



THE INTELLECTUAL IS DYNAMITE PART I

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The intellectual is a person coveted and revered, they are figures that are idolized by societies and their own intellectual successors. They partake in the creation and destruction of ideas.

The intellectual itself is an institution within human history; a feature with a role in structuring collective behavior and how societal forces operate. Traditional institutions like the judicial system or schools fall into this paradigm, but many establishments which appear less tangible, are also institutions. Take for example, ideas of rights which pervade Western societies or the practice of giving a wage and the ubiquitous use of currency exchange as a means of moving wealth, arguably, they are not as tangible as traditional institutions which exist as physical organizations, but they provide structure to societies, rendering their function the same as that of an institution.

Institutions therefore, can take the shape of ideas, loose collectives, or simply widespread practices. Intellectuals thus, not as individuals, but rather a collection of people that exert influence upon societies through thought, in the form of an institution. This is what is meant by the *intellectual as an institution*, and forms the basis of the examination of the differing roles the institution takes.

Among institutions the intellectual is one uniquely placed, it has the role of interacting with ideas, and therefore the ability to self adjust and to create or even destroy other institutions.

Self-adjustment can be seen through the tendency for movements to arise within the institution, groups of thinkers that push forth a strong paradigm or centre themselves around a theme or problem.

Think of the logical empiricists of the early 20th century who sought to eliminate metaphysics from philosophical thought or the famous French Existentialists that rejected ultimate order to the universe and rationalism. These movements dominated thought and shifted debate and the focus of questioning, even if one rejected logical empiricism or the view of an irrational universe, their entrenchment meant that they became what argument and counterargument centred around and so the institution of the intellectual became absorbed by them, both through its focus affirming and rejecting them.

Intellectual movements are therefore mechanisms for adjustment within the broader institution, they disseminate paradigms which within the institution are both adopted and refuted, with discourse and the dominant paradigm eventually seeping into society at large.

However, let us be careful not to isolate these movements to the institution of the intellectual, because it is not entirely responsible at the individual nor collective level for "creating" movements or ideas. Movements are universally responses to existing societal structures and dissatisfaction with them, most of which largely exist outside of the institution of the intellectual.

Traditionalist movements arise with a perceived breakdown in tradition, destructive movements, like

post-modernism, with a perceived failure of existing structure. In this way movements are simply responses to what surrounds the intellectual or a result of the intellectual being swept up in supporting existing political movements.

But responses can compound to realize a sort of "creation" using the institution. Humanism in the early renaissance for example could be considered initially as a response to the resurgence of classical Greek literature and ideas, but that which was initialized as a response to classical ideas resulted in the creation of a distinct philosophical movement, one which saw the creation of both rationalist and empiricist paradigms, along with a greater emphasis on the idea of agency than existing institutions.

To simplify further, small reactions or the adoption, creation, or destruction of ideas by many individual intellectuals can aggregate to create something distinct and more widespread in the whole (i.e. the institution of the intellectual). Continuing the renaissance example, widespread interest in observing geometry and reading classical literature facilitated the eventual birth of linear perspective in art, and renewed interest in logic which resulted in the formation of inductive reasoning. The common pursuit by many intellectuals of these ideas which were by no means new, resulted in a few being able to create novelty and a separate movement.

Movements and the aforementioned self-adjustments of the intellectual aren't however limited to accepted ideas, it also extends to the role of the institution itself. Group of thinkers arising or existing paradigms becoming untenable can result in how the institution interacts with that around it shifting as well, commonly through the adoption of more traditionalist or destructive tendencies.

Both roles find justification from the view that intellectuals have a role in the guidance of society, with the destructive view in particular seeing active creation and the re-shaping of society as its means of doing so. Though, this is a bit of an extreme dichotomy, as such destructive tendencies exist even within traditionalist movements.

Destructiveness is perhaps the most glorified role of the institution, its ability to push forth ideas and affect societal change, through the unraveling of what is in favour of an envisioned future state of things.

If you accept the Hegelian view that the spirit and ideology evolve through history, then ideas cannot be static. Some must spring up, others be expunged, and others briefly put to rest and brought back later. The intellectual, as an institution which is constantly engrossed with ideas, is thus a catalyst for much of this activity.

The institution is therefore entrusted with an important power, that to purge away ideas that hamper or hurt, and to push for the adoption of changing paradigms and new institutions. This is the destructive

role of the intellectual, the elimination of ideas and existing institutions for the sake of a desired end, for an envisioned "better".

This can enable the intellectual to purge ideas and misconceptions which are unsustainable and destructive in and of themselves, like Social Darwinism, but it can also result in the destruction of paradigms which may still have merit - for example metaphysics in contemporary philosophy.

If we return to the paradigm that ideas are institutions and institutions are societal structures, then by partaking in the destruction of ideas we realize that every such act involves unraveling structure itself. Doing so of course is a necessary act, as many institutions are indeed flawed. But in this act, the intellectual is prone to lapses, where there is a tendency to destroy institutions without replacement, unplanned radicalism.

An example exists in early Soviet thought, with the attempt to move away from the family unit as the dominant method of child-rearing in favour of a communal model, resulting in policy to push mothers into the labour force and creating the beginnings of state-sponsored childcare, but it failed due to the lack of replacement institutions for the family - destruction without replacement.

Alas is the limitation of the destructive role of the intellectual, it can discredit and eliminate other institutions, but it does not always create better ones. It easily idealizes a more perfect world, but often fails to create it.

This is first arrogance and the most childlike stage of the intellectual as an institution, a belief that it fully grasps progress (or its conflation of personal desires with progress). A lack of understanding for the reason for existing institutions yet glee to unravel them.

The photo shows, "The Thinker," by Mikhail Nesterov, painted in 1921.

