

Afterthought: On Writing; On Writing Sociology

Zygmunt Bauman
University of Leeds

The need in thinking is what makes us think.

—Theodor W. Adorno

Quoting the Czech poet Jan Skacel's opinion on the plight of the poet (who, in Skacel's words, only discovers the verses that "were always, deep down, there"), Milan Kundera commented (in *L'Art du roman*, 1986), "To write, means for the poet to crush the wall behind which something that 'was always there' hides." In this respect, the task of the poet is not different from the work of history, which also discovers rather than "invents": History, like poets, uncovers, in ever new situations, human possibilities previously hidden.

What history does matter-of-factly is a challenge, a task, and a mission for the poet. To rise to this mission, the poet must refuse to serve up truths known beforehand and well-worn truths already "obvious" because they have been brought to the surface and left floating there. It does not matter whether such truths "assumed in advance" are classified as revolutionary or dissident, Christian or atheist—or how right and proper, noble and just they are or have been proclaimed to be. Whatever their denomination, those "truths" are not this "something hidden" that the poet is called to uncover; they are, rather, parts of the wall that the poet's mission is to crush. Spokesmen for the obvious, self-evident, and "what we all believe, don't we?" are false poets, said Kundera. But what, if anything, does the poet's vocation have to do with the sociologist's calling? We sociologists rarely write poems. (Some of us who do take for the time of writing a leave of absence from our professional pursuits.) And yet if we do not wish to share the fate of "false poets" and resent being "false sociologists," we ought to come as close as the true poets do to the yet-hidden human possibilities. And for that reason, we need to pierce the walls of the obvious and self-evident, of that prevailing ideological fashion of the day whose commonality is

Author's Note: Reprinted with permission from Sage Publications Ltd from Zygmunt Bauman, "On Writing: On Writing Sociology," © Theory, Culture & Society Ltd, 2000, and © Sage Publications Ltd, 2000, respectively.

Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, Volume 2 Number 3, 2002 359-370
© 2002 Sage Publications

taken for the proof of its sense. Demolishing such walls is as much the sociologist's as the poet's calling, and for the same reason: The walling-up of possibilities belies human potential while obstructing the disclosure of its bluff.

Perhaps the verses that the poet seeks "were always there." One cannot be so sure, though, about the human potential discovered by history. Do humans—the makers and the made, the heroes and the victims of history—indeed carry forever the same volume of possibilities waiting for the right time to be disclosed? Or is it rather that as human history goes, the opposition between discovery and creation is null and void and makes no sense? Because history is the endless process of human creation, is not history for the same reason (and by the same token) the unending process of human self-discovery? Is not the propensity to disclose/create ever new possibilities, to expand the inventory of possibilities already discovered and made real, the sole human potential that always has been, and always is, "already there"? The question of whether the new possibility has been created or "merely" uncovered by history is no doubt welcome nourishment to many a scholastic mind; as for history itself, it does not wait for an answer and can do quite well without one.

Niklas Luhmann's most seminal and precious legacy to fellow sociologists has been the notion of *autopoiesis*—self-creation (from Greek ποιεῖν: do, create, give form, be effective; the opposite of suffering: being an object, not the source, of the act)—meant to grasp and encapsulate the gist of the human condition. The choice of the term was itself a creation or discovery of the link (inherited kinship rather than chosen affinity) between history and poetry. Poetry and history are two parallel currents (parallel in the sense of the non-Euclidean universe ruled by Bolyai and Lobachevski's geometry) of that autopoiesis of human potentialities, in which creation is the sole form discovery can take, whereas self-discovery is the principal act of creation.

Sociology, one is tempted to say, is a third current, running in parallel with those two. Or at least this is what it should be if it is to stay inside that human condition that it tries to grasp and make intelligible. And this is what it has tried to become since its inception, though it has been repeatedly diverted from trying by mistaking the seemingly impenetrable and not-yet-decomposed walls for the ultimate limits of human potential and going out of its way to reassure the garrison commanders and the troops they command that the lines they have drawn to set aside the off-limits areas will never be transgressed.

Alfred de Musset suggested almost two centuries ago that "great artists have no country." Two centuries ago, these were militant words, a war cry of sorts. They were written down amid deafening fanfares of youthful and credulous, and for that reason arrogant and pugnacious, patriotism. Numerous politicians were discovering their vocation in building nation-states of one law, one language, one worldview, one history, and one future. Many poets and painters were discovering their missions in nourishing the tender sprouts of national spirit, resurrecting long-dead national traditions or conceiving of brand-new ones that never lived before, and offering the nation as not-yet-fully-enough-

aware-of-being-a-nation the stories, the tunes, the likenesses, and the names of heroic ancestors—something to share, love, and cherish in common and so to lift the mere living together to the rank of belonging together, opening the eyes of the living to the beauty and sweetness of belonging by prompting them to remember and venerate their dead and to rejoice in guarding their legacy. Against that background, de Musset's blunt verdict bore all the marks of a rebellion and a call to arms: It summoned his fellow writers to refuse cooperation with the enterprise of the politicians, the prophets, and the preachers of closely guarded borders and gun-bristling trenches. I do not know whether de Musset intuited the fratricidal capacities of the kind of fraternities that nationalist politicians and ideologist-laureates were determined to build, or whether his words were but an expression of the intellectual's disgust at and resentment of narrow horizons, backwaters, and parochial mentality. Whatever the case then, when read now, with the benefit of hindsight, through a magnifying glass stained with the dark blots of ethnic cleansings, genocides, and mass graves, de Musset's words seem to have lost nothing of their topicality, challenge, and urgency; nor have they lost any of their original controversiality. Now as then, they aim at the heart of the writers' mission and challenge their consciences with the question decisive for any writer's *raison d'être*.

A century and a half later, Juan Goytisolo, probably the greatest among living Spanish writers, took up the issue once more. In a recent interview ("Les batailles de Juan Goytisolo," 1999), he pointed out that once Spain had accepted, in the name of Catholic piety and under the influence of the Inquisition, a highly restrictive notion of national identity, the country became, toward the end of the 16th century, a "cultural desert." Let us note that Goytisolo writes in Spanish but for many years lived in Paris and in the United States, before finally settling in Morocco. And let us note that no other Spanish writer has had so many of his works translated into Arabic. Why? Goytisolo has no doubt about the reason. He explained, "Intimacy and distance create a privileged situation. Both are necessary." Though each for a different reason, both these qualities make their presence felt in his relations to his native Spanish and acquired Arabic, French, and English—the languages of the countries that in succession became his chosen substitute homes.

Because Goytisolo spent a large part of his life away from Spain, the Spanish language ceased to be for him the all-too-familiar tool of daily, mundane, and ordinary communication, always at hand and calling for no reflection. His intimacy with his childhood language was not—could not be—affected, but now it has been supplemented with distance. The Spanish language became the "authentic homeland in his exile," a territory known and felt and lived through from the inside and yet—because it also became remote—full of surprises and exciting discoveries. That intimate/distant territory lends itself to the cool and detached scrutiny *sine ira et studio*, laying bare the pitfalls and the yet untested possibilities invisible in vernacular uses, showing previously unsuspected plasticity, admitting and inviting creative intervention. It is the combination of

intimacy and distance that allowed Goytisolo to realize that the unreflexive immersion in a language—just the kind of immersion that exile makes all but impossible—is fraught with dangers: “If one lives only in the present, one risks disappearing together with the present” (“Les batailles de Juan Goytisolo,” 1999). It was the “outside,” detached look at his native language that allowed Goytisolo to step beyond the constantly vanishing present and so enrich his Spanish in a way otherwise unlikely, perhaps altogether inconceivable. He brought back into his prose and poetry ancient terms, long fallen into disuse, and by doing so blew away the storeroom dust that had covered them, wiped out the patina of time, and offered the words new and previously unsuspected (or long forgotten) vitality.

In *Contre-allée*, a book published recently in cooperation with Catherine Malabou, Jacques Derrida invited his readers to think in travel—or, more exactly, to “think travel.” That means to think that unique activity of departing; going away from *chez soi*; going far, toward the unknown; risking all the risks, pleasures, and dangers that the “unknown” has in store (even the risk of not returning).

Derrida is obsessed with “being away.” There is some reason to surmise that the obsession was born when the 12-year-old Jacques was sent down in 1942 from the school that by the decree of the Vichy administration of North Africa was ordered to purify itself of Jewish pupils. This is how Derrida’s “perpetual exile” started. Since then, Derrida has divided his life between France and the United States. In the United States, he was a Frenchman; in France, however hard he tried, time and time again the Algerian accent of his childhood kept breaking through his exquisite French *parole*, betraying a *pied noir* hidden under the thin skin of the Sorbonne professor. (This is, some people think, why Derrida came to extol the superiority of writing and composed the axiological myth of priority to support the axiological assertion.) Culturally, Derrida was to remain “stateless.” This did not mean, though, having no cultural homeland. Quite the contrary: Being “culturally stateless” meant having more than one homeland, building a home of one’s own on the crossroads between cultures. Derrida became and remained a *métèque*, a cultural hybrid. His “home on the crossroads” was built of language.

Building a home on cultural crossroads proved to be the best conceivable occasion to put language to tests it seldom passes elsewhere, to see through its otherwise unnoticed qualities, to find out what language is capable of and on what promises it makes it can never deliver. From that home on the crossroads came the exciting and eye-opening news about the inherent plurality and undecidability of sense (in *L’Écriture et la différence*), about the endemic impurity of origins (in *De la grammatologie*), and about the perpetual unfulfillment of communication (in *La Carte postale*)—as Christian Delacampagne (1999) noted in *Le Monde*.

Goytisolo’s and Derrida’s messages are different from that of de Musset: It is not true, the novelist and the philosopher suggest in unison, that great art has

no homeland—on the contrary, art, like the artists, may have many homelands and most certainly has more than one. Rather than homelessness, the trick is to be at home in many homes but to be in each inside and outside at the same time, to combine intimacy with the critical look of an outsider, involvement with detachment—a trick that sedentary people are unlikely to learn. Learning the trick is the chance of the exile: technically an exile—one that is in but not of the place. The unconfinedness that results from this condition (that is this condition) reveals the homely truths to be man made and unmade and the mother tongue to be an endless stream of communication between generations and a treasury of messages always richer than any of their readings and forever waiting to be unpacked anew.

George Steiner has named Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luís Borges, and Vladimir Nabokov as the greatest among contemporary writers. What unites them, he said, and what made them all great, is that each of the three moved with equal ease—was equally “at home”—in several linguistic universes, not one. (A reminder is in order. *Linguistic universe* is a pleonastic phrase: The universe in which each one of us lives is and cannot but be linguistic—made of words. Words light the islands of visible forms in the dark sea of the invisible and mark the scattered spots of relevance in the formless mass of the insignificant. It is words that slice the world into the classes of nameable objects and bring out their kinship or enmity, closeness or distance, affinity or mutual estrangement, and as long as they stay alone in the field, they raise all such artifacts to the rank of reality, the only reality there is.) One needs to live, to visit, to know intimately more than one such universe to spy out human invention behind any universe’s imposing and apparently indomitable structure and to discover just how much human cultural effort is needed to divine the idea of nature with its laws and necessities—all that is required to muster, in the end, the audacity and the determination to join in that cultural effort knowingly, aware of its risks and pitfalls but also of the boundlessness of its horizons.

To create (and so also to discover) always means breaking a rule; following a rule is mere routine, more of the same—not an act of creation. For the exile, breaking rules is not a matter of free choice but an eventuality that cannot be avoided. Exiles do not know enough of the rules reigning in their countries of arrival; nor do they treat them unctuously enough for their efforts to observe them and conform to be perceived as genuine and approved. As to their countries of origin, going into exile has been recorded there as their original sin, in the light of which all that the sinners later may do may be taken down and used against them as evidence of their rule breaking. By commission or by omission, rule breaking becomes a trademark of the exiles. This is unlikely to endear them to the natives of any of the countries between which their life itineraries are plotted. But, paradoxically, it also allows them to bring to all the countries involved gifts they need badly even without knowing it, such gifts as they could hardly expect to receive from any other source.

Let me clarify. The exile under discussion here is not necessarily a case of physical, bodily mobility. It may involve leaving one country for another, but it need not. As Christine Brook-Rose put it (in her essay "Exsul"), the distinguishing mark of all exile, and particularly the writer's exile (that is, the exile articulated in words and thus made a communicable experience), is the refusal to be integrated—the determination to stand out from the physical space, to conjure up a place of one's own, different from the place in which those around are settled, a place unlike the places left behind and unlike the place of arrival. The exile is defined not in relation to any particular physical space or to the oppositions between a number of physical spaces but through the autonomous stand taken toward space as such. "Ultimately," asked Brooke-Rose, is not every poet or "poetic" (exploring, rigorous) novelist an exile of sorts, looking in from outside into a bright, desirable image in the mind's eye of the little world created, for the space of the writing effort and the shorter space of the reading? This kind of writing, often at odds with publisher and public, is the last solitary, nonsocialized creative art.

The resolute determination to stay "nonsocialized"; the consent to integrate solely with the condition of nonintegration; the resistance—often painful and agonizing, yet ultimately victorious—to the overwhelming pressure of the place, old or new; the rugged defense of the right to pass judgment and choose; the embracing of ambivalence or calling ambivalence into being: These are, we may say, the constitutive features of exile. All of them, please note, refer to attitude and life strategy, to spiritual rather than physical mobility.

Michel Maffesoli (1997) wrote of the world we all inhabit nowadays as a "floating territory" in which "fragile individuals" meet "porous reality." In this territory, only such things or persons may fit as are fluid, ambiguous, in a state of perpetual becoming, in a constant state of self-transgression. "Rootedness," if any, can only be dynamic: It needs to be restated and reconstituted daily—precisely through the repeated act of "self-distantiation," that foundational, initiating act of "being in travel," on the road. Having compared all of us—the inhabitants of the present-day world—to nomads, Jacques Attali (1996) suggested that apart from traveling light and being kind, friendly, and hospitable to strangers whom they meet on their way, nomads must be constantly on the watch, remembering that their camps are vulnerable and have no walls or trenches to stop intruders. Above all, nomads, struggling to survive in the world of nomads, need to grow used to the state of continuous disorientation, to the traveling along roads of unknown direction and duration, seldom looking beyond the next turn or crossing; they need to concentrate all their attention on that small stretch of road that they need to negotiate before dusk.

"Fragile individuals," doomed to conduct their lives in a "porous reality," feel like they are skating on thin ice, and "in skating over thin ice," Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked in his essay *Prudence*, "our safety is in our speed." Individuals, fragile or not, need safety, crave safety, seek safety, and so they try, to the best of their ability, to maintain a high speed whatever they do. When

running among fast runners, to slow down means to be left behind; when running on thin ice, slowing down also means the real threat of being drowned. Speed, therefore, climbs to the top of the list of survival values.

Speed, however, is not conducive to thinking, not to thinking far ahead, to long-term thinking at any rate. Thought calls for pause and rest, for "taking one's time," recapitulating the steps already taken, looking closely at the place reached and the wisdom (or imprudence, as the case may be) of reaching it. Thinking takes one's mind away from the task at hand, which is always the running and keeping speed whatever else it may be. And in the absence of thought, the skating on thin ice that is the fate of fragile individuals in the porous world may well be mistaken for their destiny.

Taking one's fate for destiny, as Max Scheler insisted in his *Ordo amoris*, is a grave mistake: "Destiny of man is not his fate. . . . The assumption that fate and destiny are the same deserves to be called fatalism." Fatalism is an error of judgment, because in fact fate has "a natural and basically comprehensible origin." Moreover, though fate is not a matter of free choice, and particularly of the individual free choice, it "grows up out of the life of a man or a people." To see all that, to note the difference and the gap between fate and destiny, and to escape the trap of fatalism, one needs resources not easily attainable when running on thin ice: a time off to think and a distance allowing a long view. "The image of our destiny," Scheler warned, "is thrown into relief only in the recurrent traces left when we turn away from it." Fatalism, though, is a self-corroborating attitude: It makes the turning away, that *conditio sine qua non* of thinking, look useless and unworthy of trying.

Taking distance, taking time—to separate destiny and fate, to emancipate destiny from fate, to make destiny free to confront fate and challenge it—this is the calling of sociology. And this is what sociologists may do, if they consciously, deliberately, and earnestly strive to reforge the calling they have joined—their fate—into their destiny.

"Sociology is the answer. But what was the question?" stated, and asked, Ulrich Beck in *Politik in der Risikogesellschaft*. A few pages earlier, Beck had seemed to articulate the question he sought: the chance of a democracy that goes beyond "expertocracy," a kind of democracy that "begins where debate and decision making are opened about whether we *want* a life under the conditions that are being presented to us."

This chance is under a question mark not because someone has deliberately and malevolently shut the door to such a debate and prohibited an informed decision taking; hardly ever in the past was the freedom to speak out and to come together to discuss matters of common interest as complete and unconditional as it is now. The point is, though, that more than a formal freedom to talk and pass resolutions is needed for the kind of democracy, which Beck thinks is our imperative, to start in earnest. We also need to know what it is we need to talk about and what the resolutions we pass ought to be concerned with. And all this needs to be done in our type of society, in which the authority to speak and

resolve issues is the reserve of experts who own the exclusive right to pronounce on the difference between reality and fantasy and to set apart the possible from the impossible. (Experts, we may say, are almost by definition people who “get the facts straight,” who take them as they come and think of the least risky way of living in their company.)

Why this is not easy and unlikely to become easier unless something is done Beck explained in his *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. He wrote, “What food is for hunger, eliminating risks, or interpreting them away, is for the consciousness of risks.” In a society haunted primarily by material want, such an option between “eliminating” misery and “interpreting it away” did not exist. In our society, haunted by risk rather than want, it does exist—and is daily taken. Hunger cannot be assuaged by denial; in hunger, subjective suffering and its objective cause are indissolubly linked, and the link is self-evident and cannot be belied. But risks, unlike material want, are not subjectively experienced; at least they are not “lived” directly unless mediated by knowledge. They may never reach the realm of subjective experience—they may be trivialized or downright denied before they arrive there, and the chance that they will indeed be barred from arriving grows together with the extent of the risks.

What follows is that sociology is needed today more than ever before. The job in which sociologists are the experts, the job of restoring to view the lost link between objective affliction and subjective experience, has become more vital and indispensable than ever, while less likely than ever to be performed without their professional help, because its performance by the spokesmen and practitioners of other fields of expertise has become utterly improbable. If all experts deal with practical problems and all expert knowledge is focused on their resolution, sociology is one branch of expert knowledge for which the practical problem it struggles to resolve is enlightenment aimed at human understanding. Sociology is perhaps the sole field of expertise in which (as Pierre Bourdieu pointed out in *La Misère du monde*) Dilthey’s famed distinction between explanation and understanding has been overcome and canceled.

To understand one’s fate means to be aware of its difference from one’s destiny. And to understand one’s fate is to know the complex network of causes that brought about that fate and its difference from that destiny. To work in the world (as distinct from being “worked out and about” by it), one needs to know how the world works.

The kind of enlightenment that sociology is capable of delivering is addressed to freely choosing individuals and aimed at enhancing and reinforcing their freedom of choice. Its immediate objective is to reopen the allegedly shut case of explanation and so to promote understanding. It is the self-formation and self-assertion of individual men and women, the preliminary condition of their ability to decide whether they want the kind of life that has been presented to them as their fate, that as a result of sociological enlightenment may gain in vigor, effectiveness, and rationality. The cause of the autonomous society may

profit together with the cause of the autonomous individual; they can only win or lose together.

To quote from *Le Délablement de l'Occident* of Cornelius Castorladis,

an autonomous society, a truly democratic society, is a society which questions everything that is pre-given and by the same token *liberates the creation of new meanings*. In such a society, all individuals are free to create for their lives the meanings they will (and can).

Society is truly autonomous once it “knows, must know, that there are no ‘assured’ meanings, that it lives on the surface of chaos, that it itself is a chaos seeking a form, but a form that is never fixed once for all.” The absence of guaranteed meanings—of absolute truths; of preordained norms of conduct; of predrawn borderlines between right and wrong, no longer needing attention; of guaranteed rules of successful action—is the *conditio sine qua non* of, simultaneously, a truly autonomous society and truly free individuals, autonomous society and the freedom of its members on each other. Whatever safety democracy and individuality muster depends not on fighting the endemic contingency and uncertainty of human condition but on recognizing it and facing its consequences point blank.

If orthodox sociology, born and developed under the aegis of solid modernity, was preoccupied with the conditions of human obedience and conformity, the prime concern of sociology made to the measure of liquid modernity needs to be the promotion of autonomy and freedom; such sociology must therefore put individual self-awareness, understanding, and responsibility at its focus. For the denizens of modern society in its solid and managed phase, the major opposition was one between conformity and deviance; the major opposition in modern society in its present-day liquefied and de-centered phase, the opposition that needs to be faced up to in order to pave the way to a truly autonomous society, is one between taking up responsibility and seeking a shelter where responsibility for one's own action need not be taken by the actors.

That other side of the opposition, seeking shelter, is a seductive option and realistic prospect. Alexis de Tocqueville (in the second volume of his *De la démocratie en Amérique*) noted that if selfishness, that bane haunting humankind in all periods of its history, “desiccated the seeds of all virtues,” then individualism, a novel and typically modern affliction, dries up only “the source of public virtues”; the individuals affected are busy “cutting out small companies for their own use,” while leaving the “great society” to its own fate. The temptation to do so has grown considerably since de Tocqueville jotted down his observation.

Living among a multitude of competing values, norms, and lifestyles, without a firm and reliable guarantee of being in the right, is hazardous and commands a high psychological price. No wonder that the attraction of the second response, of hiding from the requisites of responsible choice, gathers in

strength. As Julia Kristeva put it (in *Nations Without Nationalism*), “it is a rare person who does not invoke a primal shelter to compensate for personal disarray.” And we all, to a greater or lesser extent, sometimes more and sometimes less, find ourselves in that state of “personal disarray.” Time and again, we dream of a “great simplification”; unprompted, we engage in regressive fantasies of which the images of the prenatal womb and the walled-up home are prime inspirations. The search for a primal shelter is “the other” of responsibility, just like deviance and rebellion were “the other” of conformity. The yearning for a primal shelter has come these days to replace rebellion, which has now ceased to be a sensible option; as Pierre Rosanvallon pointed out (in a new preface to his classic *Le Capitalisme utopique*), there is no longer a “commanding authority to depose and replace. There seems to be no room left for a revolt, as social fatalism vis-a-vis the phenomenon of unemployment testifies.”

Signs of malaise are abundant and salient, yet as Pierre Bourdieu repeatedly observed, they seek in vain a legitimate expression in the world of politics. Short of articulate expression, they need to be read out, obliquely, from the outbursts of xenophobic and racist frenzy—the most common manifestations of the primal shelter nostalgia. The available and no less popular alternative to neotribal moods of scapegoating and militant intolerance—the exit from politics and withdrawal behind the fortified walls of the private—is no longer prepossessing and, above all, no longer an adequate response to the genuine source of the ailment. And so it is at this point that sociology, with its potential for explanation that promotes understanding, comes into its own more than at any other time in its history.

According to the ancient but never bettered Hippocratic tradition, as Pierre Bourdieu reminded the readers of *La Misère du monde*, genuine medicine begins with the recognition of the invisible disease—“facts of which the sick does not speak or forgets to report.” What is needed in the case of sociology is the “revelation of the structural causes which the apparent signs and talks disclose only through distorting them [*ne dévoilent qu'en les voilant*].” One needs to see through—explain and understand—the sufferings characteristic of the social order that “no doubt pushed back the great misery (though as much as it is often said), while . . . at the same time multiplying the social spaces . . . offering favourable conditions to the unprecedented growth of all sorts of little miseries.”

To diagnose a disease does not mean to cure it—this general rule applies to sociological diagnoses as much as it does to medical verdicts. But let us note that the illness of society differs from bodily illnesses in one tremendously important respect: In the case of an ailing social order, the absence of an adequate diagnosis (elbowed out or silenced by the tendency to “interpret away” the risks spotted by Ulrich Beck) is a crucial, perhaps decisive, part of the disease. As Cornelius Castorladis famously put it, society is ill if it stops questioning itself, and it cannot be otherwise, considering that—whether it knows it or not—society is autonomous (its institutions are nothing but human made and

so, potentially, human unmade), and that suspension of self-questioning bars the awareness of autonomy while promoting the illusion of heteronomy with its unavoidably fatalistic consequences. To restart questioning means to take a long step toward the cure. If in the history of human condition discovery equals creation, if in thinking about the human condition explanation and understanding are one, so in the efforts to improve human condition diagnosis and therapy merge.

Pierre Bourdieu expressed this perfectly in the conclusion of *La Misère du monde*: "To become aware of the mechanisms which make life painful, even unliveable, does not mean to neutralize them; to bring to light the contradictions does not mean to resolve them." And yet, skeptical as one can be about the social effectiveness of the sociological message, the effects of allowing those who suffer to discover the possibility of relating their sufferings to social causes cannot be denied; nor can we dismiss the effects of the effects of becoming aware of the social origin of unhappiness "in all its forms, including the most intimate and most secret of them."

Nothing is less innocent, Bourdieu reminded us, than *laissez-faire*. Watching human misery with equanimity while placating the pangs of conscience with the ritual incantation of the TINA ("there is no alternative") creed means complicity. Whoever willingly or by default partakes of the cover-up or, worse still, the denial of the human-made, noninevitable, contingent, and alterable nature of social order, notably of the kind of order responsible for unhappiness, is guilty of immorality—of refusing help to a person in danger.

Doing sociology and writing sociology are aimed at disclosing the possibility of living together differently, with less misery or no misery: the possibility daily withheld, overlooked, or unbelieved. Not seeing, not seeking, and thereby suppressing this possibility is itself part of human misery and a major factor in its perpetuation. Its disclosure does not by itself predetermine its use; also, when known, possibilities may not be trusted enough to be put to the test of reality. Disclosure is the beginning, not the end, of the war against human misery. But that war cannot be waged in earnest, let alone with a chance of at least partial success, unless the scale of human freedom is revealed and recognized, so that freedom can be fully deployed in the fight against the social sources of all, including the most individual and private, unhappiness.

There is no choice between "engaged" and "neutral" ways of doing sociology. A noncommittal sociology is an impossibility. Seeking a morally neutral stance among the many brands of sociology practiced today, brands stretching all the way from the outspokenly libertarian to the staunchly communitarian, would be a vain effort. Sociologists may deny or forget the "worldview" effects of their work, and the impact of that view on human singular or joint actions, only at the expense of forfeiting that responsibility of choice that every other human being faces daily. The job of sociology is to see to it that the choices are genuinely free and that they remain so, increasingly so, for the duration of humanity.

Zygmunt Bauman is an emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Leeds, having served as a professor of sociology and, at various times, the head of department at Leeds from 1972 until his retirement in 1990. He is professor emeritus also at the University of Warsaw. He is known throughout the world for works such as *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), and *Postmodern Ethics* (1993) and is the author of some 21 books in English and of numerous articles and reviews. He is described variously as one of the 20th century's great social theorists and the world's foremost sociologist of postmodernity. Zygmunt Bauman was awarded the Amalfi European Prize in 1990 and the Adorno Prize in 1998.