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Scholarship and Ideology*

By Bhikhu Parekh

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the modern university is the tremendous emphasis placed on research, on "expanding the frontiers of knowledge." The faculty has argued, and the university authorities have in many cases accepted, that research is the only worth-while academic activity and that the university largely exists simply to promote it. In its name the faculty has sometimes even ignored, with official connivance, many of its academic obligations. Although, from the standpoint of the university, teaching is more important, research has become a new industry, a new god whose directives, it is believed, only the illiterate could violate.

Conceptually and historically, research refers to the activity of discovering facts not hitherto known, or once known but subsequently forgotten. In its extended sense, it refers to a purposive investigation into the views of other writers on a given topic. Central to the concept of research is the idea of collecting information by investigation, by "looking up" a book or a document or "looking out" for certain phenomena in the laboratory. It is therefore an activity that is crucial to history, understood as an activity of reconstructing a past event or an epoch as fully and in as detailed a manner as possible. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any significant activity of a historian that does not involve research. To a slightly lesser degree, it is crucial to science. Whether he is a botanist or a zoologist or a physicist, a scientist is looking for new natural and experimental facts, and is thus engaged in

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research. But unlike a historian, facts are interesting to him not in themselves but only as instances, as falling into a general predictable pattern, for his primary concern is to construct a general theory. Now theorizing is not just, or even primarily, a matter of gathering facts, but largely one of sustained and critical reflection on them in order to elucidate and establish regular and orderly relations between them. Of course, hard, concentrated and imaginative thinking does not take place in a vacuum and one is therefore required to collect facts. That is to say, in the scientist's pursuit of knowledge, research (a more or less empirical activity) by itself is never enough, and needs to be supplemented by reflection (a non-empirical, and what earlier philosophers used to call a rational, activity). Speaking generally, the more theoretical a form of inquiry, the greater the role of reflection and lesser the role of research. And when a form of inquiry is purely theoretical—for example, some forms of mathematics and metaphysics—research plays very little role in it.

There are other areas where knowledge is expanded without much research. A novelist or a poet exploring new forms of expression is deepening our insight into human life or into the new possibilities of the literary medium, and yet no research need be involved. Or again, a philosopher who analyses concepts and draws distinctions between them often needs to do no more than sit in the armchair and think. His "source material" lies handy in ordinary language and experience, and often he does not have to look up or look out but only to look into his own experiences.

The point I am making is that knowledge is expanded and deepened and enriched in a variety of ways, of which research is not the only one or always even the most important. Research occurs in some but not in all inquiries, and for many of those in which it does occur, its significance often lies in its ability to generate or destroy a theory. Further, research does not go on only in the laboratory or in research surveys or in the archives or in the library. It goes on in interpersonal conversations as well. For example, a political philosopher, when discussing political events with a friend, may be observing how the latter interprets and describes them and how he uses certain words. Thus research is a complex activity that cannot be reduced to a single model.

When these limitations of research are ignored, and when it is seen as the only worth-while activity, or is defined in terms of a single model, or is divorced from its theoretical moorings and aspirations, certain unfortunate trends begin to arise. A writer might come to feel that he is not doing anything intellectually worth-while unless he is collecting new empirical facts. This danger is particularly great in disciplines like politics, sociology and anthropology, that have their feet in both the empirical and philosophical camp. A writer here might come to feel that he should give up an "abstract," "intuitive," "sub-
jective" and "speculative" approach to his discipline, and concentrate instead on studying it empirically—for example, by drafting a questionnaire, hiring a few research assistants, and "collecting" hard empirical data. But if his talents and interests lie elsewhere, he feels out of character in his new project, which therefore does no good to him or to the others in the field. Still determined, he might try his luck elsewhere by deciding to "dig out" some "interesting" facts about a deservedly forgotten past thinker. His plight is almost like that of a fat girl who will not wear anything but a mini skirt because this is the only thing accepted as a dress.

Even in those areas where empirical work is essential, a questionable approach may come to be adopted in the belief that facts must speak "for themselves," which as we shall presently see they never do. Collecting facts by indefatigable research may come to be seen as sufficient for illuminating a problem. For example, a student of international relations, concerned to understand, say, the behavior of the Secretaries of State, might go on to collect as much data about as many of them as he could, but would not want to concentrate on just one of them, intuitively enter into his perception of his role, and construct a sensitive, historical-biographical-sociological account. Such an attempt—to enter into his mind or to grasp his role subjectively and from within—is regarded as non-empirical, speculative, and not worth undertaking. And yet often such a procedure could illuminate the Secretary's behavior, and that of others like him, much more than a long list of tables and charts. Facts, scrupulously and diligently collected and stated with mechanical preciseness, still lack flesh and remain uncomprehended. It is amazing how in many research works one finds only a neat classification of data, but rarely a sustained argument or a reflective and critical analysis of their various possible interpretations.

An intellectual inquiry gets distorted not only when it is made to conform to a narrow and rigid conception of research, but also when research is divorced from its theoretical underpinnings. A kind of inquiry then arises that may be sanctioned by the prevailing academic consensus but that, in the ultimate analysis, has little intellectual justification.

Theory performs at least three important functions for research. First, it gives research its rationale. One searches facts because one wants, say, to arrive at a theory, or to falsify a theory, or to arbitrate between two or more conflicting theories. A theory provides a purpose, an objective to aim at, and thereby determines both the starting point and the terminus of the inquiry. Second, it guides one's selection of facts by indicating what facts are relevant and what not, and of those that are, which ones are significant and which not. Third, when confirmed by facts, a theory becomes an integral part of the existing fund
of knowledge, which it thereby enriches and expands. Theories are like tributaries that contribute their respective insights to a constantly expanding ocean of knowledge.

Now if the inquirer lacks a theory, his research suffers on all three counts. He does not know why he is collecting facts. Without a guiding purpose, since facts are in principle infinite, the inquiry has simply no end, no natural terminus. Like the individual in the classical liberal theory who had an insatiable appetite for power (Hobbes), or wealth (Locke), or pleasure (Bentham), or progress (J. S. Mill), the researcher continues aggressively and puritanically to accumulate more and yet more facts. It is suggestive that we often describe his activity as one of "gathering," "accumulating," and "aggregating" facts, as if facts like stones only need to be mechanically piled up. Logically, his ultimate ideal becomes either to discover every fact about every aspect of the universe so that nothing new or surprising will ever occur; or, more consistently, to keep digging, with the end continually receding, for newer and newer facts. Research, in its latter form, becomes an eternally necessary and self-perpetuating activity, since for every fact discovered, a few more are added to the growing pile of those needing to be discovered—that this fact was discovered by so and so at such and such a time in such and such a way. We could always ask and be required to answer if X really discovered it at this time, and in this way. If, therefore, following our researcher, we agreed to define knowledge only in terms of the number of facts known, we would constantly be increasing our ignorance!

Other implications of theory-less research are too obvious to need detailed consideration. A researcher without a theory lacks any principle of the significance of facts, and since facts cannot be evaluated in the absence of such a principle, each fact and piece of research comes to be considered "as good as" another; and the student tends to believe that as long as he is doing some research, no matter what, he is engaged in a worth-while activity. As a result, research projects remain unrelated and disparate, and there is no sense of an organic accumulation of knowledge, carried forward from stage to stage, the hallmark of the natural sciences. What is worse, many of these factomaniac researches come to have a disturbing and profoundly saddening air of futility about them. A fact is a fact only in the context of a theory. Countless events constantly occur and disappear in this vast cosmos of ours, and we never take any notice of them. It is only when one of them attracts our attention and comes to be considered interesting and worthy of our notice that it appears as a fact, an event invested with an interest and endowed with an intellectual dignity. As all judgments of worth and significance presuppose criteria, which in turn presuppose a general theory of the area concerned, if theoretical homework is poorly done, our judgment and treatment of facts suffers. We tend
to introduce shaky assumptions and poorly analyzed concepts, and ask muddled questions. The "facts" we thus collect and the relations we establish among them are therefore dubious and cannot be accepted by a serious theorist who, when these facts are relevant to his theory, will have to conduct the same inquiry all over again. This never happens in the natural sciences, where the researcher is not afraid of general theory, where so many established general theories are already available, and where, over the course of years, criteria of significance have been so securely and clearly evolved. There is widespread danger of waste and triviality in the social sciences, though again, not in all of them. It occurs less often in fairly well-established disciplines like economics than in relatively young, theory-suspicious and somewhat timid fields of political science, experimental psychology and social science.

A political scientist who researches into the dressing habits of politicians, a psychologist who asks what annoys people, and comes up, after several years of indefatigable research, with a list of fifty-five different things (such as a badly shaped beard, a hair in their food, and a fly on their plate), and a social scientist who, with the help of half a dozen research assistants, inquiries into the washing habits of the working-class women of a particular area in a small town, are all engaged in activities whose point is hard to see. Of course, no research in itself is trivial, but nor is it, in itself, significant. Like stones that a geologist collects, facts have to be seen in a context, and the context for all significant inquiries is their theoretical interest. Thus, for example, the research on the washing habits of the working-class families could become very interesting if one were trying to test, say, the theory that the working classes are the least mechanized section of the society; and similarly the research on the causes of annoyance could become interesting and worth-while if, for example, it was aimed at exploring the differences between the character of social classes or nations, or at examining the historical memories of the community that lead it to associate a hair or a fly with certain unsavory historical episodes, or at considering if the absence of a clear target in an increasingly bureaucratic society means that anger, a clearly directed emotion towards a specific object, degenerates into a diffused and grumbling annoyance. The point can be put schematically. Of any research one wants to ask and ought to be able to answer the following questions: First, what theoretical interest or problem has inspired this research? Second, what sort of general theory is it likely to give rise to? Third, is it likely to give rise to, to open up, a range of other interesting problems? If it fails on anyone or more of these three counts, its value is immediately suspect.

The decline of the intellectual

By intellectual I understand a person who takes a sustained and
knowledgeable interest in the problems of his society and civilization. His primary concern is to understand, preserve and enrich his civilization, whose ideas and values he articulates, refines and even creates. Any inquiry that has anything relevant to contribute towards the understanding of man and society has an interest for him. The findings of the natural sciences interest him if they throw light on the evolution of man, or on the possibility of the extinction of the species, or on the development of new technology, or on the way organized social life is lived. And similarly he takes a keen interest in the findings of other technical inquiries like the social sciences, philosophy and history. On the basis of the ideas drawn from various fields he constructs a synthetic perspective on his civilization. He may be a specialist in one particular area as well, but he need not be, and in any case it is not his scholarship that makes him an intellectual. Besides, though deeply interested in his society, he need not necessarily be politically active, although he might be if he thought it necessary. He inhabits that intermediate realm between pure theory and practice: he is interested in ideas but only as they relate to the organized social life; and unlike a politician he is interested in society not necessarily with a view to political action but primarily in order to preserve or change the ideas that dominate the consciousness and influence the behavior of his society. He is a custodian and a critic of the ideas and values, in a word, character, of his society and civilization. He studies it, defines, criticizes and re-creates it, exposes what is evil and humbug in it and defends and stands up for what is valuable.

In the past, the role of the intellectual was played by a number of groups, prominent among which were philosophers, theologians, historians and literary figures. Each wielded a distinctive and powerful medium of communication and a unique type of moral authority. The theologian spoke and acted on the basis of the deeply held religious beliefs of the members of his society, and commanded their reverence. The philosopher's strength lay in the realm of the intellect. He was regarded as someone who synthesized all arts and sciences into an intellectually fascinating weltanschauung. He thus wielded a type of authority over his contemporaries that came from their admiration and awe. The historian was seen as a person who explored the origins of his civilization and who therefore commanded respect for his deep familiarity with the inner springs of his society. He pointed out the great men of the past for his contemporaries to emulate; he drew lessons from the past, and dug out historical parallels for contemporary problems. He was thus expected to inspire, guide, advise, and caution. As for the literary figures they explored the deepest emotions of the human mind; and revealed and immortalized the anxieties and hopes of their society in a way that no one else could, and earned its affection and love. When all the four groups pulled together their energies and
different types of authority in a concerted attack on a society or a civilization, it was doomed.

In recent years a remarkable change has occurred that can only be described as the replacement of the intellectual by the expert. As this question is of considerable importance, it would be helpful if we first distinguished among a professional, a specialist and an expert. A professional is a person educated for a particular calling, for a particular profession, like that of a lawyer or a priest. He has acquired the body of knowledge deemed necessary by his society for undertaking a socially useful activity. His is a social activity and involves dealing with other human beings. It, therefore, raises not only technical but also larger moral and other questions from which it can never be fully emancipated.

A doctor does not deal with patients, but with men who have fallen ill, and therefore has to consider several non-medical questions. Further, though the professional activity could thus in principle touch every aspect of life, it is specific and determinate and has a definite objective and locus. A doctor may have to know my financial situation, my business worries and the health of my parents, but his main concern is to cure a disease I may be suffering from. Among other things, this is what distinguishes a professional from an intellectual who has a wider range of interests and who studies his society as a whole and not from the standpoint of a specific professional activity. This is why the expression "a professional intellectual" is somewhat odd. Again, though the professional activity is a source of livelihood it is much more than that. It is also a vocation calling for certain definite standards of honor and integrity that are generally enforced by professional associations.

Within the complex of activities a profession involves, a person might choose to concentrate on one. A lawyer might decide to make an intensive study of constitutional or tax law, just as a medical student might decide to specialize in cardiology, and a historian in the nineteenth century. Such a specialist continues to operate within the larger context of the profession, but his narrowness of concern introduces certain significant changes. As his activity does not cover the entire range of the profession, his interest in the larger issues of his profession is likely to be less than that of the general practitioner. A tax expert for the most part may be a consultant, and his contacts more with his fellow-professionals than with ordinary men. This tends to restrict his range of sympathy and to dilute his interest in the conditions in law courts or in the relations between the lawyer and his client. However, with all his limitations, a specialist is still a professional, and the difference between the two is largely one of degree.

With the expert one notices a change of kind. He shares with the specialist his narrow range of interest, but beyond that they part company. An expert is someone who knows, or believes he knows, or is be-
lieved by others to know, everything about a particular activity. He wants to, and is expected to, offer "solutions" to problems. His interest is only in the problem, not in the men who are faced with it. (Generally he is not himself in the position of having to decide a particular matter, but is someone to whom we turn to tell us what to do in a given situation.) Indeed, if I started explaining to him the human context of the problem he would consider it improper and a waste of his time. His activity thus is purely technical and raises, in his mind, no broader questions. Knowledge appears to him as a cluster of techniques to be applied to solving problems. He is, in his own view, a purely cerebral being in whom irrelevant human emotions have been dried out and who is guided only by the logic of his techniques; he is the sustaining spirit of the technological age.

In the university today, the trend is in the direction of increasing specialization. In a sense it began in the middle ages when the universities grew out of professional schools and took it as one of their main objectives to prepare students for a specific calling. However as befits a professional body, they continued to emphasize the general instruction on life and society, and insisted on a thorough grasp of all the various aspects of the professional activity. A medical student, for example, generally studied theology, classics, and everything about the human body. During the last few decades, partly because of the intense division of labor required by the advanced industrial society, and partly perhaps because of the feeling that one lacks a clear professional and even personal identity unless one is engaged in an unambiguous and neatly defined work, professionalism has begun to give place to specialization and the tendency of a scholar is to carve out a little area and concentrate on it. His ambition is to know as much as his talents permit about that area. As a specialist, he feels he should keep himself familiar with the latest literature in his field and this takes up so much of his time and energy that he feels he cannot sustain an interest in any other area. As for the larger issues of his society and civilization, he believes they must be left to appropriate specialists. He is personally not a specialist on these matters and therefore feels his opinions have no particular value. And in any case, he believes his scholarly objectivity and detachment require that he should not get involved in situations that require him to take sides and fight passionately for causes.

For those specialists whose specialty relates directly to the activities of society, the temptation has been the opposite. Believing like good behaviorists that their knowledge can be reduced to techniques, believing like good liberals that their society has solved the fundamental problems of ideological differences, and believing like good specialists that all problems can be best solved singly and individually, they have begun to set themselves up as experts. Politics, like anything else, is for
them a matter of solving isolated problems in the light of available techniques.

As experts they feel they know the solution of a problem, and that when they do not, nobody else is likely to know about it either. It is all a matter of time before they have worked out an answer, and therefore all they need from others is faith and patience. When confronted with critical and "noisy" groups who demand radical changes, an expert's attitude is either to dismiss them as stupid and gullible men who are led on by others, or to see his troubles as a problem in the failure of communication and therefore needing to be solved by a better public relations exercise. His tendency is "to get on with the job" and to forget the trivial, impatient and unintelligent interferences by dissident and critical groups. As he does not belong to or act in concert with any organized group, the expert believes that he is not a "mass man"; and since he is thinking solely in terms of objective and scientific techniques, he believes he is disinterested, has no axe to grind, and cannot but be right. His ultimate hope is to create a society ruled by experts like himself. Professor Ithiel de Sola Pool outlines "the skeletal structure of a new society" in which the leadership will rest "with the research corporation, the industrial laboratories, the experimental stations, and the universities," with "the scientists, the mathematicians, the economists, and the engineers of the new computer technology."

He goes on, "not only the best talents, but eventually the whole complex of social prestige and social status, will be rooted in the intellectual and scientific communities." 4

Now all this is clearly untenable. It is true that the conduct of political life does require taking technical decisions, and that therefore it requires specialist advice. But there are no political or economic experts, persons whose techniques deliver correct solutions to all questions. Political and economic decisions require weighing countless factors that cannot all be quantified; since many unexpected factors intervene in an unpredictable way, what is needed is an intuitive grasp of the situation, a feel for its uniqueness. And this is not a matter of expertise. Again, politics is not simply a matter of taking correct decisions but right decisions—that is, decisions in accord with the values and preferences of the community. And these are the elements that inevitably escape from the expert's net. Further, one of the crucial characteristics of a political decision is that it should win the approval of the people. And this means persuading them, educating them into a different sense of values from what they are used to, and inspiring them to do things they normally would not. All this requires that a politician should be in tune with his time, should be sensitive to changes in popular feelings, and should have that indefinable quality of character that inspires trust. Expert knowledge is no substitute. Again, as recent events have shown, it is totally wrong to suggest that
any of the modern societies has solved the fundamental problems of organized social life. Even when dissidence is not openly expressed, there remains a deep malaise in the “silent majority.” Thus some of the fundamental premises of the rule by expert are mistaken.

In defense of the expert’s close cooperation with government departments, it is sometimes argued that it “humanizes and civilizes” the man of power and gives the expert a larger view of his society.5 This almost amounts to claiming that the expert is an intellectual, carrying his civilizing mission into the dark corridors of power. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mere expertise, as we saw, involves the elimination of the characteristic human emotions and choices. It is ahuman, and cannot by definition humanize anybody. Besides, it is often the government department that absorbs the expert, silences him by the demands for secrecy, overwhelms him by countless technical and bureaucratic objections, dazzles him into a false sense of self-importance, and thus turns him into an administration spokesman, incapable even of preserving the critical and civilized environment of the university from the corrupting pressures of government.6

To argue that a collection of short-sighted experts can generate a larger view of society is like arguing that a collection of egoistic individuals can take disinterested political decisions. Both rest on the same liberal fallacy. Different expert views and standpoints reinforce each other, or cancel each other out, or create a stalemate that is resolved by a pragmatic compromise based on the pressures exerted by each of them. Each expert is a purveyor of information and techniques and not a source of creative insight, and therefore there cannot be among them that dialectical and organic interplay of ideas from which alone a broader perspective can emerge. What is more, as each expert qua expert is committed to belief in the rule by experts and to the type of society that makes it possible, not so much because he is selfish as because this is what he considers objectively desirable, he can hardly be expected to be objective in his analysis of the society. And since the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and since its logic is different from that of its parts taken individually, dealing with each problem individually and seeing it from a number of disparate angles means that the basic problems of the society and the larger trends developing in it go unexplored. In short, the role of the intellectual, of a person viewing his society and civilization as a whole, is extremely crucial and cannot be filled by a number of one-eyed experts.

The decline of the intellectual in the modern society7 has meant that there is no knowledgeable group of persons to take an active and intelligent interest in their civilization. Of the various groups from which intellectuals were drawn in the past, only the religious leaders retain something of their earlier concern, though their influence is much less, partly because of the increasing secularization of our age,
and partly because they have lost a part of their earlier authority by remaining silent when the forces of injustice and inhumanity had raised their ugly head (as with the Catholic Church in respect to the Nazis), or by positively supporting them (as with the various Protestant churches in respect to the apartheid in South Africa). As for the philosophers, they feel that they are engaged in a highly technical inquiry that has nothing to say on human affairs. As for the historians, they believe they study the past for its own sake and that therefore they have no lessons to teach. Literary figures do retain some degree of social and political concern, but their tendency is to put technique and form over substance, and craftsmanship over the deeper exploration of the human mind.

Sometimes these inhibitions of the scholars are rather lightly brushed aside by impatient critics. It is suggested, for example, that a historian today is not doing his proper job and that he should instead be inspiring and guiding us by drawing examples and parallels from the past, or that a political philosopher should be primarily concerned with constructing utopias and furnishing prescriptions. This is a mistake, as it takes a very questionable view of the nature of the academic disciplines concerned and of the relationship between theory and practice. It implies, for example, that a prescription for a specific and unique practical situation can be deduced from highly abstract and general theories. And this is surely wrong. The scholar contributes to the better understanding of his society not so much by applying to it his specialized findings as by bringing to the study of it a quality of mind that is critical, detached and sensitive to certain types of problems. Thus a historian who takes an interest in his civilization, and is thus an intellectual, sustains and enriches it not primarily by giving some examples and parallels from the past—though he may if there are any—but rather by bringing to it a historical approach, a mind accustomed to viewing problems against the backdrop of the past. And this is true of political philosophers, sociologists, theologians, physicists, artists, economists, and others as well. Each has a certain perspective, a certain sensitivity and therefore illuminates his civilization in his own unique way.

The gap left by the decline of the intellectual in the life of the community has come to be filled by a mixed bag of journalists, retired politicians, party political ideologists, and television and radio commentators, not many of whom have any theoretical and historical understanding of their society and civilization, or any time or ability to reflect on them in a detached and critical manner, and whose views therefore generally spring from nothing more elevated than common sense prejudices. As the existence of the civilized community is the very precondition of scholarship, our conception of the latter needs to be
expanded so as to facilitate and encourage the growth of the intellectual. If it is the specialist who fertilizes the intellectual by his findings, it is the intellectual who attends to the basic cultural conditions of scholarship and makes the scholar aware of those larger social and political assumptions and implications of his work that he is in constant danger of overlooking.

Academic scholarship and ideology

As we have seen, intense specialization leads to a decline of interest in other disciplines than one's own as well as in the larger issues of one's society and civilization. One of the consequences of this is that a specialist does not generally confront a situation where he is required to examine the assumptions on which his discipline rests. He applies the tools and methods of his craft that he has picked up during the course of his professional training and his faith in which is constantly reinforced by the imposing consensus professionals tend to build up through inertia, timidity and the common habit of citing each other's work. Indeed, often the tools and methods of a discipline are so closely identified with the discipline that it is defined in terms of them. Economics may be defined as a science studying the allocations of scarce resources, so that anyone who questions the assumption of scarcity is regarded as not doing economics at all! Similarly, politics may be defined as persuasion and conciliation, so that revolution, assassination, and acts of violence are not politics at all. By common consensus a particular way of practicing a discipline comes to be recognized as legitimate and anyone questioning them or practicing a discipline in a different way is regarded as professionally illiterate, needing further professional socialization. Now, of course, there is nothing objectionable in this. Indeed a consensus among the practitioners of a discipline is unavoidable and necessary, as otherwise it lacks a corpus of tools and methods by which to define itself and into which to induct its new practitioners. What is objectionable is the subtle way in which a consensus, here as elsewhere, can lead a discipline into a narrow and rigid intellectual groove by preventing it from asking critical and fundamental questions.

As a scholar's concepts and methods are derived from the existing consensus, he comes to believe that these are the only ways his discipline can be practiced. He is thoroughly inducted into his profession and, as befits a professional, he has learned to rise above all personal preferences and inclinations, to take no sides, and to put aside all passions and prejudices. He has also learned to collect facts with clinical thoroughness, and to deal with them in a systematic and methodical manner that is professionally approved. Since he thus lets "facts speak for themselves" and does not interpose himself between the facts and the conclusion they entail, it is only to be expected, he concludes, that his judgments will be disinterested and objective. When therefore some-
one, usually a left-wing critic, questions his professional tools, and inquires if they do not spring from or involve social and political preferences, he feels outraged and tends to dismiss him as wanting to politicize and contaminate the pursuit of knowledge by raising the ideological dust that he himself has long since risen above.

And yet this is simply not true. If one carefully considers the way he practices his discipline, one notices that it rests on a number of assumptions no less ideological than those of his critic, but which he has failed to notice because he has imbibed them unconsciously and also because, when articulated, they appear so self-evidently true to him. Take the example of the studies of the developing countries. The very language in which the latter are described is suggestive. Till about the end of the nineteenth century, they were referred to as primitive. Later they came to be described as backward. After the second world war when many of these countries became independent the terminology began to change, and they came to be referred to first as undeveloped, then as underdeveloped and lately as developing. In all these terminological changes one thing has remained constant, and that is a certain normative standard by which these countries are judged and graded as developed, underdeveloped, and less or more developed. This standard is predominantly economic, and is formulated in terms of a certain annual growth rate of the gross national product or of the per capita income. Thus from the total social life of these communities a single aspect is abstracted and treated as all important. It is, of course, very important to eliminate poverty and to help people achieve a certain level of comfort. However, other values like freedom, respect for life, continuity in the historical identity of the community, long-term political stability, and social and economic equality are all no less important. And therefore what is called for is a balanced growth of the society as a whole of which economic growth is one important part.

If one inquires why the developmental analysis gives so much importance to the economic criteria one is led to a conception of man and to a theory of social change on which their views rest. They seem to believe like good liberals that man is essentially an economic being who defines himself in terms of his status in the social economy and whose dominant motivation is the accumulation of money. This is indeed how rationality is defined, a rational man being one who calculates, "weighs" pros and cons, and pursues the line of maximum gain. This conception of man leads to the further belief that economic factors are the sole or the most important determinants of social change, and therefore, that once a country has reached an advanced stage of industrialization it will create a bourgeois-managerial class that will then go on to sustain an appropriate political, moral and cultural system. The implication therefore is that the first priority should be given to
the fullest possible industrialization of these societies, unrestrained by any other consideration.

When the criteria and indices of development born within the framework of the economistic conception of man are applied to the developing countries they lead to strange results. The behavior of their inhabitants appears totally incomprehensible to the developmental experts. The Americans gave Kenyan fishermen motorized boats so that they could explore hitherto unexplored fishing grounds to catch more fish. The happy fishermen finding that they could now haul a day’s load in an hour enjoyed themselves the rest of the day. The Burmese Buddhists, feeling that the inner tranquility and happiness was the most important objective in life, resisted pressure to work hard to make more money, to the utter frustration of the Americans. In the eyes of the developmental experts, these men are “irrational,” “backward,” “pre-modern,” “uncivilized.” Their traditional society, seen as the opposite of the modern society must, it is suggested, be destroyed and modelled after the western society.

Further as the economic life in these countries is still immersed in the social and religious structure, it does not have the autonomy and independence it enjoys in the developed western society. And therefore the conventional methodological tools, that presuppose individualistically oriented economy, and the conventional concepts like unemployment, maximization of utility, saving and accumulation of capital do not make very much sense. In any attempt to apply the conceptual framework rooted in the western experience, the history of the community, its distinctive tradition, its past experiences, are rarely taken into account; and it is not asked if perhaps different societies and cultures do not involve different conceptions of man and life, if the neat contrast between the “traditional” and the “modern” society is really tenable, and if the former must be destroyed in order for its people to live a better life than at present.

The controversy about the criteria of development does not remain merely academic. It comes to have disturbing practical results. When most of the experts, government advisors, and the shrewd politicians in the developed western world are all agreed that this is what development consists in, the recipient country accepts it as its ideal and concentrates exclusively on achieving the magic figure of economic growth, distorting in the process its moral, political, cultural and other values. If the increase in population hinders economic growth or shows that per capita income is rising less fast, it feels it must reduce its population at all cost, even by forcibly arresting and sterilizing men as has happened in India in recent years. Conditioned by these criteria the country concerned feels it cannot maintain its self-respect, and cannot please its donors and cannot earn good marks from international developmental experts unless it keeps showing good economic results.
The donor country for its part directs its aid to those that have reached or are reaching a stipulated growth rate and whose citizens are beginning to show signs of economic "rationality."

In all these and other ways, the consensus on the definition of development becomes a means of influencing people's behavior in a certain definite direction. The ethnocentricity of the definition goes unnoticed, and so does the fact that the developmental analysis is becoming a subtle and effective, if unwitting, instrument of imposing the bourgeois-liberal conception of man on nearly three quarters of mankind. Not just foreign aid but apparently well-meaning and politically neutral academic disciplines become a means of molding a large part of humanity in the image of the western man.

Similar ideological assumptions also underlie economics, sociology, philosophy, history, psychology, anthropology, political theory and a number of other larger and smaller fields of inquiry. Take an example of political philosophy. Many political thinkers regard "why should I obey the state" as one of the fundamental questions of political philosophy. Now they are obviously right, and indeed they belong to a tradition that goes at least as far back as Hobbes. But if one considers the question a little further, one detects a number of questionable assumptions underlying it. It implies that the state is an entity existing independently and outside of its individual members, rather than that it is, as Rousseau said, simply a certain mode or level of individual consciousness so that it exists, is realized, only in and through the actions of its members. The question assumes, further, that it is my status as a subject and not as a citizen that is really the center of interest, since otherwise we should ask not why I should obey the state but rather what we should do as citizens to make it a better state. Instead of saying that one is obeying a law, one might want to say that one is supporting and affirming it; and one might feel that one's relation to the state is not simply or primarily one of obedience but rather of actively participating in its affairs, proposing new policies, and standing up for politically right causes. It assumes, again, that the question of political obligation is asked and answered by an individual deliberating in his sovereign isolation, rather than that the decision has to be taken by us as a community and therefore by "me" as one unit in "us." That is to say, it assumes that "I" is politically speaking prior to "we" and that "we" is a plural of "I," rather than that it is "we" that is prior and that "I" is only a singular of "we." If this were realized one might prefer to ask how we as a community should respond to a law and what obligations devolve on me as a member of it. One might even ask if it is proper to speak in terms of political obligation, since it has a legalistic connotation and therefore refers only to those actions that can be exacted on pain of punishment and not to those as well
that are expected of a citizen in any civilized and politically educated community. One might therefore choose a wider term, political duty.

If these and several other assumptions underlying the problem of why I should obey the state, are clarified, one finds that this is a question that could arise only in a society that is suspicious of the state, that draws a neat distinction between the individual and the state and regards law and liberty as essentially antithetical, that confines politics to the politicians, and that regards the individual as essentially a private and not a public being who finds politics somewhat uncongenial and unnatural and who therefore judges it by the strictest standards of personal utility. That is to say, it is a question that acquires its meaning and urgency largely within the context of liberal ideology. Not that it is an unimportant question but that in a different conception of man and society it would be seen as part of a larger question like what a citizen should do to make his community a much better society than it is, or, to use a somewhat clumsy expression of G. E. Moore, what he could do to maximize the political good.12

Again, take social psychology. Many works in the field hold up as ideal the normal man, defined as one who is well-adjusted to the existing society, who is “socialized,” straight, correct. What this often means is that a strong and passionate expression of opinion, a display of anger and indignation, a resolute refusal to compromise, and tenacity in the pursuit of an unpopular cause come to be seen as a sign of abnormalcy, of mental disturbance, and in need of treatment. A Lenin or a Nasser or a Castro is then seen as a crank or a psychopath and that is the end of him. It is not considered important to take his criticisms seriously; instead a research is made into his childhood experiences to trace the “causes” of his “abnormalcy”? When Bertrand Russell died, a distinguished commentator argued in a long article in a British national daily that Russell’s championship of various causes, like the unilateral nuclear disarmament, the Vietnam war tribunal and the democratization of the university—the causes the commentator did not like at all—was due to his acute feeling of loneliness, generated by the absence of love and intimate friends in his childhood! The students of Nantes felt so strongly about the ideological nature of social psychology that they boycotted their psychology lectures on the ground that the total rejection of it was the only way to reaffirm personal liberty and respect for critical thought.13

These and other examples show how scholarship can become rather narrow, uncritical, restrictive, even suffocating, and at times subtly manipulative. It can reinforce a particular structure of beliefs and preferences and dismiss others out of hand. The question we should consider now is what follows from this realization and recognition of the possible ideological assumptions and implications of the academic pursuits.

Some skeptics have suggested that as all knowledge is inherently
ideological, we can never reach the truth, and that therefore the very pursuit of knowledge and truth is ultimately illusory. This is clearly wrong, as it is like saying that no man should try to be good or better because he can never be perfect. Though absolute knowledge is impossible, it does not mean that one conclusion cannot be judged better or more reliable than another. We can, and do, judge and arbitrate among various views in terms of their consistency and the arguments and the evidence that can be produced for and against them.

Relativists take the view that as all knowledge is ideological, one conclusion is as good as another and that the truth ultimately depends on one’s standpoint and preference. This too is a mistake. Like the skeptic’s argument it implies that one view cannot be judged as better or more tenable than another, and this is simply not true. Besides, it fails to see that the existence of several ideologies, far from leading to a relativist take-your-pick situation, is one of the very preconditions of intellectual progress. It enables us to consider a problem from a number of perspectives and thus to perceive the contributions and limitations of each by requiring it to take account of the criticisms made by others.

Marcuse has taken a third, almost totally opposite, view that it is possible to reach the truth that is free from all ideological conditioning, and that therefore we are justified in suppressing the mistaken and ideological bourgeois works of scholarship. As he says,

the restoration of freedom of thought may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teachings and practices in the educational institutions which, by their very methods and concepts, serve to enclose the mind within the established universe of discourse and behavior—thereby precluding a priori a rational evaluation of the alternatives. And to the degree to which freedom of thought involves the struggle against inhumanity, restoration of such freedom would also imply intolerance toward scientific research. . . . I shall presently discuss the question as to who is to decide on the distinction between liberating and repressive, human and inhuman teachings and practices; I have already suggested that this distinction is not a matter of value-preference but of rational criteria.15

He is restrained in his argument and suggests no more than that the liberating intolerance could be enforced in the university by teachers and students voluntarily refraining from teaching and learning the bourgeois works of scholarship. Not unexpectedly, some of his followers have taken this to be a plea for wrecking lectures and threatening teachers and burning books. They have even implied that the “bourgeois” standards of scholarship should be ignored and even positively
violated, and that books should be judged “good” or “great” in propor-
tion to the goodness of the cause they propound.

Now this, what one might call, academic antinomianism is clearly
untenable. Marcuse’s argument rests on the belief that he has grasped
the absolute truth, and this is a very tall claim to make, particularly
for Marcuse who often takes notorious short cuts to his conclusions,
and does not produce much empirical evidence for his views and close-
ly examine and refute the likely objections of his critics. He writes
more like a prophet revealing an apocalyptic vision than like someone
undertaking a rational evaluation of the alternatives that he himself
talks about in the remarks quoted above. But there are more basic ob-
jections. Marcuse fails to notice the difference between the university
and the political society at large, or what is the same thing, between
the academic and the political freedom. One can imagine situations
where the expression of certain views may have to be suppressed in
the political realm in order to forestall certain practical consequences.
Thus, for example, Marcuse’s idea of liberating intolerance makes
sense in the political life where untouchability or racialism or fascism
may have to be forcibly put down and their advocacy forbidden, when
they are no longer a freak and marginal social phenomenon, and where
their political exploitation can seriously frustrate the good work done
by the government. Indeed, there is hardly a liberal society that allows
freedom to incite racial or communal hatred. But the case of the uni-
versity is very different, it being a place where these and such other
views are discussed at the academic and the theoretical levels, where
immediate practical consequences are not likely to follow, and whose
members are used to listening to, and indeed trained to listen to and to
deal good-humoredly and critically with, eccentric and extreme views.
And therefore a discussion, even a sympathetic discussion, of even the
most bourgeois and abominable doctrines cannot be restricted in the
university.

Again, Marcuse like any other philosopher is not a disembodied
mind, and it is he, and not his mind, that thinks. And therefore his
interests, hopes, fears, unconscious biases, prejudices, preferences would
certainly tend to enter into his thinking and influence his initial choice
of premises, concepts and methods, and the reasons he finds persuasive.
As concrete and determinate creatures born at a specific historical time
in a specific society in a specific family, men are conditioned socially,
culturally, biologically, historically and in a variety of other ways; and
therefore cannot aspire to an absolute knowledge, a knowledge that is
totally liberated from all possible assumptions and presuppositions.
Further, with all his shrewd understanding of the Hegelian dialectic,
Marcuse here seems to understand negation as an abstract and blanket
rejection of what exists, since otherwise he should know that the less
ideological scholarship can emerge only by subjecting the existing
"bourgeois" scholarship to continual and rigorous criticism. Finally, in suppressing views that disagree with his, Marcuse forecloses the possibility of rational debate and intellectual growth, since it is only by criticisms made from other perspectives that the limitations inherent in one's own becomes noticeable.

None of these three approaches—skepticism, relativism, or the Marcusean absolutism—provides an answer to the question posed by the ideological assumptions lurking underneath many academic disciplines. Central to scholarship are the two general beliefs that we noted above: man is a conditioned being who can never claim absolute validity for his knowledge, and, second, he can constantly strive to improve and refine his knowledge. One gives humility, and the other confidence, to the academic enterprise. As it is only by constant and rigorous criticism that scholarship improves and becomes self-critical, the answer ultimately lies, to reiterate a commonplace, in institutionalizing rational criticism, so that we are constantly required to search and defend the hidden assumptions of our methods and questions and concepts. Further, if the criticism based on a different ideological standpoint from the one currently practiced is to have a persuasive and constructive tone, it must express itself in substantial works of scholarship. A scholarly work like Macpherson's analysis of the bourgeois social assumptions of Hobbes and Locke, or like Lucas' or Sartre's critical analysis of the nineteenth century literature, does a lot more to question the established canons of scholarship than a polemical but ineffective diatribe.

As we observed earlier, part of the reason why ideological assumptions go undetected is that many academic disciplines are approached in a highly specialized way. A narrow area of knowledge cannot be cultivated without taking some account of the larger field of which it is a part. And when this larger field is not cultivated and when general theories and paradigms are not developed the specialist tends to pick up the conventional assumptions and commonplaces about it. A specialized discipline is therefore in constant danger of becoming pedestrian and naive unless it constantly raises larger questions about itself. Since this requires a philosophical interest and orientation, social sciences at least could never be divorced from philosophy. Science-philosophy distinction, when carried too far, trivializes social sciences and emasculates philosophy.

We saw earlier how academic scholarship has in many cases come to rest on the questionable analysis of the concepts of objectivity and truth. Objectivity does not arise from letting facts speak for themselves. Facts are mute and have to be interpreted. And interpretation involves a theory in the construction of which the theorist's value judgments unavoidably enter. Objectivity therefore does not mean mechanical impersonality, as that is simply impossible. Sometimes it is
suggested that the only notion of objectivity that is appropriate to the study of man, and even to that of nature, is the one that involves an impartial consideration of the relevant evidence, and the willingness to look out for new, and in particular, inconvenient evidence and arguments and to change one's views when shown to be wrong. However, even the notion of impartiality needs to be tightened up further if it is not to conceal the grossest partiality. What is to count as evidence, and by what criteria we are to decide what evidence is relevant, are questions that need to be answered first before the "impartial consideration of relevant evidence" can be accepted as an indication of objectivity, since they are most likely places through which partiality can smuggle itself in. A specialist may collect all his evidence with clinical thoroughness, but if his framework is restricted and biased from the start, his so-called impartiality conceals a partiality. For example, a historian who thinks he is only collecting "all the facts" without any prejudice or preference may, in fact, be smuggling in most insidious prejudices. And even if he does not, his very assumptions that all facts are equally significant, that knowledge has no relevance to human needs and that he, personally, does not wish to make any difference to the world around him by his research, are themselves normative assumptions that he has unconsciously imbibed from his like-minded fellow-professionals. The refusal to make judgment is, itself, a judgment. It is a mistake to believe, as do many psychologically naive social scientists, that partiality occurs only when a choice is made consciously, and that if one picks up problems and facts immediately one cannot be partial.

Objectivity does not rule out passion or interest either, since they often dispose one to look out for new problems and assumptions. For example, a person who feels passionately about a particular reform is likely to be very sensitive to the inarticulate assumptions underlying the defenders of the status quo. As long as passion does not generate bias and close the mind to inconvenient evidence, it is not a vice. And if one considers scholarship not at the individual level but from the standpoint of the discipline as a whole, even a bias is an advantage, as it not only makes novel criticisms of the way the discipline is practiced at present but it also suggests new directions. A fascist, for example, is clearly biased in his criticism of the liberal political theory, but he exposes some of its profound weaknesses and raises problems that are generally ignored by its supporters.

Nor, finally, does objectivity mean neutrality or a lack of commitment, since after an impartial investigation a scholar may, and does generally, come to a definite conclusion which he would then wish to uphold. For example, after a careful examination he might come to accept, say, the Marxist analysis of society as far more satisfactory than the liberal or the positivist analysis, and then go on to analyze specific
problems in its light. He is no less objective than the mainstream liberal social theorist. It is, of course, crucial that he should not press his framework dogmatically into areas where it does not apply, and that he should be alert to the evidence and arguments that may be made against it. But to dismiss, as many are prone to do, a person as ideologi­cal, biased and unscholarly simply because he wants to examine the economic and social assumptions made by a moral or a religious or a political philosopher is hardly proper, as it is itself an assertion of dogmatic and ideological partiality.

In short, impersonality does not ensure impartiality, but often the opposite. Nor does one need to be disinterested or dispassionate in order to be objective. And further, as the standards of objectivity do not spring from high heavens but are conditioned and tainted by the limitations and preferences of the men who have evolved them, they cannot be regarded as sacrosanct and used to beat down unfamiliar or ideologically disagreeable works of scholarship. Thus the reappraisal of scholarship that is ultimately needed is the reappraisal not just of specific disciplines but also of the very nature of scholarship—of its nature, its objectives, its standards, its criteria of truth and objectivity. And this is a task that cannot be accomplished overnight but only over the decades as audacious works appear that challenge the established conception of scholarship both by criticizing it and by showing by example how a richer conception of it is possible.

Finally, as scholarship is not a cerebral but a human activity that is ultimately limited by the limitations of the men practicing it, and as some of the elements of our thinking draw their strength and plausibility from our personal preferences and our social position, it is an advantage for the development of a discipline if its practitioners have diverse social backgrounds, as they would then bring different insights and sensitivities. The radical critique is right to stress this point, since a discipline can easily get inflexible, inbred and somewhat narrow when all its practitioners share a common social background and similar social experiences. Intellectual openness and flexibility is not entirely unrelated to social openness and flexibility. And therefore the expansion of educational opportunities to cover those hitherto excluded is desirable not only politically but also in the very interest of the growth of scholarship.
FOOTNOTES

1. Social science should be clearly distinguished from sociology, a discipline with a longer history than it is given credit for and of which the modern social science in some of its forms is a pale ghost. Historically speaking, sociology, whether in the hands of Aristotle or Montesquieu or Marx or Mannheim or Weber or Durkheim, has always remained closely connected with philosophy, history and moral theory. When classical sociology was dissociated first from history, then from philosophy, and then finally from moral theory as well the result was something resembling the modern social science that lacks the sense of direction that only history can give, the clarity of concepts and the consciousness of its assumptions that only philosophy can offer; and he capacity for evaluating the significance of facts that can come only from a moral theory.

2. The universities of Bologna and Paris grew out of the law and the theology school.

3. An academic is a professional, and therefore not necessarily an intellectual, though he should be one.


5. These are the views of Prof. Ithiel de Sola Pool, quoted by Chomsky, *ibid*.

6. Senator Fullbright has recently argued how the universities, instead of providing "any effective counterweight to the military-industrial complex" have "joined the monolith, adding greatly to its power and influence." In refusing to act "as responsible and independent critics of the government's policies" they are "betraying a public trust." "The War and its Effects—II," *Congressional Record*, December 13, 1967.

7. This has happened in different degrees in different countries. In France, which has long enjoyed the glorious intellectual tradition, the intellectual is still a familiar animal. In England, the degree of professionalism is much greater and there is a reluctance to undertake an activity that one cannot pursue with professional seriousness and competence. The same tendency prevails in America, though there are signs of change as more and more academics, agonized by the Vietnam war, are beginning to ask searching questions about the quality of life in their society.


9. Much of this is also true of the socialists who thus combine with the liberals in producing an almost universal consensus on the emphasis on industrialization. After that, of course, the two part company.

10. In recent years, there is a trend in the direction of broadening the criteria of development to include political and cultural elements as well. But even here the basic western liberal bias persists. The two-party system, secularization, open bargaining, competing elite, socialization of the masses into a rational-bureaucratic culture, absence of a strong ideological commitment—are all considered crucial to political development. Indeed the term westernization is used synonymously with modernization, rationalization and development. See Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1966), p. 61; and C. Ake, *A Theory of Political Integration* (Dorsey Press, 1967), chs. 2 and 7.

12. Prof. Graeme Moodie has been helpful in formulating my ideas on this question.


14. Both the skeptical and the relativist positions can be knocked down on formal logical grounds as well. Though the skeptic maintains that we can never reach the truth, he is already claiming that we know at least this as the truth! Likewise, the relativist, while emphasizing the relativity of all knowledge, asserts at least this proposition as absolutely true! And since both of them thus recognize at least one exception, there is no reason why they cannot admit others.