

Intellectuals: a Story from Enlightenment to the Modern World.

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Abstract

This study examines and compares different understandings of intellectuals in Enlightenment, and in the thoughts of Gramsci and Foucault who gained new insights to the issue. In short, this study is the story of the changing role of the intellectual in the modern world, and it questions the position of the contemporary intellectual in the modern market economy.

The Intellectual and Enlightenment

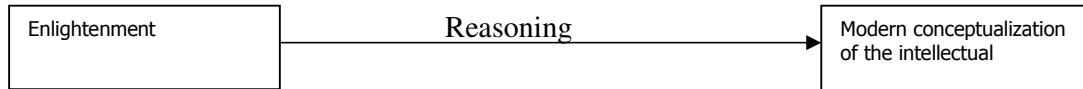
Do intellectuals construct a large group, or are they a very limited elite? Do they form their own social class, or are they a part of, or a tool of another class? Or are they leaders of ideologies and if so for whom?

Whatever those answers may be, modern thought describes the intellectual as the one who thinks freely, and makes his decisions in the light of his own mind, knowledge and ethics. The intellectual has the status of a leader in the modernist conceptualization, as his function is to know what others do not, but need to learn. The high position of the intellectual in the social hierarchy can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when the only literate people and therefore the only people to produce and pass on literate knowledge were the clergy, in Europe and the mollahs in the Moslem world. In some properties of the modernist conceptualization, we can observe a continuation of the concept of the individual of Enlightenment: Kant in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' declares that:

“Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its course lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’ - that is the motto of Enlightenment.”(Kant, 1972, pp.3)

Enlightenment and modern conceptualization of the intellectual:

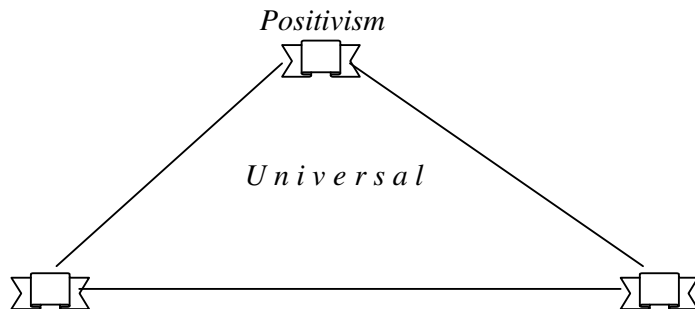
Here we have the sublimation of human reasoning. The cult of human reasoning forms one of the basic supports of the legitimacy and the respectability of the intellectual as a being who produces knowledge as a result of his or her reasoning. We have a direct link between the intellectual and Enlightenment, which is reasoning: Use your reasoning to discover and tell the truth; use your reasoning to explore and define every thing and all happenings in the world.



We can also find a similarity between the leftist intellectual (in the sense that Lukacs and Gramsci understood) and the scholar of the 18th Century, who deals with law and justice. The similarity is the (so to speak) universality of the concepts that the two parties symbolize: The philosopher of law suggests what is necessary universally, and what should be practiced universally, which are: natural law and natural rights. The same understanding can be traced back to both leftist and liberal intellectuals who explicitly or implicitly claim that their arguments are universal and therefore universally beneficial for everyone. This is not a surprising case because otherwise, if the intellectual's suggestions are controversial then he cannot be influential.

Effects of Modernism:

Declaring the universal is the common understanding of Enlightenment, Positivism, and Modernism. The comprehension of the intellectual described above totally fits the Positivist paradigm.



Natural law defends, natural rights

*the modern intellectual who knows
and represents the universal*

Gramsci, who also gave inspiration to post Marxists, had as a Marxist, modernist notions as well. Gramsci was an ardent socialist who had breathed the winds of the 1917 revolution, was

also a critically thinking leftist. His properties naturally affect his views on intellectuals: he conceptualizes two types of intellectual, Traditional and Organic.

Traditional intellectuals are the ones with specific qualities and because of such qualities they stand as an autonomous group in society, independent from the hegemonic group. Gramsci's notion of a traditional intellectual reminds one of the 'free-floating intelligentsia' notions of Mannheim: a social stratum in modern society, relatively free of economic class interests and capable of acting as a creative, political force.

In his essay 'What is Man?' Gramsci argues that regarding *Organic* intellectuals:

"It is essential to conceive of man as a series of active relationships (a process) in which individuality – while is of the greatest importance- is not the sole element to be considered.'" and continues to say that "The individual does not enter relations with other men in opposition to them, but through an organic unity with them, because he becomes a part of social organisms of all kinds from the simplest to the most complex." (Gramsci, A.1959, pp77) These relationships that individuals enter "are not mechanical but active and conscious" so much so that man modifies himself "to the extent that he changes or modifies the whole complex of relationships of which he is the nexus". Gramsci concludes : ".....if individuality is the whole mass of these relationships, the acquiring of a personality means the acquiring of consciousness of these relationships, and changing it means changing the whole mass of relationships." (Gramsci, 1959 .pp.778)

In Gramsci, we can observe an understanding of opposition to the individual, and also to collectivity (society.) A reflection of this understanding appears to me as an opposition to the intellectual and to the masses. At this point a distinction begins to form: individuality versus collectivity. The intellectual is a reflection of the individual in the cultural life, which resists homogenization, which symbolizes 'quality' against 'quantity, numbers and masses'.

In Gramsci's status we can see another opposition as well, the understanding of the importance of collectivity. As a socialist, Gramsci conceptualizes the individual (and the intellectual) together with his relationship to society, and society's relationship to him. According to Gramsci every man has the potential to become an intellectual, but in society not everyone shows this potential. The main reason for this situation is that we are living in a

class society and because of the structure of class society, not everyone has the chance to reach the means to produce knowledge.

Gramsci also asserts regarding Organic intellectuals: “Every social group coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function, not only in the economic but also social and political fields.” (Gramsci, A.1959 “The Formation Intellectuals” pp.180)

According to Gramsci every social group in the society creates its own intellectuals, to define, and defend the group’s own interests and demands.

This analysis shows two different things:

- 1) Gramsci comes to the view that the working class also has the power to produce its own intellectuals to enlighten its way and also to lead them. This point does not stray too far from Lenin’s discourse on intellectuals in “What is to be done”.
- 2) These organic relations between intellectuals and groups could also be carried on in a new platform of demand and supply relationships in the markets of current society. I will comment further on this point in the final part of this paper, headed ‘*A Note on Market and Production Relations*’.

Foucault and his thoughts on intellectuals:

Foucault, as one of the most important postmodern philosophers who narrow the intellectual’s function in the political sphere, defines the political intellectual as: the person who uses his knowledge and relations with truth in the political struggle against power.

We can say that Foucault’s analysis of the intellectual generally deals with the West and Western history. He also studied Gramsci and his works on the phenomenon of the intellectual and on revolution.

Revolution is a radical and total change of the whole system and requires:

- i) a theoretical analysis of the existing system that will be changed,
- ii) a strategy for the revolution and
- iii) a vision for the new system.

This means that revolution needs intellectuals in the modernist sense, people conceptualized as professionals of knowledge, who know the truths that others do not. This understanding

puts intellectuals in a position further and higher than the crowd and assumes that they know and tell the universal truth.

Post modern objections to modern conceptualization of the intellectual.

In my point of view, post modern objections to the modern conceptualization of the intellectual in general and Foucault's objections to modern conceptualization of the intellectual in particular can be classified as such:

- 1) the critique of the 'universal rationality'
- 2) the critique of the understanding of 'universal truth' or 'one truth'
- 3) the critique of the modernity in general.

Foucault depicts Voltaire, an Enlightenment philosopher, as a typical example of the traditional intellectual. According to Foucault, a generally traditional intellectual (particularly Voltaire), locates himself somewhere outside the crowd, criticizes the crowd from the outside, and builds his critiques on the 'universal reasoning' and declares his critiques as normative and global theory. Traditional intellectuals construct a global social theory, a 'grand theory' to give answers to specific questions: an explanation of the world and what the world should be.

Foucault strongly criticizes traditional intellectuals. According to Foucault, history shows us that the suggestions, prophecies and predictions of the intellectuals and the facts and realities that people have experienced, are not coherent or consistent with each other. This situation constructs a legitimation crisis for the intellectuals as leaders.

But in essence, Foucault's criticisms to modern and traditional intellectuals are not just the result of various disappointments, (such as those that come after certain large scale revolution attempts like the Soviet Union), rather, his critics depend on a rethinking of 'power' and 'truth' but (most important for his analysis), the relationships between people and truth (in theory and practice), deconstruction of the notions of 'the theorists' and the 'practices'.

"My intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of the truth teller, and the truth telling as an activity:...who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power... with the question of the importance of telling the truth, knowing who is able to tell the truth, and knowing why we should tell the

truth, we have the roots of what could call the ‘critical’ tradition in the West” (Foucault, 2001,pp.iv)

Foucault simply wants to use daily and local practices and facts, instead of prophecies and predictions. “ ... it is fact that we have repeatedly encountered, at least superficially at a superficial level, in the course of the most recent times, an entire thematic to the effect that it is not a theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality, not books but money, etc.” and continues “but it also seems to me that over and above, and arising out of this thematic, there is something else to which we are witness, and which we might describe as an insurrection of subjugated knowledges”¹ (Foucault, 1980a ,pp.81)

As far as I understand, here Foucault’s point is to return to knowledge and life, essentially to ‘life knowledge’. I believe this notion of ‘life knowledge’ constructs the essence of his understanding of theory and practice relations and his genealogy.

Foucault gives the name genealogy to “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and make use of this knowledge tactically today.”(Foucault, 1980a, pp.83) Genealogical researches, he says, are also ‘anti-sciences’ that seeks to eliminate the tyranny of globalizing discourses with their hierarchy and the privileging of a theoretical avant-garde” (Foucault, 1980a, pp.85)

Notions of ‘life knowledge’ and ‘subjugated knowledge’ with the telescope understanding of theory and practice, also constitutes the mainstay point for Foucault, to break the (oppositional and) separated positions of the (thinking, knowing, theorizing and representor) leader intellectual and the (represented and) led masses. In his interviews with Deleuze in “Intellectuals and Power”, they declare the end of representation.

Both Foucault and Deleuze are interested in ‘lateral connections’ and ‘network of relays’ that go beyond the representational paradigm. Deleuze says: “a theorizing intellectual, focus is no

¹Foucault is identifying subjugated knowledge as “those blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism- which obviously draws upon scholarship- has been able to reveal.” (Foucault,1980a, pp45)

longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness,” and “those who act and struggle are no longer represented, either by a group or union that appropriates the right to stand as their conscience.” and he declares that “...representation no longer exists.” (Foucault, 1980b, pp.260) At this point we can also ask the question: how can someone who lives in a representative democracy, declare that representation is finished? But I choose to understand the ‘representation’ here, as meaning ‘the representing activity of the intellectual, who knows in the name of others’.

Foucault celebrates the masses who no longer need the intellectuals to gain knowledge for themselves and declares the intellectuals role “ is no longer to place himself somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express the hidden truth to the collectivity.

I wonder if this declaration could be understood as the end of or the death of the intellectual as we know him up until Foucauldian times. Between his lines, there is a critique of Marxist ‘universality’ and the attempt to empower each resistance in its difference.

In Foucault’s interviews with Deleuze, Foucault investigates knowledge from an unusual standpoint, as practice, tactic and intervention. In this context, Foucault and Deleuze, revise the intellectuals’ role in militant practice. “The intellectual is no longer commissioned to play the role of advisor to the masses and critique of ideological content, but rather to become one capable of providing instruments of analysis.”(Foucault. 1980a, pp.12)

Deleuze, says, “For us the intellectual theorist, has ceased to be a subject, a representing and representative consciousness.... there is no longer any representation, there is only action, theory’s action, the action practiced in the relationship of networks” (Foucault. 1980a pp.206-207)

Foucault names his new intellectual as a specific intellectual: one who no longer speaks as a master of truth, justice and its content, nevertheless, one to simply discover the truths of power and privilege. The role of the theorist is therefore not to formulate a global analysis of the ideologically coded, but rather to analyze the specificity of the mechanisms of power and to build little by little, ‘strategic knowledge’. Foucault also internalizes the specific intellectual by himself as also having his own role in life and continues, “What we have to present are instruments and tools that people might find useful. By forming groups specifically to make

these analyses, to wage these struggles by using these instruments or others, this is how in the end possibilities open up.” (“Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison” pp15)

Foucault’s and Deleuze’s ideas or utopias may become true (a kind of local resistance which autonomously and collectively constitutes a mosaic of a large resistance) if we have the number of intellectuals that they imagined. But since we do not, we have problems: we are living in stratified societies (in terms of socio-economic conditions, nationality, gender, etc.) where everyone does not have the chance to reach the means of literacy, let alone knowledge. I think the philosophers of the West may have difficulties in imagining what a 20% of illiteracy means socially and politically.

Other problematic questions are: how can small and disconnected resistances combine to become a sufficient resistance to problems that have global magnitude, such as environmental problems? How can small resistances stop the US government, from removing her signature from the Kyoto Agreement? Or how can they stop or prevent the wars in the world?

A Note on Market and Production Relations:

Societies are experiencing an established capitalism (especially in the West). In our societies, intellectuals are the ones who earn their living through ideas. This fact is a distinctive characteristic of the intellectuals of recent history as opposed to their predecessors. Since the second quarter of 19. century we see intellectuals as alternative people in the aristocracy, who have wealth, time and curiosity; we observe them as anti-industrial, self enclosed and pre modern. Examples of this kind of intellectual are mainly the figures in Enlightenment, and in kinds of establishments such as Cambridge and Oxford universities.

But the intellectual, as the one who earns his living through ideas, differs from his ancestors before modernism. There is a market for ideas, and intellectual products, so there are buyers and sellers. At this point we can remember one of the golden rules of economics, that: every demand creates its supply. So in our societies, there is an inevitable dilemma for intellectuals between resisting, conforming and interpreting. From this standpoint we may question not only the supporting ideologies of the existing system but also the ideologies of resistance. Are ideologies of resistance, really talking about resistance or are they only representative but impossible utopias to practice, that have the function to fill the scene of democracy? In the

market, are intellectuals subject to influence, control and even regulation, like the laborers and firms?

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