

### On Rationalizing the Irrational

Marvin Surkin

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Ithiel de Sola Pool's rejoinder ("Some Facts About Values," *P.S.*, Spring 1970) to my essay "Sense and Nonsense in Politics" (*P.S.*, Fall 1969) covers familiar ground. We already know the basis of his thinking – including both his "science" and his "ideology." He extols the virtues of a particular mode of science and the efficacy of a particular political system, as well as its policies and priorities. Professor Pool is in the mainstream of American political science today, and for those who share *his* tradition his rejoinder undoubtedly makes sense. What this implies, in my view, is that whether or not there is full agreement as to the mandarin role of social scientists espoused by Pool is of only secondary importance since the options are limited by the given standard of rationality as well as by the conditions of the social world.

My essay is an attempt to analyze this problem in social knowledge and theory. I have tried to show the irrationality of the system of rationality developed in American political science in which sense is really non-sense, science is really ideology. Professor Pool's rejoinder serves to reinforce the connections I have described between "policy" science and political "science." He admits, for instance, that "Researchers in any science are seldom very clear about the logical status of what they are doing. That is an exercise left to philosophers of science." This admission tallies, of course, with his view that, on the one hand, social scientists will be able to supply the men of power with "a way of perceiving the consequences of what they do," while on the other hand, "... these various psychological and logical notions that we have been reviewing did get wound up in the day-to-day frame of thought (or ideology if you wish) of practicing social scientists into a highly useful set of liberal professional norms." The language changes from one context to the next but the meaning remains the same: the purpose of "science" or ideology or "liberal professional norms" is to serve the men of power.

My perspective is different. Not because it may be judged more or less rational or scientific, more or less ideological or value-laden. It is

different because I have applied to social science, to ideology, and to theoretical criticism an alternate standard of rationality. My essay sketches such a new direction in social science. On this point I hope there is no misunderstanding. In any case, what is certainly clear to me is how successfully the existence of these two worlds in a journal of American political science reflects the difficulty any political scientist has in either sinking rationality or rescuing it.

## To the Editor:

This letter is addressed to all foreign-born political scientists, and especially to those who have a non-European cultural background.

Recently the American Political Science Association has made concrete efforts to deal with discriminatory practices against black political scientists, as well as women in the profession. However, little attention has been given to a variety of discriminatory practices against foreign-born, yet tax-paying, political scientists because of their national origin, skin color, accent, and different cultural background. These discriminatory practices are evidenced in administrative behavior affecting their recruitment, salary levels, ranks, promotions, grants and awards, participation in exchange programs, and so on. Foreign-born political scientists often do not feel free to express openly their political preferences and views. During their doctoral training, many foreign-born political scientists have experienced typical colonial attitudes.

We all know that many federal, state and local agencies refuse to hire foreign-born political scientists. The same is the case with industries obtaining contracts from the government. We need to draw up a list of discriminatory practices and identify the sources of their occurrence.

It would seem opportune to organize an interest group under the auspices of the APSA to study the problems in depth and to devise strategies and correctional methods.

As a first step, we have written various letters to several foreign-born political scientists for their suggestions and viewpoints.

As a second step, we have been in communication with the APSA Executive Director. Specifically, we requested the APSA Program Committee to make room available at the 1970 meeting in Los Angeles where foreign-born political scientists and others interested in their difficulties can get together. This request was met, and a meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, September 10, at 12 noon in the Roman Room, Biltmore Hotel (Conference Room Number One).

As a third step, we ask you through this letter in PS to send us your reactions and suggestions so that we may formulate a questionnaire and a tentative program of action for an open discussion at the

Los Angeles meeting.

As a fourth step, we have requested APSA President Karl W. Deutsch to appoint a special committee to study the status of foreign-born political scientists and to recommend specific measures for the APSA to deal with this problem.

It is hoped that out of these endeavors will emerge a well-organized group which would function on a continuing basis to alleviate the existing discriminatory practices and handle future ones as they arise.

We urge you to attend the APSA meeting in Los Angeles (September 8-12). Any suggestions you have concerning any of the matters discussed in this communication may be addressed to: M. L. Goel or Ralph C. Chandler, The University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida 32504, or Amrit Lal, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama 36088.

**M. L. Goel**  
**Ralph C. Chandler**  
University of West Florida

**Amrit Lal**  
Tuskegee Institute

## To the Editor:

This letter is prompted by the resolution and argument submitted by Professor Sanford Levinson asking for termination of the Congressional Fellowship Program. I hope it will be possible to make my view known through the pages of *PS*.

I think I should begin by briefly giving some background information about my own knowledge of the program. Until six months ago, when I was appointed to the Program's advisory committee, I had no official connection with the program at all; indeed, when I tried to become a Congressional Fellow myself in 1960, I was turned down. In the intervening years I have endeavored to study Congress on my own, and have invariably found succeeding classes of Congressional Fellows enormously helpful and hospitable as I have gone about my field work. So I would have to say that to some important degree I have been a beneficiary of the program, as have, I daresay, most students of Congress whether they themselves were fellows or not.

The attribute of throwing off benefits to scholars and students at a remove, which I have just

attested to, is of course a significant hallmark of a successful educational venture, as are the publications and other educational activities of former fellows. In my opinion these taken all together identify the Congressional Fellowship Program unequivocally as a program designed and executed to encourage the study of political science squarely within the meaning of the objects of the Association as set forth in its Constitution. You are aware, I know, of my long-standing opposition to the recently terminated Congressional Distinguished Service Award because it did not meet this test, which the Congressional Fellowship Program clearly passes.

I think others must testify as to the actual internal workings of the program – how Fellows determine which Congressmen and Senators they work with, what variety of experience is made available to them, how this experience has (or has not) assisted them in understanding Congress and those public issues, ideas, institutions, and movements touching and touched by Congress both during their fellowship year and later. I can report only my impression that fellows have had a great diversity of experiences, and have learned all manner of things from their year on Capitol Hill – not only about Congressional processes, but also about Civil Rights, about foreign affairs, about taxes and spending, about public bureaucracies and private interest groups, about political campaigns and party politics all over the country. Congress is, after all, an institution of great significance in American life in part because so much of American life in some way or another does filter through Congress.

No doubt a corresponding insight about the judicial process in America – which I believe is ordinarily attributed to Toqueville – prompted Professor Levinson to apply for his Russell Sage Fellowship in Law and Society. The publisher's blurb on a book of essays Professor Levinson recently co-edited indicates that he will hold this Fellowship at Stanford Law School in the coming year. One may, I think, legitimately ask whether it will hasten the day that political scientists study what Professor Levinson thinks they should study (The American Legion? The Black Panthers? General Motors' foreign policy?) if his own Fellowship were abolished. My own view is that it will not, nor will the abolition of someone else's Congressional fellowship. I myself should like to see studies of many of the topics alluded to in Professor Levinson's letter – and some other things besides. But I doubt that termination of the Congressional Fellow-

ship Program will get any of them sponsored, or done.

Research agendas are, in my opinion, less susceptible to change through the public debate that Professor Levinson seems to crave than through the private decisions of scholars to emulate the example of good work, thoughtfully pursued. I think many of the studies of politics that the Congressional fellowship program has in one way or another facilitated do have this exemplary quality. It is thus understandable that others will want to see what they can learn from an experience so manifestly enlightening. I believe that the opportunities of the Congressional Fellowship Program should continue to be made available to succeeding groups of scholars, and not restricted to those who have already had the benefit of this program.

This, in the end, is what disturbs me most about Professor Levinson's resolution: It offers nothing but the destruction of an important educational opportunity for future political scientists. It comes from someone who has himself sought and accepted an opportunity almost identical to that which he would now deny to others.

I hope this resolution is defeated.

**Nelson W. Polsby**

University of California, Berkeley

## To the Editor:

I note that a resolution will be presented at the 1970 APSA annual meeting to abolish the Congressional Fellowship Program.

This resolution is based upon a false assumption and a basic misunderstanding. The false assumption is that we have sufficient knowledge of Congress (relative to other kinds of unexamined political activity). The misunderstanding is that the Congressional Fellows program is primarily for research purposes.

While I'm sure there has been a good research byproduct of the program I feel its primary value has been to acquaint the Fellows with the realities of Congressional government and politics while educating Congressmen as to the realities of political science and its practitioners. In my experience this value has been demonstrated. The program continues to be of great benefit to the political science profession. My view in no way

rules out the possible values of other kinds of fellowships or the need to acquaint political scientists with other elements in American society.

**Harry Howe Ransom**  
Vanderbilt University

## To the Editor:

I write to urge rejection of Professor Sanford Levinson's resolution advocating termination of the APSA Congressional Fellowship program. Although not a former fellow myself, over the past decade I have had an opportunity to observe the program rather closely. The prime payoffs, it seems to me, have been fourfold: (1) substantial research and writing on the workings of Congress; (2) more sensitive seminar and classroom teaching; (3) improved press coverage; and (4) a growing number of bureaucrats more keenly aware of the strengths and limitations of our national legislature. Members of Congress who have utilized congressional fellows usually come away with a better understanding of what professional political scientists are doing and thinking. This has led to improved access for all congressional scholars. One of the richest indirect benefits of the program is the opportunity to exchange ideas not only with congressmen and staff but also the journalists, lawyers and civil servants who are also participating in the program. Nor should the contributions of a year in Washington, D.C. to the development of individual careers be minimized.

Professor Levinson's reasons for wanting to terminate the program are not persuasive. The staff assistance that individual fellows contribute to various Senators and Representatives is a small price to pay for the experience and understanding gained from drafting amendments and following legislation from committees, to the floor, and so on to the other body. I'm all for participant-observation in other political organizations, including the American Legion and the Black Panthers. But I don't think we should underestimate the inherent difficulties of securing access or raising the necessary financial support to launch such internships. In the meantime we have a strong, on-going program which has and will continue to yield rich dividends.

I would agree with Professor Levinson that our understanding of Congress has advanced considerably over the past two decades. The APSA Congressional Fellowship program has made its

definite contribution. But I would strongly disagree that a shift in focus to "private governments," even General Motors, would have the sustained, cumulative payoffs that continued research on congressional politics is likely to produce. A study of the politics of the Ford Foundation would also be fascinating, but Professor Levinson may be sitting around a long time waiting for funds to materialize. Unless he decides to participate in the Congressional Fellowship program – then, Representative Wright Patman might have some leads.

**Robert L. Peabody**  
Johns Hopkins University

## To the Editor:

As one who feels that it would be a tragic mistake for the Association to terminate the Congressional Fellowship Program, I am both amused and concerned with the amount of nonsense Sanford Levinson manages to squeeze into three short paragraphs which also reveal a certain amount of sophistication. I have come to expect this combination of qualities; Levinson's letter is a perfect manifestation of the chic radical *Zeitgeist* that is now sweeping over a large part of the American academic community. Precisely because he turns fashionable sentiments to the task of attacking a program which I admire (and, yes, from which I have derived benefit), I am moved to reply.

The sophistication to which I refer may be seen in Levinson's recognition that "value neutrality" is impossible in social research and that participant observation is a useful means of learning about political life. What seems to follow in this case, I believe to be naive, if not simpleminded. Political scientists, we are told, are now giving "valuable professional assistance" to one elite (congressmen) and depriving others of it. Now, anyone who has the slightest knowledge of the Congressional Fellowship Program ought to know that the benefit flows precisely in the other direction. It is political scientists, not congressmen, who gain. If it is desirable, and I think it is, to understand how important allocative decisions are made in American politics, it can be easily demonstrated that the Fellowship Program has provided access to many kinds of information that would otherwise have been unavailable to us. I would doubt as a former fellow that we have managed to provide assistance of equal worth in return. This most participating congressmen know full well – so well, in fact, that they would regard Levinson's argument

as more than a little otherworldly. I might say that I think the same argument would hold for the Black Panthers. I very much doubt that Bobby Seale would gain much from our "valuable professional assistance." I *could*, though, imagine our learning a good bit from him, and I hereby join Mr. Levinson in proposing that we attempt to encourage such relationships between political scientists and the Black Panthers and other politically significant groups.

The sophistication of the second argument lies in the recognition that political scientists ought properly to study all sorts of institutions that have anything to do with the authoritative decisions of a society. Here, indeed, we can often be faulted. Historically, we have been guilty time after time of ignoring crucial political phenomena because we have defined them into someone else's discipline. The trouble with Levinson's argument is the assumption that we now understand Congress relatively well enough. This is pure nonsense, as anyone who has taken the trouble to try to derive reliable generalizations from the congressional literature can see. To be sure, there is much to be said for other kinds of internship programs. I have no trouble seeing that we can learn a great deal from such organizations as General Motors, the Ford Foundation and the Black Panthers. What I cannot see is that we would stand to gain in any way by scrapping an existing internship program that has opened so many doors to us. We might more sensibly establish new internship programs and hope they work as well.

I have the feeling that there are some unarticulated major premises in Levinson's argument. One, I suspect, is the now fashionable view that "electoral politics" and formal institutions are not really very important – that they cloak more fundamental forces which are behind the scenery. And, interestingly enough, it is the corporations and foundations to which Levinson turns. This is not the place to do battle with what I take to be an example of the disturbing tendency of political scientists of radical persuasion to ignore massive amounts of data and common sense in the name of vulgar Marxist hypotheses. I would only argue this. While we ought to study such organizations as corporations and foundations, we ought not to jettison the study of Congress and other formal institutions. Indeed, I find Lowi's arguments that we have already gone too far in this direction very persuasive. Congress does not make all of the important allocative decisions, to be sure, but it does make a great many. Anyone who supposes that men like John

Stennis, Wilbur Mills and Jamie Whitten are relatively insignificant actors in American politics needs to take another look. I must also suggest that the view from Washington is likely to be better than that from Columbus or Storrs.

There are a few flaws in the Congressional Fellowship Program, but Levinson hasn't found them. I would very much hope that our colleagues will continue to recognize the importance of Congress and to sponsor congressional research. If we are to teach our students about the realistic possibilities for social change in America, I see our continued participation in this program as an invaluable aid.

**Wayne Shannon**  
University of Connecticut

## To the Editor:

As a white subscriber to the APSA Personnel Service Newsletter, I wish to state my opposition to its silly attempts to negate historical wrongs to blacks by permitting the Newsletter to list vacancies with a preference for black candidates.

Many members of my generation were educated side by side with blacks and we accept the facts and the spirit of integration. I suggest if there are some whites who feel that their consciences must be salved, they do so with their own positions and not ours.

**Karl P. Magyar**  
Bowdoin College

## To the Editor:

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, yet women are still denied fundamental constitutional protections against discrimination.

To date the Supreme Court has upheld or refused to review state laws and practices which treat men and women differently. Examples are placing special restrictions on the employment of women as to maximum hours, night work, and types of occupations; granting less favorable social security benefits to women than to men; providing longer penalties for women than for men committing the same crime; exempting women from state jury service; and excluding women from state colleges and universities (higher admission and scholarship aid standards required for women). The inferior legal position of women in the American society

can be remedied by passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution which reads as follows: "Equality of rights under the laws shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." This proposed amendment presently has wide congressional support and presidential endorsement.

Removing discrimination by the law, however, does not remove discriminatory practices. Three major federal laws attempt to develop equal economic and educational opportunities for women. First, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 requires that men and women doing substantially the same work be paid at the same rate. But its coverage does not extend to executive, administrative, and professional employees.

Second, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 establishes the principle of job equality for women. Title VII of the act, the equal employment opportunity title, declares a new public policy which forbids discrimination on the basis of sex in hiring, promotion, and other employment practices. But this title exempts teaching personnel in educational institutions as well as employees of state and local governments. Further, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the administrative agency of Title VII, is limited to conciliatory authority.

Third, Executive Order 11246 (issued by President Johnson in 1965) as amended by Executive Order 11375 (effective as of October 1968) prohibits employment discrimination by all holders of federal contracts, including educational institutions, and requires contractors to take immediate affirmative action to remedy the effects of past discrimination. But these Orders have yet to be used with regard to sex discrimination by colleges and universities that hold federal contracts, although some 40 complaints have been filed with the Secretary of Labor.

In Congress this session is legislation to extend and amend these and other laws. The Women's Caucus for Political Science urges members of the Association to actively support this legislation. At a point in history when the President's Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities can comment that "research and deliberation . . . reveal that the United States, as it approaches its 200th anniversary, lags behind other enlightened, and indeed some newly emerging, countries in the role ascribed to women," we in the political science profession must work to accelerate the pace at which this society brings equality to all its citizens.

Indeed we must work to accelerate the pace at which this Association accepts the fact that political science is an asexual profession.

**Katherine M. Klotzburger**

National Chairwoman  
Women's Caucus for Political Science

**To the Editor:**

All Americans, not only political scientists, are indebted to our APSA Presidents who telegraphed President Nixon to reveal the one and only solution to the greatest and most perplexing crisis of this century. If our Association leaders can be faulted it is only because they did not let the world know of *the* solution prior to 14 May. No doubt, however, they had to bring to bear their intimate knowledge of Indochina, as well of military strategy and tactics, in order to calculate how best to minimize the loss of human lives. Because this surely must have taken a great deal of time, their delay is perfectly understandable.

We are thankful for another reason. Though they do not match in magnitude our present Indochina plight, we have faced crises before – the depression of the 30's, two world wars, and McCarthyism, to mention but a few. How wonderful it would be if the Association were to establish a *crisis council!* If our Association Presidents since 1964 can solve the greatest crisis of this century, then the settlement of lesser crises should be relatively easy. If, say, we had a crisis council in 1930, it would have been able to wire President Hoover offering *the* solution to our economic ills. Following the format of the 14 May telegram such communications from acknowledged experts can be very succinct and to the point. In President Hoover's case, the telegram could have read: "Print more money immediately." Or think what our crisis council might have written to President Roosevelt on December 7, 1941: "In order to save lives, capitulate." Or again, the Berlin airlift crisis could easily have been resolved with a two word telegram: "No flights."

Little is to be gained by crying over spilt milk. We must look to the future. Though there are complexities associated with the establishment of a crisis council, every effort should be made to assure unanimity amongst its members. When faced with pressing problems, our national political leaders are all too frequently confused and bewildered by conflicting advice. Would, for instance, the May 14th telegram have had such a profound



national impact if one of the signers demurred and said that June, 1971, was the appropriate date for withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam? Surely not. The telegram would have been needlessly longer but, more importantly, it would have created the impression that professional experts disagree among themselves. This could very well befuddle our national decision makers and provide them a colorable pretext to ignore the counsel of recognized experts. In sum, unanimity and simplicity of instruction are necessary if the crisis council is to operate with full effectiveness. To secure these ends perhaps we had best stick with the APSA Presidents from 1964 to 1971. Their initial effort was nothing short of exceptional.

**George W. Carey**  
Georgetown University

## To the Editor:

The discussion by Professors Danelski, Landau, and Sondermann appearing in the Winter 1970 issue of *PS* provided some excellent insights into the teaching of political science. Particularly valuable were the comments concerning an "open system" of instruction. As a consequence of these discussions, a number of points were raised which I believe require further exploration. I specifically refer to the problems of student motivation and instructor's objectives, the associations between teaching and research, and the techniques of teaching and development of teaching skills. I would like to comment very briefly on each of these points realizing the inadequacy of such commentary within the limits of this letter.

Teaching political science, or for that matter teaching in most disciplines, with an open system, where the teacher and student can establish the most beneficial relationship to the mutual pursuit of knowledge, is undoubtedly the most desirable. Yet the question remains in my mind as to the applicability of this type of system to all students. How many students are concerned enough to profit from the open system? It is a joy to most instructors to teach the concerned, the inquiring, the prepared student. But what about the student who is not in this category? What about the student who is primarily concerned with "getting the word" so that a test can be passed? What about the student who is in class because it is a required course and is simply interested in getting by as quickly as possible?

I believe we would all agree that the instructor needs to motivate, to make his subject interesting, to challenge the student. But I would also suggest that the instructor's challenges, motivations, and inspirations are not necessarily viewed as such by all students in the classroom. Students, particularly in basic courses, may come from a variety of backgrounds and may be enrolled for a variety of reasons. Consequently, they represent various levels of receptivity. To what level does the instructor direct his efforts? Should the instructor concern himself with the minority who are "students" or the majority who are "passers-by?" The greatest challenge, it seems to me, is to reach the "passers-by." Unfortunately, this appears to be on the periphery of interests of many instructors. It is the passer-by who needs to be motivated and reached. The "students" almost teach themselves. How does an instructor teaching a 10 week course reach 40-50 students and do the kinds of things suggested by Danelski, Landau, and Sondermann? What about the instructor with 100, 200 or more students?

I would agree that teaching and research are not incompatible. I would go further and suggest that one cannot teach without research. But I would not limit the definition of research purely for publication purposes. Should we not consider research conducted for the purpose of classroom preparation? How many hours are devoted to maintaining competence in the subject matter? How many hours are spent in contemplation of teaching approach, methods, and classroom personalities? An instructor committed to professional excellence and concern for the student devotes, consciously or unconsciously, a great number of hours on attempting to identify his own weaknesses and increase his own effectiveness. These considerations cannot be dismissed by simply assuming that once competence is gained, it will never be lost. This inevitably leads to last year's notes and academic stagnation. Competence requires constant revision and study, even in the most basic courses. This may be particularly relevant to the discipline of political science where there seems to be disagreement as to what the discipline encompasses as well as increasing pressure for relevance.

In most of our colleges and universities, it is assumed that the granting of a Ph.D. also grants excellence in teaching. Unfortunately knowledge of teaching techniques, competence in the classroom, and academic maturity are not automatically

awarded or acquired with the Ph.D. Yet, how many classes are assigned to the instructor with any consideration for these matters? I might add parenthetically that seniority in the academic field does not necessarily bring greater teaching ability, either. It seems to me rather naive to assume that the Ph.D. candidate acquires teaching skills while pursuing the doctoral degree. There is quite a different orientation in studying and preparing for orals and dissertation, than one who must stand before a class and teach. Teaching is more than oral presentations or "paper" reading. How many new instructors have the opportunity to take part in classes being taught by experienced teachers, *before assuming academic responsibilities?* Should we not insist that new instructors spend a little time simply learning how to teach? Realizing that teaching skills are not necessarily acquired by simply watching, but by experience and study, how can new instructors acquire this background quickly and effectively? Many other questions arise in this regard. When does one use class discussion? lecture? problem solving? How much of the technique is dependent upon the instructor's personality? What is the correlation between class size and teaching techniques, between class size and instructor effectiveness and student receptivity?

In my own personal experience teaching large classes, and small classes, as well as seminars, I have found the greatest satisfaction in seminars. Here a close relationship can be established between teacher and student and between students themselves. It is in this type of environment in which learning continues outside the classroom, in the coffee-houses so to speak, that is very difficult to achieve in non-seminar classes. The best type of relationship between the student and teacher is as suggested by Danelsky, Landau, and Sondermann. Frankly, it would be very difficult for a great number of instructors to have enough time *in one quarter, one semester, or for that matter one academic year* to develop the kinds of relationships suggested in the discussions. Perhaps this can be done with "students" but how do you achieve this with the "passers-by?" The problem is further compounded when an instructor is involved in teaching a full academic load. What I am suggesting is that the realities of academic life prevent many instructors from developing the kinds of relationships and attitudes and limit their ability to shape the academic environment in the manner suggested by Professor Danelski, Landau, and Sondermann.

**Sam C. Sarkesian**  
DePaul University