

The Senses of "Intellectual" and Its Cognates

I have been increasingly uncomfortable with my use of "intellectual" and its cognates solely in the strict sense in which it contrasts with "existential." Recently, I was struck by Robert M. Hutchins's well-known definition of education generally as "the intellectual development of the population." The more I thought about it, the clearer I became that he could hardly have been using "intellectual" in the strict sense in which I have come to use it, lest he would never have given the place he gave to the liberal arts and the humanities in the process of formal education. Indeed, I'm now as confident as I can be of most things, without engaging in the close re-reading that would be required to confirm it, that he almost certainly understood "intellectual development" to include the acquisition of—what I would call—"wisdom" as well as of "knowledge." So I've been asking myself ever since whether I shouldn't reconsider my more recent use of "intellectual" by inquiring whether it, too, may not be systematically ambiguous in that there is another sense (or there are other senses) in which it may very well be used. I have now concluded that it is thus ambiguous and is, in fact, subject to something like the same threefold analysis of senses that I have found applicable to several other terms that function more or less technically in my writings.

I would say, then, that "intellectual" and its cognates can be understood:

(1) in the *proper* sense of understanding concerned with abstract structure in itself, and thus in contrast to "existential" in the sense of understanding concerned with concrete meaning for us;

(2) in the *broad* sense of any and all understanding, "existential" as well as "intellectual" in the proper sense of the word, and at both levels of living understanding, i.e., the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis as well as the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory; and

(3) in the *narrow* sense of understanding concerned with abstract structure in itself and at the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory only.

Two comments: (1) It is, of course, the first or proper sense of "intellectual" that is the strict sense in which I have become accustomed to using it; and (2) distinguishing

the broad sense of the term takes account of, and is insofar warranted by, the cognation between "intellect" (*intellectus*) and "understanding" (*intellegentia*).

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