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Social Science Quotations by David L. Sills
and Robert K. Merton: Revisiting the
New Paperback Edition

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Introduction

More than a year ago,¹ we introduced *Current Contents*® (CC®) readers to a compendium of over 2,500 memorable quotations from the social sciences² which had just been published as volume 19 of *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.³ David L. Sills, the editor of the encyclopedia, collaborated with Robert K. Merton to compile *Social Science Quotations*, and their abridged introduction was reprinted in CC.¹

The volume recently was issued in paperback by Macmillan,⁴ so we asked the coeditors to prepare a new description for CC, which follows below. Of course, most readers know Bob Merton is a close friend and admired colleague whose work has often appeared or been discussed in these pages. Having browsed *Social Science Quotations* many times, I'm grateful to him and to David for creating such an enjoyable, entertaining, and genuinely useful reference book.

A Book for Browsing and Instructing

Collections of quotations like *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*,⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*,⁶ or *Isaac Asimov's Book of Science and Nature Quotations*⁷ are intrinsically interesting. Many of the quotations are familiar and brief, so they are fun and easy to browse. They are also instructive, often revealing a surprising source and sometimes correcting a popular misattribution. Sills and Merton cite a recent compendium as an example: *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions*.⁸

Even after more than a year I have not yet found the time to get through all 2,500 quotations in the review copy of Sills and Merton's book. But many already stand out as "memorable ideas memorably expressed," to quote the coeditors.

About the Authors

David Sills retired in 1988 with emeritus status from the Social Science Research Council in New York City. His achievements in social science and policy have been described by Merton as comprehensive and consequential.⁹ He studied the impact of the land reform program in post-war Japan; directed research at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research; was the director of the Demographic Division of the Population Council; and has been a visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation and a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences.

Merton is University Professor Emeritus at Columbia. In honor of his 50-year career there, Columbia created the Robert K. Merton Professorship in the Social Sciences. Seven years ago, I honored Bob by naming my youngest son—Alexander Merton Garfield—after him. His publications and contributions as a founder of the sociology of science are too numerous to mention here, as are the many times his works have been acknowledged in CC. In a future volume of *Essays of an Information Scientist*,¹⁰ an index to all authors and publications cited in the series will be provided.

Conclusion

Readers interested in the paperback edition of Sills and Merton's *Social Science Quotations* can find it at most university and commercial bookstores. Or they can contact the publisher, Macmillan Publishing Company, by writing 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. You can also place a credit card order by calling 1-800-323-7445.

The 438-page unabridged paperback is priced at \$25.00 and the original hardcover at \$90.00. No doubt the paperback will reach a broader market, including the public beyond academia. But the more durable hardcover will still be in demand by schol-

ars, writers, and others who plan to use the book often and over a long time, as I do.

Readers of *Social Science Quotations* will find it a fascinating and entertaining book. It already has become an authoritative reference for scholars because it is thoroughly documented and indexed. But it also is appealing to the average person curious about how social science concepts—expressed most memorably in succinct quotations—influence popular thought, culture, and expression.

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Social Science Quotations

by

David L. Sills and Robert K. Merton

Social Science Quotations, a volume edited by us that assembles the essential statements by social scientists and about the social sciences, was published last year as Volume 19 of the senior editor's *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. The book has just been reissued in a complete and unabridged paperback edition in order to make it widely available in bookstores.

In the "Introduction" to the paperback edition we described not only the quotations themselves but also some of the ways in which quotations intersect with the worlds of both scientific and literary scholarship. Drawing in part upon this text, we here attempt to introduce the paperback edition of *Social Science Quotations* to new readers.



David L. Sills



Robert K. Merton

An Authoritative, Fully Documented Source

Social Science Quotations was inspired by what seemed to us to be an unmet need in the literature of the social sciences. Writings on the lives and theories of individual social scientists abound, but there has been no fully documented collection of memorable quotations from the social sciences as a whole. Yet we know quotations are frequently used both in scientific and in literary writings. We also know mere summaries or paraphrases typically fail to capture the full force of original formulations that have made quotations memorable. After all, that is why we quote rather than paraphrase.

We have introduced a subtitle in the paperback edition—*Who Said What, When, and Where*—that succinctly summarizes the documentation procedures we followed. The author of each quotation is described by nationality, dates, and occupation or profession; the date, source, and page of each quotation are given in the text; and the extensive bibliography gives the full title of the source, the edition used, the city of publication, and the publisher. An index of more than 100 three-column pages assists

the reader interested in quotations on a particular topic.

Memorable Ideas Memorably Expressed

The majority of the quotations in this volume are of course from the social science disciplines: that is, from anthropology, economics, history, law, political science, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and statistics. Within these fields, the selections are largely from what we refer to as the “classical texts.” Most of the authors wrote voluminously; most of them wrote well; and their ideas have had a formative impact upon social thought. We ourselves are not Marxists or Weberians or Jamesians or Freudians or Keynesians; these classic quotations are included in the volume because they contain “memorable ideas memorably expressed.”

We were of course able to select only a fraction of the writings of even those scholars who are quoted in relative abundance: these include Malinowski, Sapir, and Lévi-Strauss in anthropology; Adam Smith, Jevons, Keynes, and Schumpeter in economics; Ibn Khaldūn, Machiavelli, and

Rousseau in political thought; Freud, James, Jung, and G.H. Mead in psychology; Tocqueville, Durkheim, Simmel, and Max Weber in sociology; and Holmes, Pollock and Maitland, and Cardozo in the law.

In selecting quotations, we tried to cast as wide a net as possible, making relevance to the social sciences the major criterion. Accordingly, in an effort to broaden the volume we have included quotations on society and the social sciences from the writings of physicists, biologists, and mathematicians, along with poets, novelists, dramatists, philosophers, political figures, and revolutionaries.

For example, there are selections from Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Einstein; Walt Whitman and W.H. Auden; Jane Austen and Dostoyevski; Shakespeare and G.B. Shaw; Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Wittgenstein; and from the public speeches of Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Bridging the Scholarly Gap: Darwin and Kelvin

In 1959, C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*¹ made much of the wide gulf that exists between the natural sciences and other branches of learning. Although the gulf certainly exists, we noted while assembling quotations for this volume that there are also bridges that span this gulf. (Not only are there bridges; there are intersections and pedestrian malls as well.) There is space here to point out only a few of these, as manifested by examples in *Social Science Quotations*.

A starting point is the enduring impact of Charles Darwin. He borrowed the phrase "survival of the fittest" from the writings of the sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer (1864-67) and added it to the fifth (1869) edition of *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The phrase has since been used by writers of many persuasions to advance their own ideas.

The legal historians Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland observed in their massive *History of English Law* (1895) that "a few [forms of legal action] are still-born, some are sterile, others live to see their children and children's children in high places. The struggle for life is keen among them and only the fittest survive." The industrialist Andrew Carnegie gave the concept an explicitly ideological turn when he wrote in 1899 that the law of competition "may be sometimes hard for the individual [but] it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest." For the economist John Maynard Keynes, the biological concept was seen as an extension of an antecedent concept in classical economics: "The Principle of the Survival of the Fittest could be regarded as one vast generalisation of the Ricardian economics" (1926). Finally, in this accounting, the social historian Richard Hofstadter, in a critical review of the doctrine of social Darwinism, noted that "such biological ideas as 'the survival of the fittest,' whatever their doubtful value in natural science, are utterly useless in attempting to understand society" (1944). Usages of the concept such as these may be part of what the anthropologist R.R. Marett meant when he wrote—echoing the words of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*—that "Darwinism as the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin can hardly pass away" (1912).

The physicist William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) could scarcely have imagined the future reverberations in the social sciences of the 1898 pronouncement that has become widely known as the Kelvin dictum: "...when you can measure what you are speaking about and can express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind." The economist Jacob Viner reportedly replied, "[E]ven when we can measure a thing, our knowledge will be meager and unsatisfactory." The economist

Frank H. Knight, in denouncing the indiscriminate use of the Kelvin dictum in the social sciences, observed, "In this field, the Kelvin dictum very largely means in practice, 'if you cannot measure, measure anyhow!'" (1940).²

The theme of the fruitful error provides another bridge between the natural and the social sciences. The seventeenth-century English antiquary, John Aubrey, in his *Brief Lives*, said of Thomas Hobbes that "where he erres, he erres so ingeniously, that one had rather erre with him than hitt the marke with Clavius." The theme finds renewed expression in the famous *Public Opinion* (1922) by the twentieth-century political journalist Walter Lippmann: "The study of error is not only in the highest degree prophylactic, but it serves as a stimulating introduction to the study of truth." And striking another note on the same theme, the psychologist George A. Miller reported that "some men's mistakes are more seminal than other men's valid insights" (1978).

Obliteration by Incorporation

A sizable number of quotations exhibit a phenomenon in the cultural transmission of knowledge which has become familiar to readers of *Current Contents*. This is the phenomenon of "obliteration by incorporation" (or OBI for short),³ where discoveries or ideas have become so fully incorporated into current canonical knowledge that their source is no longer explicitly cited or even alluded to.^{4,5}

Not wanting to insult their readers' knowledgeability, authors may not refer, for example, to the sources of theories, laws, concepts, methods, or instruments, such as "quantum theory" or "natural selection" or "law of gravitation" or "laser" and so on. In the course of the continued absence of such explicit references, the sources of these familiar items of our culture become obliterated and ultimately forgotten.

Examples of OBI—that is, of familiar precepts in social thought whose origins are generally not cited—are Francis Bacon's dictum "knowledge is power" (1597), Joseph Glanvill's "climates of opinions" (1661), John Adams's "government of laws and not of men" (1774), and Otto von Bismarck's "politics is the art of the possible" (1867).

Related to OBI is the phenomenon of concepts and phrases entering the vernacular with little awareness on the part of the users of their sources in the social sciences. Examples are charisma, stereotype, opportunity costs, significant others, self-fulfilling prophecy, and double bind.

Who Said What?

Dubious or misattributed quotations constitute another pattern of interest to us: we have recently come across a book devoted entirely to examples of this phenomenon in general quotations.⁶

There are a number of examples of this pattern in *Social Science Quotations*. "Ockham's Razor" ("What can be accounted for by fewer assumptions is explained in vain by more") is generally attributed to William of Ockham, but there is no compelling evidence that it was original with him. "Bad money drives out good money" is generally identified as "Gresham's Law," although there is no reason to believe it was formulated by Thomas Gresham. "The best government is that which governs least" has been variously attributed to Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Henry David Thoreau, and the nineteenth-century editor John Louis Sullivan.

Mark Twain claimed that Benjamin Disraeli had identified three kinds of lies ("lies, damned lies, and statistics"), but there is no independent evidence for this attribution. This dubious attribution seems destined to become even more confused. The lexicographic journalist William Safire mistakenly wrote just recently that Disraeli had

quoted Mark Twain as having said this about lies.⁷ In editing *Social Science Quotations*, we insisted upon actually examining the source of each included quotation before citing it. This practice we hope will set a number of such attribution questions straight.

Echoes and Improvisations

We are also interested in the phenomenon of "echoes"—quotations appearing independently or derivatively many years later, often in quite different ways. Sometimes, quotations are so much a part of the culture that they seem never to die. As an example there is Ranke's famous injunction that the historian tell what actually happened [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*]. This injunction proves to be a nineteenth-century echo of Lucian's second-century precept that "the historian's one task is to tell the thing as it happened." This historiographic rule has been commented upon endlessly. It was, for example, the target of Charles A. Beard's presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1935.

In an annotation in the text of *Social Science Quotations* we describe Freud's ambiguous 1912 remark that "anatomy is destiny" as a paraphrase of Napoleon's 1808 comment to Goethe that "politics is fate."

Parables and Parodies

Many social science parables and metaphors endure in the collective memory. For example, Montesquieu observed in 1748 that "politics are a smooth file, which cuts gradually, and attains its end by a slow progression." Perhaps this inspired Max Weber's more famous 1919 metaphor that "politics is the slow boring of hard boards."

Echoes take their most sardonic form in parodies. Herbert Spencer's 1862 definition of evolution as a process in which "matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" became in William James's 1880s parody "a change from a no-howish untalkaboutable all-alikeness to a somehowish and in general talkaboutable not-all-alikeness." In similar style Ernest Gellner in 1959 transformed Wittgenstein's much quoted 1921 injunction that "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" into "that which one would insinuate, thereof one must speak."

This has been a brief survey of how quotations are related to one another and how they demonstrate the fundamental interrelatedness of the major branches of knowledge; we hope it has also introduced like-minded readers to the new edition of *Social Science Quotations*.

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