Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings. By Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964. Pp. xxiii+712.

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Bernard Berelson and Gary Steiner dared the impossible:

> Our ambition in this book is to present, as fully and as accurately as possible, what the behavioral sciences now know about the behavior of human beings: what we really know, what we nearly know, what we think we know, what we claim we know.

A bold statement. And although it reads today like Ozymandias's "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair," perhaps we should pause and read it more carefully. To be sure, the project of cumulative social science has toppled like the statue the English poet mocked. Yet who, exactly, should despair? Should we join Shelley's mockery of the boastful Pharaoh whose works have vanished into "the lone and level sands"? Or should we rather take the implicit warning that our own projects will themselves come to nothing? After all, no technology was spared to rescue Ramses' statues from the waters of Aswan, while Shelley himself drowned in the Ligurian Sea within five years of writing "Ozymandias." His own fame would last only two centuries, until imperial decline demoted English poetry from its world-dominating pedestal. By 2000 it was probable that more people had heard of Ramses—who gave his name to a condom—than of Shelley.

We should therefore approach the Berelson-Steiner *Inventory* with humility as well as irony and critique. Who knows what scholarly salvage may raise its Abu Simbel from Ozymandian oblivion?

Unlike many books, the *Inventory* is exactly what its title says it is: a list of "scientific findings" about what people do or are or believe. Scientific here means scientific in terms of the mid-20th century, the first heyday of modern social science. That is, science means knowledge that is based on precise definitions and reliant on objective data gathering. It is public, replicable, systematic, and cumulative. It aims to explain, understand, and predict. Historically, this is the knowledge program associated with psychological experimentation at the individual level and with survey analysis at the group level. It is thus no surprise that these are the only methods regarded by the book as scientific. (Case studies are legitimate only when their results have been replicated by experiments or surveys.) Both the concept of culture and the method of ethnography are largely dismissed, anthropology being present mainly in the work of George Peter

Murdock, the lone anthropologist of that period who shared these authors' scientism.

Given the subsequent history of the social sciences, it is striking too that the book excludes most economics and political science; only the "behavioral" aspects of those fields are considered. The rest is dismissed for addressing unscientific value concerns. The scientist, the authors tell us, is not "directly concerned with good or bad, right or wrong, moral or immoral." In the physical copy of this book that I read, some mute inglorious Shelley had here penciled the obvious question in the margin: "Human behavior is not concerned with these?"

Nothing could date the book more precisely than this clarion assertion of value freedom. The *Inventory* appeared at the end of the brief period between the religious reformism of the Progressives and the energetically political social science of the later 20th century. In 1900, reformer Durkheim was preaching moral education and Weber the former law student was insisting that responsible action was the core of human affairs. In the United States, legions of clergymen and social workers were practicing a social science of reformist action. In 2000, the situation was much the same: Panglossian economists traded contempt with Robespierrian sociologists under the sarcastic eyes of the feminist Defarges. But between these two periods of ripe controversy came the quixotic, definitionally doomed attempt to build a purely empirical science about the value-driven phenomenon that is human existence. Indeed, the attempt to create a purely behavioral social science itself produced that later political chaos.

An immense book, the *Inventory* has 14 substantive chapters between a two-chapter introduction and a very short conclusion. The first introductory chapter expounds the authors' philosophy of science and investigation. The second discusses designs for inquiry and then turns to methods for data collection. There then follow four chapters on what could loosely be called behavioral psychology: development, perception, learning, and motivation. To these succeed two chapters on small units: the family and "small group relations." There are then four chapters on medium-size social phenomena: organizations, institutions, stratification, and ethnic relations. These are followed by two chapters on medium-scale symbolic phenomena (mass communications and attitudes), a chapter on societal phenomena (demography, conflict, disorganization, etc.), and a desultory chapter on culture.

Each chapter is organized as a list of findings in a roughly hierarchical structure. As the authors tell us proudly in the conclusion, there are 1,045 of these findings. The Inventory is therefore not only immense, but also unreadable. Indeed, it is obviously not meant to be read, but to be consulted. Moreover, it is also clearly meant for nonexperts—for reference librarians seeking information or sources, for experts in one field looking for the current wisdom in another, for idle curiosity seekers seeking social exotica. As one might expect, the initial reviews universally complained about the book's lack of any theoretical argument, and moreover con-

tended that isolated facts and findings made little sense without a theoretical context.

The project of such decontextualized lists, however, had a long and distinguished history. Berelson's degrees were in library science, and librarians had been promoting decontextualization to scholars for many years. Since the classification debates of the middle and late 19th century, the librarians had claimed that all knowledge was a single unit and could be effectively searched by a universal index. But it was in the 1920s that librarians got the ear of university administrators in the United States and forced the scholars to consolidate their local departmental collections into centralized dungeons called university libraries. There, it was claimed, the librarians' new indexes would provide instant access to just what the scholar wanted. (This was of course the same rhetorical program that would later launch the Internet and empty out the print libraries that we have subsequently had to rebuild.) Current information theory has of course shown that universal indexes cannot work, but 20th-century library scholars already knew that intuitively and refused to use such indexes even when they were first mooted in the 1920s. (Ironically, empirical research done at Berelson's own library school showed that this was the case.)

The *Inventory* however epitomizes the universalizing program. And its failure shows us very clearly that a real mind must take one particular point of view. Since different chapters rely on different mixes of articles and secondary summaries, the underlying theoretical assumptions change continuously, and one chapter often reports results that directly contradict the results reported in others. The resulting cacophony is evident to anyone reading the work. It is even inscribed into the book's chapter structure: the "social" chapters assume things about humans that have been shown to be wrong in the earlier chapters about individual and small-group behavior.

To be fair, Berelson and Steiner knew perfectly well that their list had such limitations. In the introduction they note that "we considered semifacetiously that every finding ought to be preceded by three sets of initials: UCC, OTE, and IOC standing for 'under certain circumstances, other things being equal, and in our culture.'" After this brief caveat, however, the book unfolds under the sign of universalism. And its underlying babble of assumptions eventually deafens the reader. The reality is that there is no view from nowhere, no way to see social life from outside. You can attempt it, but either you will thereby miss the essence of what you study, as did so many of Berelson and Steiner's peers, or you will shift your assumptions and values as you go along, as did Berelson and Steiner. For human life is not only always saturated with values. It is also always particular.

Berelson and Steiner's book is thus a wonderful example of the strengths and weaknesses of universalism as a social science program. Shorn of their contexts, shorn even of the articles of which they were

often the conclusions, the book's many "findings" seem Ozymandias-like indeed. They range from definitional truisms ("all known human societies have religions") to specialized esoterica ("people with low self-esteem [i.e., those persons high in measures of social inadequacy, inhibition of aggression, and depressive tendencies] are more likely to be influenced by persuasive communications than are those with high self-esteem, but those with acute neurotic symptoms [i.e., neurotic anxiety of obsessional reactions] are more likely to be resistant"). They range from the utterly general ("Human behavior is far more variable and therefore less predictable than that of any other species") to the very specific ("Responses learned on a 100% schedule extinguish most rapidly"). They range from the banal ("The large majority of adults in all societies are married") to the optative ("Repressed motives and other unacceptable aspects of one's own personality may be attributed to others") to the hypothetical ("The lower classes presumably violate the law more frequently than the upper classes; in any case, they are more likely to be caught and punished"). They include performative truths ("The better the soldier's attitudes towards the army . . . the better are his chances of subsequent promotion"), artifactual results ("Across countries there is substantial agreement on which occupations rank high and low"), middle-class ideologies ("The higher the level of education, the less the prejudice and discrimination"), historically conditioned statements ("Drug addiction in the United States occurs particularly among men, among those in the personal service and entertainment occupations, among those in the social disorganized sections of a very few of the largest cities"), intriguing ideas ("Human conflicts cannot usually be settled by removing the original source of conflict"), and sheer nonsense ("Men are more active politically than women").

The most amusing if not necessarily the most enlightening way to encounter such a book is to read it aloud with a group of friends and a few bottles of wine. It is in many ways a textbook of absurdities, a parody of the knowledge project it so earnestly proclaims. But it is also, one quickly realizes, a fairly accurate representation of what is inside our own heads at any given time: a farrago of (let me repeat the list) truisms, esoterica, generalities, findings, wishes, banalities, constructions, self-fulfilling truths, artifacts, ideologies, historically conditioned statements, intriguing notions, and sheer nonsense. It is for that reason that we must confront the book seriously. Inside most of us is just such an inventory, from which we ladle out half-truths to friends, family, and students as the need arises.

But these two cacophonies are very different. For one thing, the individual is a living mind, not a passive list of subdisciplinary results. That mind has a point of view, an inevitable if partial consistency. We may ladle out nonsense, but at least it is consistent nonsense, and at least we are ourselves present to clarify, or step back, or learn. More important, the individual mind has an internal continuity that the discipline lacks. We don't recall the details learned in graduate school, nor the footnotes

of our early work. But we recall more of that past than does our discipline, which is lighthearted and flighty like most macro structures. The disciplinary lingua franca changes rapidly around us, as young people foment the intellectual revolutions that get them through the doldrums of early professional life. By underscoring our own particularity in disciplinary space and time, that rapid change challenges us—not to transcend that particularity, a task both impossible and pointless—but to dereify our own theories, to see once again through our surface language to the endlessly curious phenomena of the social world itself. As a result our personal theoretical frameworks are broadened and deepened by new work and reflection. Only with such a vision—unsaid and often unsayable—can we more deeply know the human project and envision its new possibilities.

But this life journey of the individual social scientist is not the trajectory of our disciplines themselves. For a long time, the ideal for them was cumulation. But in the natural sciences, whence came the idea, cumulation is like coral. At any given moment, the living part of natural science is the outermost level, the present wisdom, the current, living forefront; underneath is the dead knowledge of the past. But in the social sciences, such a model does not apply. There may be a forefront of agreed-upon or in-principle-knowable facts, like the number of human beings alive within the borders of Switzerland in 1849. (Even for those, however, it is not certain that there is convergent "truth.") But even one short step above such facts are things like "the ideology of Peruvians in the 1930s" and "class conflicts in Korea in the 2020s," constructs that are in principle not measurable, because each involves constitutive theoretical ideas that are value based: ideology, class, conflict, even "Peruvians" and "Koreans."

At the most abstract level, if we advance at all, it is only very slowly. The entire 20th century added but one grand scheme to the 19th-century repertoire for social analysis—the scheme based on symbolic analysis. The rest was footnotes and elaborations. The methods changed radically, to be sure. But underneath the statistical esoterica of the 2000s were the same old debates about the same old things: inequality, mobility, life expectations, consequences of ascription, origins of deviance, and so on. This conversation may have been conducted in the language of ethnography or in the language of hierarchical linear models, but the content of discussion remained the same.

The reader will argue that the invasion of the computer scientists after 2010 had a major impact. It is true that the computationalists brought to social science a technical facility that offered new approaches to long-standing problems: how to think about networks of social relations, consequences of complexly interlocked interaction, and so on. But the computationalists with their atomistic ontologies could not begin to understand the social or cultural levels of the social process. Nor had they any idea what were the questions one ought to ask, now that there were methods for tracking long stretches of social life at the population level

in real time. Computational social science was merely a surface advance; at the deep level, the social sciences lost ground.

However, as the reader of course already knows, the old social science project of cumulation died in the ensuing chaos. Social science progress was recast on the basis not of cumulation but of deepening and enriching the intertranslation of its various subprojects. Inevitably, this project of intertranslation involved the mainstreaming of normative social science, which acquired a more subtle and complex voice than it had had in the late 20th century.

It was a brave idea, this *Inventory*, as was the project of value-free, cumulative social science itself. But the dream Berelson and Steiner pursued was a chimera. There is no view from nowhere. We live a life of values, and those values require not silence but constant critical reflection and constant confrontation with difference. And at the deepest levels, there can be no cumulation, only the perpetual elaboration of our basic approaches to understanding the social life of human beings. Meditate on this book, and these lessons are clear at once. Whether you see them from the viewpoint of Ramses or Shelley—or both—is your choice.