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The Worlds of Reflection and Action*

Every great modern university must balance its responsibilities to the worlds of reflection and action. There is a whole range of social roles between the ivory tower and the executive desk. At one end of the spectrum sits Thoreau by his pond, the poet in his garret, the scholar in his study. At the other sits the active citizen in his committee meeting, the leader surrounded by his followers. Every individual must decide where to place himself along that range. Each has to decide how much he wants to become personally involved in the action and effort of his society.

A society that aspires to creativity has urgent need of its detached scholars and critics, as well as of those who will become deeply involved in the world of action. Our society must have the wisdom to reflect *and* the fortitude to act. It must provide the creative soil for new ideas *and* the skill and patience and hardihood to put those ideas into action. The creative society will be one in which there is continuous and fruitful interaction between the two worlds of action and reflection. And no institution in our society can do more to keep that interaction vital and productive than the university. It must preserve within its walls an environment in which the relatively disengaged scholar, artist, critic, scientist, or writer can live and flourish. But it must also relate itself to the organized world of action.

There are those in the population, even in the alumni population, even on the boards of trustees of some universities, who resent the fact that the university is a haven for dissent, for criticism, and for the free examination of assumptions and practices. They often strive to diminish this fundamental role of a university. They seem to imagine that the chief role of the university is to endorse the status quo.

On the other side, there are some within the university community who seem to want to cut all ties with the rest of the society and to persuade every last student to choose the life of detachment and dissent. They do not like the way the society is run, but they are not inclined to prepare young people to run it better. And they communicate to their students a moral snobbism toward those who live with the ethical dilemmas of responsible action.

The life of reflection is not superior to the life of action, or vice versa. Both are essential to a vital society. Surely our universities should strive to be as effective in preparing young people for one role as for the other.

I hope that in preparing young men and women for lives as scholars and critics our universities will make them aware of the dangers of irresponsibility and moral snobbism. I hope that in preparing them for the world of business and government the universities will make them appreciative of the social function of the scholar, the dissenter, and the critic. Finally, I hope that the universities will persuade a reasonable proportion of their graduates to move back and forth between the two worlds.—JOHN W. GARDNER, *Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare*.

* This editorial is adapted from remarks delivered at the 75th Anniversary Convocation of the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, 24 October 1966.