

Novel science; or, How contemporary social science is not well and why literature and semeiotic provide a cure*

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Part One

The social and human sciences are in a sorry state today. You don't have to take my word for it. Consider some others who have reached the same conclusion.

Percy's Antinomy

For instance, consider Walker Percy's Antinomy, stated in its most general form (Percy 1958: 240).

The functional method of the sciences is a nonradical method of knowing because, while it recognizes only functional linkages, it presupposes other kinds of reality, the intersubjectivity of scientists and their assertions, neither of which are space-time linkages and neither of which can be grasped by the functional method. Therefore, when the functional method is elevated to a total organon of reality and other cognitive claims denied, the consequence must be an antinomy, for a nonradical instrument is being required to construe the more radical reality which it presupposes but does not understand.

I'm fallibly certain that I understand what Dr. Percy (the first hero of this essay) meant by the distinction between radical and nonradical methods of knowing; it goes something like this. A radical science is one in which no limits are placed upon the kinds of knowledge sought by scientific intelligences. Thus, chemistry would be a nonradical science; for chemists seek only chemical knowledge and, as professional chemists, have no interest in knowledge about art, religion, psychiatry, or literature. Thus, in a nonradical science such as chemistry, when a question about human intersubjectivity arises, chemists using the functional method can only say, 'We don't study that'. But human and social sciences would be radical, at least in regard to the inclusion of human intersubjectivity or