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Divided Loyalties and the Responsibility of Social Scientists

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JEFFERSON M. FISH

A scientist's first responsibility is to tell the truth. This includes telling unpleasant or unpopular truths and standing firm against pressure to present findings in a partial or distorted way. Social scientists' loyalties to groups with a variety of agendas conflict with this basic responsibility. The vulnerability of minority and disadvantaged groups in particular leads them to demand allegiance over candor from social scientists who are members of those groups and who may even ethnocentrically identify with this demand. Social scientists with cross-cultural experience have an advantage in viewing their own group more objectively and in resisting its attempts to undermine their commitment to the truth. Those who cooperate with efforts by government and others to limit the scope of research and to destroy data have compromised their commitment to the truth.

Telling the truth is more difficult in the social sciences than in other fields because the investigator lives in a social world and is usually involved to a greater or lesser extent in the phenomena being studied. This involvement entails the complications produced by egocentrism and ethnocentrism.

It is not that astrophysicists or microbiologists are uninfluenced by sociocultural factors in the questions they ask, the kinds of data they collect, or their interpretations of observations. The point is that they are not a part of the distant galaxies or microorganisms they observe in the ways that social scientists are a part of the social and cultural phenomena that interest them.

Egocentrism is a psychological phenomenon: we cannot observe certain things about ourselves and our relationships with others because we are doing the observing.

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When a man growls, “I am not angry,” egocentrism prevents his recognizing the emotion that is obvious to others. For example, he cannot see the expression on his face. Egocentrism has advantages: self-preservation, making it easier for us to act in our own best interest, as well as self-protection and self-enhancement, enabling us to see ourselves more positively than an objective view might warrant. Although individuals differ in self-awareness and people can improve with training, egocentrism has the disadvantage of limiting the degree to which we can see ourselves as others see us. It can lead to negative relations with others, from deceiving oneself to preening to bullying.

Ethnocentrism is a cultural phenomenon that parallels egocentrism. People grow up in social groups, and they learn to see the world from those groups’ perspectives. For example, Americans learning Spanish or French often have difficulty with the subjunctive because expressing thoughts in English does not require us to make certain distinctions of meaning that are built into Romance languages. Ethnocentrism has many advantages: it is the glue that holds groups together, that enables people to distinguish *us* from *them*, and that leads individuals to act against their own self-interest and even to die for the betterment or survival of the group. Ethnocentrism, like egocentrism, however, distorts reality and places a limit on the extent to which it is possible to observe one’s own group or others accurately—not to mention its well-known role in the maltreatment of outsiders, from snubbing to genocide.

Ethnocentrism is pervasive. We think (ethnocentrically) that we live in a physical world of things—and this world does exist—it is a good idea, for example, to get back on the curb to avoid an oncoming car—but we also live in a world of cultural concepts. Some people on the planet still have never seen a car, and they would be baffled if they came across one. Even the “I am not angry” example assumes that all participants are American (or from a related culture). Display rules for emotions, especially for anger, and for making self-referential statements about feelings vary across cultures.

A cultural misunderstanding occurs when the same behavior has different meanings in different cultures. A French man accidentally bumps into a woman on the New York subway and says nothing. She concludes that he is rude—he should have said “excuse me.” An American man accidentally bumps into a woman on the Paris Métro and says, “Excusez-moi.” She concludes that he is rude—he should have respected her privacy and left her alone. It is bad enough that he bumped into her; now he is trying to pick her up! Silence or saying “excuse me” in situations such as the one described has meaning in both France and the United States, but the meanings are different (Carroll 1988). Because all parties are ethnocentric, they act as their cultures have taught them to act and (mis)interpret the other’s behavior. They assign the only meaning they know or can imagine to the apology or silence because that is the only meaning that exists in their cultural world. The more two cultural worlds differ and the more ethnocentric the actors, the more the world of the other seems odd, strange, ugly, disgusting, or just plain wrong—worthy of moral rejection on grounds of the “yuck factor.”

Social scientists know all this. They know that it is impossible to overcome ethnocentrism completely, but also that they have to do their best to limit its effects and

to remain aware of its influence. One way to do so is by acquiring cross-cultural experience. For example, there used to be a requirement for sociocultural anthropologists to do fieldwork in another culture for at least a year and to learn the local language (or dialect of English). This requirement is no longer in effect—monolingual English-speaking Americans can get a Ph.D. degree in anthropology by studying other monolingual English-speaking Americans. As with the disappearance of the requirement for competency in foreign languages in doctoral programs in various fields, this change is symptomatic of the growing ethnocentrism of the social sciences.

The point of acquiring cross-cultural experience is that it makes one bicultural—one learns, however imperfectly, to see the world through the eyes of those in another culture. One also gets a sense, despite the limitations of ethnocentrism, of how *we* appear to *them*. Once one has an articulated awareness of two very different ways of understanding the world—including two different sets of meanings and values often applied to the same objects, events, and behavior—it is easy to see that thousands of different ways might exist. And they do.

A person can become fascinated by human behavior and decide to become a social scientist for many different reasons. Prominent among these reasons is a desire to understand oneself and others both as individuals and as members of groups. Along with this motivation often comes a concern with issues of inequality and social justice.

For the first 190,000 years of the 200,000-year existence of anatomically modern humans, we lived a remarkably egalitarian existence in small kin-related bands of a few dozen hunter-gatherers. When you are on the move, you do not accumulate many things to distribute unequally; and face-to-face relationships with people you have known all your life tend to limit the arbitrary exercise of power. In the end, the group can always kill or eject someone who becomes too self-aggrandizing, or sub-groups can split off and go their own way for any reason that seems sufficient to them.

Once humans began to plant food crops, which kept them in one place and sustained larger populations, slavery and other forms of extreme inequality became prominent, and they have remained so to the present day. Even in the United States, which is so rich that many of our poor people are obese (whereas malnutrition and starvation are more often the norm elsewhere), we see the contrast between a few multibillionaires and hundreds of thousands of homeless people.

Social scientists can hardly avoid issues of inequality and social justice. Furthermore, many have personally experienced discrimination or belong to groups that have been mistreated. Because we are all members of multiple groups, most people, including most social scientists, fall into one or more categories that have gotten a raw deal. Half the population are women; and many cultural, linguistic, “racial,” social class, and other classifications occupy positions below the top of the food chain. Few individuals in the general population or among social scientists are at the top of every hierarchy—that is, upper-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males. Even the latter individuals, because of their rarity, may at one time or another feel marginalized or discriminated against by their colleagues, making the experience of social injustice by social scientists universal.

The daydreamed self-image of a knight charging on his scientific steed to defend the sullied honor of his innocent cultural group may quicken the heart of many a social scientist. He (or she, to broaden the metaphor) may feel richly deserving of the career awards bestowed on so noble a quest. Nonetheless, our hero needs to awaken to the call of scientific skepticism.

The problem is one of divided loyalties. Scientists need objectivity, accuracy, and judgment (in short, Truth) to be higher values than loyalty to their own group. When the two come into conflict, as occasionally they must, people have to ask themselves, “Am I a social scientist first or a member of some other group first?” When they limit the story of their group (identified by ethnicity, “race,” gender, language, social class, religion, sexual orientation, or some other characteristic) to how it suffered from and overcame or succumbed to adversity, they are giving in to ethnocentrism because they are leaving out negative aspects of their group. If they are blind to these shortcomings, then their ethnocentrism has subverted their competence as social scientists. If the omissions are deliberate, however, even though social scientists know their group’s faults better than any outsider can, then they are keeping quiet for ethnocentric motives in order deliberately to create a more favorable impression. That is, they are choosing to identify with their group’s values and “self”-image, or they are caving in to group pressure not to air dirty laundry in public. This kind of ethnocentric bias, though it stems from less-unpleasant motives, is the counterpart of the covert (at least within academia), behind-the-scenes, *sotto voce*, negative stereotyping that outsiders direct at their group. It, too, is ethnocentric because it contains inaccurate information, is based on the lack of an insider’s understanding of how and why the group functions, and leaves out positive information.

Nothing compels social scientists to study their own groups, although, even if they devote themselves to other subject matter, their personal loyalties might still turn out to be relevant to that subject. Rather, the point is that they cannot have it both ways: if they want to study their own group, they have to depict it, warts and all, to the best of their abilities.

Social scientists cannot avoid making choices among group loyalties within American society, within the university, and within their academic disciplines. Examples of such choices are: my cultural group versus the dominant majority’s culture (or, if I am a member of the majority, my cultural group versus the cultures of those groups we have mistreated), and my social class versus others’ social class. The point I am making is simply that group loyalty to social science and its ideals has to trump all other loyalties when one is acting as a social scientist. Putting social science first reflects in part the same collectivist values as putting one’s ethnic group first—it just rearranges the hierarchy to make other social scientists the most important reference group. However, it is also an expression of individualistic values in its commitment to truth over group loyalty.

The key question is, “Am I a social scientist first, or am I an X first?” This question tests social scientists’ commitment to the truth and forces them to confront their

divided loyalties. It is also the question that, in my experience, they do not want asked and that they certainly do not want to be forced to answer in public because of the censure they might suffer for whatever answer they give (unless, for some, their ethnocentrism makes them proud to declare that as social scientists their commitment to the truth comes second). One thing is certain: no group, especially no minority group, will support a member who by telling the truth puts the interests of science above its own. Other members of that group will be quick to accuse the individual of making the group look bad so as to curry favor with prejudiced outsiders—or, worse, of lying or exhibiting self-hatred. Especially in times of national mobilization, such as the war on terrorism or the war on drugs, social scientists' commitment to truth and objectivity is under severe pressure, and many are sure to buckle. So I am writing this article to tell the truth as I see it about the situation in the social sciences; I am not dowsing for a wellspring of intellectual support.

In a better world, the question of social scientists' group loyalties would not come up, and there would be no need to write this article. One would take for granted their honesty and professionalism and assume that their commitment to science predominates. After all, physicists and biologists do not have to declare their religious beliefs before discussing the big bang or evolution; audiences can evaluate proffered arguments on their own merit. These days, however, social scientists routinely declare their backgrounds in response to the implicit assumption that unless proven otherwise, group loyalties skew the evidence presented. So here is my background: I am a secular grandson of eastern European Jewish immigrants; the rest of my family is black; and I have lived in and have cultural ties to Brazil. If this information changes the way you react to the points I make in this article, then your reaction is an indicator of the very problem I am considering.

The following presentation, drawing on my own experience in academia and discussions with colleagues in other disciplines and institutions, uses as section headings variations on the key question proposed earlier. These questions introduce discussions of intergroup and intragroup pressures and conflicts, ethnocentrism, and other issues related to social scientists' divided loyalties and to the ways in which group memberships undermine their commitment to telling the truth. The discussions also give examples of the many governmental and other limitations of American social scientists' previously normal activities.

Am I a Social Scientist First or an American First?

There is always the danger that social scientists will engage in self-censorship to avoid being accused of disloyalty. A half-century after the end of World War II, historians at the Smithsonian Institution were prevented from putting on an exhibit examining the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; and the scaled-down Enola Gay exhibit contained inaccuracies and distortions (Bird, Sherwin, and cosignatories 1995). As I write, we are at war with Iraq, home of the world's first civilization (Mesopotamia),

with numerous archaeological sites containing clues about the origin of the state. With the Cold War experience of the McCarthy period as a precedent, we have reason for pessimism about social scientists' freedom to investigate and to discuss the current war or humanity's past.

Am I a Social Scientist First or a Man or a Woman First?

Note how much more problematic the question is with regard to women—at least, so it seems in academia, where women are a minority. This difference illustrates the point that a group's pressure on its members, both to be loyal and to take a position in opposition to more powerful outsiders, is greater in less-powerful groups because of their vulnerability. Currently in the United States and in academia, pressure is brought to bear on everyone to show concern for the feelings of others—especially if those others are members of a group that is or has been in some way mistreated or weak. In personal relationships, this show of concern is a matter of social skills and humanistic values—surely it is better to treat others decently than to upset them because one is powerful enough to get away with it. In science, however, truth is more important than sensitivity. For example, men on average have larger brains than women. This difference is a fact, even though it upsets some women. Men's brains are larger because men are larger; men also have larger feet. It turns out that on average women have just as many brain cells as men; women's brains are just more densely packed, with more neurons per cubic millimeter (Lieberman 1999). The point is that science demands the acknowledgment of unpleasant findings and the search for alternative explanations, rather than silence or criticism of data on ideological grounds because they upset vulnerable people or might be misused by others to discriminate against those people. The best antidote to bad science is more science.

Am I a Social Scientist First or White or Black First?

The question with regard to blacks clearly poses a greater challenge. Because of their group's history of oppression and the resulting need for solidarity, black social scientists experience in-group pressure to toe the line in the subject matter they study, the ways they interpret results, and the rhetoric used to communicate their findings. For those unwilling to confront their group's disapproval, it is both easier and safer to produce works of social advocacy than to accept the responsibility that social scientists should assume. Similarly, black historians feel pressure to study slavery rather than the Renaissance, and black psychologists feel pressure to study racism rather than animal learning. In my experience, white colleagues often exert a corresponding pressure on blacks to do the same thing—"represent the black point of view" and "be a role model for African American students"—so that the appropriate boxes can get checked off for credentialing agencies. This pressure creates a ritualized drama in which all characters play their roles in the American tragicomedy, staying close to the script and never saying anything interesting or new.

Black social scientists are under considerable pressure to discuss their group's difficulties only in terms of the effects of outside forces (prejudice, discrimination, and racism), but not also to include their own negative contributions (for example, peer disparagement of academic achievers in public schools for "acting white"). The linguist John McWhorter broke this taboo in *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000) and suffered the predictable reaction. I would be interested in seeing more social scientists from other backgrounds show comparable candor about their own groups, but I am not holding my breath.

Am I a Social Scientist First or Jewish First?

Here, I am speaking of Jews as an American ethnic group, rather than as adherents of a religion. In order to consider the issues of minority-majority relations raised by this question, it is helpful to engage in a discussion of another minority group that displays a number of striking parallels: Gypsies. Both groups have extraordinary longevity—Gypsies have existed for more than a thousand years, and Jews for more than five millennia. Prior to the existence of the state of Israel, both were minorities everywhere, and both survived slavery in the distant past and the Holocaust more recently.

A people usually lives in a particular place that forms part of its identity. Its members take on an inferior status when they migrate to another place and become a minority group or when they are conquered in their homeland. Unlike Jews and Gypsies, other minorities often assimilate to the dominant culture over time, adopting many of its characteristics, such as language, customs, and religion. So Jews and Gypsies pose a cultural puzzle: they have endured, or at least survived, as minorities in many different lands, cultures, and epochs, always maintaining core cultural features and a common cultural identity. How is this persistence possible? Can we learn something from these groups' amazing survival skills?

Gypsies have a concept called *marimé*, which has been roughly translated from the Romany as "pollution" (Sutherland 1975). For example, the body above the waist is pure (*wuzho*), but below the waist it is *marimé*. Hence, Gypsies (Rom) use separate pieces of soap to wash their upper and lower bodies, and to wash garments worn above and below the waist. Gypsies might seem dirty to non-Gypsies (*gajé*), but *gajé* are perceived as *marimé* by Gypsies. Eating in restaurants poses a problem because the soap that washed the dishes and the dishwashers' hands is of unknown provenance. (Disposable plastic utensils and plates in fast-food restaurants have solved this problem.) A boy might reach into his mother's bra for a cigarette or money, but he would not touch her skirt. Even shaking the hand of a *gajo* is problematic because what that hand might have touched is uncertain.

It is easy to see that one of the main effects of *marimé* is to limit sharply the contact Rom have with *gajé*. This limitation is especially interesting: whereas other minorities assimilate to the majority culture, Gypsies have a central cultural trait that leads them to avoid it. In fact, *marimé* leads to cultural misunderstandings that

actually antagonize the majority. For example, most *gajé* value a clean appearance and restaurants with china and silver over McDonalds; and little *gajé* boys are not supposed to smoke or reach into their mothers' bras. Most significantly, *gajé* are likely to interpret avoidance of shaking hands as a slight, the rejection of a friendly greeting.

One cannot help but be struck by the parallels between *marimé* and Jewish dietary laws (*kasbrut*). From the point of view of a social scientist, the persistence of dietary restrictions that have no biological survival value (such as not eating milk products and meat products together) over thousands of years in a persecuted minority suggests that these restrictions have a social survival value. In a parallel with *marimé*, *kasbrut* would appear to have the effect of limiting the contact Jews have with non-Jews (*goyim*). An invitation to dinner from a non-Jew requires, for religious reasons, either a refusal or a counteroffer to bring one's own food and tableware (saved by plastic again!). As with *marimé*, such responses are likely to provoke cultural misunderstandings and to offend the well-intentioned host.

In other words, what we see in these two exceptional minority cultures is the apparently paradoxical existence of traits that ubiquitously antagonize the majorities among whom these cultures live. What can be the survival value of provoking antipathy? The obvious answer is that it necessitates group solidarity in response to hostility. By increasing the inevitable negative reaction that a majority has toward a minority group, the cost of defection increases for members of the minority. (Such is the case so long as defectors cannot assume some other social identity. For example, a greater proportion of Jews can pass for Christian than blacks can pass for white.)

The larger lesson to be learned from this example is that a full accounting of intergroup relations requires recognition not only of the mistreatment directed toward minority groups, but also of their partial role in provoking it and thereby in contributing to the creation of a self-fulfilling prophesy. Furthermore, the social scientist must describe not only the majority's barriers to the entry of minorities, but also the penalties that minorities impose on their members for defection. Minority-group members can easily criticize social scientists who present a more complete picture in this way as displaying prejudice (for example, anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsy prejudice, or racism), and others can criticize them for blaming the victim. Thus, multiple pressures on social scientists make it more difficult for them to tell the truth.

The educational anthropologist John Ogbu has made the important distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities (Ogbu and Simons 1998; Ogbu 2002). Voluntary minorities include groups who fled persecution or sought out economic or other benefits, whereas involuntary minorities include groups who were conquered, colonized, or enslaved. Ogbu provides evidence that voluntary minorities tend to cooperate pragmatically with the majority culture, whereas involuntary minorities tend to develop a "culture of resistance" vis-à-vis the majority. The defiant stance that some members of involuntary minorities take (which outsiders may view as self-defeating) can be understood as provoking just the kind of negative reaction to which I have been referring. Furthermore, pressures from within the involuntary minority to

engage in and support such behavior can be seen as maintaining group solidarity and raising the costs of defection. Ogbu's work suggests that involuntary minorities, who by definition have been exploited, also have developed mechanisms that contribute in part to provoking antipathy from the majority. And pressures on social scientists to omit this part of the story are similar to those just mentioned for Jews and Gypsies.

Am I a Social Scientist First or an Anthropologist, Economist, Historian, Linguist, Political Scientist, Psychologist, or Sociologist First?

This question calls attention to the potential conflict between understanding a phenomenon and doing the kind of research that gains the approval of one's disciplinary or sub-disciplinary or sub-subdisciplinary peer group. I have been interested in the concept of "race" for some time, and I have been distraught at the lack of awareness—or even interest—on the part of my psychologist colleagues (including those who do research on the topic) of basic knowledge about the subject from other disciplines (Fish 2000, 2002). This knowledge includes evidence from biological anthropology and evolutionary biology that biological races are nonexistent in *Homo sapiens* and from sociocultural anthropology that the concept of "race" varies widely from culture to culture. Subsequently, I discovered that this disciplinary ethnocentrism is not unique to my field and occurs within and between other disciplines as well. For example, sociocultural and biological anthropologists may not be aware of each other's work, let alone that of other disciplines; and the same gap appears to exist between evolutionary biologists and other biologists. This disciplinary provincialism is not a coincidence; within each specialized area of inquiry, researchers exert pressure to prevent colleagues from venturing outside of their "area of expertise." A determination to put a commitment to truth above group loyalties, however, means trying to understand a phenomenon in all its fullness, rather than refusing to venture beyond a peer group's substantive or methodological perimeter.

Am I a Social Scientist First or an Employee First?

Social scientists, like other people, have to feed their families. Besides not endangering their livelihood, they have to choose their battles. If one fought every injustice, real or imagined, no time would remain to get some work done. However, if social scientists do not stand up to fight the relentless institutional encroachments on academic inquiry, nothing of substance will remain open to their inquiry.

To begin with, institutional review boards (IRBs) pose a problem. Created to protect research subjects' rights, they hold life-or-death power over all research conducted at institutions that receive federal funds (not just studies that the government actually funds). Like all bureaucracies, they continually extend their power to new areas. For example, they reserve the right to insist on changes in the design of research on the grounds that a study that they consider poorly designed might waste

participants' time and therefore not justify their effort in providing data. Activities that are ordinary citizens' right are denied to social scientists if Big Brother cannot look over their shoulders. For example, if a curious citizen wants to see what proportion of cars actually stops at the stop sign on his corner, he can, at his own expense, look out his window and tally data to his heart's content. If a social scientist wants to do so at her own expense, however, she will need to write a proposal and to obtain permission from her university's IRB. After the weeks or months required for the process, she might even be required to obtain a signed informed-consent form from each driver before recording the observation. I will not go into the methodological nightmare that such a requirement creates by interfering with the phenomenon under investigation. The relevant point is that the growing IRB bureaucracy makes much research impossible. New researchers learn, beginning in their undergraduate years, to limit their imaginations to studies that can survive bureaucratic scrutiny, and so the Orwellian objective of preventing nonconforming thoughts from occurring is achieved. For example, in the 1960s William Masters and Virginia Johnson made groundbreaking observations of the human sexual response, and what they learned contributed to the development of effective treatments for a number of sexual difficulties (Masters and Johnson 1966, 1970). Researchers today would not waste their time in attempts to pursue similar research, and preventing consenting adults from committing science is not on the radar as an important civil liberties issue.

The problem is a familiar one: Who polices the police? Many of those who sit on IRBs have an inherent conflict of interest. They are administrators who represent the interests of their own institution in addition to those of researchers and subjects. They can easily stop any study that is controversial or that might bring bad publicity to their institution: by reinterpreting the controversy as a risk to subjects, by creating endless bureaucratic roadblocks, or by doing many other things that leave no paper trail. This topic is complex, but for the purposes of this article I simply want to point out that no organized movement exists to check IRBs' growing power, which suggests social scientists' complicity in or at least their acquiescence to the system.

IRBs limit the scope of research, but other forces undermine science by promoting the destruction of data. Nonscientists sometimes have the mistaken impression that science progresses from a hunch to a hypothesis to a theory to a fact. This view represents a basic misunderstanding of how science works. Scientists make observations and record them; these recorded observations are the data. They also develop theories to explain patterns among the data and to predict the outcomes of future observations. In other words, theories may come and go, as unanticipated observations are made or new findings contradict predictions; but data remain as the raw materials against which theories can be tested. Thus, destroying data undermines the entire scientific enterprise. For example, specimens from the Burgess shale were ignored for four decades before a researcher used new knowledge and techniques to reveal their singular contribution to understanding the evolution of life on our planet (Gould 1989). Had they been destroyed because they seemed to offer no new insights at the time, the science of later generations would have suffered greatly.

The issue of what to do with data is a complex one, involving property rights and the cost of conservation. The examples of the destruction of data I offer here, however, illustrate the current debacle in which group interests (for example, those of social class or culture) have overwhelmed the scientific interest in preserving data.

In the middle of the twentieth century, the psychologist and psychiatrist William Sheldon elaborated a now-discredited theory claiming a causal link between body type and temperament (Sheldon and Stevens 1942). In the course of decades of work, he collected many thousands of photographs of men and women in standardized, antiseptically posed, front, side, and rear views, from which he took measurements and published statistics. Some readers may remember his somatotypes, with ratings on the three dimensions of ectomorphy, mesomorphy, and endomorphy. Photographs of 1,175 men systematically arranged by somatotype, with faces and genitalia whited out, appeared in his 1954 *Atlas of Men*, though an *Atlas of Women* was never published. Like samples from the Burgess shale, 9,000 somatotype photos and negatives of Yale University students were in storage, in this case at the Smithsonian Institution. They were awaiting a future researcher who would dream up a scientific use for them, perhaps to detect early signs of illness, to predict longevity, or to test a hypothesis from a yet-to-be-formulated theory. Who knows what ingenious uses future research techniques or theoretical advances might have made of them? Unfortunately, they have been lost forever because the Smithsonian Institution destroyed them at the behest of Yale University (“Smithsonian Shreds Nude Student Photos” 1995), presumably in the belief that they might have included images of individuals who subsequently became powerful, such as George W. Bush or Hillary Rodham Clinton. Interestingly, neither the Smithsonian nor Yale has shown a similar concern for the sensitivity of non-Western native people who appear unclothed in photos actually on display and not just in storage.

Under the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, large numbers of research specimens assembled over more than a century—burial goods and skeletal remains from numerous research collections—have been returned to Native American tribes for their burial and permanent destruction (Haas 1996). In 1996, Kennewick Man, a nine-thousand-year-old male skeleton was found in the Pacific Northwest. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers attempted to return this unique specimen, which might yield important clues about the early inhabitants of North America, to tribes that currently have claims to the area where it was discovered. Although in this case archaeologists and biological anthropologists sued successfully to prevent the government from allowing the destruction of the specimen, its mishandling by the Corps of Engineers while it was in their custody significantly degraded the information that might have been obtained from it (Miller 1999). I know of no organized movement to resist the destruction of data, raising once again questions about the depth of social scientists’ commitment to the truth.

I will not belabor the point by going into further detail, but readers may want to explore for themselves the implications of other variations on the key question. With regard to the problem of divided cultural loyalties and its impact on telling the truth—and using U.S. categories (rather than those that individuals may bring with

them from other cultural contexts)—the following is a partial list: Am I a social scientist first or Asian, Latino, Native American, French, German, Italian, Irish, or Pole first; a member of the upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, or lower class first; a Christian, Jew, or Muslim first?

Even for those who are not social scientists, these questions are productive to ask. Simply change the words “Am I a social scientist first?” to “Am I committed to understanding myself and others first?” The revised question is useful for individuals interested in working out their own personal, ethnic, cultural, social class, religious, and other identities—even though, because they are not participants in an academic discussion, they do not have to express themselves publicly. Still, each individual can profitably ask, “Which is more important to me, to see my group as objectively as possible, neither exaggerating nor downplaying the negatives, or to demonstrate my group loyalty, even in my most private thoughts?”

In addition to serving a commitment to the truth, cross-cultural experience can also help to diminish ethnocentrism. Thus, a bicultural or multicultural identity is a real asset because it creates the conditions for binocular cultural vision, for seeing the world from more than one cultural perspective, with the resulting depth of perception.

There is a growing pool of bicultural Americans. They include people who are bilingual; children of mixed marriages; some immigrants (those who choose an identity that includes elements from both the culture of origin and the new culture); and people who have spent significant time living in another culture, such as anthropologists who have done fieldwork overseas, Peace Corps volunteers, some children of missionaries (those who are allowed extensive and intensive contact with the new culture), children of diplomats, children of multinational business executives posted overseas, “army brats” who grew up on bases around the world, and others whose experience has permitted them the opportunity to develop an insider’s understanding of one or more other cultures. The social sciences are strengthened and enriched when such cosmopolitan individuals join their ranks.

That “Other” is the most rapidly growing census category suggests that increasing numbers of Americans have the kinds of complex cultural identities that give them an advantage in limiting their ethnocentrism. Such people can serve as cultural bridges or cultural interpreters, though in less favorable circumstances they may find themselves caught in a tug of war between their potential reference groups. In both cases—the social scientist identity and the bicultural identity—the price of a clearer and more rounded vision is to stand apart from others, perhaps even with a sense of alienation. One who has this vision lacks the warmth of a clear social identity, the certainty of being a member in good standing of a distinctive group, and the assurance that ethnocentrism provides of knowing how the world really is. Because of one’s recognition of the existence of alternative social realities, one is always, at least in part, an outsider. Compensating for this sense of separateness is the exhilaration that comes from seeing the world more clearly, even if one often cannot share that understanding with others. It is like being able to see colors in a world where others are colorblind.

Some may find these benefits too meager to justify the cost of overcoming ethnocentrism or grappling with their divided loyalties; but eschewing the common group loyalties that are primary to many ordinary people is a price that social scientists should not be able to avoid paying.

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