§ 2. THE OBJECTIVE PULL; OR, E PLURIBUS UNUM

'Ouch' is a one-word sentence which a man may volunteer from time to time by way of laconic comment on the passing show. The correct occasions of its use are those attended by painful stimulation. Such use of the word, like the correct use of language generally, is inculcated in the individual by training on the part of society; and society achieves this despite not sharing the individual's pain. Society's method is in principle that of rewarding the utterance of 'Ouch' when the speaker shows some further evidence of sudden discomfort, say a wince, or is actually seen to suffer violence, and of penalizing the utterance of 'Ouch' when the speaker is visibly untouched and his countenance unruffled.

For the man who has learned his language lesson, some of the stimuli evocative of 'Ouch' may be publicly visible blows and slashes, while others are hidden from the public eye in the depths of his bowels. Society, acting solely on overt manifestations, has been able to train the individual to say the socially proper thing in response even to socially undetectable stimulations. The trick has

depended on prior concomitances between covert stimulation and overt behavior, notably the wincing instinct.

We can imagine a primitive use of 'Red' as a one-word sentence somewhat on a par with 'Ouch'. Just as 'Ouch' is the appropriate remark on the occasion of painful stimulation, so 'Red', under the usage which I am now imagining, is the appropriate remark on the occasion of those distinctive photochemical effects which are wrought in one's retina by the impact of red light. This time society's method of training consists in rewarding the utterance of 'Red' when the individual is seen looking at something red, and penalizing it when he is seen looking at something else.

Actually the uses of 'Red' are less simple. Commonly 'red', unlike 'ouch', turns up as a fragment of longer sentences. Moreover, even when 'Red' is used by itself as a one-word sentence, what evokes it is usually not the mere apprehension of something red; more commonly there has been a verbal stimulus, in the form of a question. But let us keep for a moment to the fictitious usage described in the preceding paragraph; for it, by its similarity to 'Ouch', will help to bring out also a certain contrast.

The critic, society's agent, approves the subject's utterance of 'Red' by observing the subject and his viewed object and finding the latter red. In part, therefore, the critic's cue is red irradiation of his own retina. A partial symmetry obtains between the subject's cue for utterance and the critic's cue for approval in the case of 'Red', which, happily for the critic, was lacking in the case of 'Ouch'. The partial symmetry in the one case, and the lack of it in the other, suggest a certain superficial sense in which 'Ouch' may be spoken of as more subjective in reference than 'Red'; 'Red' more objective than 'Ouch'.

Exceptions are possible on either side. If the critic and the subject are fighting a fire and are scorched by the same sudden gust, then the critic's approval of the subject's 'Ouch' does not differ significantly from the imagined case of 'Red'. Conversely, a critic may approve a subject's 'Red' on indirect evidence, failing to glimpse the object himself. If we call 'Ouch' more subjective than 'Red', we must be taken as alluding thereby only to the most characteristic learning situations. In the case of 'Red', typically one's mentor or critic sees red; in the case of 'Ouch', typically he does not get hurt.

'Ouch' is not independent of social training. One has only to

prick a foreigner to appreciate that it is an English word. But in its subjectivity it is a little unusual. Words being social tools, objectivity counts toward their survival. When a word has considerable currency despite the subjective twist, it may be expected, like the pronouns 'I' and 'you', to have a valuable social function of some exceptional sort. The survival value of 'Ouch', from a social point of view, is as a distress signal. And the word is of only marginal linguistic status, after all, being incapable of integration into longer sentences.

The usual premium on objectivity is well illustrated by 'square'. Each of a party of observers glances at a tile from his own vantage point and calls it square; and each of them has, as his retinal projection of the tile, a scalene quadrilateral which is geometrically dissimilar to everyone else's. The learner of 'square' has to take his chances with the rest of society, and he ends up using the word to suit. Association of 'square' with just the situations in which the retinal projection is square would be simpler to learn, but the more objective usage is, by its very intersubjectivity, what we tend to be exposed to and encouraged in.

In general, if a term is to be learned by induction from observed instances where it is applied, the instances have to resemble one another in two ways: they have to be enough alike from the learner's point of view, from occasion to occasion, to afford him a basis of similarity to generalize upon, and they have to be enough alike from simultaneous distinct points of view to enable the teacher and learner to share the appropriate occasions. A term restricted to squares normal to the line of sight would meet the first requirement only; a term applying to physical squares in all their scalene projections meets both. And it meets both in the same way, in that the points of view available to the learner from occasion to occasion are likewise the points of view available to teacher and learner on simultaneous occasions. Such is the way with terms for observable physical objects generally; and thus it is that such objects are focal to reference and thought.

'Red', unlike 'square', is a happy case where a nearly uniform stimulatory condition is shared by simultaneous observers. All the assembled retinas are irradiated by substantially the same red light, whereas no two of them receive geometrically similar projections of the square. The pull toward objectivity is thus a strong pull away from the subjectively simplest rule of association in the case of

'square', and much less so in the case of 'red'. Hence our readiness to think of color as more subjective than physical shape. But some pull of the same kind occurs even in the case of 'red', insofar as reflections from the environment cause the red object to cast somewhat different tints to different points of view. The objective pull will regiment all the responses still as 'red', by activating myriad corrective cues. These corrective cues are used unconsciously, such is the perfection of our socialization; a painter has even to school himself to set them aside when he tries to reproduce his true retinal intake.

The uniformity that unites us in communication and belief is a uniformity of resultant patterns overlying a chaotic subjective diversity of connections between words and experience. Uniformity comes where it matters socially; hence rather in point of intersubjectively conspicuous circumstances of utterance than in point of privately conspicuous ones. For an extreme illustration of the point, consider two men one of whom has normal color vision and the other of whom is color-blind as between red and green. Society has trained both men by the method noted earlier: rewarding the utterance of 'red' when the speaker is seen fixating something red, and penalizing it in the contrary case. Moreover the gross socially observable results are about alike: both men are pretty good about attributing 'red' to just the red things. But the private mechanisms by which the two men achieve these similar results are very different. The one man has learned 'red' in association with the regulation photochemical effect. The other man has painfully learned to be stimulated to 'red' by light in various wavelengths (red and green) in company with elaborate special combinations of supplementary conditions of intensity, saturation, shape, and setting, calculated e.g. to admit fire and sunsets and to exclude grass; to admit blossoms and exclude leaves; and to admit lobsters only after boiling.

Different persons growing up in the same language are like different bushes trimmed and trained to take the shape of identical elephants. The anatomical details of twigs and branches will fulfill the elephantine form differently from bush to bush, but the overall outward results are alike.