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A Sociologist's Memo: Invitation to a Proper Debunking*

RICARDO G. ABAD

I have been asked to view political analysis from a sociological perspective. In doing so, I will invite you to consider the debunking character of sociological consciousness. To debunk is to unmask, expose, uncover. In the study of politics, debunking entails the task of looking *behind* the conventions of power and of laying bare the fallaciousness of official definitions of political reality. I contend that only by engaging in a debunking can sociologists and political scientists identify sociopolitical conventions and structures which promote or degrade human values. But I also contend that to debunk simply for the sake of debunking is pure mayhem, a senseless and irresponsible effort. A *proper* debunking, I claim, is one which fulfills two mandates: *methodologically*, it leads social scientists to understand, in as objective a manner as possible, the forces which govern political action; *ethically*, it impels these same social scientists to seek alternatives to conventions and definitions which foster the arbitrary alienation of large numbers of people.

I shall discuss three issues. First, the affinity between sociology and political science. Both disciplines share an interest in analyzing political conventions and definitions which rule people's lives. A discussion of "ideology" serves to illustrate that these conventions and definitions are *human products* — limited in scope, subject to planned obsolescence, and ripe for debunking. Second, the paradox implicit in a debunking exercise. While the debunking task

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enables sociologists and political scientists to expose the weaknesses of political conventions and definitions, it does not necessarily transform these social scientists into flaming radicals or lead them to engage in revolutionary praxis. The social imperative of routine tames the subversive character of debunking. Third, the prime social responsibility of the sociologists and political scientist. This responsibility lies in the application of critical intelligence to any sociopolitical order. This is not the stance of a dispassionate observer of the political scene; it is rather the posture of a sociological Machiavellian. Those who are acquainted with the sociological perspective, particularly the insights of Peter L. Berger, will find many of these notions familiar.¹ (To these persons, I beg indulgence and suggest that they treat this article more as an invitation to a reunion rather than a debut.)

SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE: COMMON CONCERNS

Let us start by recalling the common origins of political science and sociology. Neither discipline emerged out of an enlightened philosophy applied to the affairs of mankind; both owed much to an old intellectual tradition and to the synthesis of thought and value advocated by the medieval European universities. It is also useful to recall that observers of the nature of political action have crossed, more often than not, the paths tread by sociology and political science. Plato searched for a philosopher king who would mobilize political power to establish the ideal Republic, but he was equally sensitive to the associations between education or family structure and possible forms of political action. Aristotle studied the constitutions of Greek states to see how political systems varied from place to place, yet he also posited a causal relationship between distributions of wealth and status and the type of political regime each of these communities possessed. Marxism, to take a more contemporary example, takes an approach to politics which identifies the primary source of political be-

1. The following works by Peter L. Berger are pertinent: *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1963); "Sociology and Freedom," *The American Sociologist* 6 (February 1971): 1-5; *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1969), especially pp. 127-85; and *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1976).

havior in terms of sociological variables such as levels of technological development and class structure. Furthermore, Marxist theorists such as Friedrich Engels and Leon Trotsky add that the causes of certain political events lie in the internal (also sociological) dynamics of the political system. Specifically, the two theorists cite as a cause the stubbornness of leaders in holding on to their positions — a stand which may run counter to the interests of the dominant class or to the requirements of the dominant economic system. In the past few decades, political scientists and sociologists typically have borrowed each other's concepts and methods, though a theoretical framework which integrates sociological and political variables needs further scrutiny.²

The affinity between political science and sociology has roots in one inescapable fact, namely, that everyday life is full of experiences of power and of the differences in power between and among people. This fact holds true in the "micro-worlds" — the immediate worlds of the family, school, office, and the peer group — as well as in encounters with the "macro worlds," one of which is the political world circumscribed by such conventions as parliamentary representation, presidential decrees, inaugural ceremonies, and periodic elections. These experiences of power do not simply travel from top to bottom or, from superordinate to subordinate levels. The demands of power can also spring from the bottom up: as every spoiled brat knows, one can also get other people to do things *they* do not want to do, using ploys ranging from temper tantrums to wily winks, from arm twisting to gentle cajoling. Indeed, the proper understanding of politics requires an appreciation of the sociological features governing various types of political action, among them: the effects of capital punishment, the performance of legislative assemblies, or the results of referenda.

At first glance, a sociological appreciation is useful only to political scientists who observe the behavior of people with regard to their political institutions. While this is generally correct, I also claim that the sociological insight is equally pertinent to political scientists who compare the peculiarities of various political structures, or to those who suggest "what ought to be" in political life.

2. A promising beginning is the introductory chapter of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction," in Lipset and Rokkan, eds, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 1-64.

This contention finds basis in another sociological axiom, to wit: that political structures abhor a social vacuum. To generalize, political structures evolve from specific historical, social, and economic conditions, and more important, from the way powerful groups perceive these conditions to suit their interests. The resulting structure, once legitimated by the masses, may be viewed as an imposition of order on an otherwise chaotic situation.

The critical insight from the sociological viewpoint is that formal political structures are *human products*, grounded in specific infrastructures of human history and maintained as subjectively real through a variety of "plausibility generating" mechanisms. The historical contingencies of such structures are clear enough and require no elaboration. On the matter of plausibility-generating mechanisms, one can reflect on the latent functions of a variety of political rituals among them: press releases from a bureau of public information, annual reports of government agencies, state of the union speeches, and independence day parades. In all these instances, the objective is to justify or legitimize the behavior of the state; in effect, to make the status quo look good. Guardians of law and order assist in maintaining the status quo's legitimacy as well; the kinds of punishment these guardians can inflict make citizens think twice before rocking the establishment's boats.

Realizing that political structures are historical artifacts sustained by plausibility generating mechanisms, one has little choice but to view these structures *sub specie temporis*, casting aside notions that these systems are fixed, unchanging, eternal, and divine. On the contrary, they are mortal structures, vulnerable to change, death, and who knows, even reincarnation. A brief discussion on the concept of "ideology" clarifies these points.

IDEOLOGY AS A HUMAN PRODUCT

A sociological understanding of "ideology" illustrates the precariousness of official political definitions as human products.

Let us assume that in a primitive society some needed foodstuff can be obtained only by travelling to where it grows through treacherous, shark infested waters. Twice every year the men of the tribe set out in their precarious canoes to get this food. Now, let us assume that the religious beliefs of the society contain an article of faith that says that every man

who fails to go on this voyage will lose his virility, except for the priests, whose virility is sustained by their daily sacrifices to the gods. This belief provides a motivation for those who expose themselves to the dangerous journey and simultaneously a legitimation for the priests who regularly stay at home. Needless to add, we will suspect that it was the priests who cooked up the theory in the first place. In other words we will assume that we have here a priestly ideology. But this does not mean that the latter is not functional for the society as a whole — after all, somebody must go or there will be starvation³

This illustration, simple as it is, conveys the essence of an ideology: a certain idea, or a set of ideas, which serves a vested interest in a society. To outsiders “who do not understand the system,” some of these ideas look absurd, even surreal. To insiders, particularly to staunch supporters of the status quo, these very same ideas provide an effective camouflage for any system of governance, be it tyrannical or democratic. Thus, the official belief in the purity of the Aryan race in Nazi Germany served to justify the imprisonment, expulsion, and eventual extermination of Jews. Similarly, the ideology of “free enterprise,” as practiced in some democratic countries, can serve to mask the monopolistic practices of large corporations. This is not to say that these ideas are not functional for the respective groups. The belief in Aryan purity, although barbaric in some of its consequences, helped to unify the consciousness of large numbers of Germans during the Nazi regime. Analogously, the belief in free enterprise provides members of democratic societies, at least theoretically, with equal opportunities to pursue their own economic activities with little or no interference from the state.

Ideologies are man-made, and certainly are imperfect visions of a triumphant social order. The conditions surrounding their appearance in the social scene testify to this fact. Ideologies usually emerge in conditions of crisis and in sectors of society where establishment views have become unacceptable. As Edward Shils observes, “an ideology arises because there are strongly felt needs which are not satisfied by the prevailing outlook for an explanation of important experiences, for the firm guidance of conduct, and for a fundamental vindication or legitimation of the value and dignity of the person who feels these needs.”⁴ Of course,

3. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, p. 111.

4. Edward A. Shils, “The Concept and Function of Ideology,” in David Sills, ed.,

mere rejection of the existing system and the prevailing outlook is an insufficient condition for an ideology to exist; what is critical is a vision of a positive alternative to the existing system and to quote Shils once more, "an intellectual capacity to articulate that vision as part of the cosmic order."⁵ Prevailing ideologies, then, are bound to change, and the pressures to do so increase as their capacity to give meaning to people's lives diminishes. During these crucial movements, the original manufacturers of an ideology are left with the same options spurned lovers have: (1) redefine the present situation to accommodate the intruding force, (2) surrender to the new order, or (3) commence a violent attack against the enemy.

Let it not be said that the purveyors of an ideology are liars and con men. Quite the contrary, they are sincere persons, if by "sincere" we mean, following David Riesman's definition, the state of mind of a man who habitually believes in his own propaganda.⁶ The concept of ideology is distinct from notions of lying or conning. The liar or con man, by definition, knows that he is deceiving others. The ideologist does not. For this reason, one can conclude that ideologists really believe in what they sell to people, no matter how bizarre their product appears to outsiders.

If we understand ideology as views which justify what an interest group does to others and those which interpret social reality in such a way that the justification is made plausible, it becomes reasonable to picture society as an arena where various ideologies thrive. Each of these ideologies, we might add, comprise a worthwhile topic for scientific investigation, if only to uncover how much of the perpetuated official definition we can swallow in our everyday lives. In politics, a sector of society where the term "ideology" receives most attention, we can speak of ideology when we analyze the belief of certain political lords that developing countries require dictatorships in order to boost the economy, or the conviction among certain statesmen that a regular purging of party members leads to an efficient government machine, or the position taken by activists that the social order espoused by a radical group will be more sensitive to the needs of the masses.

Analogous analyses of ideological positions can be made outside

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 7 (New York: MacMillan and Company and The Free Press, 1968) p. 69.

5. *Ibid.*

6. The phrasing here is Berger's, *Invitation to Sociology*, p. 109.

the political fence. Again, we can speak of "ideology" when we examine the view of program administrators that an emphasis on the so-called effective methods approach will perform wonders for a family planning program; or the stand of a professional association that homosexuality is a mental aberration; or the notion among certain Protestant fundamentalists that racial segregation is a God-given natural order; or the position taken by many citizens that rampant showing of "bold films" in downtown theaters will lead to anti-social behavior. Ideological postures abound in everyday life as well. The self-image of a loan shark as a respectable businessman and a loving father, of a student activist as defender of the oppressed, of the professional athlete as entertainer, of the live sex performer as an artist, of the police interrogator as a public servant — all these notions do not merely imply what C. Wright Mills calls "a vocabulary of motives,"⁷ but constitute the official self-definitions of social groups, compulsory to its members under pain of ostracism and opprobrium. What groups are and what groups claim to be are two different matters, and my invitation to political scientists is precisely that they use the tools of their disciplines to show the masks of official interpretations of power and to reveal both the comfortable as well as the uncomfortable roots of political action.

THE SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER OF DEBUNKING

It is clear that the debunking stance of sociological consciousness possesses a strong subversive impulse. This impulse, in fact, is one of the reasons why genuine sociology takes a forced leave of absence in totalitarian regimes, such as those found in Nazi Germany or in Idi Amin's motherland. For similar reasons, agencies commissioning sociologists to assess a given phenomenon are warned that they may get caught, so to speak, with their proverbial pants down. It is very upsetting for an agency to profess a mission to improve the poor man's lot and find out, after a sociologist completes a longitudinal study, that the poor the agency had supposedly served are poorer than ever before. It is equally unpleasant for educators, who see schooling as the main avenue for social mobility, to read a sociological report which concludes

7. C. Wright Mills, "Situated Actions and the Vocabularies of Motives," *American Sociological Review* 5 (December 1940): 904-13.

that persons who come from more affluent families are more likely than their poor counterparts to complete college and more likely to grab the plum jobs later. The same sour taste will rise in the mouths of law enforcers who, after successfully lobbying for a strict antidrug legislation, discover that the new law has also spawned a vast illegal empire for the drug syndicates. Consider as well the reaction of "moral entrepreneurs" (to use Howard Becker's term) when a sociologist concludes, after a rigorous analysis, that heavy exposure to pornography does not lead the average citizen (or even the average pervert) to engage in anti-social behavior. These examples can be multiplied: time and time again, sociologists, obeying the inner logic of their discipline, are impelled to debunk established patterns of thought. Call it, if you wish, an occupational hazard.

Aware of debunking's subversive impulse, one can understand why several persons (some of whom are sociologists themselves) favor the marriage between sociology and left wing politics. The marriage is unfortunate, and is bound to go on the rocks. The radical left is reminded that the very discipline powered to debunk conventional ideology is just as capable, with equal fury, to debunk *unconventional* ideology. And why not? Are not leftist ideologies just as supportive of vested interests as other political ideologies? Do not leftist and other ideologies make similar claims to enhance the "dignity" and "freedom" of the people, only to find out later that these claims lose their original fervor when the process of institutionalizing the new regime (what Crane Brinton calls the "Thermidorean reaction") sets in? Will not promoters of any ideology be equally suspicious of, or threatened by, an intellectual enterprise that drives its practitioners to debunk the political fictions of the time? The answer to all three questions is a resounding yes, one which leads the observer of whatever political persuasion to conclude: let the buyer of the sociological product beware.

TAMING THE SUBVERSIVE IMPULSE: THE IMPERATIVE OF ROUTINE

Let us emphasize, however, that sociology's debunking motif does not necessarily lead sociologists to take on a revolutionary posture. The reason, as stated earlier, is that sociologists are capable of debunking the illusory visions of a new social order. Consequently, they are wary of notions of violent change, and demur

to suggestions of bearing arms for the revolution. An understanding of the sociological imperative of routine, specifically the social imperative of order, clarifies what seems at this point to be a contradiction of sociology's subversive character.

Society, in essence, is the imposition of order upon the flux of human experience. Most people will first think here of what American sociologists call "social control" — the imposition of coercive power upon deviant individuals or groups Coercion and external controls, however, are only incidental aspects of society's imposition of order. Beginning with language, *every* social institution, no matter how "nonrepressive" or "consensual," is an imposition of order. If this is understood, it will be clear that social life abhors disorder as nature abhors a vacuum. This has the directly political implication that, except for rare and relatively brief periods, the forces of order are always stronger than the force of disorder and, further, there are fairly narrow limits to the toleration of disorder in any human society.⁸

The imperative of order is consistent with Karl Marx's thinking. Instead of beginning with an Aristotelian view that bodies at rest remain in that state unless disturbed by an external force, Marx tended to adopt, even extend, the Galilean view, namely that all bodies are in motion and will continue in their respective directions unless deflected by a contrary force. Society operates under a similar Galilean, some would say Marxist, principle: social experiences are a chaotic lot, and will remain so unless the forces of order continually go about their business of routinizing things for society's members. And society will not have it otherwise. Order and routine are essential for social life: they make our everyday encounters predictable, restful, and sane. Without these, we would all go berserk, a state which sociologists operationalize and label as "anomie." Think of a family where the members constantly redefine the rules concerning sexual relationship, property, and housework. Imagine a political system which experiences a coup d'état every fortnight. Consider what this conference would be like if the participants behaved as they would in a soiree or in a rally á la Plaza Miranda. Fortunately, these situations rarely, if ever, happen. For this, we should be thankful to the forces of order. These forces may rob us of many thrills and surprises, but they also protect us from a massive societal coronary.

The insight into the necessarily routine character of our everyday

8. Berger, "Sociology and Freedom," p. 3.

encounters implies that social life, the sum total of our interaction with other members of society, becomes discernible as an orderly set of behavioral and normative patterns that endure over a period of time. Like Eskimos who have different words for snow (condensed water, falling crystals, freshly fallen, slush) sociologists and anthropologists give different names to various networks or recurring social patterns, calling some "culture," others "values" and "institutions," and still others "social organization" or "social structure." By whatever term, the notion of routine events agreed upon and maintained by society's members persists.

The imperative of routine has a very important political implication in that societies will react with almost savage ferociousness at any pervasive and long term threat to their order. Indeed, as history documents, revolutionary movements can achieve success only if they establish, on relatively short notice, a new structure of order within which people can settle down with some approximation of social and psychological stability.⁹ But revolutionary movements rarely meet their deadlines. For the most part, revolutions hardly diffuse their newly acquired power to the masses, and hardly alter the factors that bred stagnation in the prerevolutionary society. *Equality* remains wanting in post-revolutionary societies because abolition of all forms of social stratification is impossible. Some revolutions may reduce economic inequalities, but foster, in exchange, political inequalities with equally dire consequences. *Liberty*, taken to mean freedom from all legal restrictions, is unattainable: post revolutionary societies also impose legal restrictions, which, on the whole, are not necessarily as salvific as those restrictions found in prerevolutionary societies. *Fraternity*, or a demand for a return to forms of association that would please residents of communes, involves a rebellion against social institutions, a line of action that quashes certain traditions and only strengthens the arbitrary rule of the revolutionary power elite. This is not to say that revolutions are uncalled for in specific situations. Indeed, in a state of complete social stagnation, a revolution may be the only solution, the act of desperate masses. But such revolutions do not guarantee people a more human, more humane exist-

9. See, for instance, Mark N. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974). Also John F. Doherty, S.J., "Can We Predict a Philippine Revolution?," Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ateneo de Manila University, 1969. (mimeographed)

ence. One can even argue that the positive achievements of a revolution are traceable to forces other than the revolutionary movement per se. However one argues, the fact remains that revolutions exact exorbitant economic, political, and social costs. Whatever gains these movements make must be viewed relative to these costs. Seen this way, the revolutionary gains are often modest ones. But the revolution occurred just the same, and for the people caught in the quagmire of blood and bayonets, these movements are one great cataclysm.

The failure of most revolutions to achieve what they set out to accomplish underscores, among other things, the social need for routine: the need to devote a considerable portion of everyday life to predictable forms of thought and action, the need to reserve one's energy for the extraordinary social and personal events that happen from time to time. It is impossible to exist in a situation where every aspect of life (or every aspect of post-revolutionary existence) is charged with novel, intense experiences, a situation similar to a perpetual acid trip. The slogans calling for "people power," "citizen participation," or "grassroots involvement," understood to mean that everybody will have a voice in every decision affecting his life would, if implemented, lead to a nightmare Hieronymus Bosch wouldn't have dared put on canvas.

A realization of the necessity of routine gives a conservative flavor to debunking's subversive character. But it is *not* a conservatism that pays homage to the establishment or to challengers of the establishment, the kind of conservatism that offers the buyer of sociological products a long-term warranty on solace. The debunking character of sociological thought precludes such an attitude. In this respect, sociology's main contribution to an understanding of contemporary social issues is a frame of mind which seeks a balance between passion and perspective, between iconoclasm and respect. Sociology's debunking character enables the practitioner to see through the rituals people live from day to day, but it also offers the awareness that robbing people of these rituals without acceptable substitutes will destroy the ordinary yet precious requirements of social life.

THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER

What about the role of the sociologist as a practitioner of the

discipline? Is the practitioner supposed to be a neutral observer of the social scene? Or a cold blooded technician with a perverse fascination for varimax rotations, multiple regression equations, and the strict application of quasi-experimental designs? Or perhaps a champion of the hungry and the oppressed? As a discipline, sociology (or any other social science for that matter) cannot provide an answer to this question. The answer rests instead on ethical considerations which lie beyond the purview of science.

Let us elaborate this point by applying Berger's notion of "bad faith" to the practice of sociology. A sociological analysis of poverty can result in a profound understanding of why, for example, the rural poor has become poorer despite decades of technological advances, development programs, and increasing gross national product. The analysis can furnish evidence showing demographic correlates of poverty, the powerful play of vested economic and political interests, the processes of intergroup struggle and conflict, and the needs of the country during several political administrations. From the standpoint of sociology as a discipline, such an analysis can be considered acceptable, assuming, of course, that the study adequately meets the theoretical and methodological standards of the profession. Such an understanding, however, is not necessarily morally liberating. It can instead produce feelings of acceptance, that is, an attitude that it is only natural some people must suffer for the benefit of the social system. If no other conclusion is reached, the sociologist is likely to use sociology as a form of "bad faith," meaning the belief that a given phenomenon (in this case, rural poverty) is necessary when it is in fact voluntary. I say voluntary because there is nothing natural or genetic about being poor, in the same way as there is no such thing as a born criminal. For the sociologist as *practitioner* of the discipline to say and act otherwise is to take an ethically abhorrent stance, the stance of a person who denies his own humanity and who becomes, in effect, a Frankenstein of abstract science.

Let us rephrase this argument in terms of Max Weber's notion of value freedom.¹⁰ The discipline of sociology (and I contend, political science), as a scientific enterprise, must remain "value

10. I based my discussion on four essays by Max Weber: "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation," in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 77-128 and

free," however difficult this might be to accept in specific instances. This is not to deny the place of values as guides in the selection of a problem or as sources of hypotheses; indeed, Weber himself spelled out many of the ways in which values enter the activity of social analysis. What social scientists want or prefer, however, should remain as irrelevant as possible in seeking an objective understanding of a given phenomenon. The moment the discipline discards this principle, social science becomes bad science; worse, an apologia for a political order, be it rightist or leftist or anything in between. In this sense, the study of theory and methodology is indispensable because a familiarity with each serves as a check against the over-intrusion of personal sentiment and judgment, and as protection against powerful figures who seek to manipulate empirical data for their own selfish ends. That is one side of the coin. The *practitioner of the discipline*, the sociologist or political scientist, living human beings and private citizens, *cannot* be value-free. To be such would be to practice the discipline in bad faith, to disclaim responsibility over the way other people use the science, or to justify existing inhumanities under an academic guise. If this distinction between the discipline and the practitioner of the discipline is accepted, it becomes possible to see the social scientists' role as having ethical as well as methodological mandates. Some amount of "role strain" is bound to occur in fulfilling these two mandates since it is far more convenient to remain in the blissful world of a mere technician or a mere partisan. For this reason, a reconciliation of the two mandates is desirable.

A reconciliation between these two expectations will not deny the political partisanship of sociologist or political scientists. It is important that professionals take a stand on situations which bring about the needless suffering or the arbitrary alienation of large numbers of people. If the written and spoken word, the conventional tools of the intellectual tradition, are deemed inadequate for making such a stand, then the sociologist can turn to action and become a fiercely committed partisan. But it is equally important to concede that neither sociologists nor political

129-56; and "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics" and "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, translated by Edward A. Shils and Henry Finch (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 1-47 and 49-112.

scientists can draw from their respective disciplines a doctrine of salvation to bring into the political arena. What they can apply, however, is theoretical intelligence that is the foundation of sociological consciousness – a critical intelligence sharpened by a debunking attitude toward official views of reality, mellowed by a respect toward the trivial yet essential features of social life, and motivated by a passionate desire to share in the struggles of their fellowmen. The uncompromising application of critical intelligence gives the sociologist a unique position in various political settings. A sociologist who actively participates in a revolutionary or nonrevolutionary situation should realize that his or her primary political contribution is to supply an ongoing critique of these official situations, in effect to use the theories and methods of the discipline as a means toward unmasking the limits of power and pointing out alternatives leading to a more human existence. This is an ethical and a methodological mandate.

Here, then, lies the crux of my invitation: to debunk any sociopolitical order for the sake of debunking is a wasteful and irresponsible effort unless it be guided by a critical intelligence. A restatement of this article's main points may help sharpen this message. The debunking job, I argued, is an essential task for two reasons: first, because the official conventions and definitions of politics serve to cloak a variety of political acts, some of which demean human lives; and second, because the knowledge gained from a debunking job prevents us from being duped or overwhelmed by the political conventions and definitions binding our lives. Stated differently, the debunking task enables us to understand the "rules of the game" in political life, and to find ways of "cheating on the rules" without scruples in situations where human rights are violated.

To engage in revolutionary praxis is one way to "cheat on the rules." But this engagement is futile because societies prize the imperative of routine and loathe any fundamental threat to their order. If you will pardon an allusion to parapsychology, it is as if societies possessed the intuitive sense that revolutions rarely, if ever, accomplish what they set out to achieve and only institute rules more harsh and more alienating than before. This insight into the essentials of routine does not lead the sociologist into a conservatism that butters up the status quo's ego. More pertinent is the conclusion that with greater awareness and knowledge of

routine events, the sociologist and political scientist can help others modify the fictions which trap people's lives and point out ways to bring about a fuller expression of human life and consciousness. Equally pertinent is the conclusion that with greater knowledge, the social scientist can lead others to sense the possibility of escape without seriously undermining the ordinary yet precious requirements of everyday life.

But sociology or political science is neither a school for compassion nor a garden of moral delights. Neither discipline contains a built-in mechanism which delivers printouts on what doctrine of redemption is appropriate for a given society. In fact, the possibility of escape from certain social constraints cannot be realized if scientific analyses, no matter how methodologically sound, generate attitudes of acceptance — attitudes that these constraints are simply the way things are, that nothing can be done to correct them. This is not to downplay the proper study of theory and methods; indeed, these lines of study should be pursued to keep the disciplines as value-free as possible — protected, so to speak, from the clammy hands of propaganda and political manipulation. The point is simply this: that sociology used solely as an instrument of analysis is a form of bad faith, a legitimized effort to disassociate oneself from pressing human dilemmas. Similarly, sociology used solely as a tool for advocacy borders on the perverse: first, because the discipline has no vision of a utopia to promulgate; second, because pure advocacy blinds a person to an objective understanding of the situation he or she wishes to transform in the first place. An uncompromising allegiance to critical intelligence, one guided by an ethical as well as a methodological mandate, debunks both postures of bad faith, forcing sociologists and political scientists to view existing inhumanities as matters of choice and personal responsibility, not situations immutably determined by "human nature" or by those ubiquitous genes.

We live today in a world where "social fictions," the sum total of socially constructed conventions and definitions prevail. As sociologists or political scientists, we have the tools to see through these fictions and to report the ways these fictions influence and control our behavior. In going through this debunking exercise, we will recognize that some of these conventions and definitions are useful or harmless and will feel little inclination to change

them. It will then be all right to accept the rules of the game for what they are. Continuing with the exercise, we may also discover certain social conventions and definitions which become instrumentalities for hurting people and for shattering human values. At this point, it is no longer possible to take the rules of the game seriously. It is time to act as sociological Machiavellians: to cheat on the rules and feel no scruples about it, especially if by cheating, we can soothe a little pain here and make human life a little more restful there.