification for being non-exhaustive is to assert that it does not take account of the whole situation. It is always possible to divide, that is to classify, the situation so that everything is regarded as one thing or another without remainder: beautiful or non-beautiful, true or non-true. Such divisions are model classifications as to being exhaustive, but they may be far from adequate to a given purpose (see #6). The difficulty arises when the classification is supposed to distinguish important characteristics in the situation.

In argument, where the classifications are often more complicated than cases like the marbles, one way to test a position depending on them is to search for elements in the situation which have got left out. If one finds such elements, it by no means follows that the classification is deliberately selective (see #1) or deceptive. It may just be careless. It is often possible to correct classifications that leave something out by a more careful attention to the basis of division.

EXAMPLE. Traveling Salesman Peter has submitted his expense account. A few days pass, and the book calls him in: "I understand the $421 for plane fare, the $128 for hotel bills, the $84 for dining out, and the $37 for entertaining. But what is this $202 for miscellaneous?" Peter shrugs, "Oh, that's for things I couldn't fit in."

COMMENT. Possibly Peter will satisfy his boss, but if he uses the same principles of accounting in his income tax returns, he can expect a visit from the treasury agents. This example is not an argument. It merely illustrates the frequent use of the feeble "miscellaneous" heading to take care of classifications which are not exhaustive.

EXAMPLE. Overheard on a bus: "She never says a kind word, and when she does, she doesn't mean it."

COMMENT. The speaker here has made what is called an Irish bull, that is, a statement that on the face of it is contradictory nonsense: "I'll never forgive you until the day you die, if you should
live so long.” The Irish may use the bull for humorous effect, but
the speaker in the example presumably recognized that the dis-
tinction “kind or unkind” didn’t cover all the evidence, and that
a third division “only apparently kind” was needed.

EXAMPLE. A critic writes, “Ivy Compton Bennet and Paul
Goodman, to name two, are lively writers pointing to new direc-
tions. Yet important modern novels fall into three classes, all un-
fortunate for contemporary letters. There is the historical novel,
more or less carefully reconstructing a period or a situation of the
past and exploiting it to give us an understanding of our heritage.
This is the proper function of the historian or biographer, not of
the novelist. There is, secondly, the psychological study, which
purports to convey by literary means insights into personal rela-
tions. This seemed a promising field initially, but all the novels of
this school are failures, and now it is evident that failure is in-
herent in the method. Finally, there is the novel of manners, in
the tradition of Jane Austen and Henry James. But this tradition
is exhausted, and what we get today are problem pieces and re-

gional studies, like those of the southern school.”

COMMENT. Even if it can be assumed that the critic’s eliptical
arguments convey sound judgments—that, in fact, each of the three
classifications mentioned has failed and is now creatively useless,
the unspoken conclusion that the modern novel is in a bad way
as a literary form follows only if it is true that there are no other
varieties of novels than those mentioned. There seem to be many
interesting novels that do not fit the categories of the critic, some
of them also very different from each other, for example the novels
of Ivy Compton Burnett and Paul Goodman, whom the critic him-
self mentions.

(b) Non-exclusive Classification (Rule 2)

A classification is non-exclusive when elements in the situation
get put under more than one co-ordinate head. The trouble here
can sometimes be corrected by choosing a different basis of divi-
sion. A simple artificial example would be for someone to attempt
to divide animals as “cold-blooded” or “vertebrates.” Since reptiles,
fish, etc., are both, this classification does not operate for these
important sections of the animal world. The classification is easily
corrected by distinguishing first among the vertebrates and inverte-
brates, then perhaps among the cold and warm-blooded animals.
The shark then is properly classified as species vertebrate, subspe-
cies cold-blooded; elephants as vertebrates, warm-blooded; crabs
as invertebrates, cold-blooded. This is not very profound, but it is
at least applicable to the animal world.

One way to examine an argument dependent on a classification
is to test whether or not the classification is exclusive. If it is not
for any one case at all, then there is a possibility that the classifica-
tion is not applicable to the case or cases at issue in the argument.
If the classification is faulty in general, then it may be faulty in
important particulars. Again it should be observed that the fault
may not be deliberate. It is very hard to make adequate classifica-
tions, and the classifier may simply not have noticed that his divi-
sions are not applicable to certain elements of the situation. The
thing to do is to examine the fundamentum divisionis, the basis of
the division, and see if the classification can be repaired.

EXAMPLE. Peter argues, “You either save your money or you
invest it. If you save it, you get caught in the inflation, since money
in the stock will buy less tomorrow than it will if you spend
it today. If you invest it, you run the risk of losing it. They’ve got
you going and coming.”

COMMENT. Many forms of savings are relatively free of risk—
deposits in banks, government bonds, and some types of investment
trusts. The accumulated interest is normally larger than the rate
of inflation. In the case of sound stocks and some real estate, the
value inflates with the rest of the economy. Peter’s argument is a
false dilemma.

All arguments pose a dilemma insofar as they rest on classification.
The dilemma becomes a false dilemma when the classification
is faulty. False dilemmas turn on a non-exclusive classification
whenever one of the alternatives is not as represented, just as it
will be non-exhaustive whenever there is a third alternative. In
this connection it will be instructive to review #7 and see if you
can decide which of the dilemmas cited there get their plausibility
from non-exhaustive classifications, which from non-exclusive, that
is, which violate Rule 1 and which Rule 2.
9 · Misconceptions about Classification (Rule 3)

The problem of the relation of classifications to the situation is a difficult one, and thinkers have often gone wrong on it. In fact, the theory of "sets" or classes is still a very busy field in mathematics and logic. What we say here about classification and constructions in general must perforce be elementary and partial. We are interested in fallacy: in this connection two main misconceptions of the function of classification have led to broad errors in argument. These errors are related to the philosophical systems of Platonism and relativism, but we shall try to characterize them without a long digression into the history of philosophy.

Classifications are expounded in general terms, the so-called universals. This means only that when speakers use general terms in the language, such as "man," "woman," "child," they are classifying objects in the world according to certain traits or referring to the class of such objects itself.

1. Peter is a child.
2. The child is the father of the man.

In (1) the speaker says that Peter belongs to the class of the child (children). In (2) the speaker says something in general (hence "general terms") about children, as well as about fathers and men. General terms like "child" mean certain constructions, and the constructions in turn obviously stand in some way for the situation. All children have a great number of traits in common. The situation in the world of human beings seems to impose a construction for "child," so that a language which lacked a term for the child-construction (that is, one can imagine, had only a word for person, which provided no guide to age or maturity), would certainly seem to lack a much needed term. Perhaps it would be correct to assume that the construction child is so much needed that every language has one or more names to mean it. In this common-sense way of talking about general terms, it will be seen that there are two notions at least that will stand examination.

What can it mean to say that the situation in the world "imposes" a construction? What can it mean to say that a term is "needed" for a construction? Reification and relativism give very different answers to these questions, and each can lead to serious error.

(a) Reification

In the Phaedrus Plato says that classifications should not proceed, as a bad carver might, by cutting up the situation just anyhow, but should break it "at the joints." The assumption is that there are natural structures in the situation which it is one's duty to discover. These structures are closer to reality than other characteristics, which are mere accidents due to the recalcitrance of the material in taking shape in imitation of the idea. The idea is in a heaven, and it is "ideal," that is, perfect, changeless, timeless. The things of this palpable world try to imitate the ideas, with indifferent success. The ideas, the eternal structures, are after all free from the gross embodiment of sense experience, in their pristine perfection. What you have got to do, unless you want to hack away as a bad carver, is to discover the natural structures, those closest to the ideas. Then your classification will produce neat joints and chops.

This view has the common-sense merit of recognizing that constructions stand for characteristics of the situation. It has the disadvantage of a great unprovable assumption, namely, that the characteristics referred to by the "natural" constructions are somehow more real than the other characteristics present. The preferred status of some structures over others is that the Platonists prefer certain purposes over others in classifying. These purposes turn out, on analysis, to be precisely those purposes imbedded in a culture and so traditional in their view of the world that they are felt to be natural and get built into the language. They have names in the common speech, such obvious names as "man," "redness," "goodness." Language seems to render this Platonism a natural
thing to believe, and it is not surprising that it makes a strong appeal. This is not only a view that the division between, say, child and man is a natural division; it goes deeper. The term “redness,” for instance, since it exists in the language, would seem to be a term for something, to name something, just as “the New York Central Railway” names a very complicated and ramified system. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that, since redness has a name, it must exist. “Red is a primary color,” is a perfectly legitimate expression in the language but one implicitly making an astonishing claim. Does this not seem to say that there exists a class of colors, rather like the class of children, and that red is a member of this class? Not this book or this country schoolhouse, of course, but redness itself, the redness that makes red the surfaces of this cheek or this rose. The inventor of language was a Platonist. Modern Platonists adhere to what they call the “perennial philosophy,” and they acknowledge this philosophy has a “natural piety toward language.”

There is more to Platonism than advice to eschew new-fangled terminology and modernistic or otherwise reprehensible ways of looking at things, that is, of making constructions. The senses can never give knowledge of redness, only of this red object or of that—and even the best example is not perfect. The senses, likewise, cannot give knowledge of child, only of Peter or Paul or Hazel. But these particulars can grow old and die, and knowledge must be an ideal ageless perfection. There is no point in a feeble copy. However clear the photograph, one would prefer to see the person. However typical the person, one should prefer to know the idea. Peter or Paul or Hazel are imperfect copies of the ideal “child.” Thus, in Platonism the ideal child and redness are conceived of as existing purely, of floating about, as it were, ready to enter into particular bodies or surfaces.

This reification, thing-ization, of preferred constructions is a fallacy when it leads to mistakes in argument. Philosophers may do as they choose in deciding what things are “real” and what are not. But when they carry over their reifications into other fields, then they are asking for unnecessary trouble. The history of science, of affairs, even of mathematics has been troubled for generations uncounted by demands for “real definitions,” assertions that something is because it must be, denegations of whole areas of inquiry as unreal and wicked.

Reification, then, is the “hypostatizing” of entities, that is, the making of abstractions into substances. It is the assumption that child exists (in a Platonic heaven) over and above Peter, Hazel, Ethel. It is not necessary to make this assumption even if language suggests it. Universals, such as “redness” and “child,” can be interpreted in a way that makes no philosophical claims as to whether or not the constructions they name refer to entities in the real world. This way of handling them is called Reduction.

Reduction is a rule asserting that any sentence containing a general term, if the general term designates an intelligible construction, can be reduced to a sum of sentences containing mention only of particulars. Abstractions (“redness,” “justice”) are included under general terms. Thus, A reduces to a₁ or a₂ or a₃ . . . or aₙ, where A is in a sentence containing the general term, and a₁, a₂, a₃, . . ., are sentences referring only to particular instances. Thus the sentence, “A child needs security,” as far as the child-construction goes, reduces to “Peter needs security, or Hazel needs security, or Ethel needs security,” and so for all children. “Red is a color,” similarly reduces to a mention of red books, red balloons, and other objects. The word “color” in “Red is a color” points out that whenever an object is red it is colored, that is, belongs to the larger class of all red, green, blue books and all other colored objects. This may seem a strange kind of “reduction,” involving, as it does, expansion to unlimited numbers of sentences—in the case of “child” one, in fact, for every individual young human being that now is, ever was, or ever will be. The “reduction” consists in the boiling down of general terms to particulars. The difficulty presented by the great number of sentences is only practical. Theoretically, it is soon clear how the process works out for the sentences in question, and since the series are fairly orderly, a sort of induction can be applied to show the reduced content of the general terms. (In point of fact, it seems that children actually learn the use of general terms in much this way.)

Consider “Peter is a child.” This begins immediately to give the extension of the class by naming one member. Reduction of “child” in this case begins by simply designating a class member by its proper name. When the extension of the class is evident, the general term can be eliminated another way: it is now possible to single out essential characteristics which Peter shares with Hazel and Ethel and other children and then to say that Peter has these
characteristics, thus giving the necessary and sufficient conditions for verifying the sentence “Peter is a child”: Peter is human and aged $y$ years, where $y$ = a number under 12.

What reifiers do is resist the rule of Reduction. For them the question “What is a child?” is not a question of how “child” is used in the language, or rather, it is a question that asks for more information, namely, what a child really is. In addition to Hazel, Ethel, Peter, and all the children, for the reifier there is another entity in the world, child, which Peter, et al., in their different and imperfect ways partake of, share in, embody. Similarly, with colors, there is this red object, and that, and moreover redness, the idea which enters into teacher’s pencil, Mary’s blush, the Russian flag, redness and child exist together in heaven, along with Justice and bed (Plato’s most famous examples).

In these simple cases reification is not apt to lead to confusions of the sort “Is redness red?” or “Is childhood childish?” At least in the arguments about ordinary affairs, it more often leads to pseudophilosophical meanderings about whether justice is an absolute or relative good, whether art can be for art’s sake, whether a savage dog which is not man’s pal is really a dog after all.

Suppose someone to argue, “The true friend has never yet been found. Damon was not a real friend of Pythias, David of Jonathan, Johnson of Boswell. Real friendship implies absolute equality, an equal sharing—a having of all things in common.” Otherwise, one will have the advantage of the other. And since there can be no absolute equality in all things, even among identical twins, there can be no real friendship in the world. Perhaps there can be friends among the angels, but certainly not among men.

How can such an argument be met? It is set up in such a fashion that no evidence can possibly refute it. The speaker hypothesizes an entity, apparently in heaven among the angels, of true friendship, which involves (a saying of the ancient Greeks) “having all things in common.” Then he demonstrates that this kind of sharing is impossible in the sense of an equal sharing, which is certainly one sense of sharing. By what is apparently a heavenly intuition, the speaker knows that true friendship implies equal sharing. Since such equality is impossible in the nature of things, therefore, true friendship is illusory.

The only possible answer is to point out to the speaker that the way one learns how to use the term “friendship” is precisely by observing how it is applied in the cases of Damon and Pythias, and other friends. This is obviously a high-level abstraction, involving references to many kinds of behavior—speaking well of each other, being helpful, liking to be together, having mutual trust and confidence. But it can in principle be reduced to particular events under each kind. What would the speaker say if he pointed this out to him? Presumably that he knew all this sort of thing, that his point was precisely that all this was not enough to constitute friendship. There is no way to answer such an argument. As long as the speaker persists in the habit of making a thing out of an abstraction and of saying that some other thing is clearly not that thing, he is at once so right and so wrong that argument is impossible. Obviously nothing on earth is identical with anything else on earth, to say nothing of something in heaven which is at once immutable, atemporal, aspatial, perfect.

The firm way to deal with suspicious abstractions in argument is to demand their reduction to particulars. If the opponent cannot or will not show that such a reduction is possible in principle, then further discussion is pointless, since no evidence or counter-argument is relevant. One finds oneself involved in an unruly discussion. But if reduction is admitted, at least in theory, then it is possible in principle to test the argument. It may be possible to find a counter instance, to make experimental application, to verify or falsify.

The examples are designed to show some chief varieties of reification.

**Example.** Case history of patient J.S. Young man, 28, complained to his pastor that his wife, in-laws, and associates at work were all “persecuting” him. Pastor sought the help of a clinic, reported to clinic that there seemed to be the following grounds for the young man’s complaint: Investigation showed J.S. aggressive, accusing those around him of plotting against him. These persons retaliated by avoiding his company, talking about him behind his back, and generally behaving badly towards him. His wife, especially, resented his jealousy and finally left him. What caused the pastor to seek the help of the clinic was the fact that J.S. refused to see how he was responsible for the way others behaved towards him. He maintained that everybody he knew had been “got to by a secret power.” His wife and his friends were in fact, he claimed,
the agents of that power. At his last interview with his pastor, J.S. threatened the pastor with a knife, claiming that the pastor was also an agent, trying to win his confidence in order to betray him. Diagnosis: Paranoia. Patient’s social relationships are disturbed by his self-destructive tendencies. These he projects into an outside independent agency. Recommendation: Confinement and extended therapy.

COMMENT: J.S. actually was being persecuted in a way. His own aggressive behavior and distrust had alienated his wife, his relatives, and his associates. They avoided him and “talked about him.” But notice that J.S. does not mean by “persecution” a construction that reduces to the sum of any particular occurrences in the behavior of others towards him. Instead, he sees all this as being inspired by a “secret power.” He feels persecuted by a power, a kind of Platonic entity which is the cause of all the particular occurrences of persecution. The point is that there is a class of events having the common property of acts of persecution; the reification consists in making this property into an independent entity in the world, lying behind the acts and mysteriously causing them. It can be easily seen in this case that such reification is insane. It may be harder to detect the insanity in other cases.

EXAMPLE. Commissar Petrov writes in Pravda, “Attempts to smaller nations, subsidies, bilateral trade agreements, mutual defense pacts with the inevitable concomitant of air bases and arms supplies—all of these have an obvious policy behind them of forming aggressive alliances against the Peoples’ Democracies. This is not even in effect denied, for the United States admits that its basic policy in the Cold War is ‘defense’ against communism. But what is denied is that all these activities reveal another policy, a deeper and more underlying strategy. This is the indispensable policy, in fact, of all monopolistic capitalistic nations: colonialism. All these activities of the United States carry out the capitalist necessity of imperialistic colonizing of so-called backward areas. The frank colonialism of the last century is no longer possible: the empires of Great Britain, France, the United States can not stand anywhere against the political aspirations of downtrodden peoples. So, as the powers are forced to yield political empire, with the other hand they impose an economic-military empire on the same peoples. Thus the activities of the United States serve two pur-

poses: they attempt an aggressive encirclement of the Peoples’ Democracies, and at the same time they enslave the backward areas in a new-style colonialism.”

COMMENT: This argument, like most of the arguments of dogmatic Marx-Leninism, bases its proof on a reified entity. Starting with the common characteristic underlying the diverse activities of U.S. foreign policy, defense against communism (which it interprets as aggressive alliances against the “Peoples’ Democracies”), the proof then alleges another common characteristic, colonialism. It is certainly possible that the United States could be doing two things at once. But what is the evidence for this second purpose? Pravda cites only contradictory evidence, the break-down of empire (apparently referring to the new-found independence of India, the Philippines, etc.), and alleges that this has led to a “new-style colonialism.” There is a curious sentence about the “indispensable policy” of “all monopolistic capitalistic nations” being colonialism. And this is then referred to as a “necessity.” The reader of this article is now in the presence of an Entity. Like the secret power of the previous example, this construction of an indispensable policy cannot be reduced to any supporting evidence, nor refuted by any contradictory evidence. The writer, as a Marx-Leninist, is speaking of a “truth” more basic than any mere accidents embodied in historical events. If pressed to explain, he would presumably cite other and still more fundamental entities—the “logic” or determinism of historical process, the dialectic of the class struggle. A rule attributed to the nominalist William of Occam warns that “entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.” This means that you do not keep on appealing to entities, such as colonialism or the secret power, to explain what is already sufficiently understood. As such entities go beyond all possible evidence, they are unarguable. What, if not evidence, can possibly support or refute them?

EXAMPLE. King Aroo overhears one character reproving another for throwing away his future. Now King Aroo had just learned that his own future was nothing but a smear of tea leaves, so he begins looking through ash cans for the future that got thrown away. (This is from Jack Kent’s famous comic strip for March 6, 1957.)

COMMENT: King Aroo’s search is funny because the reification is so concrete that it might be something found in the ash can.
MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CLASSIFICATION

were a special (not just a different) death for everybody. In his Orpheus the same poet personifies Death as a woman surgeon. Other writers speak of a character's life as a mystical Gestalt—a sort of space in which the drama of his fate is worked out: the world is a stage and human beings are puppets moved by destiny. The Greeks personified the fates as the Eumenides, and T. S. Eliot depicts the Eumenides howling outside the window in Family Reunion. Such devices are of the utmost importance in literature, where they effect a dramatic economy. It is philistinism to complain of reification in poetry—there is no harm in the device, provided it is understood as a play of imagination.

(b) Relativism

Relativism stands at the opposite extreme from reification. If you want to render an account of a situation, the Platonists say that you must select for your classifications only the essential characteristics, the essential being those that make the situation what it is because they reflect the eternal reality. For the relativists, no characteristics are essential or even intrinsic. None are more "real" than any others. The relativists are impressed with the obvious fact that situations can be classified in any number of ways—thus the criticism of classifications must center on the purpose of the classifier. Since his freedom in making constructions is without limit, but since he does in fact choose one set of constructions over the others, why does he choose as he does? Well, he chooses to suit his purpose. The relativists add that since there is nothing in the situation to fix his purpose, it must be given by something extrinsic. This extrinsic purpose will be found in the preoccupations of the classifier, his preconceptions, the peculiar concerns of his times, the unique interests of his class.

Relativists are thus poles apart from Platonists: there are no real characteristics in the situation, as the reifiers think, to determine the constructions. The model of the nominalist or relativist explanation is the famous case of the ass that was placed exactly equidistant between two bundles of hay. Only the relativist ass does not starve to death in indecision, but makes a choice. This choice is not determined by anything in one bundle of hay to make him prefer it to another—that would be an intrinsic consideration. No, his choice is some extrinsic matter, such as the habit of always turning left to his dinner. Of course, there are more than two...
MATERIAL FALLACIES

bundles of hay, for there is an indefinite number of possible choices in classifying situations.

Relativism bids us consider the case of the historian who sits down to write an account of, say, a battle. Thousands of objects are involved—men, guns, weapons. Thousands of events transpire—melee, charges, cries and deaths. The historian cannot know all of these. Moreover, he already knows more than he can use, in most cases. What does he do? He talks generally about the movement of wings and centers, about the breaking and holdings of fronts, about advances and retreats. He selects and arranges the materials and so doing imposes a structure on what is essentially structureless. In short, as he cannot know all the facts and cannot use even all the facts he knows, the historian’s structure is an invention of his own. It will be determined, not by the data, but by his own values, prejudices, needs, social or political commitments. If this is true of the account of a contained story, such as of a single battle, how much more so must it be of large “wholes,” such as the history of the Punic Wars or, for that matter, of the Roman Empire.

The historian does not tell the truth about the past; he does not even tell a lie. (This assumes he doesn’t fabricate evidence or conceal facts.) For relativism there is no truth beyond the particulars, that is, the actual documents and other data. There is only fiction. One account will be as “true” as another, for all accounts are relative (hence “relativism”) to the narrow intellectual and moral concerns of the writer. As these differ characteristically from age to age, it will be necessary for each generation to rewrite history for itself. Charles Beard spoke of the views of the historian as being "arbitrarily established." F. J. Teggart says that an historian may seem to be presenting a picture of some distant time but that he is perforce speaking with the “voice of his own generation,” and giving tongue “to the ideas and aspirations of his own community.”

Relativistic theories have serious implications beyond the technical problems of writing and evaluating history. The Roman Empire is obviously a very large, multiform “situation,” but other persons besides historians often must try to understand situations that are quite manifold and complex enough. It may well be that no constructual machinery can be devised that will adequately classify the events of the Roman Empire. But it does not follow from this that all situations are impervious to understanding. Even historical situations are not always vast and unwieldy, and relativists could hardly maintain that there is a difference in essential kind between historical and other events.

It is not so much the size and complexity of a situation that makes relativists despondent. It is the predicament of theorizing in general. They believe, in principle, that since the account of any situation involves classifying, that is, selection and arrangement, the account is not of the situation but of the bias of the classifier. What you get from an account of the battle is not an understanding of the battle, but an insight into the historian. So expressed, relativism seems a form of the fallacy of origin (see #19); that is, it invites you to pay no attention to the truth of what is said but only to the source of the remarks. But more is involved. It is a theory that, since the selection and arrangement are never in the situation but only in the mind, and since an account is simply the presentation of the selection and arrangement, there can be no understanding of the situation. All that there is to understand is a construction of the mind.

Of all the possible selections and arrangements, the man making the account chooses that particular way which best implements his purpose. In this sense the account is strictly relative to the purpose, and it is good to call attention to this relativism, for an understanding of the account must involve the concerns of the man making it. Our way of saying this is given by Rule 3. The classification is, we say, in fact determined by the purposes of the classifier. But does it follow that his account is not of the situation? The account is in fact limited by the situation. There is no reason to believe that the account of large situations (the Punic Wars) is different in anything except complexity from the small situation (say, the hundred marbles). Perhaps despondency over very ambitious history-writing is justified. But even Gibbon and Toynbee are bound by limits, and these limits are clear in the data. Aside from the obvious negative limits (Hannibal lacked H-bombs in his attacks on Rome), there are recalcitrant facts that also must be taken into all accounts (Hannibal failed to break Roman resistance). Historical and other vast situations present the characteristics they have and no others, just as do all situations. These characteristics are in principle classifiable, and the account can then be evaluated according to the well understood rules of classifica-
EXAMPLE. Peter says to his wife, “Why are you reading those
textbooks? Criticism is a farce. One critic likes what another
critic cannot stand. Jones in the Tribune says that a book illustrates
courage under adversity and that the characters are finely drawn
to life. Smith in the Gazette says that the theme of the
same book is that virtue is its own punishment and that the
characters are puppets manipulated by a clumsy writer. Which is right?
Neither! Each critic finds in the novel what he is looking for, and
everything in the book proves anything you care to say about it.
Why? Because there is no novel except in the reader’s head, and
what the reader likes and doesn’t like depends entirely on his taste.
This is why the old saying ‘There is no disputing about taste’ is
so wise. What would two critics be disputing about? Two separate
novels, one in the head of each. If it is silly to dispute about ‘fic-
tions,’ it is silly to write or read criticism.”

COMMENT. In a sense, there is a novel in each reader’s mind,
but it hardly follows that these cannot be very similar in salient
respects. The events in a novel can certainly be classified in various
ways, and the choice of ways will be determined by the purpose
of the critic. This purpose, in turn, may be causally related to his
taste. Similarly, the characters in fiction do and say things that are
subject to various interpretations, just as people behave in life.
But we do in fact understand each other. This is to say, our account
of each other’s character makes it possible to predict behavior, to
get along together, to cooperate. In a similar sense, good critics
give insight into the characters in a novel and elucidate the action.
There is nothing mysterious about this. If the purpose is to find
hidden motives, then psycho-analytical constructions throw light
on the characters of a novel as of life. If the purpose is to show
how the behavior is socially or economically directed, then the
speech and actions will be ordered in a different way. A good novel
is a rich and complex texture, and it will support many interpre-
tations.

EXAMPLE. Student report: “I know a lot of historians think
that President Jackson's quarrel with the Bank was a misfortune
for the country. This merely shows how they feel about banks and
about Jackson. As for me, I happen to feel different about things.
I happen to admire Jackson. The historians have a right to their
opinion, and I have a right to mine. After all, no one can say which
of us is objectively right, since there's no way to run the nineteenth
century over again without Jackson.”

COMMENT. “Objectively” here suggests the model of a labora-
tory where experiments can be “run over again.” There are clearly
other senses of “objectively,” such as “in conformity with the
evidence.” Jurors cannot run a murder over again to see if the accused
did in fact kill the victim, but they can nevertheless bring in an
objective verdict. In this model, unlike that of the laboratory, ob-
jectivity in a verdict (“opinion”) implies a verdict in line with the
evidence and free from the “subjective” elements of personal
passion or bias.

This is all rather obvious. What is important to note about the
example is the widespread supposition that “everybody is entitled
to his opinion.” This is simply absurd in the kind of case under
consideration. The student is not entitled to an opinion counter
to informed historical judgment, just as a juror is not entitled to
an opinion counter to the evidence. If the present book can be
said to have a general thesis, it is that nobody is entitled to an
irresponsible opinion on anything.

10. Unnecessary Vagueness (Rule 4)

The fourth rule of adequate classification (see p. 36) requires
that the divisions must be precise enough to avoid serious mar-
ginal cases. Let us briefly resume the account of the model of a
scientific law (see pp. 5 ff.) to see how classifications are set up
in science. What needs to be added to the previous discussion is
that science characteristically defines the divisions between the
categories in terms of measurable properties.

One of the first things that impresses the young student of sci-
ence is the difference between scientific and ordinary vocabularies.
When he now uses such terms as “mass,” “force,” “energy,” “vel-
cocity,” he must use them exactly. The student finds that they are
precisely defined; in fact, they are specified in mathematical equa-
tions. All the categories to which the student is introduced turn
out to be almost perfectly determined. The laws and observations
are expressed in terms as free from vagueness as it is possible to
make them, the language of measurement and precise definition.
Compared to the language of ordinary affairs, that vapor of vague-
ness, scientists use a language that seems a relatively perfect in-
strument of communication.

The precise determination of the categories becomes possible in
science because the phenomena dealt with are concrete; they can be
measured. This means that the laws are so formulated as to be
open to test by procedures of the laboratory and of the trained
observer. It means, moreover, that the definitions can in all typical
cases be stated so clearly (since they are given in measurable units)
that these definitions make explicit the necessary and sufficient con-
ditions for the application of the terms: a given thing or event is
an instance of a particular category if and only if such and such.
The characteristics, as they are measurable, provide criteria for
classifications that are unmistakable and final. The lines between
the categories are cleanly drawn, so that a marginal case is a great
rarity, calling for a redefinition of the terms involved.

To anyone acquainted with the clarity of scientific classifications,
进一步说明 will be unnecessary; to anyone without scientific
experience, unintelligible. What can be said about the clarity of
nonscientific classification? Surprisingly, the case is not always
derperate. Mr. Richards in lamenting the imprecision of "the sphere
of random belief and hopeful guesses" (see p. 8) allows that
there are "rules of thumb" in "the concrete affairs of commerce,
law, organization and police work," and speaks of "generally ac-
cepted convention" being helpful there. He is not interested in
these fields, but let us see what these conventions and rules of
thumb are like.

If your bank sends you a statement reading, "Your account is
overdrawn," you know exactly what evidence will render this sen-
tence true or false. You know the conditions of the category of
overdraft: subtract your withdrawals, plus charges, from your de-
posits; if the figure you get is minus, the sentence is true; if plus,
false—supposing neither you nor the bank keep inaccurate records.
Thus the category "overdraft," like scientific categories, is defined
in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions: you are overdrawn
if and only if the figure determined as above is minus. Many com-
mercial expressions are far from vague.

Mr. Richards also exempts the law. It is true that the legislatures
and the courts make a great effort to define legal categories so that
the characteristics of all the basic classes can be accurately deter-
mined. "The people of the State of N. charge that on or about 7:00
P.M. ECT, October 5, 1957, at 100 First Street, City of Y, County
of Y, the accused committed an act of burglary, to wit..." The
dates and times, the names of the people and places, are of course
almost always unmistakable. What of the category of burglary?
This is determined exactly enough for all but rare cases. A court
applying common law will instruct the jury to find the accused
guilty if and only if the prosecution has proved that at the times
and places specified the accused did in fact

a. break and enter
b. the dwelling of another
c. in the nighttime
d. with intent to commit a felony (not necessarily theft).

All these four elements are, in turn, defined to make each concept
as precise as possible. To "break and enter" refers to any entrance
without authority even though no door or window is moved and
even though the accused only reaches in with an arm or hook;
"dwelling" refers to any place of abode and its immediate out-
buildings; "nighttime" receives a statutory definition as so many
minutes after sunset; while felony is generally defined by statute
as applying to any act punishable by a certain penalty, commonly
over one year imprisonment. The trial will involve attempting to
prove that the accused committed certain acts (as specified in the
dots following "to wit" above) which fall within the legal category
of burglary.

But legal categories, since crime and other social relations can
be exceedingly various, are sometimes unfortunately vague. Many
problems do not lend themselves to crisp definitions even though
jurists might be willing, as with the case of separating day from
night, to adopt an arbitrary definition for the sake of clarity. Some-
times it is not helpful to press for arbitrary definitions, since they
would not be useful in solving the problems. For instance, "neg-
ligence" or the establishment of guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt"
cannot profitably be defined in an arbitrary way. In law as in less
rigorous fields there are categories that resist either reduction to
particular cases (precedents) or precise definition.
MATERIAL FALLACIES

Let us turn from the fields of law and commerce to Mr. Richards' area of "random belief and hopeful guesses." It must be admitted at once that many important constructions are relatively very vague. Particular instances may be instructive.

1. Peter is bald.

The construction bald is vague. Let us see just in what the vagueness consists. It is possible to construct a scale from one extreme condition of a man's head to the other:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bald} & \quad ? & \quad \text{hairy-on-top} \\
\underline{x_1} & \quad \underline{x_2} & \quad \underline{x_3} \\
\underline{x_4} & \quad \underline{x_5} & \quad \underline{x_6} & \quad \underline{x_7}
\end{align*}
\]

In the every-day situation represented here, people use the term "bald" without knowing at precisely what point they would be unwilling to call a man "bald." For \(x_1\), there is no doubt, and his dome shines afar. For \(x_2\) and \(x_3\), only very charitable persons would hesitate to employ the description, though there may be a fringe and a combed-across wisps. As to \(x_7\), there is a good thatching over, albeit a little thinning in front. But \(x_4\)! His hair springs up, it seems, from every possible minute spot: you feel there is no room for another hair, and nobody would call him bald. What about the wide range where \(x_4\) is? Well, people may say that \(x_4\) is balding, getting bald, losing his hair. Some actually say that he is bald.

If "Peter is bald" is a case of \(x_4\), then there is a broad range of possibilities concerning the condition of Peter's scalp. Moreover, the borders, so sharply drawn on the scale, are in doubt. Some users of the term might not distinguish between \(x_5\) and \(x_4\). Other users might not distinguish between \(x_4\) and \(x_3\), as we have.

Is this vagueness an insurmountable disadvantage? If it were to become important to know for every man whether or not he is bald, scientists could certainly set up one arbitrary line in the middle of the scale somewhere. They could say: "bald if fewer than 5000 hairs on the head." But note, if it were important, the importance would surely lie in a tie-in with something else, artistic ability, say, or mathematical genius. In such a case, the arbitrary number of 5000 hairs might be no help at all. The definition of baldness would depend in part on the proved relationships to the tie-in, and scientists would draw the line only where evidence of connection with genius or the like warranted doing so. Again, that evidence might not prevent a rather vague border.

#10 · UNNECESSARY VAGUENESS

The possibility of precisely setting limits is not the important thing about the usage represented by (1). Though at the present time nothing much would be gained by setting such strict limits, it is still possible to use the term "bald" in a very definite way. In the case of \(x_1\), as contrasted with \(x_7\), the difference is striking. Avoiding, then, the vague range and having well to the extremes, a careful speaker can say "Peter is bald" and communicate very effectively to those who know Peter. At the same time, the speaker does not exclude the possibility that Paul, who may have quite a number of hairs compared to Peter, perhaps is also bald. The speaker leaves Paul's case open. Obviously, it would be a very narrow view of the function of the categories of description to deny the right to say that Peter is bald just because one cannot say whether or not Paul is bald (but see #11).

This consideration enables us to give a sufficient condition for deciding when a term is too vague for reasonable communication. We shall say that when there is no clear case, no \(x_i\) on a scale, then the term should be rejected for vagueness. It will be evident that many constructions of the language pass this test. In spite of areas of vagueness, there are cases where nearly perfect communication is possible. "Child" and "redness" are quite precise enough for the needs of ordinary communication. Other constructions are becoming more clearly defined day by day. With the application of statistical analysis, the refinement of observational techniques, the discovery of linguistic and semantical principles, informed speakers today are in a position to make many judgments with a degree of intelligibility that would have been impossible only a few years ago. Despite its conceded limitations, I.Q. measurement provides a more exact description of mental ability than vague terms such as "capable" or "bright." Let us take another instance for the purpose of exploring the application of the rule for excluding vague terms.

2. Chivalry implies the ideal of womanhood.

There are here two constructions, chivalry and ideal of womanhood. Certainly these constructions are vague to the point of being diaphanous. The borders of the concept are almost hopelessly fuzzy. Can such constructions be excluded by the rule? One feels that (2) is saying something; it is not mere nonsensical mouthings. In fact, sentence (2) itself provides some help: any likely elements the speaker includes in the construction of chivalry apparently will be
relates to elements in the ideal of womanhood. But the latter is no less vague than chivalry. Still something is gained.

What of the technique of reduction? Clearly this technique will not work unless there are some clear-cut particular instances. What particulars would all users agree upon? In the case of bald there would be no reasonable doubt about x, though the term does not reduce as readily as other abstractions, such as “redness”—it passes the test. Would informed users of “chivalry” unanimously regard this deed of Sir Lancelot as germane? What of this deed by King Arthur? Or, more generally, this practice of wearing a lady’s colors in tournament? This body of amorous song? This search for the Grail?

Probably not unanimously. Nevertheless, a conscientious historian could specify certain feelings, beliefs, attitudes, as they reflect themselves in various language samples and cultural practices and weave themselves in and out of medieval institutions, such as courtly love, and thus roughly specify the development of chivalry in the history of the Middle Ages. The historian’s difficulties are legion in such an enterprise, but they are in degree surmountable.

As the term exists in the common language, it is to be ruled out by the condition for excluding vague usages. But this is not to say that it is entirely meaningless. What happens when the speaker of (2) intends an observation about behavior of today? When this is the case, how is (2) to be interpreted? Presumably the speaker can refer to feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and the like, which resemble the historian’s construction called “chivalry.” In the common usage, as opposed to the careful historical usage, it would seem that such terms as “chivalry” merely point in a direction. It is as if one gestured casually to the north when asked where Nome is. Even a general direction is something, and there is no occasion to condemn the common usage of terms represented by “chivalry.” But in responsible discussion, one can expect something more. In the case of the speaker of (2) referring to today, he can be reasonably held responsible for a knowledge of some historical specifications and, moreover, for a list of contemporary developments which he has in mind when speaking of chivalry.

One thing remains to be noted about sentences of the type represented by (2). This is the danger of reification (see pp. 41 ff.). Language encourages its users to suppose that there exists a structure corresponding to the constructions named, that there is a kind of Platonic entity in the nature of things. A term like “chivalry” names, of course, the construction of the users, but people feel that their construction more or less corresponds to strands of reality. Instead of saying that speakers and writers construct a class by relating one cultural or social phenomenon to another and calling it, for convenience, “chivalry,” some speakers tend to suppose that strands or structures of in-themselves-related phenomena, however poorly realized in any actual place at any actual time, have a basic reality which men perform notice and name. It is natural to assume that the way to achieve a sensible notion of such a term is to study, yes, the actualizations of the ideal in its poor embodiments in France and England, say, but at the same time to hold in view the pure concept itself.

Yet chivalry can be used by conscientious writers and speakers. They do not have to suggest a reified perfection crudely embodied in some Medieval institutions. They can realize that they are exploring a construction-for-convenience of cultural attitudes or practices, and the like. As to the vagueness of such terms, what is required is that one designates the particular instances intended. Presumably these will lie in the “direction” of the common use. If this is done carefully, the speaker can be as clear as he needs be for communication. Finally, there remains to be discussed a class of usages which have been called vague from the earliest times.

3. Man pursues the good.

Value terms are an instance of terms that resist reduction, in spite of heroic efforts on the part of recent writers. (They may have been the instance that led Plato to his theory of ideas.) “Man pursues the good” illustrates a use of “good” so far impossible to analyze. There are indeed many uses of “good” that can be reliably reduced or that can be translated, without loss, into a group of sentences employing “good” or its synonyms. “That is a good design” translates into a sum of sentences about the adequacy of the design, its economy, qualities it has that many people find pleasing. If the condition is added that “good,” as well as describing such things, also expresses the approval of the speaker and invites an appropriate attitude on the part of the listener, then the result is a sort of translation for “good” in “That is a good design,” that few will object to. Like many other abstractions, it turns out to be a short-
hand expression for something complicated, but not impossible, to spell out. Similarly, if one says, “Money is a good,” it is possible to reduce this meaning of “good” (as in “goods”) to things desired by people. If one should say, with Aristotle, “It is a good to have a good,” restatement would yield, without much loss of content, something like “People feel a satisfaction in the having of something they desire as well as in the thing itself.” A great many usages of value terms can be analyzed in this way, but almost certainly not all of them. Dewey and his school seem in error when they suggest that all usages can be so analyzed because most can. There still remain uses of (3) in ethics and religion that do not yield to reduction.

Can we say of these cases that they are so vague as to be useless? Well, we shall not say so, in spite of the condition of exclusion. Let extreme positivists legislate as they choose, few will obey them. For our part, we prefer to hope that analysis in years to come will teach us the secrets of these terms.

In conclusion, we can draw together the tentative findings of this section. People are always making new classifications, tinkering with old ones. The best we are able to suggest is a few rough and ready rules to follow in making or testing classifications, rules which a careful arguer employs. As we saw (pp. 36 ff.), a classification must be able to separate elements of the situation. The rules of classification can be observed only if the characteristics are given, at least implicitly, in a way clear enough for others to apply them and come up with the same results. This will not be possible unless there are at least some indisputable applications of the construction, as with the case of baldness, or unless the user of the term gives it such applications himself by pointing to unmistakable examples of what he has in mind. Let us summarize these observations.

1. Peter is bald. The unmistakably bald person is called “bald” by all users of the conventional term. Despite some borderline cases, the construction is useful. If Peter’s case is marginal, it can be dealt with by further description: “getting bald,” “thinning at the temples.”

2. Chivalry implies the ideal of womanhood. The sentence points in the general direction of certain (or uncertain) feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. The terms can be employed where a mere indication of such general meaning is sufficient, that is, where the notions are not crucial for the discussion, as when the speaker is merely blocking

in a background. Otherwise the speaker must show by citing instances some clear applications.

3. Man pursues the good. The meaning of such statements is beyond our analysis. However, note that other uses are serviceably clear: the speaker of “That is a good design” considers that the instance before him carries out effectively the principles of design. (These principles and their application to the given case can be explained on demand.) This use of “good” is not hopelessly vague, though there may be an ambiguity with ethical and other uses of “good.”

Apparently the vague usages in question are approved for argument? Not exactly. The qualifications are important. Let us gather them together:

a. a merely directional use of such terms as “chivalry” is permissible only when nothing central to the argument hangs on it.

b. vague terms in argument may be employed in a crucial place only when there are clear applications and these are the cases under discussion. If a marginal case becomes important, then a satisfactory decision must be made for this case.

When arguers make up new constructions and give them new names, they often specify the application with care and clarity. If they neglect to do so, someone will sooner or later find a counter instance and explode their balloon. But when arguers use the old abstractions, like “chivalry,” which designate constructions very vague indeed, being merely general directions of use, then they are in danger of getting into such trouble that even finding a clear counter instance would be a real help. They do not know the borders of the construction, but fail to observe that they do not know them—after all, “chivalry” occurs in the language and is defined in the dictionary. They cannot disentangle the various characteristics; they have notions of two or more unrelated strands of phenomena floating in their constructions, like letters in alphabet soup. These vague abstractions can be illustrated from almost every conversation, every popular non-fiction book, every student paper or speech, many a lecture on literature, history, social science.

EXAMPLE. Dialogue overheard in the Forum:

First Citizen: I don’t want war, but I do want our lost territory back.
Second Citizen: Well, friend, do you want the lost territory back even if it’s going to take a war to get it?

First Citizen: I don’t want war, as I say. But if it’s going to take a war to regain the lost province, then we will have to beat our plowshares into swords.

Second Citizen: I see what you mean. You don’t regard war as a good thing, but you want to regain the lost province even more than you want to avoid war.”

First Citizen: I guess that’s right.

COMMENT. Second Citizen has pressed this dialogue to clear up the vagueness of First Citizen’s assertion; the reply reveals the relative intensity of his “wants.” Vagueness in the common language is nowhere more pronounced than in the case of words designating choices: “want,” “desire,” “hope for,” “like.” These can range from the slightest predilection to the most intense. Consider the range of meaning possible in the simple assertion “I like ice cream.” I might be affirming my preference for ice cream over any other food or I might mean that only cream pie and tapioca pudding stand lower in my order of desserts. Vagueness arises from failure to limit the range of choice-words: “I like ice cream best of all.”

EXAMPLE. A grocery company was indicted under a statute making it unlawful to charge “unjust or unreasonable” prices. The attorneys for the defendant argued that the statute violated the constitutional provision, “In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall . . . be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation.” The court upheld the defendant’s contention since the term “unjust and unreasonable” did not reduce to clearcut acts so that an individual would know in every case whether or not his contemplated act would be a violation of the law. (Example founded on United States vs. L. Cohen Grocery Co., 1921.)

COMMENT. Barring vague descriptions of crime is one of the protections for individual liberty enjoyed where a rule of law prevails. Fairness to individuals requires that the terms of the criminal law be so phrased that there can be no doubt as to whether or not an act is illegal.

EXAMPLE. A literary quarterly publishes an article arguing that “responsiveness to the Zeitgeist” is the chief mark “of genius of the true poet.” This is in the first paragraph. On the second page we read “Artistic sensibility always reveals itself in a fresh wonder at language.”

COMMENT. None of these constructions is intelligible, and the sentences are nonsense. Terms like “Zeitgeist” and the dogmatically positive use of “reveal themselves” suggest, moreover, a strong leaning toward Word Magic (#12).

EXAMPLE. Professor Peter lectures his class in sociology: “The matrix of cultural usage provides for the necessary safety valve of a few non-conformists. The deviates, however, must conform at least to an accepted-rejected pattern of non-conformity. They may be non-conformists only in a prescribed way: not all patterns of non-conformity are open to them.”

COMMENT. Professor Peter is probably trying to say something, maybe something interesting. But there is a difference between paradox and open contradiction, and the difference often reveals almost at sight the difference between intelligible constructions and the kind of vague thinking that leads to the verbiage of the pseudo-scientists. One would like to bang Professor Peter’s heads together and make him talk sense.

EXAMPLE.

“Give to the Midgets’ Rest Home. You can take it off your income tax.”

“Relax your tired blood. Take Elixir of Ambrosia.”

“Panty Waists are tighter.”

COMMENT. Without such vagueness modern advertising would be impossible; it’s of the essence. “Take it off your income tax” can, in law, mean only “take it off your income before computing the tax, if you use the long form and not the standard deduction for charity, local taxes, etc.,” but you are not supposed to think of that. “Tired” is so vague in everyday usage that it seems hardly a metaphor to apply the adjective to blood, but what can it mean? “Tighter,” “better,” “smoother,” “longer lasting,” “less fattening” — than what? “Better,” perhaps, than the worst in the field?

EXAMPLE.

“-ism”

“-ist,” “-ite”

“-er”
COMMENT. It is superfluous to illustrate the tiresome exploitation of these vague formations. In political controversy, a "communist" can be anybody from a card holding Communist Party member to a patriotic clergyman who twenty years ago foolishly allowed his name to appear on the letterhead of the American League for Peace and Freedom. "Peter is a Morriseite," "Peter is a deceiver." Do these mean that Peter once deceived or habitually deceives? That he agrees with Morris on some particular, or that he follows him around day and night like a disciple? The use of these formations in argument brands the speaker as naive or vicious. Look back to the previous sections. Do such terms as "relativism" or "reifier" offend against this principle?

11. Over-precision: "logic chopping"

Some persons, apparently impressed with the rule of reduction and other modern techniques, would reject the extreme-case criterion for permissible vagueness as far too generous an application of Rule 1 (p. 53). It is not enough for them that all would agree on \( x_1 \); there must be agreement on all cases in the range. That nobody is likely to deny Peter's baldness does not qualify "bald" for precise usage unless unanimity is also possible on Paul and Henry, whatever the state of their scalps. Some writers blame the vagueness of terms in common usage for an alleged lack of progress in social science and for much of the confusion in politics and other activities of everyday life. They demand of every general term that it carry with its use the method of its reduction. As to marginal cases, they are to be eliminated by formal definition or by exact distinction.

Vagueness, they say, encourages reification and Word Magic (see #12). The existence of a certain usage in the language does not guarantee anything about any entities in the world. The name "Zeus" is a proper name, but there is no god. The difficulty with "the good" or "chivalry" is that the use of these terms often commits the speaker to a belief in Platonic entities, since the tendency in language to give some content to words leads speakers to reify when no content from reduction is possible. Moreover, a belief in a Platonic superchild does not matter for communication: the term can always on demand be reduced to this young person or that. But abstractions such as "chivalry" cannot be reduced since the concept is not well enough constructed to permit its users to state the conditions for applying it. They can, of course, provide an ad hoc definition, but then they might better have avoided the term altogether and with it the confusion with common usage and its likely reification.

For these reasons the extreme-case criterion is held to be too broad. It is not enough to eliminate the merely directional usages of terms such as "chivalry," but such terms as "bald" must also go. The fact that there are clear-cut cases misses the objection to vagueness in language: this is that there are any cases not clear-cut. Let speakers adopt the practice of defining each term as it occurs: this will eliminate marginal cases as they arise. There is no reason to put up with indecision about them and to tolerate vague uses. So goes the positivist argument.

Most of these strictures are directed against the vagueness in certain social sciences, psychology, sociology, history. Many of the key concepts in these sciences seem to the critics merely evaluative and literary. Can psychologists precisely state the characteristics of projection, of repression, of sanity itself? On the contrary, they are unable even to specify the level of abstraction for these constructions, much less show how to reduce them to particulars. Can any anthropologist state with clarity the conditions that will indicate for every human trait whether or not that trait is "culturally determined'? These criticisms imply that it is always desirable to give precise rules for the usage of terms, and that it is always possible to do so.

Sigmund Freud and Margaret Mead could, indeed, define their terms and be done with it. The definitions would perhaps be arbitrary, but they could be clear. But what is the problem such writers face? Is it merely to define, say, "repressions," that is, to provide an exact list of characteristics by which psychologists can judge whether or not any given human activity can be arbitrarily designated "repressive'? Or is it to explore a situation believed to involve a basic psychological mechanism? Reflection will show that the task of the scientist here is not to set up artificial systems, but to see some tentative constructions on the description of some clear (extreme) cases. In the bewildering complications of fact, these early constructions may be found ultimately to be as basic as was originally thought—in which case they will by degrees become entirely explicit and uniquely determined in scope—or they will be
found unproductive—in which case they will be discarded or replaced. In the meanwhile, the investigator is usually aware of the vague and tentative character of his key concepts.

It is a form of perfectionism (see #38) to reject the best available on the grounds that it is not the best conceivable. What is happening seems to be a rejection of serviceable usages for the sole reason that there are cases that are marginal or doubtful. We have stated that the function of classification is to separate, and the criticism of the marginal case seems well taken. How can the rules of exhaustion and exclusion operate if the construction is littered with doubtful cases? But we have also stated that where these are crucial they must be decided. We now add that this decision can be recognized as tentative where a formal division would not further the understanding of the situation, but on the contrary would be arbitrary and artificial. In a discussion where the marginal cases are not at issue, it is captions to reject a construction simply because such cases exist. This amounts to refusing to allow the term “bald” when Old Marbletop is being pointed to, simply because there is a gent, Old Brushcross, who is nowhere around.

In such instances we say that the criticism is fallacious. There is nothing wrong with the extreme-case uses of construction, when the alternative (“bald means fewer than 5000 hairs on the head”) is purely arbitrary. If there are some clear cases, as with “baldness,” “repression,” “culturally determined traits,” the historian’s “chivalry,” then the uses are permissible unless greater precision is possible without artificiality. This is admittedly itself a vague criterion of permissible vagueness, but it must serve the present purpose—which is only to characterize the fallacy of requiring an unnecessary precision. The fallacy is easily recognized in its extreme forms: wholesale rejection of vast areas of human inquiry as “nonsense,” pedantic hair-splitting and logie-chopping over constructions that are the best available and good enough for the purpose, the ironical bark in discussion, “I can’t understand that!” “What does that mean?”

EXAMPLE. Professor Peter writes in the Historian’s Quarterly, “It is bad enough to see this term romantic in undiminished circulation amongst music critics and literary historians. What does it mean to characterize Beethoven’s Opus 28 as romantic? Or Byron’s Don Juan? The sonata contains the notes, chords, movements it contains. How can these add up to some non-musical entity to be designated as ‘romantic’ and thus automatically grouped with Don Juan, as well as with Gothic revival, the agony of a perverse love, trap doors and ghosts? But when an historian, who should know better, seriously sets out to specify clear-cut, extreme cases of the romantic impulse in diplomacy and political agitation, then we have seen everything. I can only say that Professor Paul’s latest tome may be program notes or literary obiter dicta, but it is hardly history.”

COMMENT. It is true that terms such as “romantic,” “classical,” even Professor Peter’s “history,” are frequently used in literary and popular contexts in a merely directional way. No precise content can be given to them, and it is not even clear if there is an extreme case. Yet Professor Peter’s attack itself refers to fairly definite areas of content (trap doors, ghosts)—almost all literary critics agree in regarding the appearance of Gothic props in novels and poems as marks of what they call the romantic movement. Moreover, Professor Paul apparently is at pains to find “clear-cut, extreme” cases of practices in diplomacy and politics which he is proposing to call romantic, since they lie in the general direction of what is ordinarily called “the romantic movement.” At any rate, he must use some term to cover the phenomena he is describing, and all that can reasonably be required is that he provide some clear cases, even if he must leave it open whether or not other cases are to be so characterized.

EXAMPLE. Overheard in a bull session: “You say that whatever morality involves, it’s bound to include people helping each other in time of need. You cite rescues at sea and loans to friends, even considerate advice to troubled spirits. This is the way all you moralists talk. You list noble deeds that, of course, everybody approves of, then treat them as if they were a class of similar things, give them a same, like “helpful,” and think you have proved something. I don’t know what. All you have done is cite cases, which may or may not have something in common, and wrapped them up in a vague meaningless name. I still don’t know what it means to be helpful, and I don’t think you do. Look! What if the man at sea were dying of cancer and didn’t want to be saved, or if your alcoholic or whatever didn’t want your advice—maybe he needs his vice, not advice! How would it be helpful to interfere then? Answer me that!”

COMMENT. The providing of particular cases was apparently
designed to free the term "helpful" of some of its every-day ambiguity. The critical attack does attempt to test the extreme-case instances by imagining counter-examples, but even though such may occur, surely there are many rescues that are desired just as eagerly as the rare one is not. The intention obviously refers to such cases. Is the designation of such cases as "helpful" unjustified? It will be noted that the critic seems himself to have derived from them a clear enough notion of "helpful" to pose counter-cases; he asks, "How would it be helpful to interfere?" If he would accept the term as now specified in the light of rescues, advice, loans, the critic might then find out what his interlocutor thinks he has proved—presumably that being helpful is a moral good.

12  *Word Magic*

In the discussion of classes we saw that the existence of a name does not guarantee the existence of any corresponding entity in the situation. Suppose you start with a construction, say a fairly clear one like *child*. The name "child" means the construction *child*, right enough, but the point of the analysis was that there is no need to suppose that the construction *child* stands for a Platonic entity in the world. This is to say that, by the process of reduction (see pp. 43 ff.), you can interpret the construction *child* in ordinary usage by reference to Junior, Sis, *et al.*, and so without committing yourself to a belief in a child in Plato’s heaven, who never grows up, whose hands are never in need of washing, who is parentless and sexless. Reduction is possible in principle for even the highest level of abstraction; even the use of vague terms, like "chivalry," in careful contexts, need involve no reification.

There are other terms, however, the use of which usually implies the existence of entities in the situation unverifiable in principle. The usual occasion of the use of such terms as "destiny" and "fate" provides no clue for reduction and strongly suggests hypostatization of entities. Such use is commonly called Word Magic. The name, like a spell, conjures an Entity into being. In recent years much attention has been paid to Word Magic, and this phenomenon of language has become an important part of the much discussed "tyranny of words." There has, however, been a certain vagueness in the notion of Word Magic itself. Most writers seem to include every sort of reification and make no distinction between reified uses of, say, "child," and of "destiny." At other times writers seem to include all constructions not firmly anchored in the situation, such as an infant’s notion of Santa Claus, and thus indifferently regard simple mistakes due to ignorance of "the furniture of the world," as instances of this fallacy.

We shall want to use "Word Magic" in a less vague way. We shall exclude cases of ordinary hypostatization, where the constructions, such as *child* or *red*, can be given a straightforward analysis free of metaphysical commitment. We shall also want to exclude mistakes due to ignorance. Sentences about centaurs, elfs, ghosts, cannot be reduced, it is true, but they do not essentially involve reification of entities—for they might be uttered in good faith apparently on good authority and constitute simple mistakes. Perhaps we have already sufficiently discussed reification. We want, however, to take a look at the centaurs and ghosts. But let us first consider the following case.

(a) The Average American smokes 7.472 cigarettes a day.

Only a very naive person would suppose that "Average American" designates any class of people, especially people so carefully measuring their consumption of cigarettes. Those who are not so naive know that there may in fact be no one person who smokes exactly 7.472 cigarettes every day, or any day. They will know how to interpret such idioms and the sort of evidence that will confirm or falsify the generalizations. A mistake here is due to ignorance, but the ignorance differs from the example (c) below about the centaurs.

The ignorance here is of a rather ordinary convention of language to give a shorthand summary of complicated factual material, rather than ignorance of the kinds of things there are in the world.

(b) The centaur is a mythical beast.

The logical analysis of this sentence, which needn’t detain us here, shows that, though it probably seldom misleads, it is still a misleading way to speak. The use of "is" where there is no reference to existing things can get confused with the use of the term to imply existence, and hence is misleading. The sentence, "The President is an elective executive," states that for every case where somebody is President he is an elective executive and, moreover, there is such a case. Sentence (b) is of the same form, but can one say, "For every
case of centaur, this is a mythical beast, and there is such a case? Well, it is only the form that is misleading, not the sense, since the form is contradicted by the sense (of “mythical”).

c. “The centaur is half man, half horse.”

Unless the context contradicts the form of this sentence, there is nothing to show that the construction centaur is unanchored, that no referent can be found in the widest situation known. Now suppose this sentence were to be found in a medieval travel book and that you are a student in a little cathedral school. If you believed this sentence to be true, that is, that “there is such a case,” would you be guilty of Word Magic? One does not quibble over the use of this term if he points out that the chief mistake you have made, at the worst, is a reliance on insufficient authority (see #15). You have not traveled yourself over the world—how do you know what animals are in it? Unless you have deduced a priori (see #28) that centaurs are impossible, the most that one can expect of you in your ignorance is a certain skepticism. In the Middle Ages—and in many other times and in many places—people have made mistakes of this sort. They have eaten the horn of the unicorn ground up. They have fed rice cakes to ghosts. They have kept the werewolf from the door with wolfsbane or garlic. They have burnt witches. They have trapped demons in trees and rocks. These practices involve magic, but, as we shall use the term, not Word Magic. The spells and other linguistic incantations seem a consequence of a mistaken belief in something, rather than the other way about. The belief is theoretically verifiable. We may never encounter a centaur or a werewolf, but we should certainly recognize one if we did. Let us take another case.

d. Phlogiston makes the fire burn.

Chemists have found no “principle of combustion,” in the sense that Newton found a principle of attraction. The problem is not the name “phlogiston.” If there were such a principle—every case of combustion involved its operation just as every case of the attraction of bodies involves gravity—the name “phlogiston” of course would serve as well as any other. Yet the existence of this name has apparently led astrologers and mystics to state that the chemists must be wrong, that fire must be a uniform element in nature, that there must, therefore, be a uniform principle involved in all com-

bustion. To this day arguments to this effect can be found here and there. With this use of “phlogiston” one enters the presence of Word Magic. No longer can simple ignorance excuse. The fallacy here occurs only in comparatively rare cases where the existence of the word magically guarantees the existence of the entity: we have the name, let’s find the thing. This is like the celebrated case of the genius who argued that opium must put people to sleep by virtue of a “dormitive agent” and set out to find that agent in all cases of soporifics.

The situation being what it is, no unique principle of combustion, no unique dormitive agent can be found. Looking for one in advance of knowledge of the nature of things is not a fallacy. Persisting in the search after the situation is understood, simply because of the existence of the name (or, of course, of a useless construction, whatever its name) we call Word Magic.

We come now to usages that automatically involve Word Magic.

e. It was Peter’s destiny to build houses.

How can this sentence be confirmed or disproved? If Peter dies without building a single house, we might inscribe on his tombstone: “Here lies Peter. His housebuilding destiny was unfulfilled.” Or if Peter dies after building fifty houses, we might then write: “Here lies Peter. His destiny was to build houses, and he built fifty of them.”

The very sense of such terms as “destiny” is that no verification of sentences of the sort of (e) is possible. The clause “he built fifty of them,” does suggest a sort of evidence, but it is easy to see that it is not a condition of having a destiny to build houses to have actually built a number of them. This is made clear by the usage about a destiny being unfulfilled.

Take the case of “Sylvester has luck at the races.” If this means that Sylvester encounters a higher instance of successful bets than normal expectancy promises, then the sentence amounts to a shorthand way of saying a rather complicated thing. But the practice of touching wood, wearing special colors, compulsively avoiding certain locations—all these suggest that, in our culture, more is meant here than a mere shorthand expression. If the speaker uses “luck” to mean a force in the world which is, at least temporarily, on Sylvester’s side, does this usage not deceive him into entertaining a
thesis which, the world being what it is, is in principle unverifiable? For (e) you might try, “Peter had an interest in building construction and in residence contracting.” This is a less picturesque sentence, but at least the conditions are known under which one is willing to say that a person has an interest in doing something, even when he is prevented somehow from doing it. But if your interlocutor is unwilling to accept this or another verifiable paraphrase, if he says something like, “Yes, of course he had an interest in it, but he also had a destiny to do it, I tell you!”—if this is the best you can get out of him, then you can only tap on wood and cast a counterspell.

All such cases differ from ignorant mistakes about what the situation is, in that they cannot be falsified. No amount of evidence can reach them. Thus they can be separated from sentences about centaurs and ghosts. They have it in common with reification that they imply metaphysical presuppositions, but differ from these in that no alternative interpretation is possible in the ordinary occasions of use. Child can be analyzed by the rule of reduction to escape any metaphysical entity, though the Platonist will not accept the reduction. But with “destiny” the construction the term names cannot be reduced. Word Magic, then, is that instance of reification where there is no alternative non-metaphysical interpretation and where the construction cannot be verified or falsified in principle.

This is the last fallacy we treat under the general heading of material fallacies. When mystics go so far along the line of Platonism as to persist in using terms that can be given no reference at all to any known situation, it is obvious that psychological factors are involved. We might more wisely have placed this fallacy in the next section, where everything is tinged with magic or, alternatively, where most of the language is incantation. We would have done so, except for the obvious connection with reification. Even in discussing that fallacy, the prime example that suggested itself was the case history of an insane man. But at least the poor fellow had some evidence to support his belief that a secret power was after him: he produced detailed accounts of how this power was operating (see pp. 45 ff.). In the case of Word Magic and in many of the cases in the next section of this book, the psychology seems entirely unhinged. This is the witches’ coven, the necromancer’s magic square. It is the arena of babbling and madness. It is, in short, the everyday world of leading articles, politicians’ platforms, TV commercials, and common gossip.

**EXAMPLE.** On February 24, 1920, when National Socialism was an obscure movement, a meeting was held during which the Party Program was announced. The size of the audience and the enthusiasm for the Program exceeded Hitler’s most sanguine expectations. Hitler uses the following language to describe the thoughts that he says ran through his head as the audience filed out of the hall:

A fire had been lighted out of whose flames in time to come a sword was bound to arise that should win again the freedom of the German Siegfried and the life of the German Nation.

And beside the coming upheaval I felt strode the goddess of inexorable revenge for the act of perjury of November 9, 1918.

_Hitler, Mein Kampf_

**COMMENT.** Notice some general things about this passage. It is highly metaphorical, it is impassioned, it is even inspired. There is nothing particularly reprehensible about being impassioned or inspired, if a writer can sincerely achieve these states as Hitler probably did on this occasion. As to metaphors, figurative language does not of itself involve special difficulty. The metaphors can often translate to prosaic statements; these may be flat and involve a loss of emotion and color but perhaps no loss of substance, if there is any substance. Let us take a closer look at a few of the particular expressions here.

1. “A fire had been lighted out of whose flames in time to come a sword was bound to arise...” This translates to something like: “A movement had been started, and out of this beginning there was bound to come some day an armed political power.” Here it is not the metaphor but the notion of “bound to” that causes difficulty. “Bound to” suggests inevitability. The laws of gravity obtaining, if you drop an apple it is “bound to” fall. The expression suggests the operation of a law of nature. But there is nothing in the knowledge of political or social nature that could constitute evidence that the acquisition of power is ever inevitable. If Hitler had been killed by a bus on his way home from this meeting, or if any of a thousand other quite possible contingencies had arisen, would the National
Socialist Party nevertheless have been bound to acquire power in Germany?

2. The words "... to win again the freedom of the Germanic Siegfried and the life of the German nation" are also metaphorical. They presumably mean something like "German freedom and prosperous unity." These are the things that are going to be "regained" by the power that is bound to come from the beginnings of the movement. It is readily conceivable that a strong political movement could restore freedom of action to a nation and help it to unity and prosperity.

3. What is the "goddess of inexorable revenge" who is now walking about? Revenge is an intelligible concept; it means something like a consistent motivation to pay back evil with evil. Perhaps the goddess is the embodiment of that motive in Hitler, or even, so to speak, in his movement. But what can be inexorable about a motivation? The word "inexorable" applied to human motivations shows that magical abstractions can be adjectives, as well as nouns like "destiny," just as "bound to," used in similar situations shows that verbs are also available for concocting spells of Word Magic.

4. The date November 9, 1918, makes it evident that by "act of perjury" Hitler is referring to the proclaiming of the German Republic. At least, that is when the Republic was proclaimed. Whether one approves or disapproves of this action, there is no chance that it can be taken literally as "perjury." "Perjury" is lying under oath. It is hard to understand what metaphor occurs here. The likely thing is that the term is simply extended, for its emotive connotations, to mean the public act which the speaker detests and wants his audience to reject.

EXAMPLE. Peter, a docile follower of the party line, declares, "The dialectic of the class struggle requires the inevitable overthrow of capitalism."

COMMENT. This example is similar to the first—compare the use of "inevitable" with Hitler's "inexorable" and "bound to." If by "dialectic" is meant "clash of opposing political and economic classes," then the outcome will be decided by the course of events and the strength of the interests involved. If by "dialectic" is meant "the resolution of apparently opposed propositions," this will be a logical exercise, irrelevant to the world of political and economic struggle. Finally, if by "dialectic" is meant some underlying principle