

The Crisis of an Intellectual Who Lost His Identity Under Piles of the Read and the Heard

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[أزمة مثقف أضاع الهوية تحت مراكوم من مقروء ومسموع](#)

I am saddened by an intellectual who loses his identity, and with it, many of his other intellectual skills slip away. I am saddened by an intellectual who abandons his own self and unwittingly transforms into a vessel absorbed by a foreign thought, presented to him by others as a gifted offering. So, you see him, proud of the thoughts of others, meticulously possessive of the rich output that is not his own.

When he debates you, he draws from the wellspring of Zaid; and when he offers you a drink of knowledge, he borrows a delightful drink from the waterwheel of Amr. Time passes for him and for us, and he searches for his own identity, only to find within nothing but the identities of those thinkers and philosophical visionaries whose love has captivated him.

If you tell him, "I said," he immediately brings you a statement from here and there with near-instant speed. And if you tell him, "I see," he says, "Where are you from the visions of those who preceded you?" without even discerning that you are being sarcastic. The great calamity occurs when you critique a fundamental thread of thought; he attacks you with refutation as if he is in a modern-day war of apostasy. Did he see in you a stubborn adversary who refuses to be anything but hostile to the truth? Or did he deny you the right to speak and have visions, he who is the voracious reader of the intellectual outputs of others?

From that day on, I have been in a continuous struggle with bewilderment, and the solution to the issue still eludes me. Is thought to be the monopoly of others, and are

you and I to be content with storing what is thrown at us? Or is the glory to be for the product of others, and we make collecting and storing the best we have? For if you hear him, you hear others in the melody of his voice, and if you dare to critique their statements, he descends upon you with an 'Antar-like fury. And if you concede to a fine argument, he proudly arms himself and casts a superior glance at you from the corner of his eye. And you don't know why the anger first, and why the pride second, when he is merely a transmitter of speech in the first instance and a transmitter of speech in the second.

I swear that if you were to debate Al-Shafi'i in his time, he would have given you respite and commended you for your virtues, thought, and deliberation. So where are you, my friend, and where am I from a figure of great importance and immense significance? And he is the one who said: "Some of my speech may be flawed, but much of it has hit the mark of truth, as the passing days have shown. As for the speech of others, I see it as mistaken, and time may reveal the correctness of what is hidden from me now." Speech is attributed to its speaker, and when I reiterate speech, it is due to its profound meaning and an unrelenting purpose within me that picks at my wounds... inflames the margins. For speech does not erase speech, and time is a judge that suppresses the vile and reveals pure, precious thought.

Thus, the meeting of the deaf concludes, with everyone being eloquent – neither you have hit a target, nor has he achieved anything against you or your revolutionary visions. You leave grieving over the arrogance shown by an intellectual who refused to have his own specific word regarding the new and dialectical visions you presented. For he has locked his mind onto what he read from titans of thought who came before, thus deafening his ear to anything new coming from a contemporary – one whose head is not set on fire, nor is he a great figure in the annals of humanity.

The matter becomes grave when the speaker is a contemporary, even he already knew that he possesses competence and much objectivity. A contemporary is one close in time and place, and the worst contemporary is one who is a peer and companion from the same neighborhood, school, or that forgotten village. Knowledge cannot come from a synchronous peer, for we spent our youth reveling together in intoxication and some foolishness. How could he possibly come up with something novel when we inhaled life together in the village and drank from its gushing spring the

delightful water? How can knowledge be at his fingertips when I, the intellectual, am his synchronous peer and it eludes me? The ego boils over, and arrogance overwhelms a soul that has rebelled, a soul that was once a fine steed for the distant faraway one. The speech becomes bitter and heavy, though it was sweet and pleasant-tasting to someone distant in that far-off land. He denies the speech though it is evident, and doors are shut while the breeze is gentle, saturated with the musk of the earth and the scent of mountain flowers.

The Core and Foundation of the Dilemma:

The dilemma lies in the alienation of an intellectual and an innate flaw of the mind. For when the mind is overstuffed, ideas crowd its storerooms, and its old contents do not allow room for modern additions. The new and recent, even if adorned with virtue, is subjected by the ancient to forced compatibility tests. If the new aligns with the long-established old, it is easily seated in back seats.

There is no fear of a new idea that conforms, for honor is tied to the forelock of the ancient, possessor of majesty and precedence. The new idea, even if it possesses the radiance of youth, the old one has abundant oil and wears anklets and ringing bells.

But if the new contradicts the consensus of the old ones, they deny it early and erect psychological barriers before it. Why pursue a novel, divergent thought when life is pleasant for us and the mind is our steed? The old, having dominated time for so long, has dominated space, establishing for itself a kingdom in the corners and back halls. So, the divergent new stands forsaken at the castle gate – the door is solid, hewn from rock, and the locks are iron. The divergent new cannot have a livelihood except through patience and perseverance, for patience is an ancient weapon of great effectiveness.

An intellectual is alienated by the abundance of what he has read, becoming a victim of many intellectual inputs. Ideas have a powerful sway; not everyone can withstand their magical effects. The mind becomes accustomed to collecting and storing them, and often forgets its share of creative capacities. So, the mind does not work to create its own new, nor does it contemplate the existential ideas in the universe. Rather, you see it feverishly striving in the thoughts and books of others, hoping that the other will answer what perplexed him of issues and puzzles.

If you confront him with a question, he mobilizes his mind to search the storage for the opinion of a sage that will save him. And if you insist on something specific from him, he stammers, for he is not accustomed to such shameful questioning. He flees from you to the opinion of another sage who wrote lengthy poetries on the matter. And if your insistence returns, seeking to clarify a thought of his own, he scoffs at you with a look and turns his face away from you... as if to say, "This is all I have."

And when I say what I say, I do not deny the importance of culture nor fault all the characteristics of the old. The old was suitable for its time, and much of it is no longer valid as thought now... it has become obsolete, lacking validity. How can the worthless be distinguished from the valuable except with modern thought and modernizers who do not fear difficulties or magical talismans? The old interpreted the universe as it desired, and at that time, science was in its infancy and the tools were very local.

So why does he deny new contemplation, when science has become mature and the tools have become modern? Long ago, a sage said in a contemplation: "Empty the cup, and it will be filled with fresh, delicious drink. But if your cup is full, do not hope for a new, sweet, modern taste." Wine may be good when aged, but much of it kills if it remains too long. Such is the case with thought, metaphorically; some of its old has become a plague, although some of it is still healing for the soul. Modernization cannot happen without old making way and new taking its place without grudges or hidden hatreds. Matters, as I have witnessed them, are generations succeeding generations, and I have not found a single human being immortalized in them. So, at the very least, let a thought expire and a new one come, and the changing of ideas is more beneficial to the perception of those who are the knowing, the pious within it.

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