



ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE TREATMENT OF RATIONALIZATION IN FOUR SELECTED PERSUASIVE SPEECH TEXTBOOKS PUBLISHED SINCE 1950

by E. Eugene Williams

The primary purpose of this study was to examine critically the concept of rationalization in order to determine whether or not the unique position taken by Dr. Robert T. Oliver toward the role of rationalization in speech persuasion seemed defensible. Oliver climaxes his concept of rationalization with the statement: "Rationalization, a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means, accounts for perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision."¹

Impetus was given to this particular type of study by an eclectic approach to the problem of rationalization. An entire chapter was devoted to the collecting and winnowing of material concerning rationalization from a number of disciplines. This investigation also dealt with the major contributions of textbook writing in the specific field of speech persuasion as it relates to rationalization. Even though the comparisons and contrasts of these textbooks, all published since 1950, were restricted to the concept of rationalization, nevertheless the research produced some interesting results.

The basic thrust of the study was designed to accomplish three things: (1) to present a survey of existing thought concerning the concept of rationalization; (2) to make a study of the treatment of rationalization in four selected persuasive speech textbooks; and, (3) to point up some areas of needed research.

Chapter One, introductory in nature, indicated the creative design of this study. The writer's definition of rationalization was stated, a statement of the problem was made, procedural methodology was outlined, and a selected list of imposed limitations was given.

Chapter Two presented a survey of selected literature dealing with the concept of rationalization as it appears in various disciplines of study. From this overview there emerged certain basic considerations of rationalization. These considerations included an investigation of the attributes and the functions of rationalization.

Chapter Three presented an analysis of Robert T. Oliver's concept of rationalization as expressed in two of his textbooks, Persuasive Speaking² and The Psychology of Persuasive Speech.³ Dr. Oliver treats the subject of rationalization more comprehensively than any other writer in the field of speech persuasion.

Chapter Four analyzed rationalization in two additional persuasive speaking textbooks. The first of these, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control,⁴ was written

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by Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell and published in 1952. The second, entitled The Art of Persuasion,⁵ is the contribution of Wayne C. Minnick in 1957.

The final chapter of this study offered evaluations of the material analyzed in the three preceding chapters, along with a summation and suggestions for further research.

As a result of this investigation of rationalization, it was the writer's candid persuasion that Dr. Oliver's "80 per cent" figure, referring to the incidence of the use of rationalization in thinking-toward-a-decision, is too high to be defensible. This, of course, remains an opinion for which the writer must assume full responsibility.

Dr. Oliver's more important contribution, it seemed to the writer, was the fact that he placed greater emphasis on the concept of rationalization than other writers in the speech field, an emphasis which seemed warranted in the light of the findings discovered, and an emphasis which may well become a challenge to teachers and writers in the discipline of speech to re-examine their positions in regard to the concept of rationalization. This challenge should become especially acute in the specific field of speech persuasion where the study of motivation is significant.

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 293.

²Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking: Principles and Methods (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950).

³Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, op. cit.

⁴Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952).

⁵Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957).

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CHAPTER I

RATIONALIZATION

Introduction

The term rationalization was introduced by Ernest Jones in 1908 to denote a method of self-justification by which acceptable, rather than real, reasons are given in explanation of behavior. Considerable has been written and, undoubtedly, much more has been said, about the subject of rationalization since 1908. In fact, rationalization emerges into view wherever human beings exist. Seemingly, no one can evade use of it entirely.

The business man who believes that honesty is the best policy while mentally reserving the right to strike it rich by clever duplicity, the politician who takes a bribe, the college student who accepts grading as necessary for ability grouping but does not hesitate to cheat upon occasion, the office worker on an injudicious vacation fling, the basketball player who makes little or no distinction between team loyalty and purposefully playing the game carelessly so as to decrease the victory margin in order to receive an offer from a gambling syndicate, the housewife who shirks her responsibilities in the home, the young lady with the raspy voice who feels it is important

to her self-esteem to be regarded as a talented singer by her friends and who believes that the only reason she is not asked to sing in the church choir is because the director does not like her; these, and many others, usually seek some measure of insulation from emotional hurt, some means of explanation for their conduct. Rationalization, well known ego-defense mechanism, often becomes that protective means.

Definition

Thousands of words have been employed to describe and define the concept of rationalization. And the end is not in sight. To the growing list of definitions the writer adds his own, eclectic in nature and transposed from Chapter Five in order that the reader may have a clearer understanding of what the writer of this paper means when he uses the word rationalization.

Rationalization is a term used to identify certain types of faulty thinking, clothed usually with socially-acceptable, deceptive, and protective explanations, which are thought or spoken in order to produce self-justifiable interpretations of behavior that an objective and impartial analysis would not substantiate.

Definitions of rationalization given by other writers are presented in Chapter Two of this study.

Statement of Purpose

Questions seem to arise naturally when rationalization is discussed. How many persons are certain that they know what is meant when the term rationalization is used? What attributes are associated with the concept of rationalization? How does the process of rationalization function? Is rationalization a form of conscious or unconscious behavior, or both? And what are the values and the educational implications of rationalization? Is there some known yardstick by which the use of rationalization can be measured? Is rationalization a valid concept when dealing with certain types of faulty thinking, or is it merely an innocuous label? These are but several of the many questions that might be raised concerning rationalization. This study is an attempt to provide answers to some of these questions. If in the process of doing this additional inquiries, germane to the subject, are discovered, this paper will have served to meet a secondary objective.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine critically the concept of rationalization in order to determine whether or not the position taken by Dr. Robert T. Oliver toward the role of rationalization in speech persuasion seems defensible. Dr. Oliver postulates that "Rationalization, a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means, accounts for perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision."¹

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 293.

Does Dr. Oliver tend to give a meaning to the concept of rationalization that is similar to the meanings offered by other writers? Is his suggested 80 per cent figure for the incidence of rationalization in thinking-toward-a-decision too extreme, or is it seemingly justifiable? These and other questions are dealt with in this study.

Significance of Study

This particular type of study is both distinctive and relevant. It is distinctive inasmuch as it has never been done before. It is relevant because both rationalization and speech persuasion are important aspects of the everyday life of most people.

Added significance is given to the writing of this paper because of its eclectic approach to the subject of rationalization. An entire chapter is devoted to the collecting and winnowing of material concerning rationalization taken from a number of study disciplines. Rationalization is common and somewhat difficult to identify. Therefore, an investigation of its role in various disciplines should be worthy subject matter for research. This part of the study, which encompassed a span of more than three years, served the secondary purpose of building up a sizable library of books dealing with the subject of rationalization for the writer. In addition, it has produced material for an extensive bibliography.

The tendency very often is to assume that the concept of rationalization is commonly understood, and to imply a

generally accepted meaning when reference to rationalization is made. An attempt to check the validity of this assumption should add to the significance of this study.

Rationalization has been neglected by the majority of the writers of general speech textbooks. They tend to overlook this defense mechanism entirely, or to treat it rather superficially. Perhaps this study may serve in a small way to accentuate interest in the concept of rationalization among the writers of speech textbooks.

Another significant feature of this particular study is that it deals with what generally is considered to be the major contributions of textbook writing in the field of speech persuasion. This is true because of the limited number of persuasive speech textbooks published. Even though the comparisons and contrasts of these textbooks, all published since 1950, are restricted to the concept of rationalization, nevertheless the research produced in this study indicates some interesting results.

Last but not least, and in close relationship to the primary purpose of this paper, it is significant to consider carefully the rather unique position of Robert T. Oliver toward rationalization as it is presented in his textbooks on persuasive speaking.

Limitations Imposed

This is a creative thesis. As such it makes no direct attempt to carry out an experimental approach to the problem. This is also a master's thesis. This fact,

coupled with time limitations, restrained the writer from making a more comprehensive survey of the literature dealing with the subject of rationalization. The desire on the part of the writer to use an eclectic approach to the content of Chapter Two necessitated a degree of selectivity. It would have been impossible to have read everything written about rationalization in such disciplines as psychiatry, psychology, social psychology, sociology, education, philosophy, speech, advertising, and journalism. The choice was made, for example, to eliminate consideration of the process of rationalization in the abnormal or diseased mind. Emphasis instead was placed upon rationalization within motivational and communicational frameworks.

Further limitations were imposed when the decision was made by the writer to narrow his investigation within the speech field to textbooks written in the field of speech persuasion per se. Further limitations, although of lesser importance, were made when publication dates for these textbooks were restricted to the decade of 1950 to 1960. This choice gave the benefit of modern scholarship and, at the same time, did not exclude any major contributions other than Oliver's first edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech.² This omission was not serious inasmuch as his later books, Persuasive Speaking,³ and his second edition

²Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942).

³Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking: Principles and Methods (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950).

of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech,⁴ incorporated the material included in the 1942 publication.

The decision to select textbooks from the field of speech persuasion entirely, rather than to broaden the approach to include argumentation and debate textbooks, was made for two reasons. The first of these reasons is a general one; the second is more specific. In the first place, persuasive speaking deals with all three of the outstanding resources of the public speaking process -- the logical, the ethical, and the motivational (psychological or non-logical). In other words, it uses "all available means of persuasion" to borrow an Aristotelian phrase. Argumentation and debate textbooks consider the logical aspects primarily and, thus, were not as useful as persuasive speech textbooks for this particular study. Secondly, the statement made by Oliver which served as a strong motivating factor as mentioned in the statement of purpose is found in a textbook of persuasive speech. The challenge of determining whether the Oliverian "80 per cent estimate" of the use of rationalization in thinking-toward-a-decision was defensible or not played an important role in this aspect of imposed limitations.

Textbooks, other than the two published by Oliver, chosen in the persuasive speaking area that are analyzed in this study are Persuasion, A Means of Social Control by

⁴Oliver, loc. cit.

Brembeck and Howell,⁵ and The Art of Persuasion by Minnick.⁶ It obviously is not the purpose of the writer of this paper to try to prove that one persuasive speech textbook is more meritorious than another in any respect. Instead, the aim is to learn what these authors have attempted to do with the concept of rationalization as it relates to the speech field specifically.

In making the final evaluations and stating the conclusions of Chapter Five, the writer will have to assume full responsibility, and he wishes to place no greater value upon his interpretations and evaluations than the findings of this study would warrant. If results of this study are not as definitive as some would desire, it is due partially to the nature of the problem and to the type of thesis being presented. This, it is felt, should not hinder the study from being made providing these limitations are pointed out beforehand. This the writer has both desired and attempted to do.

Method of Procedure

A comparison of the title of this study with the table of contents reveals that the title, "A Study of the Treatment of Rationalization in Four Selected Persuasive Speech Textbooks Published Since 1950," is somewhat more

⁵Winston Lamont Brembeck and William Smiley Howell, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952).

⁶Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957).

modest than the contents would indicate. Two things contribute to this: the complexity of the phenomenon involved, and the writer's incapability to do justice to this complexity without the advantage of more extensive empirical data. In spite of these limitations and obstacles, it is hoped that this study will accomplish three things: (1) present a survey of existing thought concerning the concept of rationalization; (2) do precisely what is suggested in the title; and, (3) point up some areas of needed research.

In order to accomplish these aims and to get this study underway, an assumption is made at the outset that something exists that people identify as rationalization. There seems to be no standard yardstick to measure it, and no absolute means of detecting it when it is being used. This does not imply, however, that it is impossible of being identified or studied.

Rationalization is an important phenomenon and as such is worthy subject matter for investigation. The procedural methodology employed in this paper is basically outlined in the above paragraph dealing with intended accomplishments. Within the four chapters that follow this one, the writings of others are climaxed by the setting forth of certain conclusions reached by the writer of this paper regarding rationalization.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF SELECTED LITERATURE DEALING WITH RATIONALIZATION AS FOUND IN VARIOUS DISCIPLINES OF STUDY

Rationalizing--a term adopted from the psychologists by the general public--has become a popular catchword. In the process of becoming a catchword, it has lost considerable of its original perspicuity.

It is, therefore, the purpose of this chapter to review the literature in those disciplines of study where the term is commonly used in the hope that rationalization can be explained carefully and illustrated concretely. Foremost among such disciplines are: psychology, psychiatry, social psychology, speech, advertising, English literature, education and sociology.

Some controversy exists among certain writers in these various disciplines as to whether rationalizing occurs primarily on the conscious level or on the unconscious level. Many, using traditional definitions, have tended to emphasize social acceptability as the hallmark of rationalization. Others have believed that it was not social conformity so much as internal consistency, or coherence, that characterizes this mechanism. There are disagreements. However, for the most part, there is concurrence of opinion

and this has tended to yield important data on many facets of the rationalization concept.

Basic Considerations

Among the authorities from whom definitions of rationalization were excerpted there is general agreement that rationalization is a process of self-justification, a method of explaining in pseudo-rational form the errors in judgment, the inconsistencies, the mistakes which we attempt to cover by a facade of both good and "acceptable" reasons. As Robert T. Oliver points out:

Rationalization exists because our potentialities far out-run our abilities. It is a bridge linking our primitive past with our ideally intellectual future. Our animalistic residues cause actions which are unacceptable to our humanistic intellect. We can neither forgo the actions nor reconcile ourselves to them. Hence, we find explanations which will make these actions seem other than they are. This process of spreading a protective veil of verbalization over the naked fabric of elemental fact is what we mean by rationalization.¹

In other words, rationalization is the technique of inventing acceptable interpretations of behavior which an impartial analysis would not substantiate. Oliver defines rationalization as:

. . . a device of respectability by which we human beings protect and pamper our egos. It is a process of reasoning designed not to discover or to defend what may be true, but to discover and defend what we should like to represent as true. It is the colored glasses through which we look at reality. It is a preference for "good" reasons for explaining what we have done

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), p. 184.

or failed to do. It is a process of justifying ourselves, our groups, and our beliefs.²

Rationalization becomes, then, the intellectualized defense of that which a person decidedly desires to believe. As such, it is faulty reasoning. This was stressed by Percival Symonds as follows:

Rationalization may be defined as faulty thinking which serves to disguise or hide the unconscious motives of behavior and feeling. Rationalization, therefore, takes its place as another one of the defense mechanisms--a defense against having to recognize unconscious motivation in everyday life. It is a device frequently resorted to by many a person in attempting to reassure himself of his own prestige. It is a way of fooling oneself, or making oneself seem more able, more successful, more moral, and more honorable than one really is. Rationalization is the blanket which we throw over our own infirmities and weaknesses so that it will not be necessary for us to have to face them directly.³

In his definition of rationalization, Symonds refers to "unconscious motives" and "unconscious motivation." To determine whether the process of rationalization is conscious for the most part or unconscious for the most part is another important aspect that is dealt with by authorities in the various disciplines as they define the mechanism of rationalization.

Kimball Young, for example, indicates that rationalization is often the expression of unconscious desires:

²Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking: Principles and Methods (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), p. 131.

³Percival M. Symonds, The Dynamics of Human Adjustment (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1946), p. 454.

. . . people soon learn to make excuses or justify their acts to others and to themselves. We call this habitual pattern rationalization. It is a means of keeping peace with ourselves and our fellows when our actual but often unconscious desires and their expression, were they fully known, would make us ridiculous, disliked, or even the subject of punishment by those in power. We all seek to justify our behavior. Most of the "reasons" we give ourselves and others are not the genuine causes of our conduct but are the excuses which we imagine will be acceptable to others and, incidentally, to ourselves. The real or genuine reasons are often hidden from us.⁴

Young's socio-psychological viewpoint amplifies an earlier statement by the psychologist, Everett Dean Martin, who once observed that "any behavior which is motivated by an unconscious wish is very likely to give rise to rationalizations of one sort or another."⁵

W. N. Brigance, in a 1927 publication, under a paragraph heading in which he indicated that we tend to make wish the father of thought, stated that much of rationalization is "purely unconscious self-deception."⁶

Sigmund Freud, Viennese neurologist and psychologist and the founder of psychoanalysis who has exerted a profound influence upon modern art, literature, and philosophy as well as on psychology and medicine, had considerable to say about the concept of rationalization and its relation

⁴Kimball Young, Personality and Problems of Adjustment (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1940), pp. 121-22.

⁵Everett Dean Martin, Psychology: What It Has To Teach You About Yourself and Your World (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1924), p. 56.

⁶William Norwood Brigance, The Spoken Word (New York: F. C. Crofts and Co., 1927), p. 172.

to unconscious motives. In his original formulation of rationalization, Freud noted that it results from partial failure of repression. He saw it as a tendency of the ego to justify and defend Id impulses to oneself and to others. The term rationalization, of course, has become widely used by clinicians in the sense of explaining and justifying the acts and urges we feel do not have full social approval. The latter action takes place on the conscious level when "justification" or "explanations" are offered, when "good" reasons rather than "real" reasons are presented.

Concerning Freud, Symonds points out:

He explained that we find it difficult to accept dreams which are too distorted and that there is the necessity for modifying them to give them greater apparent reality. This attempt to make the products of our unconscious agree with reality he calls a form of rationalization. It is obvious, therefore, that even the long list of illustrations given above does not begin to show the extent to which we piece out our unconscious motives with the clothing of rational explanations in everyday life.⁷

Stagner and Karwoski refer to the Freudian approach in their book entitled Psychology:

Freudian theory states that Id impulses demanding selfish gratifications come into conflict with Superego impulses forbidding such behavior. The area of conflict between the two desires is the area in which the Ego functions. We have proposed . . . a way of understanding how the Ego may achieve satisfaction for an Id impulse by avoiding a head-on collision between it and the Superego requirements. Here is an amusing example: Little Johnny's mother had baked some cookies. As she left the house, she said, "Johnny, you must not take any of the cookies." So Johnny went next

⁷Symonds, op. cit., p. 458.

door and got his playmate. They went to the cookie jar and Johnny said, "Eddie, you take two cookies and give me one." Thus he obeyed the letter of his mother's command, while still getting what he wanted.

Rationalization is thus a process of redefining a situation, of changing the nature of the external world so that laws and other restraining influences are said not to apply to this instance.⁸

Tendencies toward over-generalizing and over-simplifying are often prevalent when the concept of rationalization is being considered. Stagner and Karwoski tend in that direction in their treatment of this subject. But they are not alone in following a single thesis for the most part (i.e., "The common core of all these and many other rationalizations is an attempt to distort the perceived situation so as to evade the conflict.")⁹ Lawrence E. Cole levels the same criticism, in a sense, upon the Freudian approach to the problem of rationalization:

Typically, we act or apprehend directly, immediately. A Freudian would add, "from unconscious motives;" Kempf would phrase it, "impelled by autonomic strivings," and Allport might phrase it, "in accordance with our prepotent habit systems." Even where, as is frequently the case, we (the actors) are able to observe and report an intervening sequence of deliberative responses we must remember that these, too, are actions of a sort; and there is no obvious reason to posit a special type of control simply because the deliberative responses are implicit. If unconscious (and psychological) factors regulate those which constitute the "streams of consciousness." . . . The question, "Why did you do that?" calls for a personal-social form of reasoning, for a justification, for an interpretation of one's conduct that will arouse approval in the hearer. And in

⁸Ross Stagner and T. F. Karwoski, Psychology (1st ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1952), p. 503.

⁹Ibid., p. 504.

our own case we are prone to assign rather worthy motives; our whole "set" when our thought turns to our own status, our guiding "fiction" of ourself, tends to preclude any consideration of certain types of motives (i.e., certain roles, functions, goals, drives). In rationalizing our conduct we are giving something less than an objective description of our conduct; we are the attorney for the defense, not an impartial judge.

From our own analysis it would appear that the Freudians have covered but one special instance of rationalization. Few of us can contribute critical essays to the current magazines on "The Pulse of Modern Life," and yet we are all in and of this stream of modern activity, our own acts are a part of the tide. To say that we are unconscious of the forces which sweep us into action may mean that we are incapable of making an analysis of them; we need not invoke ego, libido, and Id, to describe this fact.

And although the Freudian's assurance to his patient that he is of course totally unaware of the Oedipus complex may make the patient more ready to accept these "monsters of the unconscious" as a part of his make-up, we need not assume that this same type of "unconsciousness" is the root of all rationalizing.¹⁰

Cole's position sounds a note of warning against the danger of taking a position to either extreme. Rationalization is neither all unconscious nor is it all conscious action. It is both. This aspect of rationalization has received considerable attention in this chapter for two reasons. First of all, there seems to be a great deal of hedging among the authorities on this subject. Secondly, as Vernon Rank informs his readers, rationalization is according to Charles M. Harsh and H. G. Schrickel, and to himself, only a part of the total process of unconscious-conscious activity.

¹⁰Lawrence Edwin Cole, General Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill Cook Co., Inc., 1939), pp. 548-50.

Whether the process of rationalization is conscious or unconscious in another problem in its definition. That there are difficulties on this point becomes obvious when one examines the definitions of a number of writers. Harsh and Schrickel say that "Rationalization is the concoction of consciously acceptable (ego approved) 'reasons' or motives to cover up unconscious impulses and motives which the ego and others cannot accept." "People," they add, "come to know when one of them is rationalizing, yet they expect and approve such rationalizations." Kimball Young indicates that most rationalization is unconscious. Stueart H. Britt lists rationalization among the "unconscious" factors in the influence of other persons upon us, along with compensation, regression, identification and projection. However, he later changes his position by saying that they are "largely" unconscious factors. In fact, this point receives a good bit of hedging among the authorities.

Quietly unnoticed in many definitions which stressed the unconscious aspects of rationalization there is the inference that somewhere or at some time in the process the Ego becomes aware of blameworthiness of unconscious motivations, and (recognizing that something is not altogether according to Hoyle) an alibi--a reasonable explanation--is then offered. According to Harsh and Schrickel, rationalization is but part of a total process--the conscious part appearing at the terminus of unconscious impulses or motives, possibly occurring at the vague "boundary" between the Super-ego and the Ego. To this writer the idea seems plausible. Elsewhere among those who write on Rationalization there is vagueness as to the conscious-unconscious aspect.¹¹

Thus, it would appear, there is no hiatus between the conscious and the unconscious activity in rationalization. Both aspects are apt to be involved in any given rationalization. When one leaves off, the other begins. The subliminal impulse gives way to the conscious explanation. The explanation, of course, can be the justification to one's

¹¹Vernon E. Bank, "Rationalization As a Factor in Communication," Today's Speech, IV, No. 2 (April, 1956), pp. 10-11.

self or to others. It can be done briefly, almost automatically, or it can be done elaborately and with great emotional feeling and finesse. That the conscious and the unconscious meet does not imply necessarily that their coming together takes place in a harmonious setting. In fact, the opposite is usually the case. There is conflict, especially between the unconscious forces of the Id and the Super-ego. This conflict produces tension and the attempt to reduce the tension sets the stage for the rationalization process.

Eric Berne refers to this conflict and its relationship to rationalization as follows:

The decisions of a human being may therefore be made consciously or unconsciously. Conscious decisions are regulated, we like to think, by the Reality Principle and the conscious conscience. Unconscious decisions may be simplified and energy saved by means of habit in the case of actions which have little emotional significance. In most emotional situations, decisions depend on the result of the conflict between the unconscious forces of the Super-ego and the Id. Once the decision has been made without the individual being aware of the real forces behind it, he takes upon himself the task of finding justifications for it and convincing himself and others that it has been made in accordance with the realities of the situation. This is called "rationalization."¹²

Berne, a well-trained psychoanalytic psychiatrist who follows in the Freudian tradition, also observes: "A human being is a living energy system whose tensions give rise to wishes which it is his task to gratify without getting into trouble with himself, other people, or the world around

¹²Eric Berne, The Mind In Action (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), pp. 65-66.

him."¹³ In referring to Berne and his contribution to the rationalization concept, Oliver remarks:

In another passage Berne declares, "The problem of a human being is the same as the problem of an energy system, namely to 'find' the path of least resistance for the discharge of tension." This process of finding the path of least resistance or of most comfortable release (rationalization) is vastly different from finding the path of reality (along which the individual might be projected directly away from his own concept of his own well-being). Psychiatrically, then, rationalization consists of "finding justifications" for the "discharge of tension" that has been built up by the discovery of the individual that what he is thinking or doing is in conflict with what is socially approved. In such an instance the individual hastily concocts an "explanation" that will gloss over his real motivation in socially respectable terms. It is by precisely this process, psychiatrists declare, that our sexual and homicidal desires, which assert themselves freely during sleep, are masked in conventionally acceptable dream symbols.¹⁴

The search to discover explanations which cover the real reasons in socially acceptable terms is a vital aspect of the process of rationalization. It would not be "acceptable" were it not "respectable." Thus, rationalization needs a cloak of respectability. This is provided when the one who rationalizes adopts the form of logical reasoning. It is only the form of reasoning that he follows; he does not reason logically. He imitates. He assigns to his emotionalized stream of thoughts what he alleges to be rational motives and arguments. These arguments and explanations he

¹³Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁴Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d. ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 277.

uses to justify his nonrational, or nonlogical, beliefs and desires. To make the whole process appear respectable he tries to use the best form of logical reasoning that he can find. Oliver confirms this when he says:

Far from flouting reason or denying it, rationalization pays to reasoning the sincerest tribute of imitation. As H. L. Hollingworth explained in The Psychology of the Audience, "It is not quite true that the average man reasons scarcely at all. On the contrary, he has a passion for argument, and prides himself in it; but he reasons stupidly. He mistakes coincidence for proof, correlation for causality, confidence for necessity, publicity for expertness, and appearance for reality. Habit, suggestion, and imitation constitute his instruments of thinking, as distinguished from his emotional reactions, and his inadequate background of knowledge, coupled with the urgency of his needs, makes him the ready prey of the faker and charlatan." As Hollingworth has so specifically indicated, the processes of rationalization parallel those of reason. To most of us in most situations they appear to be reason. Since man prides himself upon being a reasoning creature, rationalization could not achieve its primary purpose (the preservation of self-pride) unless it did assume the respectable aspect of seeming to be reasonable. One of the commonest uses of rationalization is denial that it is being used. It can only fulfill its function of protecting and pampering the ego when the ego blinds itself to the fact that it is rationalizing.¹⁵

Hollingworth, to whom Oliver refers, also points out that "we would, it seems, prefer them (our neighbors) to think that we ourselves believe on the grounds of the logical arguments. Social education, indeed, has taught us that there is something childish about an attitude that lacks cogent support."¹⁶ So we attempt to give our attitudes

¹⁵Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., pp. 131-32.

¹⁶H. L. Hollingworth, The Psychology of the Audience (New York: American Book Co., 1935), p. 112.

and our actions the "reasonable" support they need. James Harvey Robinson emphasizes this in his book, The Mind in the Making, as he mentions that literally thousands of argumentative volumes have been written in order to vent a grudge, and regardless of how majestic their reasoning, they are largely rationalizations.¹⁷ Vilfredo Pareto, the Italian sociologist, goes so far as to conclude that rationalized beliefs and customs are the basis for all the social sciences.¹⁸

According to Ewbank and Auer there is a human desire to "be rational."

As has been said elsewhere we are apt to be more emotional than rational but we like to believe that we are, and seem to be, purely rational. Indeed, we may become quite emotional when told the contrary! Hence, in pursuing any given course of action, if we are to keep our self-esteem, we may be led subconsciously to rationalize.¹⁹

People like to think of themselves as reasonable. They desire that others would think of them as reasonable human beings, too. As J. K. Horner describes it:

This accounts for the fact that most people do not reason things out and then act accordingly, but they act according to desire and intrust to a fertile imagination the job of finding an appropriate reason to fit the circumstances. In other

¹⁷James Harvey Robinson, The Mind in the Making (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1921), p. 45.

¹⁸Vilfredo Pareto, The Mind and Society, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Borgiomo and Livingston (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1935), I, p. 178.

¹⁹Henry Lee Ewbank and J. Jeffery Auer, Discussion and Debate (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1941), p. 58.

words, they do not make their acts fit their reasons, but they make their reasons fit their acts.²⁰

Rationalization, then, is a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means. This should not imply that all false reasoning is rationalization. Rather, it means that all rationalization is fallacious reasoning. It is faulty thinking. Concerning this fact, Symonds writes:

Rationalization is fundamentally fallacious thinking. In terms of the syllogism, rationalization is a selection of facts that can be used as minor premises in order to justify certain conclusions already reached. One notes three things in this analysis of the process of rationalization: first, that the conclusion is given. Usually this is an act performed, since rationalizations are very frequently explanations justifying behavior which has already taken place. Second, in a rationalization the major premise is also given, and with this no particular fault is found, except that it may not always be a sound generalization. The essential feature of rationalization is the search for a particular circumstance to be used for the minor premise which, taken with the major premise, will lead decisively to the conclusion. Rationalization, therefore, represents a selection of possible circumstances or reasons which will justify the course of action already pursued.

For example, Max comes late to school and on being sent to the office of the principal finds it necessary to have a reason for his lateness. Lateness is the action which must be justified. Among the real reasons are the boy's dislike of school, the pressure that he is under at home to make a good record, and the convenient way of showing his hostility toward his parents provided by the demerits he receives. Max, however, is only vaguely aware of the former reason and is entirely unaware of the latter. When faced with the necessity of finding an excuse to satisfy the principal, he begins to search for a reputable one. First, it is necessary to persuade himself that it was not possible for him to get to school any earlier: "Yes, as I was coming down the walk

²⁰J. K. Horner, Elements of Public Speech (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1929), p. 98.

I noticed a trolley car just leaving, and it was five minutes before the next one came. I am sure that there must have been a delay in the street-car service." This seems reasonably convincing to him, and so he plans to use it as his excuse. The syllogism in this instance would run something like this: Major premise--if there is a delay in the street-car service, I shall be late to school. Minor premise--there was a delay. Conclusion--therefore, I was late to school.

The distinction between a rationalization and correct thinking is the distinction commonly made between the good and the real reason. The real reason is the state of affairs essentially and necessarily connected with the conclusion which is to be justified. A good reason is a circumstance selected out of many that could have been chosen which contains a superficial or concomitant explanation.

In this analysis, the implication is that certain facts are overlooked, and necessarily so, since they are repressed and therefore are facts of which the individual is unaware. In rationalization there is a disproportion of emphasis. Uncomfortable facts are disregarded in favor of ones which will not serve as deep-seated threats to the essential integrity of the person concerned.²¹

The emphasis upon highly-motivated and conflict-laden courses of thought and action rather than upon calm, objective, judicious, conceptual thinking should make it evident why so much of human thinking deserves to be called rationalization instead of sound logical reasoning.

Lawrence Cole observes: "All the fallacies of classical logic are committed in the name of rationalization."²²

It is little wonder that the old judge advised his young successor, "Give your decisions. Never give your

²¹Symonds, op. cit., pp. 454-55.

²²Lawrence E. Cole, Human Behavior: Psychology As A Bio-Social Science (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Co., 1953), p. 634.

reasons. The decisions will be just, the reasons incorrect."²³

Attributes of Rationalization

In considering the attributes of rationalization, some writers point out that there are certain characteristics which help to identify the process. Webster's Dictionary defines the word "attribute" as "that which is attributed, as a quality or character ascribed to, or inherent in, a person or thing; as mercy is an attribute of God."²⁴ This dictionary uses the words "quality," "characteristic," and "attribute" as if they were practically synonymous terms. Only slight distinctions are made. Quality applies to that which is predicable of anything as one of its characteristics; a characteristic is a mark or quality which distinguishes; whereas, an attribute is defined as an essential or inherent quality. These terms are used interchangeably by writers whose aim is to identify rationalization, and to recognize it when it occurs--either in our own thinking or in that of others.

Characterized by inflexibility.--According to Percival M. Symonds, "Rationalization as a method of thought is characterized in general by inflexibility, fixity, and stubbornness."²⁵ Symonds arrives at this conclusion

²³Ibid., p. 636.

²⁴Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (5th ed.; Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1946), p. 70.

²⁵Symonds, op. cit., p. 456.

because the person rationalizing must protect his reasoning artificially. He is not in a position to search for possible explanations from which he might select one that appears to be, by all the canons of logic, most fundamental. In the process of reasoning artificially, a person often relies upon the force of his assertion and the stubbornness with which he holds to his reason. Rationalization is generally inflexible because it usually is associated with the arousal of emotion, and emotion, Symonds points out, "notoriously leads to an exaggeration of response and inflexibility."²⁶ In this analysis, the implication is that certain facts are overlooked, consciously or unconsciously. This leads to a disproportion of emphasis characterized by inflexibility.

Consequently, rationalization functions as one of the major obstacles to social change. This becomes noticeable when it is realized that rationalization makes a person feel comfortable by helping avoid painful explanations and by justifying his own behavior and existing social practices and attitudes. Sargent and Williamson deal with this aspect of rationalization from the social psychological viewpoint in their book under the chapter heading, "Motives, Conflicts, and Defenses."²⁷

Vernon Rank makes mention of the fact that Paul C. Glick and Kimball Young conducted a study of one thousand

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷S. Stansfeld Sargent and Robert C. Williamson, Social Psychology (2d ed.; New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958), p. 183.

University of Wisconsin men and women students in an attempt to delineate the rationalizations which people give for inflexibility in maintaining religious attitudes. These students represented Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths. Their religious attitudes were found to correlate with the range and extent of their social contacts. Students who had been conditioned by a wide range of social contacts were more tolerant and flexible in their attitudes toward other religious faiths than were those whose experience had been limited with closely-knit in-groups. Rationalizations of the latter group were quite inflexible. The investigators, according to Rank, found among this second group "a tendency to indulge in what Allport refers to as the 'Impression of Universality'--a feeling that everyone ought to feel as they did."²⁸

Symonds' statement that "Rationalization as a method of thought is characterized in general by inflexibility, fixity, and stubbornness," should not imply consistency in the behavior of the one who rationalizes. In fact, the very opposite is generally the case. Symonds makes this clear when he says:

The person who rationalizes, for instance, is usually inconsistent. He may stand for liberalism in philosophy but he is quite reactionary in his political or economic view. He may stand for social security and be an active worker in various charitable enterprises, but when it comes to passage of laws which would limit the income of a corporation in which he has invested or which would increase his taxes, he takes a very reactionary stand. It

²⁸Rank, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

is almost as though barriers were erected in his mind preventing him from seeing the essential relation between his point of view with regard to social security, on the one hand, and the necessity for the redistribution of wealth on the other. The same person will claim that cigarettes steady his nerves and stimulate him.²⁹

Symonds goes on to say:

The extent to which a person avoids rationalization in his thinking can be determined by the consistency of his thought. If in discussion one uncovers certain inconsistencies that the other person fails to recognize, or, recognizing them, attempts to justify further, one may suspect that rationalization is at work.

For instance, Mr. M., who is at a bridge party where it is proposed that they play for small stakes, refuses on the grounds that it is against his principles. On other occasions, however, it has been noticed that Mr. M. is willing to compromise in one situation, one may suspect that there is some unexpressed reason behind the refusal to do so when playing bridge. Perhaps at the bottom of his expressed conviction is some deep-seated feeling with regard to playing for money which outweighs any possible gain in wealth or prestige.³⁰

The characteristic of stubbornness or inflexibility found in rationalization is cited by James Harvey Robinson in his book, The Mind In the Making, along with some explanations as to why this characteristic occurs.

A third kind of thinking is stimulated when anyone questions our beliefs and opinions. We sometimes find ourselves changing our minds without any resistance or heavy emotion, but if we are told that we are wrong we resent the imputation and harden our hearts. We are incredibly heedless in the formation of our beliefs, but find ourselves filled with an illicit passion for them when anyone proposes to rob us of their companionship. It is obviously not the ideas themselves that are dear to

²⁹Symonds, op. cit., p. 456.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 456-57.

us, but our self-esteem, which is threatened. We are by nature stubbornly pledged to defend our own from attack, whether it be our person, our family, our property, or our opinion. A United States Senator once remarked to a friend of mine that God Almighty could not make him change his mind on our Latin-American policy. We may surrender, but rarely confess ourselves vanquished. In the intellectual world at least peace is without victory.

Few of us take the pains to study the origin of our cherished convictions; indeed, we have a natural repugnance to so doing. We like to continue to believe what we have been accustomed to accept as true, and the resentment aroused when doubt is cast upon any of our assumptions leads us to seek every manner of excuse for clinging to them. The result is that most of our so-called reasoning consists in finding arguments for going on believing as we already do.³¹

The logic-tight-compartment tendency of the mind supports the characteristic of inflexibility in the process of rationalization. In fact, the term, "logic-tight-compartment" of the mind, has been used as a rather picturesque description of the mental processes of selecting "reasons" in rationalization. Some authors have referred to this tendency as "a form of rationalization in which the individual is impervious to facts that do not conform to his own preconceptions and in which his reactions are predetermined by mind sets."³² People who divide their minds into "logic-tight-compartments" generally accept things on authority rather than investigate all of the aspects and implications of their beliefs. They act in a contradictory manner; they do or say one thing in a particular situation,

³¹Robinson, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

³²Charles E. Benson et al., Psychology for Teachers (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1926), p. 341.

and then do or say the reverse in another situation. Conflict between these contradictions is avoided in the logic-tight-compartmental thinking process by keeping them apart in the mind. "A certain system of ideas," according to Ruch, "is sealed off, as it were, and allowed to function in isolation from other conflicting ideas."³³ This tendency to show dissociation in their mental processes is found in people who rationalize. Regardless of the means employed, or the motive behind the action, rationalization, is in general, characterized by inflexibility, fixity, and stubbornness.

Rationalization is passionate.--"It is," in the words of Oliver, "argument with heat."³⁴ Argument with heat is usually characterized by rationalization. A person becomes emotionally aroused when he is defending what he wants to believe. "We see things not as they are but as we are."³⁵

It is difficult, consequently, to distinguish the emotional factors which direct or restrict our thinking since emotional reactions are consistently a part of an integrated situation. They do not exist as discrete entities. Ewbank and Auer support this view by saying:

³³Floyd L. Ruch, Psychology and Life (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1937), p. 354.

³⁴Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.), p. 279.

³⁵G. T. W. Parker, quoted by Kimball Young, Social Psychology (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1930), p. 33.

Emotional behavior, experience, and the specific situation are inextricably interwoven. That is to say, our emotionalized thinking comes from a background or "frame of reference" of confused ideologies, stereotypes, and inhibitions. From the day a baby can understand the spoken word he is subject to propagandas, pressures, and restrictions, all of which will inevitably shape his future approach to such problems as war and peace, government, sex, race, and religion. The thought processes of the individual are colored by this background from which he thinks, and when he participates in discussion and debate these colorations and aberrations are not only present but . . . they are often intensified.³⁶

Within this matrix of emotionalized thinking the tendency to rationalize emerges. Rationalization represents a mode of expression for this type of thinking, according to Ewbank and Auer.³⁷

Generally speaking, rationalization is accompanied by or follows the arousal of emotion. Symonds identifies this as a means of detecting rationalization.

Another sure method of detecting rationalization is by noting the amount of emotion shown during a discussion. A person who rationalizes is almost sure to lose his temper if the adequacy of the reasons which he gives is questioned. The man who is not rationalizing meets challenges on their merits and pits one argument against another with a flexibility and a willingness to change his position, giving reputable explanations for doing so.³⁸

It is not only when there is a loss of temper or when a person is challenged as to the adequacy of his reasoning in any given situation that rationalization is "inextricably interwoven" with emotional behavior. There is a great deal

³⁶Ewbank and Auer, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

³⁷Ibid., p. 56.

³⁸Symonds, op. cit., p. 467.

of interaction between the two as Oliver, Cortright, and Hager point out in their book, The New Training For Effective Speech.

We play at thinking just as seriously as children play at "keeping house," and are just as irritated when some observer points out that it is only a game. To a great extent we insist upon acting emotionally, but at the same time we insist upon pretending, to ourselves as well as to others, that we are acting reasonably. Rationalization is the means by which the gap is bridged; it is a process of delivering emotion in the wrappings and under the label of logic. As such it ought to be combated by a "pure speech law." It is vastly more dangerous than emotional appeals, for, although they result in a great deal of our action, they are at least strenuously defended as being truly logical; they are likely to deceive their promulgators as well as their recipients. The whole process of rationalization may be very strongly condemned on strictly academic grounds, but this judgment should be modified by one all-important fact. As has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, rationalization does have an important function to perform. The nature of man is such that he will generally act only because of emotional considerations. This is true whether his action is self induced or is the result of external persuasion. But he has a higher ambition than this. He wants to be, and to be considered, a creature of logical thinking. He spurns an emotional appeal that is frankly and openly presented as such. He demands that it be camouflaged as logic. As a result, a great deal of rationalization is used. The public speaker, however, should use it only with this strict precaution: be sure that your speech is solidly based upon a factual and logical examination of the problem you are considering, and present to your audience just as reasonable a discussion as it is capable of receiving.

Rationalization is so extensively indulged in because people tend to believe only what they wish to believe.

F. H. Lund reports the striking results of a series of experiments which verify this conclusion, in an article on "The Psychology of Belief" printed in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology, for April, 1925. Several hundred individuals, most of whom were college students, were given a list of

propositions to judge. On one occasion they were asked to rate them for their degree of desirability; in other words, how strongly did they wish them to be true? On another occasion, when they would presumably no longer recall the results of their first rating, they were asked to list the propositions in the order in which they were credible; in other words, what degree of truth was there in the statements? A comparison of the two ratings showed that there was a very close correlation between them. These several hundred individuals, of more than average education and intelligence, had clearly demonstrated that they believed what they wished to believe.³⁹

It is interesting to note, also, that McBurney, O'Neill and Mills, in dealing with the subject of motivation in argument, speak of a close correlation between emotional desires and rationalizations. They describe a rationalization as "an emotionally-aroused conclusion that is rendered plausible on pseudo-logical grounds."⁴⁰

Although audiences are more likely to be influenced by appeals to emotional tendencies and drives than by intellectual appeals, they prefer to believe that they are acting logically. In this situation, resourceful speakers, including demagogues, give their listeners a rationalization, which is an emotionally-aroused conclusion that is rendered plausible on pseudo-logical grounds. Persons often do what they desire to do, and then they seek reasons for doing it. We do not suggest that a student speaker adopt the ethics as well as the devices of rabble-rousers. However, there are times when an audience can be moved to accept an ethically sound proposition by emotional means only, but it wants some seemingly logical justification for its action. However unfortunate the fact may be, it is certain that most audience decisions are

³⁹Robert T. Oliver, Rupert L. Cortright, and Cyril F. Hager, The New Training for Effective Speech (rev. ed.; New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1946), pp. 360-61.

⁴⁰James H. McBurney, James M. O'Neill, and Glen E. Mills, Argumentation and Debate: Techniques of a Free Society (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), pp. 152-53.

influenced more by desires than by evidence. A speaker can satisfy his audience and justify himself by determining the motives in his audience, associating them with his proposition, and then presenting his logical support.

One who wishes to be a critical thinker must be able to detect the use of rationalization in communication. This pseudo-logical thinking has several characteristics: it masks suggestion as deliberation; "good" reasons are presented as "real" ones; subjective ideas are disguised as objective ones; it thwarts careful scrutiny while seeming to encourage it.⁴¹

The recurring statement "that people tend to believe only what they wish to believe" is linked closely with emotional reinforcement in beliefs and with what William James called "the will-to-believe." Many of our beliefs are deeply rooted in our emotional life. The human mind has a remarkable capacity for believing when the will-to-believe has been aroused. As O'Neill and Weaver indicate in their book, The Elements of Speech, "All this discussion of the will-to-believe and emotional reinforcement of beliefs brings us back to the point that intellectual and emotional responses are always correlated and that the emotional factors are generally in control of the situation."⁴²

This point is amplified by R. W. West as follows:

Remember also that the auditor believes what he wants to believe. If his religious tenets require that he should believe that the earth is flat, you

⁴¹Ibid., p. 152.

⁴²James Milton O'Neill and Andrew Thomas Weaver, The Elements of Speech (2d ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), p. 271.

cannot convince him that it is spherical, even with perfect logic based upon unimpeachable evidence, until you have broken down that religious motive for his present belief. You must present motives for his change of belief.⁴³

It is to this point, also, that Winans comments:

One arrives at a decision by weighing the opposing arguments. Now, if he wishes to arrive at a certain conclusion, the arguments for it seem weighty and those in opposition very light. He is likely to refuse credence to witnesses and authorities against the desired conclusion. He may even refuse to listen to opposing arguments; or he may listen in an attempt to be fair, but with a subconscious determination to discredit what he hears, saying all the while, That is not true; That is not important; or, That is insufficient. In other words, he refuses fair attention. No doubt you are a highly reasonable person; still, if you were to learn that your deceased uncle had cut you off from an expected legacy, you might find it easy to believe the old man non compos mentis when he executed his will. Learning later that he had added a codicil in your favor, you might find no difficulty in believing that at the approach of death his mind cleared.⁴⁴

These arguments and illustrations tend to confirm the observation that people believe what they wish to believe. And when this occurs, the door is open to rationalization in order that pseudo-logical reasons can be offered for emotionally-aroused thoughts and actions.

The purpose for and the manner in which this process of inventing pseudo-logical reasons for emotionally-aroused thoughts and actions, the device of investing emotionalized behavior with an atmosphere of reasonableness, is described by Levine as follows:

⁴³R. W. West, Purposive Speaking (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 1.

⁴⁴J. A. Winans, Public Speaking (New York: The Century Co., 1915), p. 251.

The individual's conduct falls under the scrutiny of two "censors," emotion and reason. Each one employs a different touch-stone of adequacy. The emotions grant approval to behavior which satisfies those instinctual drives which help an individual's self-aggrandizement. Since this aim is frankly selfish, gratification at the instinctual level is marked by cruelty, stupidity, caprice and petty meanness. But the individual's dawning conscience, energized by education and experience, heaps reproach upon behavior which, viewed by others from their own purely personal angle, is apt to run afoul of their own selfish designs. Lacking the candor which avows that "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," the individual seeks to attenuate its impact upon him, by invoking the participation of another "censor," reason. Not "reason" in the formal logical signification; rather is the meaning best rendered by "reasonableness." Behavior is characterized as "reasonable" when (1) it does not serve to circumscribe too narrowly the scope of activity of others; (2) when its self-regarding content is not too conspicuously egoistic and (3) when it is an expression of an ideal consecrated to an adequate sublimation of the ego instincts.

The intensive cultivation of the faculty of reason has been advocated as a balance wheel to the anarchic surge of the emotions. It was thought that reason would be exempt from the weakness of caprice, whims, and transitoriness of instinct-dominated behavior. However, the Id forces have asserted their superiority as incentives to action; they have succeeded in perverting reason to aid selfish desires. The perversion takes the form of investing emotionalized behavior with an atmosphere of reasonableness by calling upon reason to bear witness to its inherent reasonableness. This is the essence of rationalization. Man's pride and vanity demand that he order his life on a rational basis. Life, in its entanglement with natural forces and with the tempestuous impulses, finds itself possessed by forces for which mankind has not been able to devise effective controls. But reason demands that it be served. Rationalization is the answer. It saves man's pride and places none too effective brakes upon his dominant impulses. By means of this dynamism even flagrantly impulsive behavior may be surrounded by an aura of reasonableness thus serving to regularize and to rationalize the irrational.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Albert J. Levine, Current Psychologies: A Critical Synthesis (Cambridge: Sci-Art Publishers, 1940), pp. 172-73.

Rationalization, therefore, is passionate. It consists of subjective "reasoning" masked in objective form. It pretends to rule out personal factors and in so doing relates the proposition under consideration to habit patterns, to stereotypes, and to the will-to-believe. As Oliver comments: "It is a life preserver of the highest class, for it preserves our egos from destruction. As a consequence of this purpose, it is passionate."⁴⁶

Rationalization specializes in irrelevancies.--Another important characteristic of rationalization was cited in the quotation by McBurney, O'Neill and Mills. They made reference to the fact that "One who wishes to be a critical thinker must be able to detect the use of rationalization in communication. This pseudo-logical thinking has several characteristics: it centers attention on materials that seem to be relevant..."⁴⁷ Emphasis on the phrase, "seem to be relevant," stresses the important observation that rationalization specializes in irrelevancies.

Both Oliver and Rank agree that rationalization makes frequent use of irrelevancies. According to Oliver:

Rationalization deals in irrelevancies. Facts, statistics, illustrations, authoritative quotations, and logic may abound, but the "proof" doesn't bear directly upon the proposal. The more skillful the rationalizer is, however, the harder it will be for listeners to detect the lack of logical connection. For instance:

⁴⁶Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1st ed.), op. cit., p. 184.

⁴⁷McBurney, O'Neill and Mills, op. cit., p. 152.

It's easy to see why we have so much divorce in this country. Americans are individualists. Jack Z. Sprat, the well-known marriage counselor, has written, "Divorce is a canker eating away the base of the American home." Statistics show that this generation marries an average of three years later than the previous generation did. I know a couple that married at the age of eighteen and lived together happily for thirty-three years. What we need is more religion, better education, and a higher level of morality. No wonder the American divorce rate is so high!⁴⁸

In presenting a list of fourteen of the principle types of rationalizations, Oliver, Cortright and Hager, when making reference to the use of irrelevant or non-pertinent analogies, illustrations, facts or arguments, state that:

A speech may sometimes appear very convincing because of the great quantity of specific examples, facts, and closely-knit arguments that are used, but examination may show that they are irrelevant to the point that is being made. Notice, for instance, how one speaker "refutes" the charge that the use of loss-leaders by chain stores and large department stores has harmed the small retailers: "...the Census tells the essential truth. In 1929, there were 96,900 stores in Illinois; in 1933, shortly after the bottom of the worst depression in modern history, they numbered 98,870." This, of course, does not consider whether the stores increased in number despite the allegedly-harmful loss-leaders. Or note the use in the following advertisement of an illustration instead of an argument: "Enroll in our short-story writing course and earn big money! Last week one of our students sold a short story for \$100. Signing your name on our enrollment blank is like signing a blank check. You can bill in the figures yourself!"⁴⁹

⁴⁸Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.), op. cit., pp. 279-80.

⁴⁹Oliver, Cortright, and Hager, op. cit., pp. 363-64.

As suggested, often facts which are cited are accurate but they are not related to the conclusion in such a way that they establish it. Ewbank and Auer illustrate this point as follows:

A certain cold cream, it is claimed, has been exposed to ultraviolet rays and is therefore more efficacious in removing wrinkles. While the asserted fact that the cream has been exposed to ultraviolet rays may be true, it may have little or no connection with the cream is therefore more effective in removing wrinkles. Even though the rays may have some effect upon the cream it does not follow that the cream will therefore have any more effect upon wrinkles than a similar cream which has not been exposed to the rays.⁵⁰

The subtle nature of rationalization on many occasions can give to it a high degree of sophistication so that important distinctions between facts and fictions are obscured. Brown and Gilhousen allude to this when discussing "the psychologists' vice."

Rationalization might well be called "the psychologists' vice." In most sciences there exist vast areas of ignorance. Great efforts are made to narrow these areas, but investigators do not deny their existence. In psychology the areas of ignorance are certainly as great as they are in astronomy or physiology, but psychologists are reluctant to say, "We do not know." A great deal of human behavior is, in fact, motivated in very obscure ways; it is not explainable in terms of what is known at present, and much of it may not be explainable within the foreseeable future. But psychologists are so reluctant to say, "We do not know," that they invent "explanations" that have all the characteristics of rationalization. When these explanations are elaborated into a logically coherent pattern, they become the so-called "systems" of psychology--behaviorism, structuralism, gestalt psychology,

⁵⁰ Ewbank and Auer, op. cit., pp. 183-84.

psychoanalysis. The creation of such elaborate rationalizations can be called a vice, not because any or all the systems are false, but because they obscure the important distinction between facts that are actually known and a fanciful veneer of inventions covering the enormous areas of the unknown.⁵¹

Regardless of whether it is because of a reluctance to say, "I do not know," or an attempt to reconcile conflicting tendencies within the personality, or an effort to effect a compromise between an impulse or compulsion and the demands of social propriety, there is a tendency to place emphasis on that which seems to be relevant but which, in reality, is not. It is characteristic of rationalization that it deals in irrelevancies.

Rationalization is ex post facto thinking.--Brembeck and Howell remind their readers that "We may rationalize before or after the act."⁵² This is certainly true. However, most authorities are in agreement that rationalization, for the most part, takes the form of finding reasons to justify an act after it has been accomplished or a decision after it has been reached. So strong, in fact, is the ex post facto tendency that it is labeled an attribute of rationalization.

Oliver, with reference to the process of rationalization, states: "It is reasoning after the fact. It

⁵¹Warner Brown and Howard C. Gilhousen, College Psychology (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 133.

⁵²Winston Lamont Brembeck and William Smiley Howell, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 176.

is not a search for truth, but for socially acceptable reasons. It is the logic of the advocate, who knows what he wants to uphold, and simply hunts for the best means of upholding it."⁵³ He illustrates this tendency with the following examples:

During your freshman year you "went along with the crowd," took in all the sports and social events, and ended the year on probation. You explained to your parents: College is a lot different from high school. The professors don't give you any help. The subjects are all new. Classes were too large to permit any discussion. Besides, nobody likes a 'grind' and the social advantages are more important than grades. Grades are artificial, anyway.

A professor who knows nothing about automobiles does know a friendly dealer and buys a car from him. Then he learns about its power brakes, power steering, added safety features, and high trade-in value--so he can explain to his friends why he decided on this particular car.⁵⁴

Brown and Gilhousen support the idea that rationalization is ex post facto also. They say:

Rationalization is reasoning ex post facto. Having adopted a course of action, often by way of wishful thinking, we go back and think up reasons that afford a plausible justification for the course of action already adopted. In our culture no one likes to admit that he has acted irrationally. We attach an enormous value to "reasons," "causes," and "explanations." The key word of rationalization is "because," a word that children learn to use by itself even before they can complete the sentence. In rationalization the thinking is not directed toward discovering a line of action--that has already been determined--

⁵³Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1st ed.), op. cit., p. 184.

⁵⁴Ibid., (2d ed.), p. 279.

but is directed backward toward discovering what might have determined the action.⁵⁵

In dealing with the clinical origin of the concept of rationalization, Lawrence E. Cole makes an interesting observation that has significance when considering ex post facto thinking. He points out:

Like the inversion in psychological thinking produced by the James-Lange theory of emotions, the Freudian has given new meaning to our verbalizations of our conduct. "We are sad because we cry" seemed a violation of all common sense, an inversion of the true relations; but it served to call the attention of a generation of psychologists (lost in the forests of animism) to physiological clues which have since done much to explain the mystery of emotion. In a like manner Freud's inversion, which would have it that we act first (as a rule) and then reason about it afterward, has helped to illuminate much of human thinking.⁵⁶

Cole, in another of his books in which he makes reference to the reflections on the nature of everyday thinking, calls rationalization post-mortem thinking. He states:

Rationalization is post-mortem thinking. After we have acted, impulsively, habitually, from a background of causes too complex to understand (and sometimes too unpleasant to admit) we then, after the fact, give the gloss of reason to our acts. Had we stopped to reason, the considerations we now name might have come to our minds. (Occasionally, indeed, we catch ourselves anticipating criticism, preparing our rationalizations, in advance.) The fact is, these reasons did not occur to us. Is it not surprising, under these circumstances, that we succeed almost universally in finding good and sufficient reasons for our behavior.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Brown and Gilhousen, op. cit., pp. 132-33.

⁵⁶Cole, General Psychology, op. cit., p. 548.

⁵⁷Cole, Human Behavior: Psychology as a Bio-Social Science, op. cit., p. 633.

Among others who specifically call attention to the fact that rationalization is ex post facto thinking are Sarett, Foster, and Sarett,⁵⁸ Rank,⁵⁹ Shaffer, Gilmer, and Schoen,⁶⁰ and Lindesmith and Strauss.⁶¹

In the observation of McBurney, O'Neill, and Mills: "Persons often do what they desire to do, and then they seek reasons for doing it."⁶² It is characteristic of the process of rationalization, as evidenced in the behavior of those who are rationalizing, that they find reasons to justify their acts after they have been committed, or their decisions after they have been made.

Rationalization is defensive.--Few problems are more interesting than those of human motivations, and perhaps none are in greater need of wise solution. As Hilgard has said: "To understand the struggles which go on within economic enterprise, to interpret the quarrels of international diplomacy, or to deal with the tensions in the daily interplay between individuals, we must know what it

⁵⁸Lew Sarett, William Trufant Foster, and Alma Johnson Sarett, Basic Principles of Speech (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 85.

⁵⁹Rank, op. cit., p. 14.

⁶⁰Laurance F. Shaffer, B. Von Haller Gilmer, and Max Schoen, Psychology (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 456.

⁶¹Alfred R. Lindesmith and Anselm L. Strauss, Social Psychology (New York: The Dryden Press, 1949), pp. 308-309.

⁶²McBurney, O'Neill, and Mills, op. cit., p. 152.

is that people want, how these wants arise and change, and how people will act in the effort to satisfy them."⁶³

Many American psychologists indicate that adult motivational patterns develop through the socialization of organic drives. At the outset of life, the behavior of the individual is biological rather than social. One becomes a social being by being in contact with other social beings. The growth of the personality is dependent upon contact with other persons. This contact of human beings affords action, reaction, and interaction. We influence others and they influence us. It is evident, therefore, that the aims and aspirations of the individual are largely determined by the role and status which other people set up. If their actions tend to threaten our status, fear, insecurity, and anxiety usually follow. We then react to preserve and pamper our egos. We become defensive and attempt to maintain our self-esteem or ego security. We look for socially approved devices to save our face. Perhaps most prominent among them all is the defense mechanism of rationalization. Rationalization is defensive. It is a protective explanation to promote self-justification. According to Brembeck and Howell, "Rationalization is a way of protecting our sentiment of self-regard. It assigns logical, intelligent 'reasons' for opinions and conducts

⁶³Ernest R. Hilgard, "Human Motives and the Concept of the Self," Understanding Human Motivation, ed. and comp. Chalmers L. Stacey and Manfred F. DeMartino (Cleveland: Howard Allen, Inc., Publishers, 1958), p. 196.

which are really non-rational. People don't want to appear irrational to others, so they gain facility in justifying, logically, their behavior."⁶⁴

Norman L. Munn says much the same thing when he states: "Rationalization is faulty, defensive thinking motivated by the desire to retain self-respect. It serves this purpose, at least temporarily, by enabling us to avoid facing issues and to excuse our failures."⁶⁵

In discussing the ambivalent trends in the personality, Kimball Young mentions the defensive role of rationalization in maintaining ego security.

Not only does societal organization in terms of in-group-out-group relations furnish an outlet for ambivalent trends in the personality, but socially approved devices for saving one's face do the same thing. In other words, the mechanism of rationalization comes into play in re-establishing the ego security. We explain away our sympathy, our aggression, or our anxiety in terms of social good, or in terms of other attitudes and behavior which are approved by our fellows. The man who takes away our job or status is a "bad" man. And, if we can link up such a man with a cause and an out-group which we do not like, so much the better. So the threat to the employer's continued control of his labor force by the agitation among workers for unionization is met by the former by accusations that the agitators are communists or other persons who form an out-group to the employing class. Or, in polite circles people are put back in their place by being reminded of their origin on the "wrong side of the tracks."⁶⁶

Rationalization, according to Hilgard, is the best known of the ego defense mechanisms, or mechanisms of

⁶⁴Brembeck and Howell, op. cit., p. 176.

⁶⁵Norman L. Munn, Psychology (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951), p. 313.

⁶⁶Kimball Young, op. cit., pp. 185-86.

adjustment as they are referred to on many occasions. A brief, somewhat historical, background of the so-called defense mechanisms of adjustment by Hilgard in his chapter entitled: "Human Motives and the Concept of Self," tends to support the thesis that rationalization is defensive in character.⁶⁷

Oliver expresses the defensive characteristic of rationalization in a positive manner as follows:

Rationalization puts a favorable interpretation upon what the speaker or his group does, feels, or believes. We rationalize when we say:

Oh, it's not prejudice! My dislike of women drivers is based on experience!

Of course I always vote a straight ticket. One must be loyal to his party.

Maybe it did cost too much. But then, I got the money easily.

Why, I believe that because it's the only thing decent people can believe.⁶⁸

Symonds takes a position that rationalization as a defense mechanism has more dangers than advantages and, therefore, can not be thought of as a commendable mechanism because its values are primarily negative. He states:

Rationalization cannot be thought of as a commendable mechanism. Its values are mainly negative. The only positive values that one can see are those which make it possible for a person to avoid facing disagreeable and distressing motives. This device may for the time being alleviate the anxiety, but it is an unstable form of adjustment and is always in danger of being toppled over by

⁶⁷Hilgard, op. cit., pp. 197-98.

⁶⁸Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., p. 134.

force of circumstance. In general, one may say that good adjustment involves facing of all kinds of reality, which is the very thing that rationalization attempts to prevent. As has already been noted, if rationalization at the same time, as in the "sweet lemon" variety, seems to hold other constructive values, it can be considered as a worthy method of meeting and accepting difficult situations.

Rationalization has more dangers than advantages. It tends to blind the man to the rational solution of his problems in the real world. It encourages postponing of the solution of real problems and helps a person to excuse himself from facing his problems. In rationalization there is also the danger of actually harming others. For instance, the mother who rationalizes concerning her child is putting off a realistic meeting of the child's problems. The mother of a dull-normal child may refuse to recognize the reality of his dullness. Her anxiety over school progress increases as the child continues to show increasing retardation. This anxiety leading to increased pressure creates neurotic disturbances in the child.⁶⁹

The very fact, as Symonds points out, that rationalization tends to blind a person to the rational solution to his problem and, at the same time, invites the disastrous possibility that harm may come to others is illustrated by Bonaro Overstreet in her book, Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others, as follows:

Since our nature bids us live by relationship, an abnormal isolation is not merely felt; it has also to be rationalized. Faced with constant evidence that others do not seek him out, and yet having to be able to tolerate himself, the isolated individual invents his own bases for self-toleration. In one way or another, he explains to himself that he is a fine person, undervalued, and that the cause of his unhappiness lies in the inadequacy of those around him: in their selfishness, their crude tastes, their shoddy standards, their materialism. Having once adopted this self-defense, he builds supporting behavior-patterns that other people find less and less inviting.

⁶⁹Symonds, op. cit., p. 467.

The judgments he passes upon his present associates, and even upon strangers whom he is meeting for the first time, reflect an inner rage and fear that stem from long-ago ego-defeats with which these individuals had nothing whatever to do. His isolation grows ever more marked as people weary of being on the receiving end of a hostility for which they do not feel responsible. His rationalization thereupon becomes more than ever necessary to him, because it is his ego's only support.⁷⁰

Overstreet's analysis of the tendency to use rationalization on the conscious level as a defensive device is but part of the total picture. Greater danger occurs when the actions are subliminal and rationalization is employed defensively. She makes reference to this important aspect in a later chapter.⁷¹

The more one probes into the rationalization process the greater becomes the realization that rationalization is so universal that it cannot be regarded as an indication of abnormality. However, it should always be kept in mind that rationalization may be carried to such an extreme that it begins to affect one's contacts with reality. "It is then," according to Wendell Cruze, "but a short step from the continuous rationalizations of the seriously maladjusted person to the delusions or false ideas of the mentally disordered individual."⁷²

⁷⁰Bonaro W. Overstreet, Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 8.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 94.

⁷²Wendell W. Cruze, General Psychology for College Students (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 487.

The individual may also react defensively and defectively to stimuli generated by his own behavior. B. F. Skinner, in a chapter entitled, "Psychotherapy," points out, "In simple boasting, for example, he [a person with a defective knowledge of himself] characterizes his own behavior in a way which escapes aversive stimulation. He boasts of achievement to escape the effects of punishment for incompetence, of bravery to escape the effects of punishment for cowardice, and so on. This sort of rationalizing is best exemplified by delusions of grandeur in which all aversive self-stimulation may be effectively masked."⁷³

Thus, whether done consciously or unconsciously in what is considered to be normal or abnormal behavior, rationalization is characterized by the attribute of defensiveness. In brief, it is a process of "devising acceptable explanations for apparent failures."⁷⁴

As Patty and Johnson point out, "These explanations may be offered in good but superficial faith, merely for the record. They may be believed with sincerity."⁷⁵ A good example of this is found in the illustration presented by Vernon E. Rank in a paper in which he discusses rationalization as a factor in communication.

⁷³B. F. Skinner, Science and Human Behavior (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 366.

⁷⁴William L. Patty and Louise Snyder Johnson, Personality and Adjustment (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1953), p. 214.

⁷⁵Ibid.

During an evening at bridge, I bid a hand of four hearts. Late in the play, assuming that all the trumps had been accounted for, I led a high card in another suit, only to have the trick taken by a trump card which I had forgotten was still out. My reaction of surprise and dismay was at once accompanied by the explanation that I had "miscounted" trump. This was hardly the truth. It was, rather, a rationalization, a plain case of intellectual dishonesty, although not actually and fully realized as such until sometime later. How could one make a "real" error in counting a mere thirteen trumps? The fundamental error had been that I "forgot" to account for all the thirteen suit cards, not that I had "miscounted" them. In retrospect, I also realize by the comments of the other players that apparently they did not doubt the explanation of the misplay. They were sympathetic: even intimated that they, too, had done the same thing on occasion.⁷⁶

Face-saving by explaining that the trump cards had been "miscounted," on the golf course by a dramatic trampling down of the imaginary weed which "misdirected" the ball presently slicing into the rough, on the basketball court where the star center suddenly drops to his knees and grasps his left ankle after missing an easy "lay-up" shot at the basket, or in many of the ordinary circumstances of life, provide the necessary motivation for employing rationalization defensively.

Rationalization tends to stereotypy.--Rank mentions the fact that the sympathetic acceptance by the card players of his explanation that he "miscounted" trump, as cited earlier, is indicative that rationalization as a process deals in stereotypes.⁷⁷ He points out, "We have only to

⁷⁶Rank, op. cit., p. 10.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 13-14.

look for further examples to the stereotype among American males concerning women drivers, or the condemnation by older people of the teen-age driver as a 'hotrod'.⁷⁸

Oliver also lists stereotypy as a tendency found in rationalization. He classifies it as a "characteristic of rationalization" and briefly describes it as follows:

Rationalization imposes stereotyped patterns upon individual events or conditions. This is another use of what Walter Lippmann has called the "pictures in our heads." We look upon each fresh experience through the colored glasses of our own past experience, and through the derived experience of our culture. As Gardner Murphy phrases it, "The actual stuff of which most thinking is made is social stuff." In other words, we see what, in accordance with our education and social customs, we are supposed to see. The Southern white man sees the Negro not alone as an individual, but also as an individual who has already been catalogued and labeled by several generations of social judgment. Similarly, most people have a stereotyped "picture in their heads" of politicians, Communists, artists, farmers; and of such experiences as failure, love, war, travel, competition. The stereotype often imposes itself upon the actual perception and dominates it.⁷⁹

Since the stereotype does tend to impose itself upon the actual perception and dominate it, and since rationalization imposes stereotype patterns upon individual events or conditions, a clear definition of stereotypy and a description of its relationship to the process of rationalization is offered. According to Lindesmith and Strauss:

Etymologically the first part of the term derives from the Greek word stereos meaning solid, firm, hard. Historically it derives--at least in American

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁹ Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.), op. cit., p. 280.

usage--from a book on public opinion by the journalist, Walter Lippmann, who used to refer to "the pictures in our heads." Lippmann noted that because people go to the facts with pre-established classifications, they do not see the facts clearly or in unbiased fashion. Instead they see what their preconceptions lead them to see. Students of race relations find, for example, that when people believe Negroes are dirty, lazy, and unintelligent, they notice only those Negroes who correspond to their bias. Lippman put the matter thus: "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see."

. . . when a person stereotypes he he merely classifying or categorizing. To see in terms of stereotypes is to see objects as class-members.⁸⁰

To this description are added the words of Gordon W. Allport from his book, The Nature of Prejudice, as reported by T. H. Pear:

Whether favourable or unfavourable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalise) our conduct in relation to that category Stereotypes are not in themselves a full explanation for rejection. They are primarily images within a category invoked by the individual to justify either love-prejudice or hate-prejudice. They play an important part in prejudice, but are not the whole story. . . .

An image manifestly comes from somewhere. It may, and normally should, come from repeated experience with some class of objects. If it is a generalized judgment based on a certain probability that an object of the class will possess a given attribute, we would not call the judgment a stereotype . . . A veritable assessment of a group is not the same as the selecting, sharpening and fictionising of a stereotype.

Some stereotypes are totally unsupported by facts; others develop from a sharpening and over-generalisation of facts. Once formed,

⁸⁰ Lindesmith and Strauss, op. cit., p. 291.

they cause their possessor to view future evidence in terms of the available categories.⁸¹

Allport's observations serve as an argument for the basic position expressed by Oliver regarding the interaction between stereotypy and rationalization. In many respects they share the same attributes, and their functions are not too dissimilar. Just as Allport stated that the function of the stereotype "is to justify (rationalise) our conduct," so the function of the rationalization is to justify our stereotype on occasion. The rationalization and the stereotype are not the same, as their dissimilarities soon prove, but the fact remains that they do hold many things in common. And to the degree that this is true, rationalization tends toward stereotypy.

Rationalization is self-reinforcing.--Hence it tends to perpetuate itself. This attribute of reinforcement is closely related to stereotypy. As Vernon Rank phrases it, "They nourish and sustain each other."⁸² Rank suggests that we:

Consider for example, the worker who "tells off" the foreman. Later, in the washroom or at lunch, he goes over the story to fellow-workers. Much of what he says can be recognized as justification for his behavior. In the course of the day, he probably gives several times an account of what happened, but in the retelling, there is further elaboration of detail and explanation of why he "told off" the boss. The reason for the embellishment is plain enough, for he has been

⁸¹T. H. Pear, Personality Appearance and Speech (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1957), pp. 94-95.

⁸²Rank, op. cit., p. 14.

going over the events in his mind many times, seeing it is the way he undoubtedly wishes to see it. When a fellow-worker comes by his machine and says, "I hear you told off the old man," he is ready with a "good" account of his side of the story. By the time he gets home to tell his wife, besides having a very "reasonable" tale of what he did and why he did it, he probably is somewhat of a hero in his own eyes for having stood up to the boss so courageously.⁸³

Self-reinforcing rationalizations follow a pattern. Once the process of rationalization begins in a given situation, the tendency often is to reinforce the "reasonable explanations" we have used with further particulars. This procedure of embellishment with a purpose helps to "prove" to ourselves that our action is both right and reasonable. Again, according to Rank, "This reinforcement serves as a justification of the original rationalization, supplying additional selected and corroborating details, the total of which merely makes us more certain that we can fully justify our behavior."⁸⁴

Cruze provides an example of this in the following illustration:

A man buying a new home is able to persuade himself that he should buy one near the golf course. He argues that although the location will make it more difficult for him to get to his work, it will be away from the traffic hazards of the city, and that his children will have plenty of room and will be able to enjoy an abundance of sunshine and fresh air. He argues that his wife will have more room for her flower garden and even hints that he may be able to start a small vegetable garden. He never admits, even to himself, that the true reason

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

for moving to this neighborhood is to make it more convenient for him to get to the golf course. It might be pointed out that his children will have to travel a greater distance to school and that this new location will seriously inconvenience his wife in her shopping activities. Since such an admission would make his behavior appear very selfish, he emphasizes the advantages for his wife and children, points out the possible disadvantages to himself, and insists that he is willing to be a "martyr" for the sake of his family.⁸⁵

As one rationalization leads to a second, and a second to a third, and others follow to perpetuate the tendency toward self-reinforcement, it can occur that rationalization becomes established as a habitual pattern in the lives of some people. A person may engage in this process persistently. This may create serious problems of personality adjustment. "The persistent use of rationalization," according to Lester and Alice Crow, "May lead to the development of a false appreciation of one's own personality."⁸⁶ Moreover, "If this device is utilized consistently as a means of self-justification, the group soon learns to resent its implication and the individual's social adjustment is hindered by the unfriendly attitudes of his associates."⁸⁷ In fact:

As a result of extreme utilization of this device, reality becomes less and less a part of the mental content; delusions are imminent. A serious form of projection may accompany the rationalizing habit to

⁸⁵Cruze, op. cit., pp. 485-86.

⁸⁶Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, Understanding Our Behavior: The Psychology of Personal and Social Adjustment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 169.

⁸⁷Ibid.

the extent that the reasons for an individual's failures are completely divorced in his thinking from inability to achieve. He places the blame for his inadequate adjustments upon conditions outside himself, or upon other persons or groups. In extreme cases this shifting of responsibility for personal inadequacies develops into strong feelings of persecution.⁸⁸

Often these personal inadequacies are emotional handicaps. Patty and Johnson tell us that "Emotional handicaps are not so easily identified as other handicaps. Many are catalogued as laziness, hotheadedness, or merely bad disposition. Others are expressed in psychosomatic illnesses. They may be mirrored in rigidity or so-called 'temperament,' vanity or excessive modesty, craving for affection or withdrawal from human contacts. They sometimes appear as phobias, paralyzing their victim in some phase of activity."⁸⁹

The emotionally handicapped person is usually emotional because he is engaged in too many battles expressing inconsistencies in his personality integration. In order to defend or excuse himself, he rationalizes. The greater his emotional difficulty, the greater the tendency to reinforce his rationalizations with additional rationalizations.

Such emotional handicaps have far-reaching effects. Especially is this true in the cases of neurotic individuals. Anxieties and fears are projected in verbalized forms of

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 170.

⁸⁹Patty and Johnson, op. cit., p. 302.

rationalization, one upon another generally in self-perpetuating style, into all phases of the life situation.

Related to the Patty and Johnson example and, yet, presented as an aside, suggested first of all to the writer by Dr. David F. Busby, a distinguished psychiatrist in Chicago, Illinois, the process of rationalization is usually the verbalized accompanist of other defensive mechanisms. Vernon Rank, largely influenced by the writings of Raymond B. Cattell and Percival Symonds, goes so far as to suggest that "it might be well to consider rationalization primarily as an effect of the operation of the other defense mechanisms."⁹⁰ He adds, "It is here that the writer wishes to suggest that rationalization, though closely related to the ego-defense dynamisms, does not belong in the same category with them. It is suggested rather, that the act of rationalization is distinct from other ego-defense mechanisms in its use of verbalization, whether at the vocal or sub-vocal levels."⁹¹

Comments by both Busby and Rank raise some interesting questions as to the role of rationalization in relation to the ego-defense mechanisms. Also, the question might be posed as to how such a discussion escaped insertion in this paper at the place where rationalization was being considered as a defensive mechanism, rather than being introduced as an aside when the characteristic of self-reinforcement as an attribute of rationalization is under consideration.

⁹⁰Rank, op. cit., p. 17.

⁹¹Ibid.

In the first instance, comments by Busby and Rank infer the principle of reinforcement with regard to rationalization. Not self-reinforcement necessarily in the instances cited, but certainly reinforcement of the other ego-defense mechanisms. If rationalization is usually the verbalized accompanist of other protective mechanisms, as Busby implied, then it would seem to have the supporting role of reinforcement to such ego-defense mechanisms as compensation, denial, displacement, fantasy, identification, intellectualization, projection, reaction formation, repression, sublimation and withdrawal. It would tend to reinforce through verbalization in an attempt to produce justification. Words may be uttered or it may be merely thoughts formed in the mind without overt expression. In each instance, rationalization would tend to reinforce the other adjustive mechanisms of the ego which it accompanies.

If rationalization could be thought of primarily as an effect of the operations of defense mechanisms (rather than to consider rationalization as a defense mechanism by itself), in the manner suggested by Vernon Rank,⁹² it still would function in the supportive role of reinforcement. Either way, rationalization tends toward reinforcement, toward strengthening by adding something extra. And once the rationalizing process begins, it tends to perpetuate itself by additional rationalizations in numerous instances,

⁹²Ibid.

each reinforcement serving as a justification of the original rationalization.

Discussion of the observations made by Busby and Rank, due to their emphasis on reinforcement, were purposively reserved for consideration at this point of development of the attributes of rationalization. Rationale for this decision was based upon consideration of the various types of reinforcement that may occur. Reinforcement can be a matter of kind or degree, or both. It may include a series of different kinds of "reasons," or it may be embellishments of the "one good reason" offered as justification. In the final analysis, paramount in this particular discussion is the important fact that self-reinforcement is an attribute of the process of rationalization.

Thus, the attributes of rationalization are that the process is characterized by inflexibility, is passionate, specializes in irrelevancies, is ex post facto thinking, is defensive, tends toward stereotypy, and is self-reinforcing.

Functions of Rationalization

"Does rationalization have any proper functions that should be recommended?" This question is asked of readers by Oliver in his book, Persuasive Speaking. Oliver adds this comment: "However we might decide such a question ideally, the fact is that a great proportion of our thinking-toward-a-decision is rationalizing (some estimates run as high as 80 and 90 per cent). Obviously such thinking

must serve functions that prove useful or it could not persist in such proportion."⁹³

To attempt to list all the varieties of the functions of rationalization and to give illustrations of them would be an impossible task since rationalization enters into almost every phase of human affairs. However, some of these functions can be given, and an abbreviated list of them follows:

(1) Rationalization functions as a disguise of the self for the self. In elaborating this point, Symonds remarks:

First and foremost, we wish to protect ourselves against recognizing our own motives which a part of our personality would consider ignoble, mean, and discrediting. In order to maintain a certain integration of the personality and to find ways of making all kinds of behavior and circumstance acceptable, one resorts to rationalization. However, the integration is not complete; hence, the logic-tight compartments. It is after one has persuaded himself of his rightness and integrity that he then attempts to justify himself to the world and persuade others also that his reputation is still unsullied. One naturally thinks of rationalization as an attempt to prove to others that one's motives are noble, but it should not be forgotten that preceding this attempt is the necessity of persuading oneself.⁹⁴

(2) Rationalization is used to justify fundamental values, especially those which were acquired through the process of identification during early childhood.

Every person grows up a citizen of a country, a member of a church, and a member of a political party with certain basic personal values and philosophy. Later he finds it necessary to

⁹³Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., p. 136.

⁹⁴Symonds, op. cit., p. 457.

justify his membership in his political party, his adherence to a certain church, his loyalty to a club or state, and searches for reasons and arguments which will justify his choice. It is because of that that one must suspect much of the campaign oratory, for the arguments used in political speeches are more for the purpose of justifying choices made long ago rather than the attempt to help people form their opinions anew.⁹⁵

(3) Rationalization functions as a morale builder by protecting endangered egos.

After an organization has experienced a disastrous failure, perhaps through the fault of its members, its continued existence may depend upon masking the extent and cause of the failure. Many a football coach, for instance, has found that he must fabricate excuses for his players if they have lost a series of games, in order to build up their spirits so they can face the rest of their schedule with courage and determination. Hence, he will explain to them that their schedule is unusually tough, that they have been plagued with injuries, that they have had a lot of "tough breaks," and that by the "law of compensation" they can expect better luck in the future. Similarly, supervisors have learned that inexperienced employees need special encouragement till they have mastered their jobs. Teachers have discovered that praise is often a better motivator for their students than blame. Many such devices of rationalization are indispensable if the spirit of "try, try again" is to be stimulated.⁹⁶

(4) Rationalization is used as a means of modifying dreams in order to give them greater apparent reality.

Freud pointed out another quite different meaning of rationalization when he discussed the tendency to expand a dream when reporting it in order to give it a certain amount of rationality. He explained that we find it difficult to accept dreams which are too distorted and that there is the necessity for modifying them to give them

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 458.

⁹⁶Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., p. 136.

greater apparent reality. This attempt to make the products of our unconscious agree with reality he calls a form of rationalization.⁹⁷

(5) Rationalization makes it possible for an individual to deal quite successfully with a complicated world by thinking in broad terms.

Youthful Francis Bacon "Took all knowledge to be his province," but in the twentieth century it is impossible for any individual to know a fraction of the facts that are necessary in dealing with our civilization. We have to think in stereotypes, labeling one nation as aggressive, one political party as conservative, one set of dogmas as progressive, one religion as satisfying, etc. To attempt to go through a single day performing no acts or thinking no thoughts except upon the basis of full information and rigorously logical thinking is utterly impossible. We accept and act upon broad generalizations that (so far as we know) have no validity except that "everyone" believes them or some newspaper reports them. Whether or not the United States should aid financially in the rehabilitation of Western Europe is a complicated question with almost infinite facts to be correlated before a "true" answer could emerge. Many of these facts cannot be known till some future date when any action would be too late. Even the presently existing facts are so diverse that not even the experts can consider them all. Hence, we have to make some kind of decision upon the basis of a "calculated risk," and then pursue it even though we may not understand very clearly to what result it may lead. On a more limited and personal plane, each individual has to reach many decisions (such as what vocation to pursue) involving a great many unknown and unknowable factors. In such a world, we can act with confidence--if, indeed, we can act at all--only as we indulge in a rationalistic process of lulling ourselves into the delusion that we really do know what we are doing and why.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Symonds, op. cit., p. 458.

⁹⁸Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., p. 138.

(6) Rationalization functions as a means of justifying the behavior of other people.

One can use rationalization not only to justify one's own behavior, but also that of another person with whom one has identified oneself or for whom one feels responsible. A mother, for example, may explain away the behavior of her naughty child by saying that he is tired. However, in this example, it may well be that she is protecting herself, as well as the child, by trying to hide her inadequacies as a mother. But as a parent identifies himself with his children, he will run to their defense and offer excuses for their delinquencies. Generalizing, we find a tendency to rationalize for the failure or shortcomings of our school, political party, golf club, or even state or nation. Whatever we feel a part of, that we must uphold and justify.⁹⁹

(7) Rationalization is used to excuse personality deficiencies or limitations.

Practically any personality limitation, either real or imagined, is subject to justification by the individual who feels the need to be protective. Any error or mistake will frequently call forth an attempt to justify the self. "The poor workman quarrels with his tools," and he readily finds occasion to excuse imperfections in his handiwork. The cabinet maker will find excuse in the grain of the wood; the tennis player in the uneven surface of the court; the billiard player in the fact that the table is not exactly level. Most persons in our culture find it necessary to rationalize their status and excuse their failures, whereas the real reasons may lie in their own deficiencies. The person who is in debt to another can usually find many excuses for postponing payment. One also finds it necessary to rationalize his social status. Persons in minority groups are especially given to rationalizing about their conditions and failures in life. This is possibly one of their greatest handicaps in that it keeps them from evaluating their circumstances in true perspective. The Negro business man rationalizes that he cannot succeed because

⁹⁹ Symonds, op. cit., p. 458.

Negroes prefer buying from white dealers when, as a matter of fact, he may not have used business tactics that insure success.¹⁰⁰

(8) Rationalization is also used to justify a person's eccentricities and character weaknesses.

Most persons with eccentricities, for instance, obsessions, which are their bulwark against disturbing duties and anxieties, find it necessary to rationalize them, usually on the grounds of their social value. Indeed, most neurotic persons will find rational excuses for pampering their neurotic tendencies. The man who must have his whole household quiet from two to three every afternoon so that he may have a nap justifies his behavior on the grounds of his health. The mother who has an obsessive need to nag at her son day in and day out about his work in school justifies the action on the ground that in no other way will Arthur be able to get through school....Then there are any number of character weaknesses which must be justified by rationalization. One person may attempt to justify selfishness on the grounds that he must look after his own interests first, because only when he himself is healthy and satisfied can he be of service to others....The tendency to hate, which many persons seem to hold irrationally, is often justified by finding superficial reasons for disliking or hating the other person. The man who frequently finds it necessary to escape from responsibilities must also accompany his refusals with reasons almost certain to be rationalizations.¹⁰¹

(9) Rationalization functions to bolster against fears and anxieties in an individual's experience.

Many people carry around a burden of anxieties and fears which they find it necessary to rationalize either verbally or in behavior in order to protect themselves. Many women, for instance, are afraid of approaching old age, and they do everything in their power to retard its advance. The cosmetology industry has been developed largely to help women ward off the encroachments

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 459.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 460-61.

of age. Most persons adopt a variety of rationalizations against disease and pain. They will try to persuade themselves that the pain does not exist, or that its treatment can be postponed. Other commonly held anxieties against which most persons find it necessary to bolster themselves are the fears of being neglected, of being poor, and of being ugly. Fear of social disapproval and losing caste with others is a basic cause for rationalization both in word and in behavior.¹⁰²

....Those who have anxieties whose cause is buried in the unconscious may find it necessary to rationalize them by adopting a real object to fear. This is the basis of most phobias where fear of a specific object is only an excuse for the real fear buried deep in the unconscious.¹⁰³

(10) Rationalization functions variously as a means of justifying circumstances. Included in this category are the three excuses, given special names as rationalizations, that are popular in psychological literature. Reference is made to the mechanisms known as "sour grapes," "Pollyanna" or "sweet lemon," and "Alibi Ike."

The sour grapes mechanism is another rather common form of rationalization. This mechanism derives its name from the fable of the fox that spent considerable time and effort jumping for some grapes which were beyond his reach. When it became apparent that failure was inevitable, he consoled himself by declaring that the grapes were sour anyway and hence undesirable as food. Similarly, many people insist that the things they cannot achieve are undesirable anyway.¹⁰⁴

The chronic "Pollyanna" provides us with an illustration of another type of rationalization. Frequently referred to as the sweet lemon mechanism, this type of rationalization is the converse of the sour grapes mechanism. It usually shows up in the

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 464.

¹⁰⁴Cruze, op. cit., p. 486.

form of an attitude that things are just as they should be and that "everything will turn out all right." The "Pollyanna" will view almost any calamity with relative calm and point out that it might have been much worse.¹⁰⁵

"Alibi Ike" was a character who always failed in what he was trying to do; but the blame always rested on circumstances, not on Ike. "Dust got in my eyes." "There must have been a hole in the pavement." "I couldn't study that night because I had a headache." The common factor in all these excuses is that the blame should not rest upon me; I was blocked by circumstances beyond my control.¹⁰⁶

The common core of these, as well as many other rationalizations, is an attempt to distort the perceived situation so as to relieve anxiety and to evade conflict.

The ten functions of rationalization listed are but a few of many that could be given. Most all rationalizations function to avoid suffering, conflict, loss of prestige, and unpleasantness. That they serve purposes generally deemed to be useful is confirmed by universal acceptance for the most part. However, continual use of the device of rationalization as a means of alleviating anxiety, of preventing a facing up to disagreeable and distressing motives, is an unstable form of adjustment. It is vulnerable because it is always in danger of being toppled over by the force of circumstance. It is not too satisfactory because it encourages the postponement of the solution of real problems that persist.

On the other hand, as Kimball Young points out, "Rationalizations, at least those acceptable to our group,

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 486-87.

¹⁰⁶Stagner and Karwoski, op. cit., p. 504.

make for smooth and uninhibited behavior. It would be hard for us to participate in the society of our fellows if we were constantly aware of the true or actual foundations of our conduct."¹⁰⁷

Rationalization, then, is neither good or bad, constructive or destructive, to be approved or disapproved. It is necessary and neutral and should be judged by its results more than by any absolute standard. A certain degree of rationalization in a person's life experience would appear to be normal and necessary in a complex environment. Persistent rationalization can be pathological, however, and may result from the individual's inability to maintain integration under stress.

Experimental Studies of Rationalization

Thorndike once said, "Whatever exists exists in some amount and can be measured." To a certain extent every time we pass judgment upon another person we are making measurements in a rough way. When we refer to an individual as being sincere, or honest, or kind, or strong in character, or introverted, or vain, we are making crude measurements in the form of judgments. If we show more discernment and say that a man is usually honest in a given situation, or seldom dependable in keeping promises, our qualitative descriptions become finer, somewhat more exact, and in a sense, better forms of measurement. Most of this

¹⁰⁷Young, op. cit., p. 122.

measurement is being done by introspection, casual observation, and hear-say information. Such "measurements" abound in generalizations; often in inaccuracies.

Examination of much of the literature dealing with the subject of rationalization reveals that not too much has been done scientifically to investigate the process of rationalization. As Rank summarizes the situation, he states:

Examination of periodical literature and graduate studies reveals that little has been done to investigate scientifically the process of rationalization. By far the greatest amount of writing on the subject has been done from introspection.¹⁰⁸

Oliver says much the same thing when he writes:

"Of the three avenues of motivation, rationalization is the most recently isolated, and the one which has been least examined experimentally."¹⁰⁹

And, yet, there is some agreement that it is to the experimentalists, to those trained in laboratory techniques or in psychological testing who will use statistical methods in the validation of diagnostic techniques, that we must ultimately look for increased understanding in human affairs.

Meanwhile, the question might be raised: "Has anything been done experimentally to date regarding rationalization?"

¹⁰⁸Rank, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰⁹Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1st ed.), op. cit., p. 192.

Vernon Rank gives a partial answer to this question in his article, "Rationalization As a Factor in Communication" which appeared in the April of 1956 edition of Today's Speech. He cites relevant studies of rationalization made by E. F. Heidbreder, B. B. Vance and W. Wynne, Frenkel-Brunswick, H. B. Lewis, P. H. Cook, J. C. Sawatsky, W. Edgar Vinacke, and others.¹¹⁰ A careful review of the Rank summary of these studies should be made by the reader interested in some of the experiments conducted concerning rationalization.

In general, experimental studies of the process of rationalization are few in number and meager in content. This fact also tends to emphasize the need for greater integration of the research findings of the social scientists.

Interdisciplinary inquiries, with attempts at integration, have grown to embrace such large areas that it is difficult to achieve proper coordination. It has become increasingly apparent that no one discipline is fully capable of handling all the intricacies involved in studying personality structure and functioning, socialization, and group dynamics. It follows, therefore, that no one technique discovered to date is adequate to obtain necessary data.

In the few empirical studies up to the present time that have been related to the subject of rationalization, rationalization has been treated indirectly for the most

¹¹⁰Rank, op. cit., pp. 11-13.

part, or as a by-product of the principal research findings. If this mechanism is such an important part of the average person's experience, then it is worthy of considerable scientific research. Advertising, for example, with its emphasis on "the appeal," on finding out what interests people most, would provide an interesting field for empirical research. Brewster, Parmer and Ingraham point out that "There are three approaches to securing the effect the advertiser desires: suggestion, appeal to reason, and rationalization."¹¹¹ In explanation of the third approach, they add:

Some advertisements begin with an appeal to the instinct and close with an appeal to the reason. In fact, it is not always easy to draw a clear-cut distinction. If we try to analyze our own reactions we cannot always tell where the influence of instinct leaves off and where the influence of reason begins. Sometimes reason and instinct may be in accord and at other times in opposition. My appetite may call for a cup of coffee before retiring but my reason may tell me that the coffee I drank the other night kept me awake several hours. My desire may impel me to buy a new suit of clothes, but my reason may restrain me on the ground that I cannot afford it.

The rationalization appeal seeks to prevent this possible conflict between desire and reason by presenting arguments that will justify the reader in yielding to his desire. These arguments must be stronger than the arguments the reason might otherwise raise against making the purchase. For example, my instinct says, "Buy a new suit of clothes." My reason says, "Don't buy a suit of clothes, you cannot afford it just now." The rationalization appeal in a clothing advertisement says, "To succeed in

¹¹¹Arthur Judson Brewster, Herbert Hall Parmer, and Robert G. Ingraham, Introduction to Advertising (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1947), p. 128.

business you must be well dressed. You need that suit of clothes for the sake of your business success."

If this appeal is strong enough and plausible enough to outweigh the argument my reason advances against buying, the advertisement has been effective.¹¹²

The suggestion mentioned by Brewster, Parmer and Ingraham, "If we try to analyze our own reactions...", might be accepted as an invitation to make some experimental studies. A series of carefully planned, scientifically arranged studies in making such an analysis of rationalization in advertising appeal is needed.

Conclusion

Rationalization, "a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means,"¹¹³ is a popular catchword which has lost considerable of its intrinsic distinctiveness. In spite of the fact of such universal usage, that, according to Oliver, it "accounts for perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision,"¹¹⁴ it is a mechanism which needs clearer definition among the various disciplines studying human nature, and a process which should merit greater attention among investigators using the scientific method of research.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 131-32.

¹¹³Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.), op. cit., p. 293.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

Characterized by inflexibility, detected by its passionate nature, supported by irrelevancies, marked by a tendency to find reasons to justify an act after it has been accomplished or a decision after it has been reached, manifested by such attributes as stereotypy, self-reinforcement, appeal to self-interest and defensiveness, rationalization is orderly thinking without critical examination. It is more concerned with appearances than with reality. As such it functions as a disguise of the self for the self, as a means of justifying fundamental values, as a morale builder by protecting endangered egos, as a modifying agent for dreams in order to give them greater apparent reality, as a means to make it possible for an individual to deal reasonably well with a complicated world by thinking in broad terms, as a protection against fears and anxieties, and as a justifying technique in excusing personality deficiencies, limitation, eccentricities, weaknesses, extenuating circumstances, and the behavior of other people.

It was not the purpose of this chapter to denounce or to defend rationalization. Rather, it was an attempt, first of all, to analyze what has been written in various disciplines of study concerning the subject of rationalization; secondly, and only in a limited manner, to evaluate the findings.

CHAPTER III

THE OLIVERIAN CONCEPT OF RATIONALIZATION

The basic thrust of this study, as suggested in the title itself, is an investigation of the treatment of rationalization as it appears in speech textbooks which emphasize persuasion. More specifically, this study is restricted to persuasive speech textbooks published since the beginning of the year 1950. The result of such limitation produced a total of four textbooks, and two of these were written by Dr. Robert T. Oliver, Chairman of the Department of Speech at Pennsylvania State University.

Primarily, the purpose of this particular chapter is that of analyzing Oliver's concept of rationalization. This analysis is based upon the material which he presents in two of his textbooks, Persuasive Speaking which was published in 1950,¹ and his second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, made available to the reading public in 1957.² Reserved for Chapter Four, which follows, is a consideration of rationalization as it is set forth by Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell in their textbook,

¹Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950).

²Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957).

Persuasion: A Means of Social Control,³ and by Wayne C. Minnick in The Art of Persuasion.⁴

Dr. Oliver, who has been Chairman of the Department of Speech successively in Clark Junior College, Bradley College, Bucknell University, Syracuse University, and Pennsylvania State University, devotes an entire chapter to the concept of rationalization in both of his persuasive speech textbooks published in the 1950's. This expanded emphasis represents a change from the format he employed when he wrote the first edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, which was published in 1942. In the first edition, rationalization was presented along with emotion and reason as the three approaches to fundamental motives for which people act. All three approaches were described under the chapter heading, "The Avenues of Persuasion."⁵ By the time of the writing of his second edition, Oliver had changed his nomenclature to "Modes of Appeal" and classified these modes under the following four chapter headings: evidence and authority, dynamic logic, emotion, and rationalization.⁶ Treatment of rationalization by Oliver in the second edition

³Winston Lamont Brembeck and William Smiley Howell, Persuasion (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952).

⁴Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957).

⁵Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), pp. 161-96.

⁶Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.), pp. 199-295.

is much more comprehensive than in the earlier edition. For example, in the 1942 publication of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech Oliver briefly introduced the subject of rationalization and then went on to discuss the extent of its usage, to offer reasons for its use and present some forms of rationalization, to mention four characteristics of this device, and to make a cross-section analysis of rationalization with emotion and reason.

In his second edition, Oliver included what he had in his first edition with slight revision and added sections dealing with definition, functions, methods of detecting rationalization in persuasion, uses of this mechanism in persuasion specifically, and several paragraphs dealing with the process of rationalization and fallacies in reasoning.

The most noticeable revision was the addition of three new characteristics of rationalization (i.e., deals in irrelevancies, imposes stereotyped patterns upon individual events or conditions, and is self-reinforcing). Two other characteristics were reworded (i.e., ex post facto for post hoc thinking, and the sentence, "Rationalization puts a favorable interpretation upon what the speaker or his group does, feels, or believes;" replaced the word, "defensive"). The descriptive term, "intellectual," was dropped as a characteristic although its significant meaning is inferred in the other characteristics given.

Before an analysis is made of the Oliverian concept of rationalization as it appears in his two books published in the 1950's, Persuasive Speaking, and The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (Second Edition), certain comparisons and contrasts between these two books might be set forth to good advantage.

In both instances an entire chapter is devoted to the subject of rationalization. The Psychology of Persuasive Speech textbook contains the longer and more comprehensive chapter. In sections dealing with the definition of rationalization, its uses in persuasion and its methods in persuasion, rationalization and fallacies in reasoning, the conclusion, and the exercises suggested, both books are identical, word-for-word, with one exception. The exception occurs in "Exercise No. 6" where there is a slight rephrasing and several additions in recommended readings are given. These occur in the later publication.

The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1957) incorporates all that is included in Persuasive Speaking regarding rationalization and, in addition, presents sections on the extent of rationalization, reasons for rationalization, detecting rationalization, and emotion, reason and rationalization compared. Two additional characteristics of rationalization appear in the 1957 publication which are not included in the Persuasive Speaking book, published in 1950.

This general analysis of the Oliverian concept of rationalization singles out one obvious conclusion. All that Oliver has said concerning the subject of rationalization in textbook writing can best be found in the second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech. It is from this source, therefore, that material shall be taken to present specific analysis concerning Oliver's viewpoint of rationalization.

Oliver's Introduction

In an introductory paragraph, Oliver points out several observations concerning rationalization. He states that even though it is not as well known as other prominent terms which are identifiable as modes of persuasive appeal, and even though it is regarded with suspicion, yet more and more it is coming into common usage and playing an important role in the thinking process. He makes the comment that "...no study of persuasive speech can ignore this type of mental process."⁷

The Extent of Rationalization

To his question, "Is this type of thinking done very often?", Oliver answers, "There is no question but that rationalization is a widespread habit."⁸ Three quotations are used to support his postulation. Intelligence and education are more apt to aid in promoting rationalization,

⁷Ibid., p. 274.

⁸Ibid.

rather than hindering the process, since the more sophisticated a person becomes, the more he is inclined to "invent reasons" for what he does.⁹ A hypothetical illustration of the interesting results that can be secured in the study of rationalization means of hypnosis is cited by Oliver.

Reasons for Rationalization

Most prominent of all reasons for rationalization, according to Oliver, "is to serve as a defense for our egos. It is used to prevent censure by ourselves or by our associates....

Without rationalization our egos would be sadly bruised. Every failure would have to be faced as such. Our shortcomings and inefficiencies would have to be admitted....Without this cushion for our egos to recline upon, life would be far harsher than it is."¹⁰ Once again several illustrations are used by the author to clarify his statements.

Rationalization Defined

Oliver gives an extended definition of rationalization as follows:

Rationalization is a device of respectability by which we human beings protect and pamper our egos. It is a process of reasoning designed not to discover or to defend what may be true, but to discover and defend what we should like to represent as true. It is the colored glasses through which we look at reality. It is a preference for "good"

⁹Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 275-76.

reasons instead of "real" reasons for explaining what we have done or failed to do. It is a process of justifying ourselves, our groups, and our beliefs.¹¹

Rationalization was called "respectable" because it uses the form of logical reasoning, being a good imitator.

At this point in his discussion of rationalization, Oliver quotes Eric Berne and Kimball Young and then summarizes by saying:

It is evident that there is no real conflict of views between the psychiatric and sociopsychological views of rationalization. The former lays great stress upon the "unconscious conflicts" within the individual and the consequent need for self-justification. The latter stresses the need to avoid social conflicts and thinks the "good reasons" are concocted primarily for others and only incidentally for ourselves. But both agree on the protective function of rationalization and on the form it takes.

Restated, rationalization is self-justification. It is a defensive or protective explanation, clothed in a form sufficiently resembling reasoning to appear respectable. Its whole aim, in fact, is to be "acceptable." It deals with appearances rather than with realities, with what will look good rather than with what is true. Rationalizations are alibis and excuses--often elaborate in form. We are rationalizing when we hide undesirable realities behind a screen of favorable interpretation. "Did you forget the appointment?" "Umm, not exactly, but just before the hour for it I received a very important long-distance telephone call that shifted everything else out of my mind." That is an example of rationalization.¹²

It is in this section that Dr. Oliver makes a rather important observation when he says: "One of the commonest uses of rationalization is denial that it is being used."

¹¹Ibid., p. 276.

¹²Ibid., p. 278.

It can only fulfill its function of protecting and pampering the ego when the ego blinds itself to the fact that it is rationalizing."¹³

Characteristics of Rationalization

Much of what Oliver has to say about the characteristics of rationalization already has been mentioned in Chapter Two of this study. Most interesting aspect of this particular part of Oliver's chapter is the developmental process reflected in his three textbooks on persuasion dealing with this subject. In his first edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1942), he listed the characteristics of rationalization as follows: (1) intellectual, (2) defensive, (3) passionate, and (4) post hoc. In further explanation, he stated:

The more intelligent an individual is, the better he can rationalize. Rationalization is a form of creation; it is fiction produced upon demand, without time for consideration or revision. Furthermore, it has to be good enough to fool not only the auditors, but also the creator. Rationalization is not lying; there should be no mistake on this point. It is unconscious fabrication. It is not only deceptive, but also self-deceptive. Only people with good minds can do it well. The defensive characteristic of rationalization has already been made clear. It is a life preserver of the highest class, for it preserves our egos from destruction. As a consequence of this purpose, it is passionate. The emotions are aroused in self-defense. Argument with heat is invariably rationalistic. One becomes emotionally aroused always and only when he is defending what he wants to believe. Finally, rationalization is post hoc. It is reasoning after the fact. It is not a

¹³Ibid., p. 277.

search for truth, but for socially acceptable reasons. It is the logic of the advocate, who knows what he wants to uphold, and simply hunts for the best means of upholding it.¹⁴

At the time of the publication of Persuasive Speaking in 1950, Oliver had revised his "characteristics of rationalization" to read as follows:

- (1) Rationalization puts a favorable interpretation upon what the speaker or his group does, feels, or believes.
- (2) Rationalization is ex post facto thinking or finding reasons to justify an act after it has been performed or a decision after it has been made.
- (3) Rationalization is passionate; it is argument with heat. Instead of trying to find correct answers, it tries to find answers that satisfy the needs of the speaker. Hence, there is an urgent desire to win approval for the precise point of view advocated.
- (4) Rationalization deals in irrelevancies. Facts, statistics, illustrations, authoritative quotations, and logic may abound, but the "proof" doesn't bear directly upon the proposal. The more skillful the rationalizer is, however, the harder it will be for listeners to detect the lack of logical connection.¹⁵

To these statements Oliver adds: "Another characteristic of rationalization, however, which can neither be 'listed' nor readily identified, is great variability. Everybody rationalizes in a wide variety of circumstances. Neither ignorance nor education, neither intelligence nor stupidity, is a barrier to it."¹⁶

¹⁴Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (1st ed.) op. cit., p. 184.

¹⁵Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 135.

The only characteristic that Oliver reproduced without change in this second textbook on persuasion was the third one listed in each instance--that rationalization was passionate.

One other attribute merely underwent a name change. Post hoc, which literally means "after this," was exchanged for ex post facto, which conveys the meaning "from what is done afterwards." Denotatively, this was an improvement.

A positive approach to the "defensive" characteristic of rationalization was stated by Oliver in these words: "Rationalization puts a favorable interpretation upon what the speaker or his group does, feels, or believes."¹⁷

The characteristic described as "intellectual" in his first publication of a persuasive speech textbook was replaced in Persuasive Speaking by the fact that "Rationalization deals in irrelevancies."¹⁸

The unnumbered characteristic which was mentioned but not given equal status with the others was "great variability."¹⁹

Between Oliver's writing of Persuasive Speaking and the publication of his second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, there occurred the research performed by Vernon Rank, one of Oliver's students at Pennsylvania State University.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁹Ibid.

An article, "Rationalization as a Factor in Communication," by Rank appeared in the April, 1956 issue of Today's Speech. In this article, Rank listed the four characteristics cited by Oliver in Persuasive Speaking. To these four, he added two more: i.e., tends to stereotypy, and self-reinforcement.²⁰

When Oliver's second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech appeared in 1957, his section dealing with the "Characteristics of Rationalization" enumerated the four attributes that has been mentioned in Persuasive Speaking and added the two supplied by Rank, designated numbers five and six, as follows:

5. Rationalization imposes stereotyped patterns upon individual events or conditions.
6. Rationalization also is self-reinforcing, and hence it tends to perpetuate itself. In the words of Vernon Rank, "Once we have rationalized in a situation, we tend to reinforce the arguments we have used by adding particulars and further embellishment, as if to assure ourselves that what we did was correct, or the only possible and reasonable thing to do." This reinforcement serves as "a justification of the original rationalization, supplying additional selected and corroborating details, the total of which merely makes us more certain that we can fully justify our behavior."²¹

²⁰Vernon E. Rank, "Rationalization as a Factor in Communication," Today's Speech, IV, No. 2 (April, 1956), 13-14.

²¹Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.) op. cit., p. 280.

Functions of Rationalization

Once more Oliver uses the rhetorical question as he asks, "Does rationalization have any proper functions that should be recommended?"²² He goes on to say, "Obviously such thinking must serve functions that prove useful or it could not persist in such proportion."²³

He lists four functions of interest to persuasive speakers as follows:

- (1) Rationalization builds morale by protecting bruised or endangered egos.
- (2) Rationalization may be necessary with a particular audience if it is to be motivated at all....If in many situations it is simply true that audiences cannot follow logical reasoning--and may be too sophisticated or alert to yield to emotional pleas--then the speaker has but one of two choices: (1) to attempt to achieve his desired result (which may, of course, be a thoroughly admirable one) by rationalization, or else (2) abandon his purpose as hopeless.
- (3) Rationalization saves much suffering, conflict, and unpleasantness by masking selfish or unsavory motives.
- (4) Rationalization makes it possible to think in broad terms and to deal with a complicated world....In such a world, we can act with confidence--if, indeed, we can act at all--only as we indulge in a rationalistic process of lulling ourselves into the delusion that we really do know what we are doing and why.²⁴

At this particular place in his chapter, Oliver makes good use of quotation, example and illustration.

²²Ibid., p. 281.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 281-83.

Detecting Rationalization

What Oliver has to contribute in this section serves both as a warning and as sound advice. He comments:

One of the reasons for studying persuasion, of course, is to improve your ability to defend your own judgment against persuasive appeals that are not logically and factually sound. In this era of international propaganda and of domestic "high pressure" salesmanship and political demagoguery, it is well to understand that many logical fallacies are presented to entrap the unwary. They include irrelevant analogies, illustrations, facts, or arguments; name calling, ridicule, and sarcasm; the citation of unreliable authorities; and obscurity parading as profound thinking. Other familiar forms include the argument that a contention is true because everyone believes it, or because it is old, or because it is new, or because it is scientific, or because no one can prove it to be false, or because it would be unpleasant not to think it true, or because it is associated with contentions that are true, or because the speaker believes it to be true.

It is not always easy to identify rationalization when it is used, for it presents itself in the form of reasoned argument. It may consist of evidence which is sound enough (but irrelevant) and of chains of inferences which are false only in their major premise. Hence, rationalization may appear to be good sound reasoning unless examined against the full background of facts. Generally, however, it gives itself away by revealing its inherent characteristics of intellectual form added to passionate, defensive, and post hoc content.²⁵

It is interesting to note at this point that even though Oliver revised the introductory sentences of this section, "Detecting Rationalization," which appeared in his first edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech under the heading, "Using Rationalization," he did not change the wording of it substantially. In fact, he permitted the use of the nomenclature employed in describing

²⁵Ibid., p. 284.

the characteristics of rationalization which appeared in his first persuasive speech textbook to remain in his second edition in spite of the fact that he had revised the section dealing with characteristics of rationalization considerably. He also made the rather serious omission of the three additional attributes, (i.e., deals in irrelevancies, tends toward stereotypy, and self-reinforcement), as means of detecting rationalization.

Uses of Rationalization in Persuasion

Purposefully slanting his description of rationalization toward the process of speech persuasion, Oliver suggested seven indications of the uses of rationalization in persuasive speaking. They are:

- (1) To secure unity and coherence in a group by providing a set of stereotypes, goals, or motivations that all or most will accept.
- (2) To undermine or refute opposing doctrines that the audience may not clearly understand and so can only be led to oppose by rationalistic reasoning that will have, for them, the appearance of reality and justification.
- (3) To enhance the morale and determination of a group by presenting their motives, goals, and ideals in a favorable light.
- (4) To secure acceptance for a speaker's proposal by picturing it in terms of the kind of motivation that actually appeals to his audience under whatever circumstances exist when he speaks to them.
- (5) To explain the failure of a program in a manner that will win support for another effort to carry it to completion.
- (6) To justify a decision or an action in order to organize support behind it.

- (7) To minimize disagreement within the group by pointing out that while everyone has the right to his own opinion, loyalty to the common purpose demands the sacrifice of individual preferences for the good of the whole.²⁶

These seven indications, according to Oliver, emerged out of the consideration of the nature, characteristics, and functions of rationalization.

Methods of Rationalization in Persuasion

As a reinforcement, or at least a supplement, to his section on "Detecting Rationalization," Oliver catalogues fourteen types of specious reasoning as devices of rationalization which have considerable persuasive effect. This list of "methods of rationalization in persuasion" appeared in Oliver's first book, Training for Effective Speech, (1939), and has been repeated in The New Training for Effective Speech, (1946),²⁷ in Persuasive Speaking, (1950),²⁸ and in the second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, (1957).²⁹

Concerning this list, Oliver comments: "The following catalogue of methods of rationalization has a dual usefulness. It may aid the persuasive speaker to rationalize effectively when he has to. And it serves as a partial

²⁶Ibid., pp. 285-86.

²⁷Robert T. Oliver, Rupert L. Cortright, and Cyril F. Hager, The New Training for Effective Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), pp. 361-64.

²⁸Oliver, op. cit., pp. 139-44.

²⁹Oliver, op. cit., pp. 286-90.

checklist by which as listeners we can detect more surely when rationalization is being used upon us."³⁰ The fourteen methods compiled by Oliver are:

- (1) Affirming the consequent. If anyone declared, "X is true because X is true," nobody would accept his statement as being logical. But when he says, "If Y is true, X is true. Y is true. Therefore, X is true," it sounds sufficiently logical to be widely accepted....
- (2) Argument based on sympathy. This consists of an appeal to sympathy, thinly veiled as argument. "I could not get my assignment because I was sick. Therefore, I should not be given a low grade." "Think of the unemployed men, the hopeless women, the undernourished children, the families without homes. The industrial system responsible for these conditions must be destroyed."
- (3) Argument by applying labels. President Harry Truman, in a speech on September 4, 1949, said: "Last November the people gave the selfish interests the surprise of their lives. The people just didn't believe that programs designed to assure them decent housing, adequate wages, improved medical care and better education were 'socialism' or 'regimentation.' So the selfish interests retired to a back room with their high-priced advertising experts and thought things over. They decided that the old set of scare words had become a little mildewed. Maybe it was time for a change. So they came up with a new set of scare words. Now they're talking about 'collectivism,' 'statism,' and the 'welfare state.'" President Truman's cogent remarks explain well what is meant by "argument by applying labels"--but perhaps he should note that "selfish interests" and "high-priced advertising experts" belong in the same category. Rationalization is hard to avoid!
- (4) Argument from antiquity. This is an appeal to age. "The old-time religion (or economic or political systems) is good enough for

³⁰Ibid., p. 286.

me." "Our ancestors got along under this system and I guess we can, too." "We've always done it that way!"

- (5) Argument from ignorance. This is an assertion that your argument is proved by the fact that it cannot be refuted....
- (6) Argument from novelty. This is an appeal to recency or newness. "The latest theory, you know, shows a different point of view." "Your idea is old-fashioned; it goes back to the horse and buggy days. Mine is in accord with the newest theories."
- (7) Argument from popularity. "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong!" "Buy the car that leads the field!" "More people smoke Cuties than any other cigarette."
- (8) Argumentum ad hominem. This is a transference of the argument from principles to personalities....
- (9) Being sufficiently obscure to sound convincing. H. L. Hollingworth calls this "depending upon the impressiveness of words." Glittering rhetoric has often proved an effective substitute for sound argument....
- (10) Presentation of popularity as expertness. This method is used not only in advertisements citing the opinions of movie stars, baseball players, and mountain climbers about tobacco, automobiles, and whiskey, but also in speeches citing the authority of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson concerning industrial, social, and international problems of our time..
- (11) Confusion of correlation with proof. Because two things happen together or in immediate succession, it is assumed that one is the cause and the other the effect. "He has never lost a game while wearing his mother's wedding ring. It brings him luck." To say that "He went to college and became a radical" does not demonstrate any causal relationship between the two facts; yet much rationalization of this sort passes muster as proof.

- (12) Explanation intended to confuse or mislead. This is the device of spreading a film of words over a situation to avoid the embarrassment of making a direct answer....
- (13) Use of irrelevant analogies, illustrations, facts, or arguments. A speech may sometimes be very convincing because of the great quantity of specific examples, facts, and closely knit arguments that are used, when, as a matter of fact, they are irrelevant to the point that is being made....
- (14) Use of ridicule and sarcasm. Belittling an opponent's argument is often easier than refuting it. An example is found in Burke's comments on the king's ministers, in his speech on American Taxation: "They never had any kind of system, right or wrong; but only invented occasionally some miserable tale for the day, in order meanly to sneak out of difficulties, into which they had proudly strutted." Roosevelt in 1932 helped win a first term in the White House by denouncing the Republican plank on prohibition as "high and dry on one end and moisterous on the other" -- not good argument, but apparently effective rationalization.³¹

These fourteen methods were not intended by Oliver to be a complete list, for as he declares, "the methods of rationalization are almost endless."³²

These fourteen types of specious reasoning are far from a complete catalogue of the devices of rationalization. But they do illustrate the variety of forms it may take. Whenever you find such rationalizations in the speeches of others (or in your own), note whether it is the cause of truth or of self-interest that is being served. Yet, however we must condemn them as logicians or moralists, human limitations being what they are, such devices continue to have a considerable persuasive effect.³³

³¹Ibid., pp. 286-90.

³²Ibid., p. 286.

³³Ibid., p. 290.

Rationalization and Fallacies in Reasoning

In this section of his chapter dealing with rationalization, Oliver anticipates a question that he realizes might arise from his discussion in the previous paragraphs dealing with methods.

Since the fourteen types of rationalization that have been listed are all forms of logical fallacies, the question may arise whether rationalization actually exists as a separate form of motivation, or whether it is not merely a failure to use the forms of reasoning properly. The answer is that all rationalization is fallacious logic, but not all fallacious logic is rationalization. There may well be honest failures in reasoning when the reasoner is making every effort to pursue a clear trail of rigorous logic. Rationalization occurs only when the intent of the speaker (whether or not he may consciously realize it) is justification of the belief, feelings, or action of himself or his group.³⁴

Oliver supports his contentions by use of the following examples:

Generations of physicists reasoned wrongly (but without rationalization) simply because they lacked the guidance of Planck's quantum theory. Even more generations of geographers were led into contorted reasoning about the world by the false belief that it was flat. Lack of evidence, ignorance of logic, or lack of skill in reasoning may, singly or in combination, lead to false conclusion. When such objective causes are responsible for the result, the blame may properly be placed upon fallacious reasoning; for sound reasoning is defined as correct interpretation of all relevant data.³⁵

The fact still remains that there may be serious differences of opinion as to the identity of the deviations from logic. Are such deviations to be construed as mere failures to use good reasoning technique, or are they to

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 290-91.

be classified as rationalizations? Regarding this point, Oliver says:

It is obvious, however, that much of what passes for reasoning fails of soundness for a very different reason. It fails because of a purposive twisting of the evidence or of the interpretation of it in order to support a conclusion favored by the speaker. The process of reasoning in such instances is necessarily fallacious, but it is directed and purposive. Often the speaker may be quite innocent in the sense that his rationalization is so spontaneous and natural that he is himself unaware that self-justification is his real purpose. Consequently, there may be strenuous differences of opinion as to whether a specific deviation from logic is a mere fallacy or is in fact rationalization. The motive, known or unknown, is always the test.³⁶

Conclusion

Dr. Oliver concluded his chapter on the subject of rationalization by presenting a cross-sectional analysis of emotion, reason, and rationalization in order to make clear their essential differences. In his classification, "reason" included both logic and factual exposition.

In general, the Oliverian analysis pointed out that in the use of reason an appeal is made to the auditor's intelligence, with attention centered rather closely upon pertinent facts, and with a careful and visible progress from premise to conclusion being made. In the use of emotion, Oliver mentioned that the will to believe rather than the intelligence is appealed to, that the attention of the listeners is diffused to include a general field of more or less closely related interests, and that no detailed

³⁶Ibid., p. 291.

attempt is made to progress from premise to conclusion. In rationalization, which according to Oliver falls midway between emotion and reason, "a pretense is made of concentrating the attention; but in reality it is diverted to contiguous but irrelevant facts, and although both premise and conclusions are stated, their relationship is assumed rather than proved."³⁷

A concise summary of his chapter dealing with rationalization is recorded in the words of Dr. Oliver in the following two paragraphs:

Rationalization, a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means, accounts for perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision. As such, it is a major type of persuasive discourse. Appealing to self-interest, reasoning backward from results to socially acceptable causes, marked by emotionalism, and supported by irrelevancies, rationalization is far more concerned with appearances than with reality. It serves (1) to build morale by protecting bruised egos; (2) to appeal to audiences that reject emotionalism and are unable to follow strict reasoning; (3) to mask unpleasant or unsavory motives; and (4) to provide a basis for dealing with problems that lie outside our field of knowledge or beyond the power of our thinking capacity. All four of these functions are useful, if not indeed essential, in our complicated society.

The various indicated uses of rationalization in persuasion may be accomplished by a wide variety of means, of which fourteen representative devices are identified. These two catalogues of uses and methods should serve for identifying rationalization when used by others as well as indicating how a speaker may use it himself to accomplish his own persuasive goals.³⁸

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 293.

In the second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, Oliver has incorporated in one volume the best features of his earlier writings dealing with the concept of rationalization. His approach was not one dedicated to defend rationalization, but aimed at analyzing and evaluating rationalization for its persuasive effects.

The purpose pursued by the writer of this study in this particular chapter was to analyze Oliver's contributions concerning rationalization only. Evaluation of the Oliverian concept of rationalization is reserved for Chapter Five.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALIZATION ACCORDING TO BREMBECK AND HOWELL AND MINNICK

It is generally recognized that during the decade of the 1950's there were four textbooks published in the field of speech persuasion. Two, written by Oliver, have been considered in the preceding chapter. It is the task of this chapter, therefore, to consider the other two textbooks with specific regard to the treatment afforded the concept of rationalization by the authors.

In chronological order, the first of these is the textbook, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control,¹ written by Winston Lamont Brembeck and William Smiley Howell and published in 1952. The second, entitled The Art of Persuasion,² is the contribution of Wayne C. Minnick of Northwestern University in 1957.

Brembeck and Howell have less to say directly about rationalization than did Oliver. Minnick, by comparison, writes considerably less than Brembeck and Howell about the subject. Minnick, in fact, makes direct reference to

¹Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952).

²Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957).

rationalization in two paragraphs only. This does not tell the complete story, however, as several germane indirect references to rationalization are found in Minnick's book.

A clearer understanding of the treatment given to the principle and process of rationalization in both books should emerge in the analyses which follow.

Analysis of PERSUASION

Initial summary.--Brembeck and Howell deal with the concept of rationalization in a diversified manner in their textbook, Persuasion. Initially, the authors, in their examination of the bases of persuasion, suggest that rationalization is a method that is designed to unite the listener's desire to do something with the predetermined goal of the speaker. This, according to Brembeck and Howell, provides a basis to suggest study of reasoned discourse as a motive appeal.

Secondly, also within the context of considering reasoned discourse in persuasion, the writers of Persuasion point out that the continual quest of good and sufficient reasons to justify conduct and convictions to ourselves and to others accounts, in part at least, for the prevalence of rationalization in our modern society. This universal search provides proof for them that there is a basic respect for reasoned discourse.

In a section of their book concerned with the identification and the interpretation of the tools of persuasion, Brembeck and Howell list rationalization as one of

ten psychological forms of persuasion. The ten forms listed were not meant to represent an exhaustive list. Rather, they were presented as those which are in greatest use today.

Finding the available means of persuasion within the speaker, according to Brembeck and Howell, is one important method of applying persuasion to the public speaking situation. This includes the application of the elements of the speaker's manifest speech personality (ethos) to the speaking occasion. Involved in this is the consideration of primary, secondary, and tertiary sincerity. In instances where persuasive speaking rests upon secondary and tertiary sincerity, rationalization is always present since it enables the speaker to live comfortably with himself.

In Chapter XIX the authors offer a sampling of speech patterns illustrating different approaches to the problems encountered in persuasive speech planning. Among these "sample patterns" is a brief entitled, "Speech Based Upon a Pattern of Rationalization."³ This speech, directed to student members of an All-University Congress, was meant to persuade this organization to recommend to the University Administration the adoption of a system of student ratings of teaching ability. This was one of five basic approaches to the problem of organizing the persuasive speech illustrated by Brembeck and Howell. It emphasized the importance placed upon the concept of rationalization by the writers. It also pointed out that the use of

³Brembeck and Howell, op. cit., pp. 352-55.

rationalization is more prevalent when logical supports are difficult to find and strong desires related to the topic can be recognized in the audience.

Part VI of Persuasion included evaluative materials, principles, and methods presented in order to list a comprehensive survey of persuasive studies, to suggest methods for assessing the effectiveness of persuasion, and to offer a yardstick to be used in measuring the ethics of persuasion. In this setting, Brembeck and Howell once again deal with the concept of rationalization. To the authors, behavior emerging out of propositions accepted without proof, or even a search for proof, is nonexperimental behavior. This is the area where tendencies to rationalize occur and this fact is pointed out and illustrated.

This initial summary of the Brembeck and Howell treatment of the concept of rationalization indicates to some extent the relatively significant role that rationalization plays in the persuasive speaking process. A more detailed analysis will enable us to follow the development of rationalization in the persuasive speech textbook written by these co-authors.

An Assumption of the Form of Reasoned Discourse

It is pointed out by Brembeck and Howell that a great deal of confusion among students of persuasion has come about through the consideration of appeal to reason and appeal to desire as distinct and separate entities. They

state: "Some argue that one should and can be used to the exclusion of the other. But the practical persuader cannot choose to persuade either 'logically' or 'psychologically' as all his utterances have both logical and psychological aspects. He can emphasize one of these means of motivation but the attempt to eliminate one or the other reveals a failure to understand the nature of their interaction."⁴

Brembeck and Howell clarify this by saying:

If we view the above analysis in the framework of our definition of persuasion (controlling behavior by manipulating human motives), we see that reasoned discourse may be viewed as a motive appeal. Derived motives determine much of the behavior of the individual. Controlling this motive-behavior is the goal of persuasion and reasoned discourse has been seen to be a means for effecting that control. Therefore, we submit that a sound justification for using reasoned argument in persuasion is its motivating power.

O'Neill and McBurney suggest this interpretation when they isolate "associating desire with the proposition" as a key problem in persuasion. They specify four methods: (1) By suggestion, (2) by rationalization, (3) by open explication, and (4) by demonstration. Methods three and four can be classified as reasoned discourse. Number two, rationalization, assumes the form of reasoned discourse, and only suggestion circumvents the logical basis of the argument. All four of these techniques, however, are designed to accomplish the association of desire within the persuadee with the goal of the persuader. Therefore it seems useful to study reasoned discourse as a motive appeal.⁵

Since rationalization assumes the form of reasoned discourse, it enjoys some of the prestige values usually

⁴Ibid., p. 126.

⁵Ibid., pp. 125-26.

reserved for reasoned discourse. Outwardly it appears to be what some authors have termed the "idealization of the rational." In its disguise rationalization pretends to exercise problem-solving ability, ability to suspend judgment, and firm insistence upon the use of sound evidence as a prerequisite to decision. As such, to some people it looks as if it were reasoned discourse and should be accepted with the same approval. Perhaps in no other technique does this "marriage" of the logical and psychological, suggested by Brembeck and Howell, occur so realistically as in the process of rationalization.

The Necessity to Produce a Reason

"We prefer to believe what we are told, but the fact that we try to be rational imposes the requirement that we have a reason for every change in belief and action."⁶

This necessity to produce a reason, according to Brembeck and Howell, "accounts in part for the prevalence of rationalization in our modern society."⁷

The citizen of today's dynamic society with its multiple competing persuasions, reinforced by the media of mass communication which intensifies the campaigns of advertising and other propaganda, is usually looking for an adequate means of resolving conflicts. He feels the "pressure." He is constantly being urged to decide this or to

⁶Ibid., p. 132.

⁷Ibid.

decide that and to do it on the spur of the moment without ample time for deliberate consideration. When he makes his decision, he senses a new type of "pressure." This pressure is the need to offer a "good" reason for the choice that has been made. Hence, he searches for adequate reasons to justify his decision, both to himself and to others. "This great search for good reasons is," in the words of Brembeck and Howell, "further proof of the fundamental respect we have for reasoned discourse."⁸

Such respect for reasoned discourse does not mean that reasoned discourse is always used respectfully. On the other hand, the authors of Persuasion inform their readers that:

It is a popular fallacy that the reasoning associated with rationalization is necessarily unsound, possibly resulting from attempts to assign a moral dimension to it. True enough, it may be poor thinking, but on the other hand there is nothing in the process of rationalization which is dependent upon the quality of the reflective thinking entering into it. If your rationalizing deceives yourself and others, your reasoning is defective. The better the thought structure of rationalization the better it serves the needs of the individual. Figuring out a network of good reasons to support any premeditated course of action can be a praiseworthy activity, and one which is subject to all the rigors of logical discipline. It is possible to apply to rationalization the criteria of reasoned discourse.⁹

Consequently, when a speaker supplies rationalization to his audience in an effort to resolve their conflicts he

⁸Ibid., p. 133.

⁹Ibid.

may use valid or invalid forms of support. This is the option of the one who rationalizes. He does have a moral obligation, however, and this is spelled out by Brembeck and Howell.

He has a moral obligation to supply only sound reasoning based on revealed premises. Otherwise he will be indulging in misrepresentation and deception. But the form of rationalization demands that the speaker go to considerable pains to appear to be logical.¹⁰

The better way, and the easier way, it is pointed out, is to be logical rather than simply to appear to be.¹¹ As most everyone knows, it is not quite as easy as it sounds. Rationalization usually maintains a high degree of respectability. It is generally both self-deceptive and auditor-deceptive. Detection is not easy as a general rule and the results of rationalizing are often more "satisfying" to the rationalizer than the results of reasoned discourse based upon reflective thinking.

A Psychological Form of Persuasion

Brembeck and Howell elect to deal with the concept of rationalization next as one of ten of the psychological forms of persuasion which they list in Chapter X. In this section of their book rationalization is treated in a more definitive manner. Here they state:

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Rationalization is a way of protecting our sentiment of self-regard. It assigns logical, intelligent "reasons" for opinions and conducts which are really non-rational. People don't want to appear irrational to others, so they gain facility in justifying, logically, their behavior. The older and more intelligent we are the more proficient and subtle we become in this matter. Such a procedure soothes our consciences and often protects us from facing the disconcerting reality of some very selfish and socially unapproved desires and behaviors.¹²

The point is made by the authors, also, that a person may rationalize before or after the act.¹³

Treatment of rationalization as a psychological form of persuasion is climaxed by Brembeck and Howell with the presentation of two ways in which a persuader can make use of this device. They suggest:

(1) If the persuadee already has a desire for your product or for any other course of action or belief, then persuasion becomes the process of helping the individual justify the desired end or, in short, of helping the person to rationalize.

(2) A second use is suggested by Ewbank and Auer "...we may use rationalization as a 'short circuit' appeal in persuading others to accept conclusions we have reached on a rational basis.... The purpose, of course, is to present via the 'short circuit' approach what cannot, for reason of time, perhaps, be presented in detail. And the persuader may feel himself ethically justified in using a non-rational technique to gain acceptance of a conclusion which he himself has reached on a rational basis."¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 176.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

Rationalization in Relation to Sincerity

Consistent with the stated purpose to locate and analyze "the available means of persuasion within the speaker,"¹⁵ Brembeck and Howell present rationalization in Chapter XIII as a constant companion to secondary and tertiary sincerity. The writers' insertion of the concept of rationalization at this particular section of the book is rather unique and, although they do not mention the process of rationalizing in detail at this point, what is said is significant.

Basically, the chapter deals with the speaker's ethos. This word, broadly translated as "character," includes two elements in the context of persuasive speech. They are: (1) The reputation or prestige which the speaker enjoys with respect to his particular audience and subject at the time he begins to speak; and, (2) the increasing or diminishing of this reputation or prestige as a result of what he says or does during the speech.¹⁶

It is with respect to the latter element that the authors make specific mention of the sincerity of the speaker. They do it in the following manner:

Now let us turn to the means by which the speaker builds ethos during his speech. We must mention good delivery, frankness, friendliness, knowledge, rhetorical skill, in fact, all the elements of ethos supplied by classical and modern analysts. References that humbly call attention to his unusual experiences

¹⁵Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁶Ibid.

and qualifications probably help. However, the basis of a powerful aspect of ethos is more subtle. Contemporary writers call it sincerity of the speaker.¹⁷

Brembeck and Howell make certain distinctions in their definition of sincerity as it relates to persuasive speaking. Going beyond the general "dedication to a cause" and "profound intellectual conviction" meanings, they identify three orders of sincerity: primary, secondary, and tertiary. To them, primary sincerity consists of an unreserved belief in the persuasive proposition, a profound conviction in the central proposition of the persuasive speech; secondary sincerity emerges from a conviction that securing acceptance of the persuasive proposition is socially desirable, and this in spite of the fact that the persuader may or may not be in agreement with the persuasive proposition; and tertiary sincerity which rests upon the persuader's personal reward from his act of persuasion rather than upon his personal conviction of the truth of the proposition or upon its social consequences.¹⁸

It is at this point that Brembeck and Howell make the statement: "Two comments may be made concerning persuasive speaking that rests on secondary and tertiary sincerity. Rationalization is always involved, enabling the speaker to live comfortably with himself....(and) as the high correlation of belief and desire would lead us to

¹⁷Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 255.

expect, the persuasive speaker tends, over a period of time, to increase his belief in the central proposition."¹⁹

Rationalization is found in secondary sincerity. The speaker, who doubts the persuasive proposition, has faith in the desirability of persuading others to accept it. Thus, he rationalizes his position. In tertiary sincerity the speaker, because of his personal stake in the outcome, has to rationalize his actions since he is not convinced at all in the central proposition or its social utility. In both instances the speakers appear to be "sold" on the persuasive proposition and on the need to sell others.

Speech Based Upon a Pattern of Rationalization

Some speech patterns are based upon logic while others are based upon psychological analysis.²⁰

In this section the authors do two things. First of all, they describe briefly the pattern of building a speech which utilizes the technique of rationalization. Secondly, they offer a four-page brief of a speech based upon a pattern of rationalization as an example.²¹

The method employed by a speaker using the rationalization technique is described as follows:

¹⁹Ibid., p. 256.

²⁰Ibid., p. 351.

²¹Ibid., p. 353-55.

In brief, the persuader using the technique of rationalization first induces his audience to desire his proposal by the mention of selfish benefits (the real reasons). For accepting the proposal he then supplies "good" reasons with which members of the audience can reassure themselves and others in explaining their acceptance of his message. To be sure that they understand the point he hints at the selfish benefits, but by emphasis, he suggests that the main reasons for action are those which are socially approved. The substitution of "good" reasons for "real" reasons leads us to term it "rationalization."²²

The "brief" illustrates this technique. Points established in the outline appeal to selfish interests first, then to idealistic matters inciting social consciousness. The selfish interest appeal is reiterated, and this is followed by a repeat of the idealistic appeal. The proposition outlined concerns the adoption of a system of student ratings of faculty teaching ability.

The Tendency to Rationalize Nonexperimental Beliefs

Final mention of the concept of rationalization by Brembeck and Howell in their book, Persuasion, occurs in a chapter dealing with the ethics of persuasion. To the writers, any behavior which emerges out of propositions that are accepted without proof, or even a search for evidence, is nonexperimental behavior. It is in this area of nonexperimental behavior where tendencies to rationalize are found. The situation is presented in the following manner:

²²Ibid., p. 351.

Much of man's mental energy has been directed toward self-justification, finding "good" reasons for what he wants to do or believe. Our non-experimental premises come to us with high prestige, from parents, associates, respected institutions, and so on, so we want to believe them. When they conflict with our common sense -- we are trained in reflective thinking to some extent -- we can search only for reasoning in their support. Because many of these traditional advices work out quite well in practice some of this reasoning is sound enough to be termed experimental verification. Often it is specious for lack of data and is characterized by gaps and leaps in induction.²³

There is but one thing a speaker should do, according to Brembeck and Howell, if he desires to be ethical when he is faced with a situation where information is inadequate and rigid reasoning forms cannot be applied. He should abandon the pretense of basing his claims on reason and admit the lack of proof in any scientific sense; then he should request acceptance of his proposition because it accords with the judgment, experience, and sentiments of his audience, and these are not to be regarded lightly as well-established bases of decision.²⁴

Summary

Brembeck and Howell have treated the concept of rationalization effectively in their book, Persuasion. The relation of rationalization to motive appeal was described. Rationalization is a method designed to accomplish the association of desire within the persuadee

²³Ibid., p. 459.

²⁴Ibid.

with the goal of the persuader. As such, it is a process which often assumes the form of reasoned discourse.

The necessity to "manufacture" suitable and acceptable reasons as a means of justifying changes in behavior to ourselves and to others accounts in large part for the prevalence of the use of rationalization in our present-day society. This is especially true when the need to resolve conflicts is urgent.

Presentation of rationalization as a psychological form of persuasion and as a device related to secondary and tertiary sincerity indicated the versatility of this mechanism.

The description of the method by which a speaker employs the rationalization technique and the example which followed were well-developed.

An understanding of the tendency to rationalize nonexperimental beliefs was followed by the suggestion that the persuasive speaker follow the course of high ethical standards and "prove" his ability to discern "real" reasons from "good" reasons in all fairness and honesty.

Analysis of THE ART OF PERSUASION

Wayne C. Minnick, author of The Art of Persuasion, assumes that an act of persuasion is a complex thing, and that "one who would persuade requires knowledge about attention, perception, credibility, basic needs, values, and emotions plus the ability to recognize and deal with

obstacles to action."²⁵ His treatment of these subjects comprises most of his book.

Conspicuous by its absence in the Minnick textbook on persuasion is the concept of rationalization. This is especially noticeable when comparisons are made to the persuasive speech textbooks authored by Oliver and Brembeck and Howell. Minnick, in fact, makes but two direct references to rationalization and both of these are brief.²⁶ He considers rationalization a form of response to social pressures in our society which places premiums upon good reasons offered to explain behavior. Secondly, and also by direct reference, he selects the word rationalize as an example of occult ambiguity and, then, sets forth his reason for making this choice. In a third instance while dealing with the device of propaganda, Minnick seems to make an indirect reference to rationalization although use of the term is avoided.²⁷ An example of rationalization is given in Chapter Six of The Art of Persuasion;²⁸ however, it is not identified by name.

Minnick's cursory treatment of the concept of rationalization is dealt with briefly in the analysis which follows.

²⁵Minnick, op. cit., Preface.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 23 and 77.

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 139-40.

The Influence of Reason

Human behavior is extremely complex. This complexity has resulted in the formation of a variety of theories about the causes of human behavior. In the second chapter of The Art of Persuasion, Minnick discusses four categories of theories relating to human action. They are presented as: (1) Instinct-Drive Theories, (2) Reason-Impulse Theories, (3) Learning Theories, and (4) Field Theory.²⁹

It is in the second category, the area dealing with Reason-Impulse Theories, that the writer mentions rationalization. The approach used is one in which two extreme positions are described and then rejected in favor of a modified position, which is actually a middle-ground between the two extremes.

The one extreme is described by Minnick as follows:

Man has regarded himself from the dawn of history as a rational animal. He has assumed that his choices are made largely in response to "objective" or "real" criteria, and that they are the product of logical necessity, not of whim or caprice. His intellect he has regarded as the governor of his emotions -- thought as the master of desire.³⁰

The other viewpoint, which involves a tendency to move to the other extreme, is set forth by Minnick in the paragraph which follows:

Recently critics have ridiculed this picture of human behavior [i.e., the one described in the last quotation.] It puts the cart before the horse, they say, by elevating to prominence the least important

²⁹Ibid., p. 19.

³⁰Ibid., p. 21.

influence on behavior -- the intellect. Reason is merely a thin crust, they believe, coating a mind that is an abyss of unconscious or barely conscious urges and habits. These urges and habits overwhelm the intellect at almost every turn, enslaving it and rendering it incapable of objectivity.³¹

The middle-of-the-road approach accepted by the author is summarized in these words:

It is probably unwise, in view of the preceding facts, to characterize man either as a rational animal or as a whimsical, impulsive one. He is not wholly rational or wholly irrational, but a mixture of both. Every act is the response to desire, but the desire is governed at least to some extent by a proper and "real" estimate of circumstances. Only the totally insane are completely the victims of impulse; only a computing machine produces rational calculations without feeling.³²

Attempting a compromise between the extreme positions, Minnick makes two observations. He allows that the pre-eminence of needs and motives as the driving forces in behavior may be conceded, but states that reason appears to function as the primary means to their attainment. According to Minnick, "If man is to attain desired ends at all, or to attain them efficiently, or is to attain them without harm or injury, then he must have some real and rational grasp of the circumstances in which he is confined."³³ "Reason," he adds, "shows men how to get what they want, efficiently and safely, within the limits of the available means."³⁴

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 23.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

It is at this point that the author of The Art of Persuasion makes a brief admission that rationalization is a possibility as ex post facto thinking.

It is also evident that reason, or rationality, is highly prized in our society and for many persons functions as a decisive regulator of conduct. Social pressures are such in our society that we, at least as far as public action is concerned, are encouraged to offer good reasons for our behavior. We are expected to be reasonable, and acts which can be justified by good reasons are praised, while capricious and whimsical action is condemned.

Confronted by this pressure, we often merely rationalize our behavior; that is, we learn to justify our conscious or unconscious desires by finding reasons for giving in after we have already resolved to do so.³⁵

An Example of Ambiguity

The only other direct reference to rationalization that Minnick makes is found in Chapter Four of his book. This is a chapter which deals with the problem of accurate perception. The content of this chapter is summarized by the author briefly as follows:

Communication consists of a person organizing a set of symbols that has a certain meaning to him, and an audience inferring from those symbols what was intended. Factors which influence the way an audience perceives words and sentences were organized into two groups: objective factors, or those which have to do mainly with the nature of the symbols themselves, and subjective factors, or those that spring from conditions inside the mind and body of the audience.

Objective distortions of meaning were said to spring from ambiguity, and five kinds of ambiguity were distinguished.

³⁵Ibid.

Subjective distortions were said to arise from learned frames of reference or habits of perceiving accumulated from experience.³⁶

The five kinds of ambiguity which account for these objective distortions of meaning that complicate communication are listed as: (1) Objective Factors, (2) Ordinary Ambiguity, (3) Occult Ambiguity, (4) Connotative Ambiguity, and (5) Subjective Ambiguity. Minnick points out that: "Ambiguity occurs whenever a word or a series of words is subject to more than one reasonable interpretation."³⁷ Occult ambiguity, in particular, occurs when stipulated definitions of terms vary considerably from customary meanings of these terms. The author, Wayne Minnick, describes it this way: "Once a person has attached a definite meaning (or meanings) to a word, that meaning tends to obliterate a stipulated meaning unless the stipulated meaning is a close derivative of the known meaning."³⁸

The example offered to prove his point gives to the reader of The Art of Persuasion the second specific reference to rationalization by Minnick.

A good example of this tendency is supplied in the general response to the word rationalize. In the meaning stipulated by psychologists, to rationalize means to find ostensibly logical reasons to justify impulsive behavior. But to the layman rational means reasonable, logical. Even when the layman is exposed to the stipulated meaning of rationalize in psychology classes and elsewhere,

³⁶Ibid., p. 99.

³⁷Ibid., p. 71.

³⁸Ibid., p. 77.

many persist in inferring from rationalize the meaning "to think logically or rationally."³⁹

A Process Used in Propaganda

"Although the propagandist does not like to reason at all, he will at times offer a kind of pseudo-reasoning process which often deceives the intelligence rather than enlightens it."⁴⁰ This statement by Minnick may or may not be a reference to what could be described as the process of rationalization. It is employed by him in Chapter One when he is considering the method of authority in decision-making.

If the propagandist is deliberately deceiving others with falsehood and distorted truth, he is lying rather than rationalizing. However, if he is himself deceived, as might easily be the case since the will-to-believe is so great in many instances, he is rationalizing. Such self-deception may lead to the deception of others. Thus, the "pseudo-reasoning process" mentioned by Minnick may be the process of rationalization at work. Since he did not spell it out specifically, or identify this "kind of pseudo-reasoning process," only the possibility of rationalization in this instance may be inferred.

Maturity Versus Immaturity

Chapter Six of Minnick's book is a consideration of argumentation in persuasive discourse. It is the author's

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 5.

conviction that "A man's arguments will tend to be sound if he is a mature thinker and speaks honestly; they will tend to be unsound if he is an immature thinker or speaks falsely."⁴¹

Minnick clarifies this by saying:

Mature thought reflects actual or real relationships among things (facts, and reliable opinions), whereas immature thinking tends to reflect autistic distortions of real relationships. The mature thinker says, for example, "I failed yesterday's math test because from want of study or plain obtruseness I did not know several fundamental processes. If I go back and learn those I will be able to work problems such as those given on the exam." The immature thinker says, "I failed yesterday's math exam because the professor deliberately inserted catch questions. If I change to Professor Smith's section I will be all right. They say Smith is a good Joe."

The mature thinker, like the scientist, strives for accurate observation and sound inferences; hence, he tries to evaluate his personal inclinations objectively; the immature thinker is often unaware that his own desires may distort the accuracy of his observations and the content of his thinking, or if dimly aware of the fact, he makes little effort to overcome the tendency.⁴²

It would appear that once again Minnick had made an indirect reference to the process of rationalization. Although he gives no identification that his example of the "reasoning" employed by the immature thinker is rationalization, yet it possesses the obvious characteristics of rationalization and might easily be identified as such.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 139.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 139-40.

Summary

Wayne C. Minnick gives little attention to the concept of rationalization in his persuasive speech textbook, The Art of Persuasion. He makes but two direct references to rationalization and both of these are brief.

In the first instance, he considers rationalization a response to social pressure as a result of the influence of reason. People are expected to be reasonable and whenever they can justify their acts with good reasons they are commended. Society places a premium upon the "reasonable act" and tends to reject or to disapprove of capricious and whimsical action.

In the second instance, Minnick mentions the word rationalize while citing it as an example of occult ambiguity. On two other occasions, the author seems to make indirect references to rationalization. In both cases, however, use of the term is omitted.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Modern psychological research has placed considerable emphasis upon human motivation. As a result, many contemporary writers of speech textbooks base their treatments of persuasion largely upon selected lists of human motives. The time has come, it would seem to the writer of this study, when students of persuasive speech should move out beyond the past horizons with their long lists of human motives, named but not explained, to new vistas of learning that will yield knowledge and wisdom as to how and why motives are derived. To do this will be another step forward to "find the available means of persuasion" suggested many centuries ago by Aristotle.

One vital area where a major break-through could be made is an area which concerns the concept of rationalization. Robert T. Oliver and Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell have opened the way with their preliminary investigations. Other students of speech persuasion must join them and, by accepting responsibility to take the initiative, move forward. A forward movement, based upon empirical research, must have its roots established firmly in an understanding of past investigations of the process of rationalization.

It has been the purpose of this paper essentially to bring together material which might serve as part of the foundation upon which future work can be structured. Chapters Two, Three, and Four have presented analyses of important literature dealing with the rationalization concept. This chapter will offer evaluations of the material which has been analyzed along with a summation and suggestions for further investigation.

Summary

Chapter One, introductory in nature, indicated the creative design of this thesis. The writer's definition of rationalization was given, a statement of the problem was made, and a selected list of imposed limitations was set forth.

Chapter Two presented a survey of selected literature dealing with the concept of rationalization as it appears in various disciplines of study. From this overview there emerged certain basic considerations of rationalization.

Some controversy exists among several writers as to whether rationalizing occurs primarily on the conscious level or on the unconscious level. Consensus of opinion, for the most part, considers rationalization as neither totally conscious, nor totally unconscious, behavior. It is both. Both conscious and unconscious aspects are apt to involved in any given rationalization.

Some authors, using traditional definitions, have emphasized social acceptability as the hallmark of rationalization. Other writers have believed that it was not social conformity as much as internal consistency, or coherence, that characterized the process of rationalization.

Among the authorities from whom definitions of rationalization were excerpted there is general agreement that rationalization is a process of self-justification, a method of explaining in pseudo-rational form the errors in judgment, the inconsistencies, the mistakes which we attempt to cover by a facade of both good and "acceptable" reasons. As such, it is faulty reasoning. It is the technique of inventing acceptable interpretations of behavior which an impartial analysis would not substantiate. Rationalization needs a cloak of respectability. This is provided when the one who rationalizes adopts the form of logical reasoning. It is only the form of reasoning that he follows; he does not reason logically. He imitates. He assigns to his emotionalized stream of thoughts what he alleges to be rational motives and arguments. These arguments and explanations he uses to justify his nonrational, or nonlogical, beliefs and desires. To make the whole process appear respectable he tries to use the best form of logical reasoning that he can find. Rationalization, according to Oliver, is a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means.

How may rationalization be detected? The survey of the literature concerning the concept of rationalization

revealed that there are certain attributes which help to identify the process. It was found that rationalization is:

(1) Characterized by Inflexibility. This is true because the person rationalizing must protect his reasoning artificially. He is not in a position to search for possible explanations from which he might select one that appears to be, by all the canons of logic, most fundamental. In the process of reasoning artificially, a person often relies upon the force of his assertion and the stubbornness with which he holds to his reason. Consequently, rationalization functions as one of the major obstacles to social change.

(2) Rationalization Is Passionate. Generally speaking, rationalization is accompanied by or follows the arousal of emotion. A person becomes emotionally aroused when he is defending what he wants to believe. The person who is not rationalizing meets challenges on their merits and places one argument against another in logical fashion. Since people usually believe what they wish to believe, the door is open to rationalization in order that pseudo-logical reasons can be offered for emotionally-aroused thoughts and actions. Rationalization, therefore, is passionate. It pretends to rule out personal factors and in so doing relates the proposition under consideration to habit patterns, to stereotypes, and to the will-to-believe.

(3) Rationalization Specializes in Irrelevancies.

It centers attention on things that seem to be relevant. Facts, statistics, authoritative quotations, illustrations, examples, and logic may abound, but the "proof" does not bear specifically upon the proposal being considered. The subtle nature of rationalization on many occasions can give to it a high degree of sophistication so that important distinctions between facts and fictions are obscured. Regardless of whether it is because of a reluctance to say, "I do not know." or an attempt to reconcile conflicting tendencies within the personality, or an effort to effect a compromise between an impulse or compulsion and the demands of social propriety, there is a tendency to place emphasis on that which seems to be relevant but which, in reality, is not. It is characteristic of rationalization that it deals in irrelevancies.

(4) Rationalization Is Ex Post Facto Thinking. A person may rationalize before or after the act. However, most authorities are in agreement that rationalization generally takes the form of finding reasons to justify an act after it has been accomplished or a decision after it has been reached. So strong, in fact, is this ex post facto tendency that it has been labeled an attribute of rationalization. This reasoning after the fact is not a search for truth, but for reasons that are socially acceptable. It is the logic pursued by the advocate who knows precisely what he wants to support, and simply looks for the best means of supporting it.

(5) Rationalization Is Defensive. It is a protective explanation to promote self-justification. It is faulty, defensive thinking motivated by the desire to retain self-respect. It serves this purpose, at least temporarily, by enabling the person who rationalizes to avoid facing issues and to excuse his failures. Rationalization places an acceptable and favorable interpretation upon the actions, feelings, and beliefs of the one who employs this ego-defensive mechanism. Thus, whether done consciously or unconsciously in what may be considered to be normal or abnormal behavior, rationalization is characterized by the attribute of defensiveness.

(6) Rationalization Tends to Stereotypy. Since it is usually impossible for a person's mind to apprehend all of the characteristics of any one thing at a given time, the tendency is to think of ideas, things, and events with a preconceived and limited set of characteristics. This tendency is stereotypy. Stereotypes are often regarded as inaccurate and prejudiced views and, doubtless, many of them are. But it is wise to keep in mind that all perceived things of any complexity tend to be stereotyped. Rationalization and stereotypy, however, are not the same thing, as their dissimilarities soon prove, but the fact remains that they hold many things in common. And to the degree that this is true, rationalization tends toward stereotypy.

(7) Rationalization Is Self-Reinforcing. It tends to perpetuate itself. One rationalization leads to a second, and a third, and others follow in many instances. It can occur that rationalization becomes established as a habitual pattern. A person may engage in this process persistently and this may create serious problems of personality adjustment. The emotionally handicapped person is usually emotional because he is engaged in too many battles expressing inconsistencies in his personality integration. In order to defend or excuse himself, he rationalizes. The greater his emotional difficulty, the greater the tendency to reinforce his rationalizations with additional rationalizations. Reinforcement can be a matter of kind or degree, or both. It may include a series of different kinds of "reasons," or it may be embellishments of the "one good reason" offered as justification.

Chapter Two listed ten major functions of rationalization also. Any attempt to name all the varieties of the functions of rationalization would be most difficult, if not impossible, since rationalization enters into almost every phase of human affairs. The ten functions mentioned were:

(1) Rationalization functions as a disguise of the self for the self. A person wishes to protect himself against recognition of his motives which he might consider ignoble, mean, or discrediting. In order to maintain a certain degree of integration of the personality, he finds

ways of making certain kinds of behavior acceptable by the process of rationalization.

(2) Rationalization is used to justify fundamental values, especially those which were acquired through the process of identification during early childhood. Consequently, a person often finds it necessary to justify his membership in his political party, his adherence to a certain church, or his loyalty to a service organization. To do so, he searches for reasons and arguments which will justify his choices.

(3) Rationalization functions as a morale builder by protecting endangered egos. Rationalizations are often indispensable if the spirit of "try, try again" is to be offered for encouragement.

(4) Rationalization is used as a means of modifying dreams in order to give them greater apparent reality. Freud refers to the attempt to make products of our unconscious mind agree with reality as a form of rationalization.

(5) Rationalization makes it possible for an individual to deal quite successfully with a complicated world by thinking in broad terms. To go through a single day performing no acts or thinking no thoughts except upon the basis of full information and rigorously logical thinking is an impossibility. Rationalization helps a person to "believe" that he really does know what he is doing and why when faced with a complicated situation.

(6) Rationalization functions as a means of justifying the behavior of other people. Whatever we feel a part of, that we must uphold and justify.

(7) Rationalization is used to excuse personality deficiencies or limitations. Practically any personality limitation, real or imagined, is subject to rationalization by the individual who feels the need to be defensive.

(8) Rationalization is also used to justify a person's eccentricities and character weaknesses. For example, the man who frequently finds it necessary to escape from responsibilities usually finds it necessary to accompany his refusals with reasons almost certain to be rationalizations.

(9) Rationalization functions to bolster against fears and anxieties in an individual's experience. For instance, fear of social disapproval is a basic cause for rationalization both in word and in behavior.

(10) Rationalization functions variously as a means of justifying circumstances. Included in this category are the three excuses referred to as "sour grapes," "sweet lemon," and "Alibi Ike." The common core of these, as well as many other rationalizations, is an attempt to distort the perceived situation so as to relieve anxiety and evade conflict.

These ten functions of rationalization are but a few of many that could be listed. Most all rationalizations function to avoid suffering, conflict, loss of prestige,

and unpleasantness. They do serve purposes generally deemed to be useful. This is confirmed by universal acceptance for the most part. However, continual use of rationalization as a means of alleviating anxiety, of preventing a facing up to disagreeable and distressing motives, is an unstable form of adjustment. It is vulnerable because it is always in danger of being toppled over by the force of circumstance. It is not too satisfactory because it encourages the postponement of the solution of real problems that persist.

Rationalization is neither good or bad, constructive or destructive, to be approved or disapproved. It is necessary and neutral and should be judged by its results more than by any absolute standard.

A certain degree of rationalization in a person's life experience would appear to be normal and necessary in a complex environment. Persistent rationalization can be pathological, however, and may result from the individual's inability to maintain integration under stress.

Chapter Two also disclosed that not too much has been done to investigate scientifically the process of rationalization. An examination of much of the literature revealed that most of the writing has been based upon introspection. In the few empirical studies to date that have been related to the process of rationalization, rationalization has been treated indirectly, or as a by-product of the principal research findings, for the most part. If this mechanism is universally employed in our lives, then

it is worthy of considerable scientific investigation. Scientific research of the process of rationalization is needed and greatly to be desired.

Chapter Three presented Robert T. Oliver's concept of rationalization as it is set forth in two of his textbooks, Persuasive Speaking (1950), and The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (Second Edition, 1957). Dr. Oliver treats the process of rationalization more comprehensively than any other writer in the field of speech persuasion.

According to Oliver rationalization is widespread. Education is an aid in the promotion of rationalization since the more sophisticated a person becomes, the more he is inclined to invent reasons for what he does. Oliver also believes that the most prominent reason for rationalizing is to serve as a defense for the ego. If it were not for the process of rationalization every failure would have to be acknowledged as a failure and every inefficiency would have to be admitted.

Oliver thinks of rationalization as a device of respectability enabling a person to protect and to pamper his ego. He thinks of the process of rationalization as a means of justification where "good" reasons are offered instead of "real" reasons for explaining what has been done or what failed to get done. Rationalization fulfills its function of protecting and pampering the ego most effectively when the ego is blind to the fact that it is rationalizing.

In his second edition of The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, Dr. Oliver lists six attributes of rationalization. He states that rationalization puts a favorable interpretation upon what is said, felt, or believed; that rationalization is ex post facto thinking; that rationalization is passionate, argument with heat; that rationalization deals in irrelevancies; that rationalization imposes stereotyped patterns upon individual events or conditions; and, that rationalization is self-reinforcing, tending to perpetuate itself.

Four functions of rationalization are named by Oliver. These functions, of special interest to persuasive speakers, are: (1) as a morale builder; (2) as a special motivator for particular audiences that cannot follow logical reasoning; (3) as a means of masking selfish or unsavory motives in order to avoid suffering, conflict, and unpleasantness; and (4) as a method by which a person can deal with a complex world.

Seven uses of rationalization in the process of speech persuasion are dealt with by Oliver. His description of these uses are as follows: (1) to secure unity and coherence in a group by providing a set of stereotypes, goals, or motivations that are generally acceptable; (2) to undermine or refute opposing viewpoints; (3) to enhance the morale and determination of a group by presenting their motives, goals, and ideals in a favorable manner; (4) to secure acceptance for a speaker's proposal; (5) to offer an

explanation for the failure of a program in such a way as to win support for another effort to carry it to completion; (6) to justify a decision or an action in order to rally support behind it; and (7) to minimize disagreement within a group by stressing loyalty to a common purpose which transcends individual preference for the good of the whole.

Oliver catalogued fourteen types of specious reasoning as devices of rationalization which have considerable persuasive effect. In brief, they are: (1) affirming the consequent; (2) argument based on sympathy; (3) argument by applying labels; (4) argument from antiquity; (5) argument from ignorance; (6) argument from novelty; (7) argument from popularity; (8) argumentum ad hominem; (9) being sufficiently obscure to sound convincing; (10) presentation of popularity as expertness; (11) confusion of correlation with proof; (12) explanation intended to confuse or mislead; (13) use of irrelevant analogies, illustrations, facts, or arguments; and, (14) use of ridicule and sarcasm. Oliver acknowledges the fact that there may be strenuous differences of opinion as to whether a specific deviation from logic is a mere fallacy or a rationalization. He claims that the motive, whether known or unknown, is always the test. Rationalization occurs only when the intent of the speaker, whether he may or may not realize it, is justification of the belief, feelings, or action of himself or his group.

Chapter Four considered two additional textbooks in the field of speech persuasion which dealt with the concept of rationalization. The first of these, Persuasion: A Means of Social Control, was written by Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell and published in 1952. The second, entitled The Art of Persuasion, is the contribution of Wayne C. Minnick in 1957.

Brembeck and Howell made the suggestion that rationalization is a method designed to accomplish the association of desire within the persuadee with the goal of the persuader. This idea provided a suitable reason for them to suggest study of reasoned discourse as a motive appeal. Moreover, the authors pointed out that the continual quest of good and sufficient reasons to justify conduct and convictions to one's self and to others accounts in large part for the prevalence of rationalization in our modern society. Rationalization, according to Brembeck and Howell, is a psychological form of persuasion. It is a way of protecting our sentiment of self-regard. It assigns logical, intelligent "reasons" for opinions and conducts which are non-rational. And since rationalization assumes the form of reasoned discourse, it enjoys some of the prestige values usually reserved for reasoned discourse. Such respect for reasoned discourse does not mean that reasoned discourse always is used respectfully. Brembeck and Howell pointed out that it is possible on many occasions to apply to rationalization the criteria of reasoned

discourse. However, it is best to be logical rather than simply to appear to be.

It is the observation of Brembeck and Howell that rationalization usually maintains a high degree of respectability, and that it is both self-deceptive and auditor-deceptive. They claim that detection of rationalization is not easy as a general rule and that the results of rationalizing are often more "satisfying" to the rationalizer than the results of reasoned discourse based upon reflective thinking. They also believe that a person may rationalize before or after the act.

Finding the available means of persuasion within the speaker, according to Brembeck and Howell, is one important method of applying persuasion to the public speaking situation. This includes the application of the elements of the speaker's manifest speech personality (ethos) to the speaking situation. Involved in this is the consideration of primary, secondary, and tertiary sincerity. To the authors, primary sincerity consists of an unreserved belief in the persuasive proposition, a profound conviction in the central proposition of the persuasive speech; secondary sincerity emerges from a conviction that securing acceptance of the persuasive proposition is socially desirable, and this in spite of the fact that the persuader may or may not be in agreement with the persuasive proposition; and tertiary sincerity rests upon the persuader's personal reward from his act of persuasion rather than upon his personal

conviction of the truth of the proposition or upon its social consequences. In instances where persuasive speaking is based upon secondary and tertiary sincerity, rationalization is always present, Brembeck and Howell claim, since it enables the speaker to live comfortably with himself.

The description of the method by which a persuasive speaker employs the rationalization technique and the example cited by the authors which followed were informative. Brembeck and Howell pointed out that the technique of rationalization probably is best when logical supports are difficult to find and strong desires related to the topic can be recognized in the audience.

Final mention of the concept of rationalization by Brembeck and Howell in their book, Persuasion dealt with the problem of ethics in persuasion. A speaker, faced with a situation where information is inadequate and where rigid reasoning forms cannot be applied, should abandon the pretense of basing his claims on reason and admit the lack of proof in any scientific sense; then he should request acceptance of his proposition because it accords with the judgment, experience, and sentiments of his audience, and these are not to be regarded lightly as well-established bases of decision.

Chapter Four also considered The Art of Persuasion by Wayne C. Minnick. This book made only two direct references to the concept of rationalization. Neither reference was an extended one.

Social pressure in our culture, Minnick allowed, tends to encourage rationalization. A person feels compelled to explain his feelings, beliefs, and actions. Such explanations must appear to be logical since the prestige value of logic is great. Minnick did not encourage use of the process of rationalization, however. Instead, he advocated that a person should learn to apply rational techniques before deciding and acting and to be guided by them irrespective of personal wishes.

The word rationalize was pictured by Minnick as an example of occult ambiguity. In other words, once a person has assigned a given meaning to a word, that meaning tends to obliterate a stipulated meaning unless the stipulated meaning is a close derivative of the known meaning. The word rationalize often elicits a response that should be reserved for the word rational. Minnick points out that even in cases where a person is exposed to the stipulated meaning of rationalize, such as in a psychology class, there is often a tendency to persist in inferring from rationalize the meaning "to think logically or rationally."

Finally, Minnick makes what may be regarded as two indirect references to the process of rationalization. One of these references is found in an example cited which deals with the procedure of immature thought in argumentation. The other possible reference to rationalization is given by the author when he writes concerning a pseudo-reasoning process which deceives, rather than enlightens, the

intelligence. The propagandist, Minnick points out, often makes use of this pseudo-reasoning process.

The foregoing summary presents the reader with an analysis of some of the important literature dealing with the concept of rationalization, especially literature in the field of persuasive speech. It is now the self-imposed responsibility of the writer to give a general overview of his impressions and opinions regarding some of this literature. In particular, the writer wishes to evaluate the Oliverian concept of rationalization.

Evaluations

The compilation of material for Chapter Two of this study was an experience that uncovered an apparent need. After reading or scanning through several hundred books in various disciplines in search for information regarding rationalization, the writer developed an awareness that treatment given to the concept of rationalization by the majority of authors was both repetitious and inadequate. There were exceptions, of course, and it is to those authors who devote serious attention to the concept of rationalization that the writer is especially indebted for the material used in the second chapter. Candidly, we are indebted particularly to men like Percival M. Symonds and Robert T. Oliver for their more extensive study of rationalization.

The interdisciplinary approach of Chapter Two also revealed the obvious need for sound empirical research in

dealing with the subject of rationalization. Almost all informative data concerning rationalization compiled to date have come from the avenues of introspection, observation, and hear-say. Consequently, results have a tendency to abound in generalizations. Greater depth and insight into the total concept of rationalization are needed. The plethora of problems already uncovered with regard to rationalization have been relatively untouched by research efforts. The picture is not entirely negative, however. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and social psychologists, especially, are now in possession of certain facts and insights concerning rationalization as a defense mechanism. Many of their facts and insights are partial but still valuable. These psychiatrists, psychologists and social psychologists also possess considerable knowledge about both individual motivation and group process, knowledge of direct importance for the understanding of the phenomena of rationalization. Realistically, it does not appear too optimistic to hope that the day will come when all existing facts can be incorporated into a systematic theory of rationalization; and that such a theory when formulated could be used as a guide toward additional research attempts which would hasten the arrival of demonstrably useful applications.

Such interdisciplinary developments are not without their problems, however, and to leaven the foregoing note of optimism just a little bit, the writer would like to

mention the need for an "indisciplinary definition" of rationalization; by this is meant a definition inclusive enough to comprehend all the important components of rationalization, and exclusive enough to be selective, meaningful, descriptive, and specific. Finding such a definition that might be universally accepted in the various disciplines is not an easy task. The writer of this paper does not wish to be presumptuous in suggesting that he has uncovered a definition that meets these standards. He would like to propose a definition of an eclectic nature that might be a start only in that direction.

As a result of the research experience gained in this study, the writer offers the following definition of rationalization. Rationalization is a term used to identify certain types of faulty thinking, clothed usually with socially-acceptable, deceptive, and protective explanations, which are thought or spoken in order to produce self-justifiable interpretations of behavior that an objective and impartial analysis would not substantiate.

When a satisfactory definition is found, one that meets the approval of the social scientists of those academic disciplines dealing with human behavior, a greater degree of consistency might reasonably be expected when dealing with the concept of rationalization.

Of greater moment for the time being, simply because it has direct bearing on the stated purpose of this study, is an evaluation of the Oliverian concept of rationalization.

The primary purpose of this study, mentioned in Chapter One, is to examine critically the concept of rationalization in order to determine whether or not the position taken by Dr. Robert T. Oliver toward the role of rationalization in speech persuasion seems defensible.

Dr. Oliver, it has been pointed out, postulates that "Rationalization, a form of reasoning from false premises or by illogical means, accounts for perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision." Dr. Oliver, in making this statement, is not talking about rationalization in general; he is making specific reference to the role of rationalization in decision-making.

A close analytical view of the Oliverian concept of rationalization reveals a basic fact that is germane to this discussion. Oliver attaches a meaning to rationalization that is very similar to the meaning given this concept by the majority of other writers. This point can be established by reviewing Chapters Two and Three of this study. It can be substantiated further by comparing these findings with Chapter Four. Thus, the writer believes that a great deal of similarity exists between Oliver's viewpoint of rationalization and that which may be construed to be the expressed views of many other writers.

The majority of these other writers also agree that rationalization is common and widespread in human affairs. How common and how widespread was not qualified specifically in percentage figures by any of the writers except Oliver.

He projected a percentage figure for the incidence of rationalization in thinking-toward-a-decision. Since his projection was "perhaps 80 per cent or more," Oliver has been afforded a rather unique place among the exponents of rationalization in the field of speech persuasion. The writer is certain that Oliver's unique position is due to much more than this statement which he made in his summation of rationalization. Oliver's extensive treatment of this concept is, in the mind of this writer, a worthy presentation of rationalization. The statement which he made concerning the high incidence of the use of rationalization in decision-making has caused more than one eyebrow to be raised in the presence of this writer. This, in part, accounts for the specific thrust of this study in dealing with the feasibility of the "perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision" statement Oliver made in reference to the use of rationalization.

What particular role, according to Oliver, does rationalization play in the thinking-toward-a-decision process? He would have his readers understand that rationalization is orderly thinking without critical examination which tries to tie up specific propositions with suggested hypotheses; that rationalization deals with a combination of "real" and "good" reasons, all being presented as "real." Unlike reason which consists of orderly, deliberate and critical thinking, rationalization consists largely of suggestion. When rationalization is being employed the

listeners believe, according to Oliver, that they are using sound deliberation in thinking-toward-a-decision.¹

Are there any supporting factors that might tend to make Oliver's postulation of "80 per cent or more" seem defensible? It would seem, at first glance, that there are many.

We are living in a highly competitive society where "judgments" are being made continuously. People are competing whether they consciously desire to do so or not. Even children are placed under great pressure to meet certain "standards," and to justify their acts. In this type of setting rationalizations are encouraged. "Excuses" are offered in order to reduce the tension, to justify failures to meet the "standards." These rationalizations usually appear to be attempts to justify oneself to others, but more basically they are attempts to reconcile inner conflicts. Rationalization is the cover which we throw over our inadequacies or failures so that we will not have to face them honestly for what they are.

In our complex society many "hurried" decisions are made. Proper time for careful deliberation seems to come at a price so high few people are willing to pay it. Consequently, explanations to justify behavior that has already taken place are generally in great demand. These explanations very frequently are rationalizations.

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (2d ed.; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), p. 292.

In the use of rationalization there is generally a disproportion of emphasis. Unpleasant thoughts and uncomfortable facts are disregarded, or if not ignored then treated lightly, in favor of other thoughts and facts that serve as less of an ominous threat to the personality. In an age in which such terms as doubt, fear, anxiety, nervousness, and worry are common descriptive words, rationalizations seem to be quite common as well. People "work" at trying to make the situation appear better than it really is, or in making it look worse than it actually is. In both instances there is a disproportion of emphasis and a distortion of facts. The same is true when a person desires to minimize the virtues or the successes of another person toward whom he feels hostile, or with whom he is in direct competition.

The prevalence of inconsistency in the behavior of people is an invitation to the use of the process of rationalization. A person may support liberalism in philosophy but be quite reactionary in his political position, for example. He may claim to believe in the value of saving his money and, yet, be an extravagant spender. It is almost as if barriers were erected in his mind preventing him from seeing the incongruity of his behavior. Such dissociation of the mental processes occurs when "reasons" offered are, in reality, rationalizations. In order to maintain a certain integration of the personality and to find ways of making various kinds of behavior and circumstances "appear" to be consistent and acceptable, a

person resorts to rationalization. The use of rationalization is quite common in such situations.

Another cue to detecting the use of rationalization is by noting the amount of emotion displayed during a discussion. People who rationalize usually "lose their tempers" if the adequacy of their proffered reason is questioned. This is not the case with the person who does not rely upon rationalizing. Instead, he meets challenges on their merits. He places one argument against another indicating a willingness to change his position if necessary, giving reputable explanations for doing so. Almost any observer of human nature would confirm that the "emotional approach" has a great degree of "popularity."

Symonds suggests that "To attempt to classify all the varieties of rationalization and to give illustrations of them would be an impossible task, since rationalization enters into every phase of human affairs."² Statements similar to this one by Symonds, who has examined closely the process of rationalization, and corroborative evidence from other writers, attest to the widespread use of rationalization. All this, of course, might tend to support Oliver's position that "perhaps as much as 80 per cent or more of our thinking-toward-a-decision is rationalization."

However, there is another important side to the picture. Rationalization has more dangers than advantages.

²Percival M. Symonds, The Dynamics of Human Adjustment (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1946), p. 459.

"It tends to blind the man to the rational solution of his problems in the real world."³ It encourages postponement of the solution of real problems. As a result of the extreme or excessive utilization of the device of rationalization, reality becomes less and less a part of the mental content of the person's life; delusions are imminent. If this device is utilized to the degree suggested by Oliver, it would soon lead to the development of a false appreciation of one's own personality. If the device of rationalization is used consistently as a means of self-justification, the group soon learns to resent its implication and the individual's social adjustment is hindered by the unfriendly attitudes of his associates.⁴ It is thus, for example, that the person who lacks friends often makes his own problems increasingly difficult. Among the attitudes with which he furnishes his "place apart" are self-pity, a critical depreciation of other people, and a disguised dream-infected will to power. These attitudes are the least likely to attract others to him.

Persistent and excessive use of rationalization, therefore, affects one's contacts with reality. "It is then," according to Wendell Cruze, "but a short step from the continuous rationalizations of the seriously

³Ibid., p. 467.

⁴Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow, Understanding Our Behavior: The Psychology of Personal and Social Adjustment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 169.

maladjusted person to the delusions or false ideas of the mentally disordered individual."⁵

As a result of the investigation into the concept of rationalization by the writer of the study, it is his candid persuasion that Dr. Oliver's "80 per cent" figure is too high to be defensible. This, of course, must remain an opinion for which the writer must assume full responsibility.

Dr. Oliver's more important contribution, it would seem to the writer, is the fact that he has placed greater emphasis on the concept of rationalization than other writers in the speech field, an emphasis which seems warranted in the light of the findings discovered, and an emphasis which may well become a challenge to both writers and teachers in the discipline of speech to re-examine their positions in regard to the concept of rationalization. This challenge should become especially acute in the specific field of speech persuasion where the study of motivation is of significant importance.

One final observation should be noted in this section dealing with evaluation. It was thought at first that writers of speech textbooks might be dealing with the concept of rationalization indirectly, and that references to this concept might be made under other "labels." The result of this research indicates that this is not the case to any significant degree.

⁵Wendell W. Cruze, General Psychology for College Students (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 487.

Future Research

The educational implications of rationalization should be studied. Tendencies to place too much pressure on children, forcing them to justify their acts, and to accept rationalizations once they are given should be examined carefully. Parents and teachers should recognize that children are constantly acting from unconscious motives and for this reason should not be expected or forced to justify their behavior on rational grounds. If parents and teachers would accept the child's behavior with its many irrational qualities, it would be much easier for the child to approach his problems more realistically. Perhaps the best way to help children to face reality is through identification with parents and teachers who themselves are able to face reality and are under no immediate pressure to justify their behavior by resorting to rationalization.

It would make an interesting study, also, to discover what kinds of incapacity make people feel sensitive and inferior. Most people do not feel it necessary to give excuses for not being good artists, good athletes, good musicians, or good scientists. Yet, many people feel compelled to justify their mental abilities. Why is this so? Is it because of pressure placed upon children to succeed academically in school? Some empirical research in this area is needed.

Research potential should be focused upon the use of rationalization in commercial advertising and in

propagandizing. It would be interesting to know, also, what use of rationalization is apt to be made by people of intelligence and education. A study of the process of rationalization in the field of international politics might reveal important and interesting results. Further investigations into the ethical considerations of rationalization are needed. It might be a worthy study to determine the part that language plays in the facilitation of the process of rationalization.

It might be helpful to re-examine rationalization carefully to see if it should be classified as an ego-defense mechanism by itself, or if it should be thought of as an effect of the other defense mechanisms since it generally makes its appearance in verbalized form.

Another interesting projection for future research regarding the concept of rationalization, of interest to both the student of speech and the student of political science, would be a systematic study of the speeches of political orators to determine the frequency of the use of rationalization as well as the kinds of rationalization employed. The same approach could be used with sermons delivered by ministers. Since rationalization appears in its more obvious forms in the abnormal personality, considerable research should be done with this type of personality, also.

Much remains to be accomplished concerning the future research possibilities in dealing with rationalization. It

can only be hoped that the day may soon come, through the help of empirical research methodologies and intensive study, that an objective, systematic approach to the concept of rationalization will emerge to supplement the subjective, introspective techniques employed to date.

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