

TO EVERY AFRICAN FRESHMAN

By

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III

The End and Purpose of University Studies

In philosophical jargon, a distinction is made between the **formal end** and the **final end** of any action or enterprise undertaken by a conscious agent. Here, however, to render what I am saying less esoteric or pedantic, I will simply speak of the **End** (for the formal end) and the **Purpose** (for the final end).

When I speak of the **End** of an action, I mean the natural obvious result that that action produces, in which it terminates; the end is external, objective, independent of the intention of the doer.

The **Purpose** is the intention itself that the doer has in mind in doing what he does; it is entirely subjective.

When a person sharpens a knife, for instance, the natural, inevitable outcome is that the knife gets keen, sharp. But the intentions of two chaps sharpening knives may be miles apart: the purpose of one may be to carve up wood; that of the other may be to carve up a man, to cut a throat! Thus the end of an action, done as it should, with the means that ought to be employed, is invariable; whereas the intentions of the agents may be as different, one from the other, as sculpture is from murder.

The Twofold End

What, then, is the end of university studies?

The end of university studies is twofold.

In the first place, university studies, correctly, diligently and thoroughly pursued, provide the student, in a specific field, not with a formless heap of knowledge, like a random pile of stones, but with a corpus of facts and principles, a corpus of learning, which

corpus shall have been built up, scientifically and philosophically, into a coherent, integrated, organised system, like a well-built house, or, better still, like a living organism. University studies, rightly and assiduously pursued, in other words, should provide, in a given domain, the expert, the technologist, the lawyer, the man of letters, the chap skilled in mind, and, if need be, skilled in hand.

In the second place, by the prolonged, thorough, methodical, that is, scientific and philosophical, exercise of his intellect on a particular field of university studies, the student should become instilled with a scientific and philosophical mind;—a mind whose natural reaction, when confronted with a phenomenon or problem, whatever it be, should be to dig to the proximate and the deep-most roots of the said problem or phenomenon;—a spirit that questions, that doubts, that searches, that enquires methodically, systematically;—a spirit that is not satisfied until it has unearthed the specific and proximate, the all-embracing and ultimate causes of things;—a spirit ever thirsting for knowledge; a mind that never accepts as certain things unproved;—a mind and spirit whose watch-word is **Thorough**. In other words, correctly, diligently and thoroughly pursued, university studies should produce the thinker-scholar, or the individual that is more commonly referred to, in our day, as the **Intellectual**. Thus learning by rote, however profound the subject, can in no way be regarded as university education, properly so called.

This second aspect of the End of University Studies is of the highest importance. And, this, for various reasons.

Firstly, the thinker-scholar, or the scientist-philosopher, cannot seclude himself, forever, in the ivory tower of his specialisation. Life is not composed of water-tight compartments; and he will often, in private as well as in public life, come up against situations for which his particular field of studies offers no ready-made solutions. Indeed, it happens, very often, that fellows, after university studies, are called upon to serve in fields which have little or no bearing on what they did in college; and, yet, even in this foreign field, they are expected to show proof of intellect and efficiency, by reason of their scientific and philosophical training. It is obvious then that the university man, irrespective of what his particular domain may be, will be looked up to, by virtue

of his high education; indeed, it will even be incumbent on him to help to find answers to the manifold, diverse and often baffling and staggering questions that arise to confront the community in which he finds himself. This is so to the extent that Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American Philosopher (1803-1882) did not hesitate to make this seemingly exaggerated assertion:

*"The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be a university of knowledge..."*¹

It is characteristic, therefore, of the genuine thinker-scholar, that however far-removed from his particular domain the problems he comes up against may be, he will approach and, tackle them methodically, searchingly, with that scientific and philosophical spirit that years of drill in his special field have instilled into him; will search for all the relevant facts, for all the deep-most causes, will ponder them over, in order to draw out the conclusion that issues naturally, logically, from the said facts and causes.

There you have it—the twofold End of University Studies: it is, by long, thorough and diligent drilling, to create in the mind concurrently, simultaneously, a corpus of knowledge built up scientifically and philosophically; and to inculcate into the mind a spirit which approaches and tackles every problem, whatever it be, scientifically, philosophically; in other words, University Studies should confer deep knowledge in a particular branch of learning, and, into the bargain, a sharp mind that questions, that wonders, that ponders, that digs to the depth of things.

The Intellectual

This conclusion that University Studies should produce the thinker-scholar has led me to ask myself another question, namely, what is an **Intellectual**? For, today, the word is used so indiscriminately

¹ Quoted in Dialogue (*American Quarterly Journal*)
By Melvin J. Lasky, page 30.

minately, so vaguely, so much out of rhyme and reason, that it is difficult without careful examination to say what the genuine intellectual is. What then are the qualities that make the thinker-scholar stand out, head and shoulders, above the general run of educated men and earn for him the title **Intellectual**?

Let me begin by another question.

Suppose a chap, after a brilliant university career, gets a job, let us say, as a civil servant, and plies his skills superbly, and becomes an expert **back-room boy**, an efficient executive of policies handed down to him by his political bosses; but suppose he never thinks to give himself pause to ponder and wonder whether these policies and the rules that govern their execution stem from expediency or from fundamental principle; whether, inherently, they are good and right or evil and wrong, whether they will lead, in the long run, to the weal or to the woe of the commonwealth, in order to warn his masters of impending catastrophe; suppose he gets into the rut of unthinking routine, reads nothing but files, never looks beyond the narrow confines of his civil service job to see the world without; but employs a superb intelligence to justify ready-made policies and to make them work — would such a man be called an intellectual, even if he were endowed with mind sharp and keen and was armed with a doctorate?

I say no.

What then are the hall-marks of the authentic intellectual as distinguished from the merely highly intelligent man?

Sovereignty of Mind

The first is that, in the genuine intellectual, mind reigns supreme, at least in so far as things that lie within the realm of reason are concerned; he possesses not merely highly specialised knowledge in a given field but is dominated by that scientific and philosophical spirit of which I have spoken above. Obviously, no man, on this imperfect earth, is pure mind. Even the most mentally endowed will be impeded by his inborn temperament, the stem and background from which he sprung, the milieu in which he was reared, with all that these entail of sentiment, tradition, prejudice, bias. Yet, as I have said already, the first characteristic

of a genuine intellectual is that, in him, in spite of these, mind will reign and rule supreme; in him it shall be, ever, his guiding light, his final arbiter, his chief justice, his lord and king.

Life-Long Student

The second characteristic of the genuine intellectual is that, consequent on this supremacy and primacy of mind in him, his main preoccupation, his predominant, all-absorbing concern in life shall be the **Search for the Truth**. As Truth's votary, ever faithful, ever sure, he is committed to wage life-long warfare against falsehood. And as goodness and beauty are inherent in truth, it follows that he must be a constant seeker of the good and right and an inexorable and unplacable foe of evil and wrong; and a devoted worshipper at the shrine of the beautiful and the sublime.

Since the depths of Truth are unfathomable, since Goodness is boundless, since the riches of Beauty are inexhaustible, it follows that the real intellectual must be a diligent student all his days. So complex is the universe, so complex and inscrutable the life of man, that there is no field of learning, however narrow, where men can confidently say that they have seen the last. Thus, the moment he says good-bye to his books and ceases to inquire, and ceases to reflect, and ceases to focus a searching light into his own soul, and ceases to question the **status quo** critically, he ceases, ipso facto, to be an intellectual. His university career, rightly understood, is only a spring-board from which to plunge ever deeper into the mysteries of his own special field, into the depths of truth at large.

Unruffled by Passion

Furthermore, if intellect is to reign and rule supreme in the thinker-scholar, if his search for the True, the Good and the Beautiful is to keep along the right road, if his thinking is to remain pure and straight, if his spirit is to shine like a lambent light in limpid atmosphere, his mind must be keen, cold, firm, serene, above bias, above prejudice, above passion. For heated passion and pride and prejudice deprive the thinker of discipline and control, bedevil the mind and warp judgment; they are the deadliest foes

of intellectual life. Thus, it is easy to perceive that this keenness, this coldness, this serenity, this firmness of mind are of the utmost importance in the thinker-scholar. For the intellectual is Seer and Prophet, the eye and mind of society; and to assume this awful role efficiently, and to the full, he must be able to see both deep and far, must have both insight and foresight, in order to recognise, as some wits have put it, not merely ideas that have arrived, but also ideas whose time has not yet come; in order, when the need arises, to warn his community of coming catastrophe. The genuine intellectual, therefore, is a diligent, dispassionate, unrelenting searcher, a deep and foresighted seer, the mind and eye of society, its humble, persuasive, faithful, unobsequious servant; not a haughty bigoted, self-styled prophet, contemptuous of the crowd, denouncing the weak, and predicting doom.

No Rigid Dogmatism

For, indeed the deeper genuine learning and scholarship penetrate, the more they should induce a profound and ever deepening humility. For, as I have stressed already, the universe is complex, and complex is the nature and the life of man. Each tiniest section, each tiniest detail, that we take up to investigate, however infinitesimal it may seem, is a labyrinthal and unexhaustible world in itself. There is hardly any thesis however logical, however lofty, propounded and defended by an eminent philosopher, that has not been attacked and denounced by another philosopher equally eminent. Truth is intricate and elusive. The portion of the universe, or of the life of man, about which men can speak with categorical certitude, is small when compared with the vast Unknown. Most of the ideas, that men of learning and thought propound and propose, are, at best, opinions or hypotheses to be held and used while research continues to unearth new facts which may come either to confirm and consolidate the said opinions and hypotheses, or to disprove and reject them. Indeed it has been said of the really learned man that the more he learns, the more he learns that he knows nothing. Within even his special field, no scientist or philosopher or expert can lay claim to omniscience and infallibility. How much more when he ventures out of it! Within or without his special field he has to search assiduously, meticulously, to dig deep, to pile relevant fact on relevant fact, cogent principle on cogent

principle, in order to draw conclusions, cautious, yes, but solid enough to enable him to proceed with firm foot, and, if need be, to speak with a sure degree of authority. Thus no intellectual, genuinely such, will dare to assume the posture of a sovereign pontiff, speaking *ex cathedra* and hurling anathemas on those who differ or disagree. Indeed rigid dogmatism is one of the surest signs of a shallow mind. Yet the stance of the intellectual on a point that has been the object of diligent and meticulous study and probing, on his part, should be neither timid nor apologetic: having gathered all the relevant facts he can dig up, all the principles relative to the point, having drawn the logical, cogent conclusion that issues inevitably from the said facts and principles, he should speak with confidence, yes, even with authority; but ever with the humble readiness to correct his stand, should new facts and principles come to light to prove him wrong.

Mental and Moral Independence

On a par with, yes, even more important than humble open-mindedness, as an authentic hall-mark of the thinker-scholar, is his intellectual and moral independence. Intellectually, his mind should not become the slave of any established, dogmatic system, however coherent, however cogent, however excellent, yes, however sacred they may look; for the human mind, in the nature of things, is limited, man's nature is corrupt, and, thus, when things hallowed are entrusted to men, they will vitiate them, inevitably; through their weakness of mind; through the natural drag towards evil that is part and parcel of our nature; through narrowness, pride and bigotry. As thinker and critic, the intellectual must stand back, detached, and scrutinise, and ponder, and evaluate; and accept or reject things on their intrinsic merit, on principle and conviction. If the faithful to his calling, he cannot become the victim of unthinking routine, or a mindless cog in the wheel of any **Establishment**, whatsoever. To gain and consolidate his moral independence, the intellectual should shun, indeed, should wage unrelenting, ceaseless war, against the enticements of a life of ease, against the allurements of wealth, and, most especially, against the insidious seductions of power. In its sublimest form, intellectualism will condemn its devoted, uncompromising votary to the life of a loner. Schiller

wrote and Beethoven sang, inviting all men to participate in universal joy. This *Hymn to Joy* singles out as the foremost invitees:

*"Wem der grosse Wurf gelungen"
eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
mische seinen Jubel ein!"*

*"He who has got the good fortune
to be the friend of a friend;
he who has won a worthy wife,
let him join the jubilee!"*²

The poet's words rendered immortal by the genius of one of the greatest music-makers the world has ever seen, are true and beautiful and profound; and the genuine intellectual must be the ardent lover and servant of the human kind, the affectionate brother of every human being. Yet the conscientious thinker-scholar of the highest worth must be wary of certain human contacts and shield himself resolutely against relationships likely to lead to betrayal of principle or to vicious compromise. Detached thinker and critic, jealous of his independence, the intellectual of this worth and calibre will find himself, more often than not, at variance with society, will be sometimes bound to reprove, will risk hostility and rejection and will often be forced to walk a lonesome road. In an imperfect world, the devoted thinker-scholar dedicated to the defense of the ideal, is bound, more often than not, to be a non-conformist. As one writer put it:

*"The 'intellectual' is the natural guardian
of quality in the life of the mind and the
natural critic of shoddy. He is the partisan
of the ideal. That is why, if he is faithful
to his calling in the imperfect world and
culture in which he lives, he cannot become
the poet laureate of the status quo."*³

This will often arouse indignation and draw upon his head the fury and thunder, especially, of men in power with a stake

2. Friedrich Schiller's *An die Freude* (Hymn to Joy, immortalised by Ludwig van Beethoven in his *Choral or Ninth Symphony*).

3. The Philosopher Sidney Hook, quoted in *Dialogue* Vol. 1, No. 2, page 33

in the system he calls to question. Yet this critical attitude of the committed thinker-scholar, this non-conformism, is not the bane but the boon of man, will lead not to the woe but to the weal of society. Students of American political history will agree with me that hardly any politician in recent times did more than the late Adlai Stevenson to bring thought into the ruthless arena of American politics. Although he failed twice in his bid for the highest office, he won a significant moral victory in that the stand he took, the method he adopted, the road he trod, tore a breach in the formidable philistinism of the American political establishment and ushered thought and mind into the public affairs of the U.S.A.. On this point, Stevenson himself left a statement worthy of note:

*"The conformists abominate thought. Thinking implies disagreement and disagreement implies non-conformity and non-conformity implies heresy and heresy implies disloyalty. So obviously thinking must be stopped... But I say to you that bawling is not a substitute for thinking and that reason is not the subversion but the salvation of freedom."*⁴

When I look back into the vista of History, and ask myself whom I rate, in my judgement, as the greatest intellectual, in the highest sense of the term, the world has ever seen, that stands out, in the lengthy panorama of the human story, as a giant colossus, dwarfing all others; the detached, independent, dedicated, keen-minded thinker, profound in thought, short of ambition, abstemious, large-hearted; the gad-fly and goad of society, ever stinging, ever prodding, at his risk and peril, to urge men towards Truth and Goodness—when I ask myself this question, I would (barring Christ, not to get involved in the question of his godhead) unhesitatingly single out Socrates, the ever questioning philosopher of ancient Athens, whose name has become a house-hold word, from his day to this. He took his calling so seriously, brought it through so thoroughly, that he finally aroused the furious Athenians and they hurled him before the court to try him for life. The court pronounced him guilty of death, but before he died this is what he said, among other things:

4. *Dialogue* Vol. 1, No. 2, page 14.

"I have never lived an ordinary quiet life. I did not care for the things that most people care about: making money, having a comfortable home, high military or civil rank, and all the other activities—political appointments, secret societies, party organisations—which go on in our city; I thought that I was really too strict in my principles to survive if I went in for this sort of thing. So instead of taking a course which would have done no good either to you or to me, I set myself to do you individually in private what I hold to be the greatest possible service. I tried to persuade each one of you not to think more of practical advantages than of his mental and moral well-being...

"It is literally true (even if it sounds rather comical) that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly; and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life. I suspect, however, that before long you will awake from your drowsing, and in your annoyance you will take Amytus' advice and finish me off with a single slap; and then you will go on sleeping all the end of your days, unless God in his care for you send someone to take my place.

"If you doubt whether I am really the sort of person who would have been sent to this city as a gift from God, you can convince yourselves by looking at it in this way. Does it seem natural that I should have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing

my family to be neglected for all these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going like a father or an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness? If I had got any enjoyment from it, or if I had been paid for my good advice, there would have been some explanation for my conduct; but as it is, you can see for yourselves that although my accusers unblushingly charge me with all sorts of other crimes, there is one thing that they have not had the impudence to pretend on any testimony, and that is that I have ever exacted or asked a fee from anyone. The witness that I can offer to prove the truth of my statement is, I think, a convincing one—my poverty."⁵

Fearlessness

If the intellectual, as I have defined him, is to be unflinchingly faithful to his role, that is, to be the unflinching seeker of the true, the good, the right and the beautiful and their dauntless defender against falsehood, evil, injustice and philistinism; if he is to be the principled non-conformist, or as I have baptised him, the gad-fly and goad of society, raking 'the frown of the great' and 'the tyrant's stroke; he must acquire a will of granite, must possess or cultivate a more than normal calibre of courage. Indeed, without fearlessness, without the readiness to die, to lose all if need be, no scholar-thinker, however high his talent, can ever make an impact on his community. In my view, nobody in our times, understood this more than Mahatma Gandhi, who, in a fashion out of this world, played in modern India a role similar to that which Socrates played in ancient Athens. To steel himself for this vocation, Gandhi took some stringent, indeed almost unearthly vows, foremost among which were the Vow of Truth and the Vow of Fearlessness:

"Not simply truth," he said "as we ordinarily understand it, nor truth which merely

5. Plato: *The Apology*, pages 42-44, 26-27, translated by Hugh Tredennick, The Penguin Classics, 1957.

answers the saying, "Honesty is the best policy," implying that if it is not the best policy we may depart from it. Here Truth as it is conceived means that we may have to rule our life by this law of Truth at any cost; and in order to satisfy the definition, I have drawn upon the celebrated illustration of the life of Prahlad. For the sake of Truth he dared to oppose his own father; and he defended himself, not by paying his father back in his own coin. Rather, in defence of Truth as he knew it, he was prepared to die without caring to return the blows that he had received from his father, or from those who were charged with his father's instructions. Not only that, he would not in any way even parry the blows; on the contrary, with a smile on his lips, he underwent the innumerable tortures to which he was subjected, with the result that at last Truth rose triumphant. Not that he suffered the tortures because he knew that some day or other in his very lifetime he would be able to demonstrate the infallibility of the Law of Truth. That fact was there; but if he had died in the midst of tortures he would still have adhered to Truth. That is the Truth which I would like to follow. In our Ashram we make it a rule that we must say "No" when we mean No, regardless of consequences

* I found, through my wanderings in India, that my country is seized with a paralysing fear. We may not open our lips in public; we may only talk about our opinions secretly. We may do anything we like within the four walls of our house; but those things are not for public consumption.

"If we had taken a vow of silence I would have nothing to say. I suggest to you that there is only One whom we have to fear, that is God. When we fear God, then we shall fear no man, however

high-placed he may be; and if you want to follow the vow of Truth, then fearlessness is absolutely necessary. Before we can aspire to guide the destinies of India we shall have to adopt this habit of fearlessness." 6

Friend and Servant of Man

I have said that it is of the highest importance that the thinker-scholar should possess a cold mind; I also say that it is of equally highest importance that he should possess a warm heart; should be a man who, by loving his neighbour, by loving his community, by loving those in need, loves mankind at large; is concerned about its welfare, rejoices in its triumphs and grieves at its tragedies. For one of the frightening spectacles of modern world is that, as science becomes more and more powerful, and takes over labour, and conquers the universe, and attains the stars; as ideologies wax more furious with exclusive bigotry; as political ambitions become increasingly staggering, man, the individual, is counting for less and less; he has virtually ceased to be a **human being** and has become a **number**—just one among a nameless, faceless, countless mammoth multitude. Take the case, for instance, of the head of a mighty state waging war, with specious motive; does it ever occur to him, as he listens to the news and hears the piling figures of the dead announced, monotonously, day after day,—does it occur to him that each man killed is an irreparable loss, means deep personal grief to a large number of friends and relatives? Maybe it does. But this butchery, perpetrated everyday, becoming commonplace, has come to look as rather in the nature of things; and we are getting ages away from President Lincoln who sat down to write his historic letter to a mother who had lost five sons in the Civil war. This war told on him, wore him down, because he felt for men. No, man hardly counts any more. But, to the true intellectual, he should count, before all else; should be his prime preoccupation. That is why the question he should be asking himself, ceaselessly, with regard to his special field is:

6. **Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas:** C. F. Andrews; George Allen and Unwin 1947, pages 102, 103, 108.

wrong with these reasons; yet, they are low, self-centred, circumscribed and fall short of the ideal.

What then should be the lofty, large and selfless purpose that educators should have ever in mind in imparting university learning?

Obviously, the End of University Studies, of which I have spoken so much above, that is, the formation of men armed with deep systematised knowledge in a specific field, men equipped, consequently, with a scientific and philosophical bent of mind, that is, the production of the genuine thinker-scholar, the scientist-philosopher, in short, the production of the authentic intellectual, should constitute, in itself, and at once, a primary purpose of university education.

Dedication to Public Service

Yet the intellectual, thus conceived and fashioned, however brilliant, however skillful, however profound in science and scholarship, does not constitute an end in himself; you do not produce him merely for the pleasure of producing him, to set him up (for popular worship) like a golden calf in the wilderness of ignorance and mediocrity. The pertinent question is; what should he do with his learning and skill and mind; to what use should he put his specialised knowledge, his scientific and philosophical training? In other words, what should be the ultimate purpose for providing a given community, or society at large, with the university-trained man—the scientist, the technologist, the thinker-scholar, the genuine intellectual?

I have pondered this question over and over again, and, ever, I have come to one and the same conclusion, namely, that the purpose of university education should be, not merely to equip the rising youth with scientific and philosophical knowledge and skill and mind, but most especially to instil into them, over and above, a deep, keen and lofty sense of dedication to the service of the commonwealth, the immediate community of which they are members, and thereby, to the service of the world as a whole, of humanity at large.

But how should this sense of dedication and service be manifested, how should it be put into effect in the concrete; or, to put

it more generally, what roles, what services, should a genuine intellectual perform among men?

Seeker and Finder

The most obvious and immediate one is that he should put his special knowledge or skill (as an agronomist, an engineer, an economist, a social scientist, an educationist, a philosopher) at the disposal of the community. But this is not enough. To whom much has been given, from him much shall be required. And the university man out of acadamy and among ordinary men would be a woeful failure if he did no more than ply his special skill. What then is required of him over and above?

Firstly, I have said earlier that the genuine intellectual should regard his university studies essentially as a spring-board from which to plunge deeper still and deeper into the bottomless waters of knowledge; that he must remain a student, a researcher, a thinker all his days. The essential intention here is that these studies, this research, this thinking should result not merely in increased learning, on his part, for himself, but in the **discovery** of new knowledge for the human-kind—a new fact, a new thought, a new principle, a new law. Thus the foremost and never-ending role of the intellectual is to be a seeker who finds, who discovers. As **finder** or **discoverer** he causes the horizons of knowledge to recede further back; he sets the bounds of learning wider still and wider, by adding something more, something new, to the existing store of human science and wisdom.

Maker or creator

In the second place, thanks to the finding of new facts, new thought, new laws, new principles. The scientist-philosopher builds up new solutions, concrete or abstract, for the problems that face his community or the world at large. In this way, like a man who fathers a son, he participates in the unending act by which God is ceaselessly creating and renewing the world. By such singular and original accomplishment, the scientist-philosopher, the thinker-scholar, the genuine intellectual, becomes a **creator**, a **maker**. To this category of **makers** obviously belong the great benefactors of mankind who have invented new sources of energy, new tools to

make labour easier, speedier, more efficient, more prolific; and life more livable; who are creating or perfecting new means, new machines to make travel ever swifter ever surer; to make communication more instant and clearer and, thereby, bring the far-flung peoples of the world closer and closer together.

But special mention must be made of that class of creators who dedicate their talents to the finding of solutions to the inner problems that plague the human kind, and, thus, contribute to the continued moral and spiritual enrichment and renewal of society. Such are the thinkers and philosophers whose works of unprecedented originality, depth and power have made revolutions and changed or reshaped the course of history and the face of the world. You see them standing out like giant land-marks in the long-drawn vista of the story and progress of man. As an example in modern times towers the colossus Marx. But there have been others without number, in all places, at all times, who, though less gigantic, have contributed effectively, by their thought, in the making of a better human being and of a world fitter to live in.

Here also must be mentioned that class of creative thinkers who have not merely been content to address themselves to a coterie of the initiate, but have also sought to reach the ordinary man by presenting their thought to him in concrete, living, dramatic shape. They dig deep down into the depths of the human soul, into the heart of society, in order to discover the root sources and springs of their behaviour, in order to grasp their inmost nature and workings; then they proceed to mirror or depict the world of their day as it really, truly and deeply is, with its joys and sorrows; its problems, its perplexities, its dilemmas, its conflicts; its triumphs, its blunders, its tragedies, catastrophes; and, through seductive media—history, the novel, the play, the short story, the fable, the poem, the essay—these creative writers propose effective solutions to these problems, either for the individual, or for mankind at large. Indeed, makers of great literature are creative intellectuals in the truest sense of the term; for from their studies and research, from their meditations, from their searchings into their own souls, from the intimate experience of their own lives, from their penetrating observation and insight into the world of their times, they create a new and similar world and people it with men and women who live intensely and love and laugh and come to

grief and suffer and perish. Thus, makers of creative literature, by rewarding virtue and punishing vice and waywardness, strive to show how life on earth ought to be lived, how a measure of real happiness can be attained. At its less ambitious, creative literature strives at catharsis, strives to purge and soothe the emotions and give suffering humanity a brief escape and respite from the dreary drudgery and monotony of real life in this weary world.

The Intellectual Public

In this effort to reach and instruct the ordinary man at large, the thinker-scholar participates directly in the achievement of a fundamental end and purpose of intellectual enterprise, namely, the creation of an **Intellectual Public**; a public alert, enlightened, disciplined and sagacious and firm in decision and action. For knowledge must penetrate the masses, must illuminate minds, and stir up wills and wisely rouse to action, if it is to change society and the world—for the better.

Seer and Prophet

Furthermore, the thinker-scholar, thanks to his special training and knowledge; thanks to his scientific and philosophical bent of mind; thanks to his ceaseless searchings into his own soul, the endless questioning of his own life; thanks to his penetrating insight into the labyrinthal nature of the soul of man, into the mazes and the intricate workings of the nature of society; thanks to his comprehensive knowledge of the past, becomes a **Seer** into the confusing depths of the human mind, into the illusive future, a **Light** in the darkness of his days urging men towards right and rewarding achievement and rich fulfilment; or warning society, should the need arise, against impending cataclysm. Seer and Light, he *ipso facto* becomes a teacher, not in the sense of a pontiff expounding dogma, or a priest propounding mystery and preoccupied with ritual, but in the sense of a humble persuader who 'shows the light', as Zik's motto once ran, 'for the people to find the way'; who imposes himself on his community by the force of his logic; by the profundity of his scholarship, his insight and foresight; his clarity of thought, his precision of expression; the transparency of his sincerity, his rectitude and integrity; who imposes himself by the shining example of his life.

This to my mind is the surest way by which the thinker-scholar, the man of letters can help to transform a mindless, heedless community into that **intellectual public**, the creation of which intellectual public should constitute the foremost purpose of his endeavours.

Keeper of the Public Conscience

I now come to a point, which, as I see it, is of the first and highest importance. It is this. If the thinker-scholar is verily a Seer, one of the foremost things on which he will inescapably, relentlessly, have to focus the searching light of his eye and mind will be on the nature of good and evil, of right and wrong, of justice and injustice in the living of private lives, in the conduct of public affairs; and, since man is corrupt from conception, helpless at the enticements and the seductions of evil, more often than not; more inclined to wrong than right, to injustice than to fairness; since the holders of office, the wielders of power, will be tempted more surely, more irresistibly, to its abuse than to its judicious and salutary use; the genuine thinker-scholar, if he is faithful, if he is **integer vitae scelerisque purus**⁸—pure of life and free from sin—he must become, inevitably, the **Keeper of the Public Conscience**; indeed he will have to be very **Conscience** itself of society. If he is really genuine, far from being a cynical, supercilious, haughty, self-righteous, self-appointed judge of weak and erring men, he will become a humble votary of Truth, Goodness and Justice; ever conscious of his own weaknesses and short-comings, full of sympathetic understanding; but yet a determined, unflinching, dauntless combatant in the war of truth against falsehood, of good against evil, of right against wrong, of justice against injustice, of humanity against wickedness, of freedom against tyranny; he will become a tireless crusader-persuader urging men by word and deed along the road to right; a goad and gadfly, ever pricking, ever stinging society in order to rouse its conscience to shun evil and seek the good; a fearless defender of truth and justice ever ready to from "the frown of the great" to bide "the tyrant's stroke".

8. Horace: Lib. 1. Car. XXII

Intellectuals and Public Affairs

Now I come to a point at once provocative and controversial but, to my mind of capital relevance and urgency, especially in emerging Africa. Here it is. Should the specialist, the technologist, the scientist-philosopher, the thinker-scholar, the intellectual (which ever you please) participate in the conception of policy, in its implementation, in the running of the State? To put it in less scholarly jargon: should the intellectual take part in politics?

My answer is unhesitating and unequivocal: Yes.

And saying yes with me are some of the highest authorities the world has ever seen.

For his part Socrates laid it down categorically, without mincing words, that those destined to rule, should be given, as an absolute prerequisite, a thorough physical, moral and intellectual education.⁹

For his part, Aristotle asserted tersely that

"A good State is not the work of Fortune but of **Knowledge** and **Purpose**; a state is good only when those citizens who have a share in the government are themselves good."¹⁰

Plato is celebrated for his famous dictum that either philosophers must be kings or kings philosophers:

"Unless," said he, "philosophers bear kingly rule in cities, or those who are now called kings and princes become genuine and adequate philosophers, and political power and philosophy are brought together, and unless the numerous natures who at present pursue either politics or philosophy, the one to the exclusion of the others, are forcibly debarred from this behaviour, there will be no respite

9. **Socratic Discourses**: Xenophon (and Plato) Everyman's Library, No. 457, Book 1, Chapter vi; Book II, Chapter 1

10. **Aristotle**: Politics; Everyman's Library, No. 605, Book VII (p. 210).

from evil, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor, I fancy, for humanity...¹¹

Indeed, who can doubt it, who can challenge it and still lay claim to truth and honesty, namely, that there is need for the best efforts of the best minds in the conception and the running of public affairs?

On the other hand, intellectualism tends to lift men away from the crude, brute world into the high ethereal heavens of lofty absolute principles. Participation in affairs of state brings them back to earth, and sobers them down, and chastens them by putting them at grips with the dangerous, bewildering, care-needing, nerve-racking task of the governance and guidance of erring men—by erring men.

But in what way should he do this? What role should the intellectual play in the running of public affairs?

Back-Room Boys

The first is an obvious one, albeit indirect, namely, where men of intelligence (even of intellect) and specialised training—experts, technologists—serve in the civil service as executors of policy or advisers to government—the faceless, self-effacing men of know-how that, in England, people refer to, mockingly, as **back-room boys**. Under a politician who respects expertise, or one who, on the contrary, does not understand what the whole thing is all about and lets the experts do their job, these faceless **boys** behind the scenes can wield tremendous power. Conversely, under conceited, wayward, wrong-headed ruthless politicians, who believe they know all about it and don't need to be told, the intellectual, in this role, is in real trouble. And, if he is not firm of mind and will, he will constantly be harassed and blagued by the fear of rousing the fury of his boss, of losing his job.

What is worse, sometimes, intellectuals in this position fall victim to the seductions of greed, and degrade themselves into yes-men, sycophants, servile flatterers, opportunists, for whom preferment becomes the **summum bonum**, the sole and single ambition, for which all self-respect and integrity should be sacrificed.

¹¹ Plato: *The Republic*, Everyman's Library, No. 64, Book v (p. 166).

Corruptio optimi pessima, says a latin adage — the corruption of the best is the worst; there is hardly any degradation so deep, and unsightly, as that of an intellectual who prostitutes his talent, and himself so meanly. Thus it is clear that the intellectual in this position will often need guts to see to it that his expert knowledge is not used to serve expediency or to achieve outright evil ends. There is no denying that, given the chance and the green light, if he is honest in mind, firm of will, faithful to truth and principle, and dedicated to the public weal, the expert thinker-scholar, even in this role of playing second fiddle, can do a world of good to promote sound government.

But another question remains to be cleared; to wit, should intellectuals participate in public affairs as politicians on their own right?

Here answers are hesitant.

There are those who, seeing what power politics have to warp and debase even the best-intentioned of men, espouse the thesis that the genuine intellectual, Socrates-wise, should stay clean out of this corrupting, often sordid, enterprise; that he should remain a nay-saying outsider, the dedicated, uncompromising defender of the ideal. Indeed, when one has seen how rotten politics can be, how rank with expediency, lying, ruthlessness, philistinism, treachery, run-away ambition, and what have you, one is powerfully drawn to agree with the protagonists of this view.

Still I persist in the belief that it is necessary, even imperative that, at least, some intellectuals should steel their will and brace themselves and enter the arena of politics in order to usher in and further thought and conscience and righteousness and integrity in the conduct of public affairs. On this point I am in full agreement with an American Congressman with a Harvard-Oxford background who had this to say:

"...I think... that in political life we need both men of intelligence and men of intellect; for in politics, as in every other field, we must have 'intelligent' men who are capable of operating 'within the framework of limited but clearly stated goals.' But just as we need 'intelligent men in politics, in both the executive

and legislative branches, we also need some "intellectual" men. That is to say, we need persons who are willing to evaluate the evaluations, to raise questions about the policies themselves as well as the methods for implementing policies, willing, indeed, to inquire into the presuppositions on the basis of which policies are made.

"Politics—even electoral politics—requires more than first-class technicians, indispensable as these are. If our society is to remain open and free, if it is not to stumble and falter when confronted with the enormous problems we face, there must be in decision-making positions in our government—in Congress—and not only as advisers but as principals, at least some men who are deeply concerned with objectives and assumptions as well as with techniques and methods. There must be some men who are interested in rethinking policy as well as explaining it, interested not only in making present policies work, but in asking whether they are right. There must be at least some politicians who do not feel threatened with complexity, but challenged and stimulated by it.

"To view the status quo critically and not simply to be its servant is, I believe, the appropriate role of the intellectual in politics as well as out of it. He may finally decide—or he may not—to attack established policy; as an intellectual, however, his chief vocation is to scrutinize it.

"...there are many... ways of improving the exchange of ideas between the political and intellectual communities. The final one, of course, is for more thoughtful, well-educated men and women to become candidates for Congress; more citizens of intellect and intelligence to become politicians. Young men and women with convictions about the direction in which their country should move

will find in Congress an opportunity to assert those convictions and thereby serve the public.

"...there is a satisfaction in being involved, even with but one voice and vote, in decisions that shape the future of the country and the world." 12

The Realm of the Possible

But in entering the lists to joust for thought and right in the political tournament, as an active participant, in his own right, the scientist-philosopher, the thinker-scholar, the intellectual must bear one thing ever in mind. It is that he is now in the domain, not of the **Absolute**, but in that of the **Possible**; that he is in a field in which dialogue and negotiation and judicious compromise are the watch-words. I insist on the term judicious compromise advisedly, because I do not intend, in the least, that compromise should cloak a betrayal of inalienable principle. In the rough and tumble of politics, the intellectual, dedicated to the Ideal, will have to learn to temper his Idealism with deep-sighted Realism. As I see it, the **Realist-Idealist** is one who, while keeping his ideal ever before the eye of his mind, while knowing thoroughly that core and essence of it that cannot be bargained away, that cannot even be made the subject of negotiation, is yet practical and shrewd enough to know exactly how much of his ideal he can realize **hic et nunc**, here and now, in present concrete circumstances; who knows the marginal non-essentials that he can sacrifice to conditions of time and place, without betrayal of the substance of principle.

Yet, in this hurly-burly, the thinker-scholar should never forget that his foremost, utmost, inmost purpose in life, as an intellectual, is to think, even for thinking's sake; should never forget that his essential mission in politics is to be the **Conscience** and not merely the **Agent** of society; that, on no account should he become, merely and simply, the apologist of the **status quo**. Henry Kissinger, once Harvard don, now special adviser to President Nixon, had this to say on this point:

12. *Dialogue*: Vol. 7, No 2, pp. 11-12, 21, 22.

"The intellectual should not refuse to participate in policy-making, for to do so would confirm administrative stagnation. But in cooperating... it is important for him to remember that one of his contributions to the administrative process is independence, and that one of his tasks is to seek to prevent unthinking routine from becoming an end in itself." 13

Thus, from my point of sight, some intellectuals, at least, should become sharers of power, direct participants in active politics. I say **some** advisedly, because I still believe, firmly, that, in society, in so far as politics are concerned, there is an essential, permanent need for the intellectual outsider—that votary of Truth, that defender of the Ideal who is untrammelled by partisan considerations, who of the Ideal who is untrammelled by partisan considerations, who has no eye on the next elections, no heart on office. Such men have been 'the salt of the earth', as Christ put it, the shapers and changers of the world,—men like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, in days of long ago, like Marx and Gandhi in modern times.

To summarise what I have been saying on this head, I can do no better than put before the reader the learned views that were expressed on this point by the famous English university Churchman and scholar, John Henry Cardinal Newman:

"Necessity has no law, and expedience is often one form of necessity. It is no principle of sensible men, of whatever cast of opinion, to do always what is abstractedly best. Where no direct duty forbids, we may be obliged to do, as being best under circumstances, what we murmur and rise against, while we do it. We see that to attempt more is to effect less; that we must accept so much, or gain nothing; and so perforce we reconcile ourselves to what we would have far otherwise, if we could..."

"I allow then fully, that, when men combine together for any common object, they are obliged, as a matter of course, in order to secure the advantages accruing from united action, to

13. Dialogue: Vol. 7, No. 2, page 17.

sacrifice many of their private opinions and wishes and to drop the minor differences, as they are commonly called, which exist between man and man. No two persons perhaps are to be found, however intimate, however congenial in tastes and judgments, however eager to have one heart and one soul, but must deny themselves, for the sake of each other, much which they like or desire, if they are to live together happily. Compromise, in a large sense of the word, is the first principle of combination; and any one who insists on enjoying his rights to the full, and his opinions without toleration for his neighbour's, and his own way in all things, will soon have all things altogether to himself, and no one to share them with him. But most true as this confessedly is, still there is an obvious limit, on the order hand, to these compromises, necessary as they are; and this is found in the proviso, that the differences surrendered should be but 'minor', or that there should be no sacrifice of the main object of the combination, in the concessions which are mutually made. Any sacrifice which compromises that object is destructive of the principle of the combination, and no one who would be consistent can be a party to it." 14

Such being the characteristics of the genuine intellectual—his dedication to the Ideal, to mind and meditation, his obligation to tell the truth as it is, his non-conformism, his role as critic of society, as Keeper of the Public Conscience—an interesting rider to consider is, what have been the attitudes towards intellectuals in various places and at various times. Let us begin with the most favourable—apparently.

Dubious Friends

It is that of those who worship the intellectuals and rain on them showers of fulsome praise. Any genuine thinker-scholar shrinks

14. John Henry Cardinal Newman: *On the Scope and Nature of University Education*: Everyman's Library, pp. 9, 13-14.

backs with horror from adulation as from the plague, runs away from fans as from a 'madding crowd'. Back in 1962, I attended a conference of African writers of English expression in Makerere, Kampala, Uganda. This conference warned the rising African writers against the exaggerated praise poured on them by European admirers—well-meaning people, but who, burning with thirst for the strange and exotic, seize on the budding efforts of the African writers and laud them to the skies as if they were the very quintessence of human achievement; whereas, more often than not, this superabundant praise, on the part of those who mouth it, means, in reality, not that they believe the work to be of high worth, in itself, by any standards, but that they are surprised that it should come from Africa. Fulsome praise, the blaze of publicity, exciting and harmless as they may look, can do untold, even irreparable, harm to the up-coming intellectual: like sweet, seductive wine they can easily go to the head of the young, the immature, the unwary and the prone to pride; and thus blight a talent in the bud and ruin a life of promise. For once the intellectual ceases to think of himself as a humble seeker of the Truth in the vast unknown and assumes the airs of an omniscient demigod, the knell of his creative life begins to toll.

Danger of Prostitution

Next comes the attitude of those who appreciate the intrinsic worth of the genuine intellectual but shrewdly seek to use him, as a cat's paw, to achieve their own ends. This is very dangerous indeed; for if those who seek to use him are men devoid of conscience, men who know no scruples, men with covert or overt crooked intentions; and, if the intellectual thus enmeshed is spineless, or if he harbours a lurking appetite for material gain and preferment, he will surely end up by prostituting his talent and himself, and, thus, become a by-word and a fraud. Indeed, if there is one thing we should ever keep in mind, it is that intellectualism, however high it towers, is no bulwark against human frailty. The higher it soars, the more shattering can be its fall.

Mind a must

Next come those, especially in positions of power, who affect the attitude that intellectuals count for nothing and can be dispensed

with in the running of public affairs. Where this attitude becomes ingrained and general, it leads headlong (surely never to the west but) to the woe of the commonwealth. You cannot banish mind from the running of the state and have it good.

Egg-Heads

Then comes that attitude prevalent, about a decade or two ago, in the U.S.A. where dedication to thought was looked upon with contempt, by a dollar-worshipping, materialist, action-crazy society for which achievement in the field of wealth was the highest good, as a bootless, worthless, if not despicable pursuit. It was this society which gave to the intellectual the scornful name of egg-head. In this mocking, disdainful atmosphere, it was only the intellectual firm in faith in the overwhelming need for intellectual enterprise, confident in its future and sure to be vindicated in the end, that could hold his head high amidst the jeering crowd. The unsure, the sensitive and the cowardly were tempted to hide or to apologise for their existence. In those days, in the United States, a chap with a Harvard-Oxford background who dared to run for Senate or Congress was a loser from the start. It took the shock of the first Soviet Sputnik to jolt the Americans out of this senseless attitude. And lol to day, in the U.S.A., the intellectual has come to his own, is being sought and wooed. Since the days of President Kennedy, he is everywhere without the groves of academe: you find him in research, you find him in industry, you find him in places close to summit power, often not merely as a back-room boy but as an active participant on his own right deeply committed and involved. As I am writing this, the second pair of American astronauts are walking the moon. The conquest of space (albeit by borrowed German brains) is ample evidence that the acceptance of the intellectual, in the United States, has paid enormous dividends and promises more untold.

Witch-Hunting

We come now to the worst attitude of all. It is that which prevails where the intellectual has to seal in lips and live in dread of what might happen to him if he dares to speak his mind; where he has to face not merely 'the frown of the great' but is often the victim of fierce and cruel persecution. You found it, and find it

No Freedom, No Growth

What then is the right policy, on the part of rulers, towards the intellectual?

The answer is simple and clear, as plain as a pike-staff; freedom; freedom from fear; freedom to follow his thought, without let or hindrance, to its logical end; freedom to say it as it is.

Once in liberal mood Mao cried:

*"Let a hundred flowers blossom;
a hundred schools of thought
contend."*

It may be argued that Mao, with his **Cultural Revolution** and his swarming hordes of **Red Guards** allowed neither a hundred schools of thought to sprout nor a hundred flowers to bloom. But that is beside the point; for the fact remains, notwithstanding, that in this ecstatic outburst, in so far as the attitude of those in power towards intellectual enterprise is concerned, Mao gave voice to a policy that is sane, sober, sound, sagacious; indeed, the only one that is right.

Plato, as far back as twenty-two hundred years ago stressed the same point with more philosophic serenity:

"When the Persians, under Cyrus," he said, "maintained the due balance between slavery and freedom, they became, first of all, free themselves, and, after that, masters of many others. For when the rulers gave a share of freedom to their subjects and advanced them to a position of equality, the soldiers were more friendly towards their officers and showed their devotion in times of danger; and if there was any wise man amongst them, able to give counsel, since the king was not jealous but allowed free speech and respected those who could help at all by their counsel,—such a man had the opportunity of contributing to the common stock the fruit of his wisdom. Consequently, at that time all their affairs made progress, owing to

their freedom, friendliness and mutual interchange of reason." 15

In this treatise on the Nature, the End and the Purpose of University Studies, I may appear to have set goals too lofty to be achieved, standards too hard to be attained by a humanity imperfect in mind, weak of will, dominated by emotion, vexed by a thousand cares and fears, and plagued relentlessly by problems of livelihood and security, in a precarious world. Yet I remain convinced that the principles I have laid down in these pages, namely the acquisition of knowledge scientifically and philosophically profound, the cultivation of minds instilled with an instinctive, scientific and philosophical approach to all question with which they are confronted, the forging of wills dead to private interest, but alive and fervently dedicated to the public service, of characters courageous enough to become trusty, intrepid Keepers of the Public Conscience—I remain convinced, I say, that these principles enter into the very essence and substance of the Nature, the End and the Purpose of University Studies.

I firmly believe, therefore and profess that the inculcation of these ideals, from first to last, should remain the foremost preoccupation and duty of that Institution, whose very *raison d'être*, since its birth, has been the initiation of youth into intellectual enterprise, the steeling of wills in the unswerving choice of right, the furtherance of the growth of budding talents by urging them ever to pursue, unremittingly, the higher things of mind, the nobler aims of man, the loftier ends of life.

15. Plato: *The Laws*: Book III; The Loeb Classical Library Vol: 7, p. 225.

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