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**INVITATION TO POLITICAL ECONOMY: Berger and the Comedic
Drama of Political, Economic, and Social Life**

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Invitation to Political Economy: Berger and the Comedic Drama of Political, Economic, and Social Life

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1.0 Introduction

Peter L. Berger is one of the most influential social scientists of the 20th century. A citation study of his work published in 1986 that studied the decade between the early 1970s to early 1980s demonstrated that his citation count during this time (1,052) put him in the company of other thinkers such as Dewey, Whitehead, and Marcuse. His contributions to the sociology of knowledge, sociology of religion, and the sociological/cultural analysis of capitalism are well known and widely discussed. They are not without controversy, however. In fact, it might be safe to say that Peter Berger marched to a beat of a different drum within his chosen field of sociology. Paul Samuelson once remarked that in economic science we compete for the only coin worth achieving, the applause of our peers. Peter Berger saw things differently and pursued a more subversive agenda in the social sciences. The pursuit of truth and the coming to an understanding of the society in which we dwell, as well as that which remains exotic, required a more skeptical stance, and certainly a more comic one, toward the enterprise of one's peers as well as one's own efforts.

A certain level of irreverence to the task of social understanding is to be encouraged. This is not to undermine the seriousness of the task of sociology, but to recognize that self-effacement is a sign of intellectual maturity. We often have the hardest time gaining an understanding of that which is closest to us in terms of familiarity. Those that are in professional academic disciplines dwell within university settings (and the politics of everyday academic life) and the disciplines themselves (with specialized language and expectations). But precisely because we are embedded in these worlds, it is hard for us to have the critical distance that is often required to gain understanding.

Ironically, Berger lays this out in his introduction to the field to the uninitiated. His *Invitation to Sociology* (1963) sold approximately 670,000 copies in the 25-year period (1963–1988) since it was published, and was translated into 16 different languages by that time as well. The book was widely adopted throughout the United States for Introduction to Sociology classes. As one commentator observed, given the extensive used-book market for college books, Berger's book has probably been assigned to well over a million students over that period. Yet, the professional reviews were mostly weak, and the student feedback hasn't been all that encouraging. This actually presents a puzzle. On the other hand, graduate students in the discipline are said to have been particularly impressed with the work, as well as older professors. The undergraduate initiates find the book intimidating; the currently practicing sociologists find the book too glib; but the graduate student finds the book refreshing as it reminds them of what they wanted to do when they first started out studying sociology, and the older professor finds

the book appealing because it discusses in clear language what they had hoped for the discipline only to see it lost. What actually am I talking about?

Berger is a humanistic sociologist and he sees the discipline as humanistic. But the social sciences, especially in the United States after WWII, moved in unison toward a more scientific stance. That scientism actually hinders scientific progress is one of the great puzzles of 20th-century social thought. Unfortunately due to the tight grip scientism has over the minds of the social scientists, they don't see this, and they mistake a perilous progress for real progress. In a characteristic passage from Berger he sums this point up as follows: "sociologists, especially in America, have become so preoccupied with methodological questions that they have ceased to be interested in society at all. As a result, they have found out nothing of significance about any aspect of social life, since in science as in love a concentration on technique is quite likely to lead to impotence" (1963, 13). Disciplines can, in fact, lose themselves in methodological quagmires. In the sciences of man, this is particularly true because of an inferiority complex in relation to the sciences of nature. The mimicking of the methods appropriate for the study of nature has embarrassingly been the habit of those who study man precisely for fear of being accused of engaged in a non-scientific intellectual enterprise.

A simple example might get this point across. The sciences of nature matured by purging all forms of "anthropomorphism" from their explanations. Lightning doesn't come from the anger of the Greek gods anymore than the change in the seasons are a consequence of their commands. Instead of understanding these physical phenomena by reference to the purposes and plans of the gods, scientific thought was advanced by finding the underlying physical explanation. But the sciences of man differ from the sciences of nature. When we purge purposes and plans from the sciences of man, we actually purge the subject matter for our study. Man is not a rock, and rocks cannot speak to us. Concepts such as intentionality and meaning have no role in the sciences of nature, but they are the stuff of the sciences of man. Berger states his concern with confusing the sciences of man with the sciences of nature as follows: "Sociology will be especially well advised not to fixate itself in an attitude of humorless scientism that is blind and deaf to the buffoonery of the social spectacle. If sociology does that, it may find that it has acquired a foolproof methodology, only to lose the world of phenomena that it originally set out to explore" (1963, 165).

Berger's concerns echo those of other social scientists, such as Kenneth Boulding who was concerned that the flawless precision of mathematical modeling would prove less fruitful than the less precise literary methods for understanding the messy social world in which we live (1948, 247). F. A. Hayek (1952) is perhaps identified as the most vocal critic of scientism in the study of man and warned that the scientific path led not only to a false picture of man and society, but too easily led to the impression that social science could be an effective tool for social control. My intent in this essay, however, is not to make a methodological assessment of these arguments. Instead, I want to see how, given these positions, one offers an invitation to others to study man in his various walks of life and social situations. Berger, as well as the others I mentioned, warn their readers about viewing the social sciences in a certain way, but they also promise insight to those

who study man in another way. The invitation to study promises enlightenment, but it also contains a warning of the limits. This is what I want to explore. As Berger highlights, the sociologists meets up with the economists in some social space, and the political scientist in others (1963, 19). Thus, how ones sees the sciences of man when we study economy, polity, and society is what I am hoping to explore, and in particular to see how one offers an invitation to this conversation. In other words, what is the topic of the conversation, and who is going to be invited to join the conversation? Berger is explicit that this conversation is a “royal game” and that “one doesn’t invite to a chess tournament those who are incapable of playing dominoes” (1963, vii). On the other hand, we are offering an open invitation to those in our classroom and beyond who are “intensively, endlessly, and shamelessly interested in the doings of men” (1963, 18).

2.0 An Invitation to Inquiry

I am going to compare and contrast two books that are intended as invitations to their respective disciplines: Berger’s *Invitation to Sociology* and Thomas Mayer’s *Invitation to Economics* (2009). Berger’s is a classic, Mayer’s is recent and not as widely known. Berger and Mayer both come from a German language background (Austria) but received their graduate education in the United States after WWII (and both in NYC; Berger received his PhD from the New School in 1954 (born 1929); Mayer his PhD from Columbia in 1953 (born 1927)); and both take a rather irreverent look at current practice of the discipline they are asking students to join, at the same time they see great opportunity for the advancement in thought if the discipline was practiced correctly. Once the invitations are compared and contrasted, it is my goal to see what is common to both invitations concerning the subject matter to which understanding is hoped for through the invitation being offered.

2.1 Comparison to invitations to economics

The great strength of Berger’s invitation to students is to think of society as an unfolding drama and man’s various roles as that of actors on the stage. But the script is not so determinant as that imagery might imply and the concept of play extends far beyond the confines of the stage. Our identity is wrapped up in the range of roles we play. The rules we accept are a function of the games we play. Society shapes us, but we shape it as well in our actions in various social situations. Berger argues, in fact, that it is impossible to understand culture and society unless we look at it from the perspective of play and playfulness (1963, 140). Along the way, each situation in the play is sustained by the fabric of shared meanings that is woven out of actions of the individual participants. The social world constitutes an order that is the result of human action, but not necessarily of human design.

The great strength of Mayer’s invitation is his emphasis on the intuitive yet logical structure of economic argument. He tells his readers from the beginning that good economics begins with a recognition of the trade-offs that individuals face in making decisions and continues with an examination of unintended consequences. As he

argues, his approach is a human centered approach because it deals “with the way human beings spend much of their time” (2009, 3). The “tragic vision” of life that recognizes scarcity defines the situation man finds himself in, but the analysis of trade-offs and unintended consequences (or indirect effects) defines thinking like an economist. But Mayer also suggests that this way of thinking is really just an exercise in applied logic. “It is amazing how far common sense, accompanied by a critical attitude and a willingness to think about a problem instead of jumping at an emotionally satisfying conclusion, can carry you in economics” (Mayer 2009, xiv).

Both books put man at the center of the analysis, recognize the constraints individuals must confront in acting, and stress both intentionality and consequences of those intended actions that go beyond those intentions. And both see economics as embedded in a broader context of politics and society and that all three (economy, polity, society) are embedded in a broader fields of philosophy and history. Yet, both books also promise their reader that isolating their respective disciplines (Berger sociology, and Mayer economics) has its benefits as a “fruitful and convenient research strategy” (Mayer 2009, 7). By looking closely at both invitations, it is my hope to show the commonality one can see in a humanistic sociology and an humanistic economics, to suggest that a positive RSVP to the party is warranted, and that the going-on at the party will consist of a focus on human intentionality, the unintended consequences of human action, and the dramatic comedy that is the story of man. The jokes at the party will be plenty, but while often cutting, they will always be about capturing truth in the human realm.

Perhaps the most important aspect of both books is that if the invitation is accepted, the reader will be taught with candor the tools of reasoning to detect “bullshit” in the arguments and social explanations offered in the popular press, by politicians and others in authority, as well as by other social thinkers. While both books present themselves as invitations to a discipline, what they are really are is an invitation to inquiry and to critical thinking. In the case of Berger, the sociologist takes a subversive stance as he/she transforms the understanding of the meaning of the familiar through critical analysis. To Mayer, again starting from our observations of the “ordinary course of living” (2009, 311), the aspiring economist is advised to pursue common-sense reasoning and critically ask “is this really so” and “under what conditions is it true.” Berger looks at the interaction between intentionality and social structure; Mayer looks at trade-offs and unintended consequences; both are looking at the systemic forces that produce and reproduce social order.

2.2 Spontaneous Sociability and the two disciplines

There can be little doubt that part of the economist’s effort at intellectually seducing the reader would be a discussion of the spontaneous order of the market economy. Adam Smith’s invisible-hand style of reasoning has been the main intellectual pull of economic theory since the 17th and 18th century, and the phenomena of the spontaneous order of the marketplace the central theoretical puzzle of the discipline. Mayer refers to this discovery as “The Crown Jewel of Economics” (2009, 115-155). The price system

permits an extensive division of labor in society by coordinating the exchange and production activities in a society. The market system is a complex web of interconnected activities guided through price adjustments and disciplined by profit-and-loss accounting. The production plans of some are led to mesh with the consumption plans of others, and to do in a manner that tends to simultaneously answer the questions of what is going to be produced, how it is going to be produced, and for whom is it going to be produced. A free-market economy accomplishes this by marshalling incentives and mobilizing information, and doing so in a manner that continually alerts economic actors to potential gains from exchange and gains from innovation. Interference in this economic process only distorts the pattern of exchange and production by not allowing prices to tell the “true story” about relative scarcities, underlying tastes and preferences, and technological possibilities. The important point to stress for our purposes is that this system is neither mechanical nor dehumanizing, but intimately human centered throughout. It begins with man, and it ends with man—it consists of the everyday doings of men.

Many representations of economic man and the market economy do present the material in a machine-like fashion with human actors reduced to flawless rational agents and the market system as perfectly competitive. But such presentations of the economic way of thinking and the logic of the marketplace need not be, nor they have been, the dominant representations. Adam Smith and David Hume, for example, both had a more complicated understanding of man and a more dynamic understanding of the competitive processes that make up the market economy. In short, there is a way to see the complex interdependencies of economic relations guided through price adjustments that is initiated at each step of the analysis by *humanly* rational actors.

These two pictures of the market economy—one human the other mechanical—can also be seen in depictions of society in general. Functionalism, for example, could be seen as the sociology equivalent to the mechanical rendering of the market economy in textbook models of maximizing behavior and perfect competition. Berger points out that to Durkheim, society was an objective constraint that individuals had to confront. Society confronts us as whole and cannot be reduced to its constituent parts. Rather, it has an objective existence outside of us. “Society, as objective and external fact, confronts us especially in the form of coercion. Its institutions pattern our actions and even shape our expectations.” Society has reward structures when we conform to our expected role, and sharp penalties when we deviate from that path. From ridicule to actual deprivation of liberty, society has its way of disciplining its members. Society, in this picture, both precedes us and will live beyond us. Society, Berger concludes from this Durkheimian, perspective, “is the walls of our imprisonment in history” (1963, 91–92).

This grim picture of our fate corresponds nicely to the picture that modern textbook economics paints as well. The individual is of measure zero in the model of perfect competition, and the “choice” problem is reduced to an exercise in applied mathematics as the individual maximizes his utility subject to constraints. In fact, Berger is alert to the similarity in the picture drawn by functionalism in sociology with that of functionalist formalism as drawn in economics and argues that perhaps the imagery of

society as a forbidding prison could replace the economics picture of constrained optimization in the face of scarcity as the true practitioner of the “dismal science.” However, there is also evidence of another picture drawn in both disciplines and that is the spontaneous order of the market and sociability as captured in the law of unintended consequences. In the disciplines of economics and sociology as represented by Mayer and Berger, the invitation to inquiry is two fold—first to see the dilemma of human choice and understanding of the individuals place in society, and second to examine the by-product of those choices as both intention driven but not intention limited. The outcomes of the choices individuals make and the interactions they choose to engage go well beyond the motivations that give rise to those choices in the first place, and the outcomes can be both more desirable than originally imagined or more problematic. The invitation from Mayer and Berger respectively is to study the systemic reasons why actor intentions are channeled in directions where the total benefits of their interactions are greater than the sum of the individual transactions in some instances, and in other instances the total benefits is actually less than the sum of the parts. To put this in economic language, both “invisible hand” outcomes and “tragedy of the commons” outcomes are arrived at using the same intellectual tools of spontaneous order analysis.

2.3 Examples of “filters” and “equilibrium properties”

The tools of spontaneous-order analysis postulate a behavioral motivation, examine the institutions within which individuals act and interact for the incentives and information provided to decision makers, and the penalty and reward structure established in the specific environment, and finally the properties of the resulting order. Again, economics as a discipline provides the most-refined set of tools for thinking along these lines about social order. The individual actor does not act in a vacuum, but instead within a specified institutional environment defined by law (e.g., property rights) and cultural history (e.g., beliefs) that serve as a “filter” in shifting and steering behavior in this or that direction depending on the incentives, information, and rewards. As action is filtered it comes out the other side exhibiting strong tendencies toward equilibrium states that have “properties” that can be attributed to the order produced. Some orders are ‘beneficial’ while others less so with respect to the overall society. To Berger and Mayer, the Scottish Enlightenment phraseology “of human action, but not of human design” aptly explains the massive social structure we find ourselves in whether it be the norms of middle-class suburbia or the array of prices we confront at the supermarket. Social order doesn’t just happen; it is composite of the behavior of multitudes of individuals who create and sustain it. In this process, however, Berger and Mayer permit some individuals to have a bigger role than others even though they don’t have determinant control either—the charismatic in the social realm (1963, 127–129) and the entrepreneur in the market realm (2009, 157–159).

To see the spontaneous order style of reasoning at work in the different disciplines, I am going to draw on examples primarily from Berger’s discussions that analyze the social structure as it exists in the world-as-taken-for-granted that he was writing in: academia and scientific values. I have steered clear of religion, though of

course that is perhaps the realm of human life that Berger is most famous for analyzing, but religion could be used as a shining example of spontaneous order theorizing as it was in Smith and Hume. Just to give another example of how the style of reasoning goes and the normative stakes involved, consider the shared analysis though differing normative judgment in Smith and Hume's analysis of state sponsored religion. Both Smith and Hume observed that in states that had a publicly supported monopoly of religion, the level of religiosity among the population (as measured by attendance) was weak. But in states where religious service and education was not sponsored by the government, religious diversity and religious fervor among the population was characteristic. Both reasoned that this was due to the incentives that religious leaders faced under the different institutional conditions (i.e., the filter in place). In the state-sponsored monopoly environment, religious leaders felt no special need to attract parishioners to their church and be observant to the teachings of the church, but in situations where the religious leader had to raise the operating expenses for the church through donations from parishioners the incentives led to more entertaining sermons and more activities directed at persuading parishioners of the benefits of religious practice. Both less religiosity in the one instance and more in the other were equilibrium properties of the institutional filter of competition (or lack thereof) in the context of religious services. Smith, who felt that religiosity was desirable, advocated the abolition of state monopoly on religion in countries, while Hume, who felt differently about religion, used the same analysis to conclude that state-sponsored religion was the more desired policy.

The analysis does not entail a normative stance, nor does even the 'normative' welfare conclusion entail the adoption of a normative position, but the application of the analysis to the world of policy does entail a normative judgment be made. At the level of the invitation, however, what is seductive to the reader is not the normative policy conclusions in Berger or Mayer, but the astute observations of the world that follow from the analysis. It is very much an intellectual/analytical seduction our authors are engaged in, not an ideological/policy seduction. In both cases there is a sort of sophisticated distance that they adopt, while using the analysis to question familiar institutions and practices. In both instances they invite their readers to develop their critical faculties and be alert to the "b.s." that often passes as "analysis" in the media, among politicians, and certainly among their peers.

2.3.1 Academia

Consider their respective treatments of contemporary academia and scientific values of their respective disciplines. Both describe the incentive structure within academia, the "filter mechanism" of tenure and promotion, and the "equilibrium tendency" of the research and publication practices in the fields of economics and sociology. In both instances the picture is not pretty. To Berger, the structure of American academic life has encouraged research in sociology that has decidedly rejected theory and instead is preoccupied with "little studies of obscure fragments of social life, irrelevant to any broader theoretical concern" (1963, 9). Mayer, on the other hand, sees the incentives of modern academic economics as steering the young economist into the all too common

practice of writing papers with “many unnecessary citations to papers by colleagues in the hope they will reciprocate” (2009, 76).

Part of Berger’s and Mayer’s appeal to their respective invitations is that they offer distance from the current practice but an intellectual promise of what the appropriate practice of the discipline can in fact deliver to those brave souls who choose to accept the invitation as offered and join the party. And let me reiterate, Berger is clear that not everyone is invited—“one doesn’t invite to a chess tournament those who are incapable of playing dominos” (1963, vi). Mayer is more inviting, and suggests that anyone can come to the party provided they are willing to engage in “systematically thinking about a problem in a common-sensical way” (2009, 311). You can be your own teacher of economics by never taking statements as given, but always scrutinizing them by asking, “Is this so?” and, “Under what conditions?” would that be so, and never ever forget to ask not only what the immediate effects of a government policy will be, but also demanding that the long-run and indirect effects be explicitly considered. And, you can train your economic intuition by constantly seeking to explain the reason why the ordinary behavior you see occurring everyday. In short, to be seduced by economics proper¹ is to enable oneself to be amazed at the miracle of the mundane.

Again we see here common-ground in the invitation, an appeal to the “world-taken-as-granted” and then subjected to critical analysis which then changes our perception of the familiar in economic and social life. We get to see spontaneous sociability through the lens of sociology and spontaneous market efficiency through the lens of economics. But we also see how that spontaneous sociability can break down and how the economic order can be inefficient. In the context of academia and scholarship—the world-taken-as-given—for the students and faculty who are the primary readers of the *Invitation to Sociology* and *Invitation to Economics*, the structure of incentives for faculty tenure and promotion, as well as everyday academic politics and the sociology of knowledge, produce results which should disabuse one of the notion that this is a game consisting of pure truth seeking scientists pursuing only the lofty goals of philosophical wisdom and historical accuracy. However, despite the troubles with the process, both Berger and Mayer affirm that the process of scholarship and critical dialogue does produce as a by-product improved understanding of both the underlying social and economic relationships and empirical reality.

3.0 The Curse of Scientism

Another surprising common ground in the two invitations is how they see the curse of scientism both distorting the respective disciplines and ultimately transforming the disciplinary practice to such an extent that the invitation offered is no longer interesting to those who should be invited to the intellectual party. In other words, though emphasizing different issues, Berger and Mayer can be read as arguing that scientism kills science. Let me reiterate this, it is not that scientism produces less insightful work,

¹ Not the seduction of scientism and the false social engineering of economics as a tool for social control.

it is that it kills the ability to actually derive insight. A grim humorlessness takes over. Not only do we lose the miracle of the mundane and the mystery of everyday life, but also we can no longer appreciate the buffoonery of humanity in social settings.

Economic man is reduced by formalism and positivism to a lightning calculator of pleasure and pain, rather than a creature forever caught between alluring hopes and haunting fears that must embrace the challenge of their freedom and is compelled to cope with the imperfections of their knowledge. Similarly, the foolproof methodology of formalism and positivism fits well with a certain form of functionalism in sociology. The individual's struggle with identity, association, and community are ignored as outside the realm of the appropriately scientific. "Freedom," Berger writes, "is not empirically available." While we experience freedom everyday in our lives, "it is not open to demonstration by any scientific methods" (1963, 122). Freedom is thus elusive to the scientific mind. But Berger warns such a positivistic understanding of the sociologists task produces a form of "intellectual barbarism" (1963, 124).

Ironically, for our purposes, Berger sees the solution to the problem of freedom in the framework developed by Max Weber for his interpretative sociology. Subsequent developments in sociology would accuse Weber's sociological theory of being "voluntaristic." While Durkheim emphasized the external and objective nature of society, Weber emphasized human intentionality and the subjective meanings of social action. In this rendering of the perspectives, we are presented with what might be called a pure externalist point of view and a pure internalist point of view. But, as Berger points out, this misconstrues the Weberian (and Schutzian²) sociological project. Weber recognized not only the intentions of the actors in society, but also the unintended consequences. Weber's point was simply to stress that in the sciences of man, the "subjective dimension must be taken into consideration for an adequate sociological understanding" (1963, 126). Social order cannot be viewed purely from the outside, the social actors interpretations of meanings run throughout and the social order is sustained by "the fabric of meanings that are brought into it by the several participants." Any "scientific" methodology which precludes our ability to gain access to this world of social meanings ultimately undermines the scientific enterprise. There can be coherence to a purely externalist perspective, but they hide from view what is most human about social life. On the other hand, a purely internalist perspective would deny the social reality of others and the reality that we are born into a social world that defines and shapes us from birth. No, our scientific methods must make room and legitimate a dialogue that enables us to come to grips with what Berger calls the paradox of social existence. "That society defines us, but is in turn defined by us" (1963, 129).

Berger uses the metaphor of theatre to explain the subject of the human sciences. Man is performing in drama and comedies. He is playing a role in a play, but also improvising on stage. Society appears to the actor as precarious, uncertain, and unpredictable. At the same time, the institutions of society constrain us and channel our

² Alfred Schutz wrote his PhD under the guidance of Ludwig von Mises, who also attempted to build on Weber's project in the sciences of human action.

behavior. All sounds very much like the economic way of thinking as influenced by Mises, Hayek, Lachmann, Kirzner, and Lavoie. As it should, since it also finds its roots in Weber's *vertshend* sociology and its methods of scientific procedure represent positive social science prior to positivism.³

Mayer is not an Austrian school economist, though he was born in Austria. He is instead a rather conventional macroeconomist trained mid-century. However, he does possess unusual sensibilities about methodological and philosophical questions. He rejects naïve positivism and the difficulties that the empirical project in economics must confront (2009, 227-310). On the other hand, he is a strong advocate for careful empirical economics and especially sophisticated statistical analysis. However, he does believe that the efforts at demarcating science from other forms of human knowledge have not been successful. The search for a demarcation criterion, he argues, may in fact be futile. There is no reliable way to draw the line between science and non-science, but we can distinguish between sense and nonsense. Mayer embraces the German language distinctions between subjects such as the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. The disciplined study of an area of human knowledge—*wissenschaft*—is modified by “*Naturwissenschaften*” or “*Sozialwissenschaften*” as we get the only demarcation points we can humanly achieve. Scientific thought progresses when those practicing it are able to evaluate arguments and evidence in a disinterested way, be willing to abandon previous beliefs when logic and evidence persuades us to the opposite, and, “in general, be more interested in establishing truth than in building their reputations” (Mayer 2009, 55).

Berger makes the compelling argument that once we take the humanistic turn in social thought, the students and practitioners of the discipline so conceived must be in continuous communication with other disciplines that explore the human condition. In Berger's *Invitation*, he ignores economics, and rightfully so because the economics he sees being practiced circa 1960s is the technical economics of textbook maximizing man and perfect competition in microeconomics, or the mechanical exercises at social control with the hydraulic Keynesianism of aggregate demand management of macroeconomics. Nothing very human to either of these intellectual exercises. In fact, as we has suggested, this style of economics aligns quite nicely with the pure externalist perspective of some forms of functionalism, and as such completely purges the human actor with his purposes and plans from the analysis. But Berger does mention philosophy and history as the most important discipline to keep the social theorist engaged humanistically (1963, 168). For those who are critical of formalism and positivism in economics, the same disciplines are called upon to keep the humanistic economist grounded in the concern for the human condition.

³ The positive analysis is assured by the strict adherence to value neutrality. The ends actors pursue are treated as given and not subjected to critical evaluation, and the analysis is limited to the efficacy of chosen means in terms of satisfying given ends. As Kirzner once put this, only by taking the extreme subjectivist stance can the analysis of the economist be assured to be objective and value free. This is what Weber advocated in his famous essay on method in the political and social sciences.

4.0 Conclusion

As pointed out, Berger's *Invitation to Sociology* has had a curious history. In terms of sales it has been an amazing success, in terms of reviews by peers less so. The reason for this paradox is simple. Berger offers a staggering criticism to the dominant sociological approach within the academic milieu at the time of publication and up through today. Yet, as he notes, if a more humanistic sociology is going to be practiced, it will have to be practiced in the academy.

Berger excites his readers by informing them that they must be curious and “be a person that is intensively, endlessly, shamelessly interested in the doings of men.” The sociologist must be willing to study man in “all the human gathering places of the world, wherever men come together.” And “his consuming interest remains in the world of men, their institutions, their history, their passions.” The sociologist must not only be drawn to understand man in his “moments of tragedy and grandeur and ecstasy.” But also the sociologist will be “fascinated by the commonplace, the everyday” (1963, 18).

I have argued that Berger's *Invitation to Sociology* has many striking similarities to Thomas Mayer's *Invitation to Economics*. Both attempt to seduce the reader through a combination of critical irreverence as well as a stunning appreciation for the mystery, and even miraculousness, of our mundane existence. Man with his purposes and plans, as well as his foibles and fears, is at the center of both invitations to inquiry. The institutions of society both define us and are shaped by us in both the story offered by Berger and by Mayer. Dynamic individuals break the lock-hold of social structure—the charismatic in society, the entrepreneur in the economy. And the notion of play—in its many different meanings—and the rules that define the realm of play make an appearance in both invitations. And for our present purposes, the central theme of the play is the spontaneous ordering of society. Sociability in the form of identity, associations, and community in Berger's story, and in the form of firms, organizations, and patterns of trade in Mayer's. The law of unintended consequences is one of the core ideas that is offered to readers of both invitations as a critical tool of reasoning and social understanding.

Jon Elster (2009) has recently described Tocqueville as one of the first great social thinkers. In a book written at the same time by Richard Swedberg (2009), he describes Tocqueville's political economy. In a recently published book, Dragos Aligica and I (2009), pick up on Vincent Ostrom's (1997) ruminations on Tocqueville and democracy and lay out the modern project for the science of association, and the cultivation of a people well prepared to accept the “troubles of thinking and the cares of living.” But actually Berger beat us all there (except Tocqueville), when he concludes that while we can learn much from the metaphor of a puppet theatre as society. The logic of the situation comes into sharp focus in such a theatre and we can see ourselves in such a play. The pure externalist perspective may even lead us to think of ourselves as puppets dancing at the end of the strings. “But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theatre and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by

which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom. And in this same act we find the conclusive justification of sociology as a humanistic discipline” (1963, 176).

In so concluding his *Invitation to Sociology*, I want to suggest that Peter Berger not only demonstrated throughout the work the seductive intellectual project of spontaneous order studies—the critical frame of mind that can result from examining sociability as the product of human action, but not of human design—but also made the indispensable linkage between the humanistic project in sociology and the understanding of the freedom of the individual in society. If our methods make us blind and deaf to the buffoonery of human society, they will also steer us away from a true understanding of the human condition. Peter Berger fought constantly (and continues to fight) so that we may see man live and that we may hear man tell, in all his glory, and in all his silliness, the story of a free human actor in the unfolding drama (and comedy) which constitutes our social world.

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