

THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE*

Alkis Kontos

When you start on your journey to Ithaca,
then pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.

.....

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.

C. Cavafy

Neither its origins nor its genesis are known to us. Both remain veiled in impenetrable anonymity and obscurity. Though its existence has always been precarious, its perpetuation, from epoch to epoch, is taken for granted; yet neither sovereign command nor rituals secure its continuity. Its history, in oracular fashion, discloses a myriad of visions and revisions without ever permitting them to crystallize in a single, precise, harmonious totality. Without ever lapsing into incoherence, it retains its enigmatic aura. Perhaps by nature, or force of circumstance, it is paradoxical, contradictory, elusive; a peculiarly unique way of life.

It is a life whose oceanic scope engulfs the silenced dreams, fears and prophecies of the past; it arches into the unborn future remaining firmly anchored into the demands of the present. Its continuity yields no uniformity, no convenient slogan. It evinces meaning, but no messages. Its past does not bind with the authority of tradition. Its temperament and mode of being cryptically allude to its hidden grandeur and potential heroism. Its fiercely intense, solitary individualism with a passion for the public space and a melancholy propensity toward the tranquility of contemplation reveals its inner, contradictory dimensions. Society, when convenient, celebrates, admittedly with a

* For Alexis and Pia, that they might experience the proud silence and the courage of the poetry of Ithaca.

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touch of discomfort and anxiety, its devotees; occasionally they are persecuted, mocked, ridiculed, killed; mostly, society ignores them with that absolute indifference reserved only for complete irrelevancies. They, at times, bow to society's visible power and honours. More frequently, they are lured and seduced by the tangible effectiveness of political power and the fabulous fetishism of the market place. They happily surrender. But mostly, they shroud themselves in paralyzing doubt and despair. Also, they do become, without shame, intoxicated with their self-centred importance and, in self-adoration, they seek the political and social instrumentalities by which to implement their visions which are easily translatable into schemes of fanatical righteousness and excessive narcissism.

Such are the adventures, dangers, temptations, illusions and delusions of those who pursue the intellectual life.

The historical stage admits the intellectual life into its drama relatively late. War heroes had arrived already, followed by poets who immortalized their deeds in the field of violence. Only then did the intellectuals emerge in the guise of philosophers.¹ Of course, the merchants were there from the beginning, supreme rulers of the market place. Historical documentation registers the momentous entry of this new *dramatis persona*. The founding act of the intellectual life as philosophy, in the West, is identical with the strange phenomenon of Socrates: a bizarre figure in the market place.

The Socratic enigma is rooted in the dualism of a proclaimed radical ignorance and the avowed commitment to pursue knowledge. Socrates' radical ignorance would not have been problematic had it been cured by his desire for knowledge. But this was not the case. His radical and profound ignorance persisted, rendering difficult, if not impossible, the meaning of wisdom.

Socrates, in essence, has no philosophic doctrine to enunciate, no theoretical perspective to proclaim. He writes nothing, he advocates no set of ideas, no system of thought. He is loyal to his quest for truth as much as he is to his self-knowledge of total ignorance. His insistence to engage and consume his life in a dialogical quest for knowledge inverts from the beginning the image of the intellectual as the knower and shatters any possibility of locating the official sources of knowledge: no institutional, educational structure of truth exists. Socrates is thrown into the everyday life, having exhausted, in utter dissatisfaction, the authoritative route to knowledge. No guru, no teacher, no book does he find. The quest never ends, never does it become a conquest. The philosopher's experience of the quest transforms it into an exhilarating odyssey, an end in itself. Yet nowhere do we hear Socrates say that the so cherished and treasured truth does not exist.

A careful and systematic study of the historical Socrates, even if it were to resolve conflicting evidence — Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes — and identify Socrates' inner motive and meaning, cannot erase the problematic character,

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the paradoxical features and episodes of his whole life and, finally, his last public performance, his death. The relentless questioning, the profound, conscious denial and avoidance of an articulated position, cannot but fascinate and irritate. Here we have Socrates the teacher without a teaching, the extraordinary in the most ordinary. Socrates' concrete simplicity and great complexity are disturbing to the intellectuals. They cannot renounce him or ignore him; neither can they nor are they willing to emulate him.

Perhaps it is the nemesis of Socratic irony that the founding act of the intellectual life, by the very personality of its founder, did not consolidate its future performance under the aegis of an explicit testament. Intellectuals have as their beginning a dilemma. No patron saint guides their thoughts and choices. The demonic and the divine agonize them from the start.

It is this deeply haunting, disturbing and intriguing beginning, this paradoxical and enigmatic Socratic image that some tend to romanticize, exaggerate, distort and, lending it, incorrectly, Plato's authoritative approval they project it as the archetype of the intellectual life: contemplative purism.

Contemplative purism affirms, quite erroneously, the intellectual life as an endless voyage in the boundless sea of eternity. Intellectuals are seen as detached from external reality. The world of the mind gains a privileged status, as if all else is false. Lucidly mystical, the intellectuals' world resides outside history and its violence. Essence, fully spiritualized, is pitted against the whole of appearance. The intellectuals' mind is faithfully fixed upon other worlds, worlds of beauty and order, without history, struggle and anguish. Intellectuals are urged, in this view, to think like true believers and not to succumb to the temptations of the world, to remain pure, untouched by the horror of the suffering children of time.

The intellectuals are imagined as trans-worldly creatures whose beautiful souls are immune to, and distant from the real world. Their minds and thoughts are autonomous and self-sufficient. Thought and action are absolutely severed. They become antagonistic, irreconcilable and truly antinomic. The intellectual life offers a privileged escape from the pressures and demands of the world; it becomes the perfect refuge and grand rationalization. Ascetic mystics are more in touch with the world than these so grotesque, irrelevant creatures of intangible thoughts and passive minds, hearts and bodies.

This is one scenario of intellectual men and women in bad faith, worshipping a false Socrates under the presumed priesthood of Plato, oblivious to the vibrant, sensual transparency of the Greek sun under which no such insult to the world could have been conceived.

The central point of the Socratic experience that concerns us here is this: Socrates did introduce a dimension in the intellectual life which cannot constitute, in its significance, the totality of its meaning. The Socratic example has injected in the image of the intellectual life a paradox by its noble but perverse

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consistency, its inversions and reversions stabilized only in the specific personality that acted them out.

The Socratic way of life and fate are the source of a mood in intellectual life from which a serious, fascinating and, at times, confusing ambiguity emanates.

Plato struggled successfully with the Socratic dimension. He comprehended Socrates' unique and immense talent for mid-wifery, but he also sensed his ultimate limitation and sterility. With Plato, the intellectual is situated in a tense, potentially dangerous interaction with the polis. For Plato the tension between knowledge and power, truth and opinion, is embodied in the philosopher's voyage *in* the world. These tense, antagonistic but inescapable dualisms constitute the core of Plato's political philosophy.

Plato's unique and historic contribution to the meaning and significance of the intellectual life is that he totalized existential and intellectual features of Greece previously thriving only in disparity. He realized that they could not be unified. He located them in his brilliant totalization and liberated himself from the fascinating yoke of Socrates. Now, in Plato, the intellectual is the articulator of a world view, a cosmology. The intellectual life becomes a state of being, an orientation. Theorizing is open to the indeterminacy of experience and meaning; but a solid centre exists. The vast oceans of time are navigated with elegance and purpose, with creative discrimination. These new navigators, the philosophers, could transmit part of their visions, adventures and experience in the discourse of lucid minds. Other parts must be uttered in poetic allegories and metaphors in order to be experienced vicariously by others, until they, in their turn, by inspiration or of necessity, will come to navigate the vast oceans of the polis. The intellectual now passionately engages in the public space. The contemplative mood, that intelligent and so necessary solitary hour, is situated in the most individualistic, private recesses of the thinker; it is not extinguished. Yet it neither exhausts nor does it determine the whole of the intellectual life. It only constitutes an aspect, indispensable, enriching, of the intellectual's life.

The intellectual armed with the vision of the imagination, the penetrating, comprehensive totalizations of theory and the poetic articulation is now, in Plato's cosmos, simultaneously, the hero, the poet, the philosopher, who declares war on the merchants. This is an unprecedented war: it constitutes the life of the allegory of the cave. The intellectuals must maintain their integrity and dignity. Their solitary being could easily succumb to loneliness. The temptations of power and luxury are strong. The futility of the effort can be overwhelming. Plato the intellectual, who has now politely refuted and in essence transcended the sterility of the otherwise inspiring Socratic image, has reinterpreted and transvaluated the past as well as his existential predicament, becomes the new educator of Greece. Plato appropriates and transforms Homer's meaning and lesson. Only then is he self-enthroned as the educator of

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educators. Now the intellectuals have a precise and immense task: to educate the unphilosophic city. But also to continue educating themselves. Their philosophy cannot be allowed to become an ossified system. The Socratic odyssey is now given structure and substance of public significance, even though its innermost essence remains highly individualistic and solitary.

The intellectual, according to the thematic interpretation I give to the Platonic paradigm, situated in the specificity of an existential predicament, does not seek a comprehensive, once and for all answer to his/her condition. If this were the case, intellectuals would be nothing else but religious believers who seek and find the true answers at the feet of their benevolent god.

Intellectuals do not open their eyes only in order to close them again blissfully under the auspices of the thoughtless murmur of mechanized doctrines. The proselytized do not theorize, interpret, interrogate, think, develop and assert a perspective on the world. The intellectuals do.

Plato's insistence that the intellectual-philosopher is the educator par excellence, profound as it is, cannot be taken literally today. Plato is correct in asserting the dangers of political office and power — the programmatic non-dialectical implementation of thought — but the philosophers' educational task — the Academy — as their public role has been tarnished drastically in modern culture. Its transfigurations and monstrous deformations constitute the tragedy of modern times.

The difference between Plato's Academy and the modern university is as great as that between Plato's genius and the mediocrity of that modern functionary, that merchant of ideas, the professor.² The university ought to be the appropriate milieu for the nourishment of intellectuals. It is not. The contemporary university is a bureaucratic institution structurally tied to the established order of society. The university, it is true, is not identical to any other bureaucratic institution. It is incorrect to compare it to a factory where products are processed. It is less oppressive than the atmosphere of a factory. Its monotony is less destructive. But being less dehumanizing does not render it human or creative. It fails in its historic mission.

Though still, at particular times and in certain areas, universities allow the fleeting emergence of creative intellectual discourse, they do so by default. The prevailing, intentional policies and attitudes are those appropriate to academic mediocrity and parasitic scholarship. Footnotes, that panoply of scholarship, become the emblem of academic "creativity". Universities are fundamentally not so much, as the radicals think, the puppets of the establishment that lend respectability to various "objective" scholarly endeavours; rather, they are the grand refuge of the "educated philistines" — Nietzsche's phrase — who pretend to be the guardians of our cultural achievements and mental development.

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Obviously, not every member of Plato's Academy was a brilliant, original mind. Nor each original, great mind was instantly acknowledged as such and given its due respect. After Plato's death an insignificant relative of his takes over the Academy; Aristotle departs. The most crucial difference between then and now is that now, the exceptional scholar is lost, obscured in the sea of mediocrity, in the market of opinions. Furthermore, the modern university suffers from its size and the confusion between teaching either as an activity meant to initiate the young to great ideas and to critical thinking, or as proselytizing, rendering them meek echoes of one's self. It is the exaggerated, fetishistic attachment to books and libraries that mystifies the academic life. There is greater truth in the caricature of the academic than we suspect or we are willing to admit. The unreality of the academic realm of ideas and the irrelevancy of the effete academic who, in essence, is the modern bureaucrat of ideas, ideas which belong to others, which were the creative, lived experience of others constitute a pantomime, a mimicry of genuine intellectual activity.

When Plato warned us that the intellectuals' worse enemy is not the un-philosophical polis — yes, the polis can be their mortal enemy — but themselves, he prophesied the fate of intellectual life in the hands of modern academics.

Plato also warned us of the unholy alliance between wisdom and power which can only foster tyranny. Such would be another scenario of intellectual bad faith: the violent, forceful, artificial creation of what can only be voluntary, individualistic, self-determined. As the intellectual betrays his/her task when passively abstaining from the affairs and destiny of the world so does he/she when the meaning of the intellectual life is treated as tantamount to a fierce, frantic crusade to intellectualize the whole universe.

The tension and ambivalence of the intellectuals regarding their impact on the world is central to Plato's political philosophy and his resolution to this anguished predicament stands as a corrective to the Socratic example and experience. It also, cryptically, intimates a hidden, tragic dimension: the lucid conviction that indeed the scheme of things could be otherwise. Underneath Plato's philosophic tranquility exists the restless passion for an absolute reorganization, a tempting madness for total change.. This is contained by reason and metaphor. Like a wild beast it is caged but never politicized.

Of all great thinkers since Plato, Hegel is the one who, in his historiosophy, exorcizes this possibility completely. Action, the making of history, precedes its understanding. The philosopher arrives at the scene to interpret, to bestow meaning, to decipher the oracle of History. Minerva's owl spreads its wings not like reckless, impatient young Icarus against the luminous sun. Only when the day's creation has been completed do the springs of wisdom begin to flow. After the creation, unlike god who rests, the activity of the logos commences to grace chaos and incoherence with unity and order.

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Plato managed to keep in abeyance the desire to create *ab initio* and thus transform thought, the Idea, completely into action without residue and without regret. He knew of the danger; he sensed the adventure. The perfect circle could be visualized but could not be realized. The contemplative mood provided a silent catharsis of the twilight of the cave-polis as much as the poetic expression offered, in its logos, a catharsis of the secret, all too human, dream of the imagination: to create a totally other world. Contemplation and poetry constitute for Plato the completely private and the public modes of the therapeutic exorcising of the intellectual life. The latter, in perfect reciprocity, playfully civilizes contemplation and poetry so that the polis could receive them never fully knowing or suspecting their true educator: the authentic philosophic intellect.

With Hegel thought and action are chronologically inverted. Theorizing, the expression of thinking, becomes, after the fact, a philosophy of history. The intellectual, unlike the non-intellectual, understands the motion of the world, the meaning of which is put into a philosophic narrative. The world is not re-created but rather re-discovered through the active mind. Hegel is the idealist-purist, not Plato.

If education for Plato was a dynamic form of action, of creation, for Hegel the philosophic narrative was a restorative mode of comprehending the meaning of the fragmented whole, history's true movement, a veritable phenomenology, the bacchanalian glory of the mind.

The panoramic observation of the mind after the battle of the day, as posited by Hegel suffered a Promethean onslaught by the impatient, political Marx. The famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach reopens Plato's cryptic tension and seeks a new, more satisfactory relation between thought and action. Neither the Hegelian narrative nor Plato's therapeutic satisfy Marx. The world offers itself to be moulded, if only properly understood.

The mind's understanding of the world is inadequate when executed from afar. A new, dialectical unity is advocated. Thought is invited to enter the world, to escape its confinement and seclusion.

In a single, momentous, magical gesture, Marx imposes a specific, tangible and measurable task on both, the workers of the hands and the workers of the head. The intellectuals' tasks are no longer abstract, distant and unhealthily autonomous. The new imperative is to achieve a transformative interpretation of the world, one which by its very truth can be fully substantiated and validated in praxis.

That Marx occasionally was more ambiguous and indeterminate about thought and action, about voluntarism and mechanistic action we should have no doubt. But it is also certain that the tenor of his whole thought asserts a rigid politicization of the mind. The old, classical dilemmas are now transformed into problems. And for Marx problems have solutions.

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With Marx the intellectuals have the touch of secular prophets; theory leads into action, formulating the channels of transformation and social change. As much as Machiavelli loathed contemplative, effeminate minds, tormented by self-imposed indecision which wasted historic opportunities, so did Marx despise that mortification of the mind, that nightmare of the phantoms of the mind which obscured and mystified the concrete, scientifically lucid, humanist intervention in the real world.

The intellectuals must, now, become revolutionaries. Theorizing and the dynamics of reality are as intimately connected as scientific knowledge is connected to the laws of Nature. It is in Marx that we find the prototype of the intellectual as radical ideological activist, the opposite of the contemplative purist. The intellectual becomes an ideologue. Intellectualism is mechanized. A fixed truth is appropriated which can be programmatically implemented. The realm of thought now has specific boundaries and a mapped out route. It is a closed system.

The intellectual life is propaedeutic to the discovery of a method of acting which springs from the subscription to a certain doctrine. The intellectual life is viewed as needing the gravitational pull toward action in order to complete itself, to humanize it. The intellectual life, in itself, is an inadequate life devoid of redeeming qualities. Without its practical counterpart it remains sealed in its lifeless abstraction, a fragment, a form of dehumanized existence.

Similar to the radical view and the tangible demands that it imposes upon the intellectual life is the view of the intellectual as the liberal civic activist. The intellectuals' role is that appropriate to the intelligent, well-informed, privileged citizen. The intellectual life becomes identical with the life of the active, concerned citizen epitomized in the active, civic humanist. Intellectuals are the active advocates of honourable, noble causes. Signing petitions and manifestoes exhausts their energy and appeases their conscience.

The other-worldliness of the contemplative purist leaves the status quo unchallenged. The structure of the society does not concern such purists. It is not that the purists believe that nothing can be done to ameliorate human suffering. They are not defeatists. They simply do not see it within their intellectual province to act.

The radical activist substitutes energy for thought. Immediate, direct action, mobilization, organization are the primary tasks. The radical believes that plunging into the ocean is the best practice in learning how to swim. Preliminary thinking and learning are manifest signs of procrastination. Of course the polar opposite is equally pathetic. The individual who assumes that he/she can become a swimmer without ever setting foot in water.

The humanist activists function within the limits of legal protest. They are philanthropists with causes. They emulate the frenzy of the activist and rejoice in the rationalized wisdom of their compromise. They transform the in-

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lectual life into sophisticated social work. They even lack the courage of the true missionary. They safeguard their security. After all, they are reasonable people.

Perhaps the fate of the intellectuals will remain that of the high priest or court jester; of the effete aesthete or crude crusader as long as intellectuals themselves suffer from a severe confusion about their identity — their omnipotence and impotence — and as long as intellectuals and non-intellectuals tend to identify intelligence and sophistication devoid of expertise with the essence of the intellectual life. So far, in this essay, I have attempted to disentangle the intellectual life from a certain web of confusion and inauthenticity. Though I rejected directly and explicitly some images of the intellectual life, I have only suggested obliquely aspects of its authenticity. Now I turn to a more explicit statement regarding what the intellectual life is.

The intellectual life defies any precise, exhaustive definition. It is a state of being, a lived experience injected with meaning from within; it is not a tangible object bound by its clear, visible, exterior form. But unlike other states of being, worlds of the interior, the intellectual life is inherently ambiguous and its manifestations are frequently conditioned by its socio-historical times and circumstances. Certainly it is amenable to clarification.

The intellectual life is the state of being of particular individuals, of a certain personality, temperament and mode of thinking. The intellectual like all other individuals, is rooted in a particularity: an historical era, a specific society, a culture, a language. Like some other individuals, the intellectuals proceed to question the world, to wonder about it and their particularity in terms of meaning. But the intellectuals, unlike others, are intensely individualistic, existential, whose lived experience is a constant, continuous mediational theorizing between the particular and the universal. The intellectual demands a meaningful existential totality, not a systemic whole or a mere set of answers. The intellectual differs from the scientist, the religious believer, and the artist, though there are great affinities between intellectuals and artists.

The scientific quest for understanding and explanation and the religious quest for theodicy are alien to the intellectual life's interpretive performance. The intellectual's particular predicament, existential space and time, is never assimilated in a larger unit, in a universal category or law. The particular is never subsumed or fully transcended. There is no unity between the particular and the universal; there can be between them only a precarious affinity.

The intellectual affirms, negates, rejects. The intellectual's interpretive voyage is, in its most strict existential sense, a voyage in the interior, an individualistic odyssey, a self-reflective establishment of the ground upon which to found personal identity and an entry into the world.

This is the most esoteric, privatized, contemplative moment of the intellectual life, not an end in itself but the beginning. Here the intellectuals

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simultaneously, passionately engage in their worldly existence but also restlessly rebel against its structure. Attracted to the facticity of vibrant life, they rebel against denied possibilities of freedom. This is the root of their ambiguity as well as their difference from the artists. The latter counter-create. Their rebellion is exhausted in the objectification-exteriorization of the artistic expression. The scientist cannot rebel under the enslaving light of the facts of discovery. The believers cannot rebel without sinning. The intellectuals cannot think without rebelling.

The essence of the intellectual life is not then an exploration of or mystical encounter with the world. Nor is it a withdrawal from it. It is a reconstruction, recreation of the meaning of a concrete particular, an individual life, affirmed and asserted in the world as such, against the actual, historical condition of the world.

The intellectual's predisposition is not simply a proclivity toward thought and abstraction, but a vital engagement with the world's actuality. Intellectuals do not live in a vacuum. Their active, lucid minds interact with an external, real world. This interaction combines the imaginative dimension of the artistic creation, the rigour of the scientific inquiry and reasoning with the clarity, comprehensiveness, and adventure of self-knowledge and active creation of our condition of existence — the interpretation of the human drama and the merciless interrogation of history.

The intellectual, unlike the romantic dreamer-thinker, bookish individual who trembles in fear and terror at the sheer sound and sight of life, desires life in its concreteness and in its totality. The intellectual is not the individual who never had any experience of life, who like a virgin mind engages in substitutes and fantasies. The intellectual life is the life of actual, lived, vital experiences raised to full consciousness under the luminous auspices of the imagination and the theoretical dynamism of the mind. Such is the way in which sensuality, intelligence and insight are given meaning and elegance. Flesh and concreteness are not renounced and spiritualized but are blessed with eloquence and comprehensive universality in order to tell the human story in its full depth.

The intellectual begins from a highly personal, individualistic predicament and perspective. Just as aspects of existence must in private self-reflection be interpreted and integrated into a meaningful totality, so must the past of the intellectual life, of that unique passion, be interpreted. The mind and life thought of the luminaries of the past must be studied, articulated and experienced.

Just as Collingwood insisted that historical knowledge is self-knowledge, knowledge of the limits of human potential and a measure of its greatness, so it is with the past of the intellectual life.

But unlike the diligent, faithful student of history or the meticulous archaeologist, the intellectual's past is buried in the silence of the dead without

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testament or explicit directives; only mere fragments, obscure voices are available. The intellectual must plunge into the ocean of the past in a creative gesture of interpretation. In a monumental, imaginative monologue³ the meaning and truth of the past must be re-created and then united with time present and the promise of the future. This monologue founds and discloses the structure of the intellectual life: its rebellion and critical spirit, its wisdom, its ambiguity and passionate commitment.

The existential and experiential self-interpretation of the intellectual is a totally solitary, private, individualistic act. The archetypes of the past, their voices, their re-created story, permit a constructive rupture of the silence of the past and of the intellectual's privatized, utter solitude. With this rupture the intellectual completes the metaphysical grounding of the self. The intellectual remains immensely individualistic and genuinely ambiguous: private and public, contemplative and active. Intellectuals are so adamantly individualistic that even among themselves they cannot form a cohesive group. Perhaps Malraux was correct when he indicated the irreconcilability of intellectuals and authority (*Man's Fate*). Anarchistic, rebellious in temperament they can serve the public but they will obey none.

The monological exploration-re-creation of the past provides the intellectuals with the symbols of their articulation. Personages of the past are signs, ideas, characters in a drama. It is not so much that the intellectuals cannot function without reference to them but that it is convenient and meaningful to refer to them be it in praise or critique.

The intellectual life possesses no immediate, direct relevance to the practical affairs of the world. Its essence is the lucidity of the mind; the intelligent allegiance to the truth; the courageous, wise rebellion against the inertia of society. It bears witness, past and present, and judges the inhumanity of history.

The intellectuals speak out as the guardians of the logos of the imagination, the conscience of the polis, the castigators of its dormant consciousness and its damaged life.

The intellectuals' passion for freedom and truth, their alertness of mind, engage them with the world in an active, constant interaction. The intellectuals have a responsibility toward the world, but they are not responsible for the world's woes. Nietzsche told us that it takes an ocean to absorb a dirty river. The intellectuals cannot be that ocean. No one alone can, except mythic heroes and non-existing gods. But the intellectuals can be a clean, lucid river flowing into the dirty, cruel ocean of History. Many would say: this is not enough. It does not feed the hungry, it does not liberate the oppressed. The intellectuals know this already.

The intellectual life cannot be either fully private or fully public. It is uniquely marginal: it exists in two universes. Their common root is the in-

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tellectual's experience. The significance of both is the meaningful, poetic utterance of truth, its affirmative universality.

This constitutes the very soul of the intellectual life. That it is impotent against the oppressive structure of society is a well known fact. But whatever force can penetrate and overthrow such structure warrants the enlightening alliance of the intellectual life, its guidance. Otherwise, brute force would be challenging brute force. One form of oppression would succeed another. Darkness shall prevail.

Uttering the truth does not destroy the world of lies. It does prevent its total supremacy. And this is a good beginning. This indispensable beginning is the authentic task of those committed to the ambiguous blessing of the intellectual life, the Archimedean point of a non-intellectual world.

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Notes

1. I treat philosophers and intellectuals as identical. Any sophisticated, erudite, cultured individual who can think is not an intellectual. Not anyone who can run is an athlete.
2. Exceptions exist. Ironically, the greatest philosopher of this century, Heidegger, was an academic.
3. Some would like us to believe in a dialogue. Animosities among intellectuals are quite common and fierce. Unanimity is absent among them. Friendships do not stem from the mere fact of intellectualism. Think of these encounters: Plato and Homer, Weber and Marx, Marx and Hegel, Nietzsche and Plato. No conversation would take place. Consider these broken associations: Sartre-Camus, Sartre-Merleau-Ponty. It is the monological aspect that allows the creative articulation.