

interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 2/3

spring 1972

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martinus nijhoff, the hague

edited at

queens college of the city university
of new york

interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 2

issue 3

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interpretation is a journal devoted to the study of political philosophy.
it appears three times a year.
its editors welcome contributions from all those who take
a serious interest in political philosophy regardless of their orientation.

all manuscripts and editorial correspondence
should be addressed to the executive editor

interpretation

jefferson hall 312 · queens college · flushing, n.y. 11367 · u.s.a.

subscription price

for institutions and libraries Guilders 36.— — for individuals Guilders 28.80
one guilder = ab. \$ 0.31 = ab. £ 0.12
subscriptions and correspondence in connection
therewith should be sent to the publisher

martinus nijhoff

9-11 lange voorhout · p.o.b. 269 · the hague · netherlands.

THE DEPENDENCE OF FACT UPON "VALUE" *

MARTIN DIAMOND

The title of this paper states its basic argument, namely, that the scientific study of politics—the study of what *is* politically—requires the hypothesis that reason can teach men something about how they *ought* to live politically. Not any normative yearning, but the empirical enterprise itself requires that hypothesis. Rational explanations of political facts require a like possibility of making rational statements about political “values.” This is what is implied by the phrase “the dependence of fact upon value.” Accordingly, I argue that the radical distinction made by modern political science between facts and values is false and misleading and that the refusal to treat the validity of values as subject to scientific reasoning is fatal to the empirical study of politics.

Let me hasten to add that this article is not addressed to the full theoretical scope of the fact-value question—at least not any more than can be helped. The perspective is that of a working political scientist who tries to understand and explain the factual stuff of politics, such as statesmen, governments, opinion, movements, parties.

Now the factual stuff of politics presents itself empirically to our senses and minds with facts and values inextricably entwined. Indeed, the first and most fundamental fact about politics is that it is all about values. For example, “power” and “influence”—those modern spook-terms (to paraphrase Hobbes) that have haunted us now for several generations—are not the indicator and measure of the political. Behavior is not political behavior merely because of the presence of power or influence. Until and unless power and influence are involved with the deliberate mutual public pursuit of values, we are dealing only with some merely social phenomenon such as, say, a gang, the bedroom, or the factory. Political power is distinguished from the power of a gangster, a courtesan, or a factory foreman by the fact that political power is generated and constituted out of the deliberate mutual public pursuit of values or, as it would be more sensible to say, out of the public process whereby rival opinions are put forward as to what is mutually advantageous and just for the whole community.

Consider what everyone of us knows in his bones—how we come in fact to see and hear the political. It is not when spook-abstractions like power and influence present themselves to our eyes and ears, for they

* The present paper is based upon a series of lectures given at Loyola University (Chicago) in 1970, and is to be published in the Loyola Series on Political Analysis by F. E. Peacock Publishers.

cannot be seen or heard. We see and hear the political when statesmen, governments, citizens, movements, and parties present themselves to us as rival claimants regarding virtue, justice, or the common good. Each comes clamorously explaining its behavior in terms of some argument or opinion as to what is good and just. These rival opinions about virtue, justice, or the common good are the first and the central political phenomenon: they are what makes behavior political behavior.

Now the peculiar character of these politics-constituting opinions is that they are arguments: for example, "such and such is just or good for the country because of this and that." Therefore, the first demand the empirical phenomena make on the working political scientist is that he confront and evaluate, that is, judge the validity of, these conflicting arguments as to what is just. After all, what else can you do with an argument besides evaluate it? The political scientist cannot go spelunking, he cannot reach beneath these opinion arguments to any underlying facts about power or influence until he has first dealt justly with the rival opinions regarding the ought. The *fact* he has to deal with first is the argument the opinion makes about *values*. In short, the ought stands at the gateway to the political study of the is.

But precisely here lies the failure of modern political science. It has barred itself from entering through the gateway because it does not believe that opinions regarding the ought can be evaluated. The fact-value distinction—that self-denying methodological ordinance regarding values—teaches modern political science that reasoned argument and values belong to two radically separate realms. Hence all value opinions are equal in being equally nonevaluable: the arguments upon which they claim ultimately to rest all equally fail before the tribunal of science. Accordingly, modern political science necessarily treats all serious political opinion, which is always at bottom some sort of reasoned argument regarding values, as ultimately spurious or self-deceived. Party platforms, constitutions, the great debates over policy issues, the promises of candidates, the speeches of statesmen, all these are ultimately massive rationalizations of underlying interests and passions. Politics as it presents itself to the eye and the ear is a snare and a delusion, a giant fabrication. The knowing scientific observer must steel himself against the delusions. Like the wily Ulysses, he must tie himself securely within the coils of scientific method and hold tenaciously to the fact-value distinction when exposed to the siren song of politics, that is, when exposed to the spurious opinion that is the fundamental stuff of politics.

Now this is not only to misunderstand the nature of political opinion, but it is also profoundly to degrade both the political and the science that studies it. The fact-value distinction degrades politics and political science because that view of values denies to the political the unique element that constitutes its being. As I have argued, politics is constituted by the rivalry of human opinion regarding justice and the common good. That is to say, politics is an expression of the uniquely human faculty of reason-

ing about such matters. It is that rational faculty alone that distinguishes human things from all other things and, in particular, distinguishes the political from the merely social or the economic or the biological. But the fact-value distinction denies the authenticity of the human capacity to reason about justice and the common good. That distinction is therefore fatal to political science; but it is a veritable spawning ground of the other social sciences. They rush to fill the gap created when modern political science improvidently abdicates its proper subject matter and cheerfully acquiesced in its preemption by others.

And it has been preempted. That is the history of the last century of the social sciences. Since the fact-value distinction makes the rational and the political epiphenomenal, derivative, and reflexive, the political becomes the dependent variable, varying with the underlying independent variables—the social, the economic, and the psychological. These sister disciplines seem to have a subject matter and an independent variable all their own; or at least all seem to be somehow closer to the core of the general stuff of behavior. Political science, in contrast, has come to seem derivative, marginal, sustaining life on table scraps of data and hand-me-down methodology from these richer autonomous relatives among the social sciences.

It is hardly necessary to document the recent development. But it may be illustrated clearly in S. M. Lipset's *Politics and the Social Sciences*, the fruit of a series of panels conducted at the 1967 meetings of the American Political Science Association. The various essays explain the contribution of the other social sciences to the study of politics. Political sociology, we are told, is "the effort to apply various concepts and methods of sociology to the study of political behavior and institutions." There is a "new enthusiasm for the application of economic theory to politics." And political psychologists draw "their intellectual sustenance from psychology and apply it to the study of political attitudes and behavior." Regarding the question of whether politics itself affects behavior, it does so only as "the effective arena" in which policy choices are made; but "our hypotheses concerning the determinants [of such choices] must come from the other social sciences."¹ Sociological theory of politics, economic theory of politics, psychological theory of politics—any theory for the study of politics but political theory.

This situation results inevitably from the denial that political opinion regarding values can be founded on reason; political opinion must be understood as mere rationalization. Aristotle was wrong in thinking man to be the rational animal; modern political science knows him to be

¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Politics and the Social Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). The quotations are from pages xi, xv, xv-xvi, xxii. It should be emphasized that Professor Lipset is primarily reporting on what is in fact happening and that he himself usually shows an awareness in his work of the dignity and autonomy of political things.

instead the rationalizing animal. Political opinion is a superstructural thing; what really counts is the substructure. Behavior when it manifests itself in the political arena has the annoying habit of masquerading itself as noble and just. As it were, the other disciplines may deal with the fundamental behavioral stuff neat, straight off the shelves as it comes to them; but the modern political scientist has, uniquely, the duty to unmask the data. He must discredit the pretended grounds of the behavior and reveal its true subrational or arational "determinants."² Hence reality is to be sought, not in opinion, but behind and beneath it; not in the exercise of man's distinctive rational faculty, but in the exertion upon that faculty of determining forces that link man with all the other creatures and things.

From this it follows that what explains all other creatures and things likewise explains man; inevitably, then, political theory must give way to theory imported from those apparently more primary disciplines that deal more directly with the universal stuff of behavior. Hence "our hypotheses concerning the determinants" of political things must indeed "come from the other social sciences." From its former position as the architectonic study—the study of the most important independent variable, namely, man's unique rational-political capacity—political science is relegated to studying only the "arena" in which the universal stuff of behavior is displayed.

All the foregoing developments may be seen simply by considering carefully the term "values." In the process, it will become clear why quotation marks were used around the word "values" at the outset, as a way of indicating its dubious status. Consider first how recent is the contemporary social science usage of the term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not recognize it; in any event, the one reference that could at all be said to be in the new mode dates only from 1899. *Webster's New World Dictionary* lists the new meaning and attributes it to sociology, which both dates the usage and should give political scientists pause. The traditional meaning of the word was connected primarily with things, i.e., the value of commodities, of material values—as in the expression, "What value do you the buyer or seller place on this ring or jewel?"³ That is,

² It turns out on closer inspection that modern science does not treat all values as equally nonevaluable, as, for example, Brecht seems only modestly to claim. Rather, all value arguments turn out to be equally false when evaluated by a science based upon the fact-value distinction.

³ A second traditional meaning according to the *OED* dealt with the "worth or worthiness (of persons) in respect of rank or personal qualities," for example, being of value as a soldier, holding a valued rank in society, setting a high value on one's own qualities, or valuing someone in the sense of esteeming that person. Still another traditional meaning of the word is as a measure of things, such as mathematical quantities or musical notes. But the way the word is used in modern social science clearly derives from the idea of material values, where the emphasis is on the desirer and the value he idiosyncratically places on things, rather than on their inherent worth.

the traditional use of the term emphasized the conventional value of material things—the worth assigned to them by the more or less arbitrary and changeable desires of men.

Thus the arbitrary element—so important to the modern usage regarding ethical and political values—was always implicit in the traditional term. But as far as I can tell, the word *value* was never used hitherto to mean *opinions of justice or the common good*. And that is precisely the change that was wrought: questions of justice were transferred from the realm of opinion to the realm of “values,” which is to say, from the realm of the partly rational to the realm of the wholly arbitrary. Treating justice under a term heretofore reserved for material things and their conventional values proved an extremely effective rhetorical ploy, because whether applied to commodities or to justice, the word *value* persuasively implies that neither the commodities nor justice have any intrinsic merit, but only what men subjectively and arbitrarily attach to them. Indeed, when applied to justice, the word came to imply a wholly arbitrary matter; after all, everyone always knew that most commodities have some objective, intrinsic worth.

Values being thus understood, there is naturally a radical distinction between facts and values. The word *value* rhetorically prejudges the case and settles all the important questions before they can even be asked. For example, hear how the term *value judgment* settles the matter: a *value judgment* is a judgment made as to whether one likes or dislikes certain facts, but only *after* the facts have already been considered. The very term presupposes and thus seems to confirm that facts and values belong to different realms—facts are accessible to scientific reason, while values belong to the “noncognitive” realm of interests and passions.

Consider the similar import of some terms closely related to the concept of values—commitments, preferences, attitudes. They are used almost interchangeably with the word *value*, and for the good reason that they all have the same thrust regarding the status of rationality. By *commitment* I mean my *will*, by *preference* my *desire*, and by *attitude* my *inclination* or *predisposition*. And notice: *my* commitment, *my* preference, *my* attitude. Like the word *value*, these words also presuppose that there is no intrinsic merit that reason can perceive in the thing or idea valued; there is only an act of will or desire derived from material interests or passions. Consequently, the substantive or rational content of my commitment, preference, attitude, or value is of little significance; what counts are the interests and passions that determine the content.

The difference between all these terms and the idea of opinion must be stressed. For example, pollsters typically ask what the respondent’s *attitude* is to a given issue, the word *attitude* being used synonymously with opinion. But an attitude need not justify itself, while an opinion must. An attitude can be expressed in a sentence that does not include the word “because”; but a sentence expressing an opinion must always give a “because,” because opinions are arguments, while attitudes are only likes

and dislikes, tastes and preferences, inclinations and aversions. An attitude can be expressed with a shrug or a grimace and is merely expressive, but an opinion must always be discursive. However poorly stated, however ill considered, an opinion is an exercise of the rational faculty; it always includes a rational element that is independent of the subrational or arational influences that also bear upon opinion. By contrast, attitudes, commitments, preferences are *simply* the products of subrational or arational determinants. It is therefore an entirely different thing to speak of opinions of the just and to speak of values regarding justice. Values and facts clearly do belong to different realms when values are understood merely as the expression of desire, inclination, and interest. But it is not clear that facts and opinions are equally heterogeneous. That is why no one ever spoke of the fact-opinion distinction. Facts and opinions manifestly do *not* belong to different realms, the one in which reason is relevant and the other in which it is not. While reason cannot support *values*, it surely can support *opinions*. Indeed, the support of reason is precisely what distinguishes sound opinions from foolish ones.

Now opinion is so central to the study of politics that even modern political science, although it has misunderstood the nature of opinion, has nonetheless given a central place to the problem of opinion. Indeed, the study of opinion is perhaps that area in which modern political science most prides itself on having made the greatest advances upon the old political science.⁴ A formidable mass of studies would seem to be sufficient support for the claim. With all due trepidation in the face of these massed volumes, let me nonetheless state the following: far from advancing the study of opinion, modern political science has abandoned it. It has not studied opinion at all, but rather has substituted for that study something entirely different—the study of opinion *formation*.

The study of opinion proper is in the first instance the study of its substantive content, its arguments, its wisdom, its folly. The study of opinion formation, on the contrary, presupposes the utter irrelevance of an opinion's substance to explaining the process of its formation. This radical conclusion is so startling to common sense that it may be insufficiently appreciated in its starkness. But the accepted contemporary texts on opinion formation readily confirm the point. For example, Smith, Bruner, and White introduce their work by disclaiming any interest in the specific opinions they dealt with; these were used only as the "focus of investigation." Their book is not concerned with any particular opinions but "is, rather, a study of the psychological processes involved in forming

⁴ Compare a somewhat similar statement by Walter Berns in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 3. I am indebted to Berns for his critique of voting studies, to Storing for his thoughtful editing of the book, and to Leo Strauss, whose work made possible the *Essays* and this paper.

and holding an opinion—*any opinion*.”⁵ Consider what “any opinion” means. No matter how wise or foolish, how soundly based or ill informed, no matter whether the opinion is that of Plato or the Athenian town drunk, the same “psychological processes [are] involved in forming and holding . . . any opinion.” The content of the opinion, its accuracy and sense regarding the ethical or political problem to which it is a response, has zero consequence for the process of opinion formation. In explaining why an opinion is formed and held, one abstracts wholly from its evidence, arguments, and inferences, because they *cannot* have been the reasons why the opinion is formed and held. The study of opinion formation is perfectly divorced from the study of opinion.

How could so incredible a position come to have been held? The answer is that once the fact-value distinction was accepted this ludicrous conclusion was inescapable. The theoretical presuppositions must be restated. All important political opinions rests on “values,” i.e., upon arguments as to the ought. But since values can have no cognitive status, such arguments can have no standing. *All* opinions ultimately are equally unfounded in reason; hence there are no sound or foolish opinions regarding the ought. The purported grounds of any opinion—that is, the arguments that constitute its content—cannot possibly have influenced the formation of the opinion. That content is a mere rationalization of subterranean interests and passions, which are the true determinants of the opinion. Thus, by necessary inference from the fact-value distinction, the study of opinion formation divorces itself from the study of opinion.

The persuasiveness of modern political science, despite the ludicrousness of its main conclusion, rests in part on what we all know and acknowledge, namely, that interests and passions do profoundly influence political opinion. Of course men are influenced by their pocketbooks, their character structures, their childhood training, and the like. But *influenced* only; modern political science radicalizes that common sense understanding into the idea that opinions regarding the ought are *determined* by such factors, that opinion cannot be more than a rationalization of underlying interests and passions. I want to argue exactly the contrary: that passion and interest cannot by themselves determine opinion and that we have been wrong to accept the notion that any opinion, no matter how crass or transparent, can be so determined. What an economic interest, for

⁵ M. Brewster Smith, Jerome S. Bruner, Robert W. White, *Opinions and Personality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964). Emphasis supplied. See also Robert E. Lane and David O. Sears, *Public Opinion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964). “Our study deals mostly with the ways people arrive at their opinions—this, rather than exploring just what it is the public believes” (p. vi). Lane and Sears seek to understand “the mechanisms and processes of opinion formation” (p. vi). And in conclusion, “We have not looked at the complexion of popular beliefs in this book, but we have examined various ways in which beliefs and opinions are learned and changed . . .” (p. 114).

example, can determine is the conclusion or objective that the opiner or rationalizer wants to reach. A man's pocketbook can indeed make him favor or oppose a policy because it will or will not put money into his pocket; he wants the end result. But that does not end the matter. The man or the group or the politician has to make arguments; they have to support the result they desire with an opinion that makes sense to others and, for that matter, usually to themselves as well. What I submit is that the economic interest, while it explains favoring the conclusion, *does not and cannot* explain the arguments offered, i.e., the content of the opinion.

Let us acknowledge that most political opinion is in some important respect a rationalization. Yes, but why does, say, the economic interest choose this particular rationalization, these words, these arguments, out of the infinite number of possible words and arguments? Why this view of justice or the common good and not another? The easy answer is that groups choose arguments that will be persuasive to particular audiences. But that only pushes the problem one step back. Why does this argument and not another persuade that audience? What is it in the argument that makes *sense* and hence persuades? Whatever it is, it cannot spring from the economic interest by itself; no subrational or arational factors can transform themselves into a precise set of arguments or rationalizations. Our inquiry therefore impels us to look for something else that will help explain *the* empirical political phenomenon, the contending opinions about justice that form political life. As it were, plotting the curve of a rationalization requires points on two axes. One is indeed the axis of, say, economic interest; but what can the other be? I can conceive of no other explanation for the behavior to be explained, i.e., the content of opinion, than a perception, a rational intimation, of what really is just. Our effort to give an empirical account of opinion forces us to acknowledge that, just as facts impose themselves upon our senses, so too does the ought impose itself on our minds. In short, with regard to both the is and the ought, the rightness or correctness of opinion is one of the causes of opinion. This at least is a tenable hypothesis regarding the formation of opinion, whereas the prevailing view that opinion is simply the product of underlying arational forces is incapable of answering the political question: what determines the precise content of opinion?

All important political opinion, I submit, is the product of these two kinds of "determinants," that is, what men opine is the truth about human justice skewed by the force of interest and passion, which do indeed so deeply press upon all of us. We all hear the voice of justice, but the meaning is twisted and dulled in the caverns through which it has to reach us. The force of the rational factor, the intimation of what really is just, is the independent variable that belongs to political science; the force of interest and passion is what we share with the other disciplines. But ours is the architectonic task—the fascinating task of seeing the blend in actual behavior of the rational and subrational forces. And the only way we can do our job is by evaluating the ought arguments, which are the factual stuff of political behavior.

My meaning can be illustrated with a well-known example from Aristotle's *Politics*. The two perennial sources of political division, Aristotle explains, are the oligarchs and the democrats. They have sharply opposed opinions of justice. The democrats believe that justice requires the equal sharing of office and honors; the oligarchs believe that justice requires inequality. The very first thing Aristotle does is to show what is sensible in both these views. "Both oligarchs and democrats have a hold on a sort of conception of justice"; but their views are incomplete and distorted. What each holds is a skewed version of distributive justice; the view of each, Aristotle seems to believe, is the product of two forces, one the rational intimation of what justice is, and the other the biasing force of interest. In the first instance, their opinion is formed by the portion of the truth that they do in fact see. According to Aristotle, justice does indeed require both a certain kind of equality and a certain kind of inequality in the distribution of office and honors. But the democrat, biased by his social and economic position, sees only the equality side of justice; the oligarch, biased by his position, sees only the inequality side. Both democrats and oligarchs are partially blinded in their conceptions of justice by their respective interests. Thus, "the oligarchs think that superiority on one point—in their case wealth—means superiority on all: the democrats believe that equality in one respect—for instance, that of free birth—means equality all round." The reason they have only this partial and hence distorting opinion of justice is that "they are judging, and judging erroneously, in their own case,"⁶ that is, in the light of their special interest.

Democratic and oligarchic opinions, then, are a blend of justice rationally perceived and of interest rationalized. The task of political science is to see all important political opinion as precisely such blends and to distinguish the elements. In a proper political analysis, interest and reason are each assigned their just share of influence in determining the content of opinion. Evaluation is thus inextricably a part of explanation; facts are dependent upon "values." The true foundation of a political science that can explain political behavior is the capacity to distinguish between the rational and the rationalizing, between the sound and foolish and fraudulent parts of opinion.

Now before everyone is turned off by this astonishing claim, let me assert that we all act on that claim every day in our work. Unfortunately, most of the time it is done covertly; but that is another story. When political scientists analyze patterns of aggressive behavior or the question of violence, they presuppose knowledge of what the right behavior is, i.e., behavior that is neither aggressive nor timid but just right; one might almost say they presuppose knowledge of a sort of Aristotelian mean.

⁶ *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). The quotations are from Book III, chapter 9.

Analysis of ghetto riots and of "backlash" similarly presupposes normative knowledge. For example, riot behavior has to be discriminated into categories of ordinary criminality and political militancy; i.e., the behavior has to be judged as either self-seeking or vicious or as justifiable and manly wrath. And what happens to the fact-value distinction when the very word "backlash" means an unjustified or excessive hostility or punitiveness? For example, in a survey study of backlash, every characterization of a respondent would involve a normative judgment. In short, all important empirical analyses of behavior rest upon tacit "value" premises; and if the value premises can have no objective validity, neither can the empirical conclusions. You can't tell one factual datum from another without a normative score card.