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FOREWORD

The intellectuals like to believe that they hold the monopoly of Wisdom, with a capital W.

They even have cogent arguments to support this.

They spend more of their life in study than their fellow men who are not university graduates. According to popular belief, studies are nothing but paths leading to wisdom.

If the intellectuals wish to rise above their fellow graduates, voicing wise insights will mark them as scholars. To go farther, they have to do more and this is then attested to by successive and higher degrees and certificates. This is known as a scientific rank. It is a rank because it alleges to attest to a higher and deeper level of wisdom.

In the modern era the intellectuals have done everything for wisdom to be given a high social standing. (Knowing the historical literature on intellectuals we can say that in times past this was certainly not taken for granted). The intellectuals have done everything to link Wisdom and their own existence. They also did everything to assure that what they said, being legitimated by wisdom, could not be questioned by those outside the inner circle. They inevitably fostered the notion that knowledge equated wisdom. This is what the high degree of the highly respected institutionalization of wisdom and science was all about.

The assessment and the high evaluation of intellect and science, as well as of institutionalized wisdom, led to a related consequence namely to a linkage between knowledge and thought. More accurately, one can assume that thinking and thought could exist in the absence of learning, but also that whoever is well educated and a scholar certainly thinks on an elevated level. The concepts of the strength of wisdom and the concept of the strength of intellect have been largely melded into a

single unit. I must emphasize that we are speaking here only of a concept but a concept is just as realistic as a proven claim.

The concept also strengthens the radiating certainty emanating from a posture of wisdom.

All we can say with any confidence about intellectuals and intellectuality that they are learned and, indeed, highly learned. It does not ensue causally from this, however, that they are smart or that they even are entitled to their certainty.

The history of the intelligentsia and of knowledge therefore is, in some respect, the history of conceit.

Because, however, there is some foundation for this conceit it is irresistible even though it is open at times to some question.

I deem that it is best to accept whatever one cannot struggle against successfully. Yet, I also do not believe that one can follow the maxim attributed to Charles de Gaulle according to which you should take the leadership in matters that you can not prevent.

I have no desire to participate in the recrudescence of conceit but I have no desire to combat it either.

This is why I wrote this essay. This genre makes it possible to show one or more problems in a reasoned interpretation and it even tolerates what we have popularly called the freedom of thought.

My basic position differs considerably, however, from the usual attitude of historical essays and in a variety of ways.

I entitled this essay: "Hungarian Illusionism." I could have given it a different title that would have suggested a completely different content, namely: "Hungarian Realism." Both titles, having a very different content, could be simultaneously true and misleading and false. From this it follows that, considering the subject matter of my writing, I am just as certain about it as I am uncertain. Actually I cannot even say precisely what is illusion and what is reality or realism. Certainty has never been my particular strength and I not only confess this, but am proud of it. (If it is so, why not be proud of it?)

Furthermore, possible explanations usually stand on shaky grounds. In other words, my basic stand in no way corresponds to the customary historiographic works where it is blasphemy to admit openly and justifiably that one lacks conceptual certainty. Also, it is just as blasphemous to explain certain events by reasonable assumptions

rather than by specific causes. Admission of a lack of certitude and the acceptance of the limitations of recognition and knowledge are clear violations of the intellectual rules established by the trade.

The essay, however, is an unfettered form of writing.

My perspective used for interpretation is also different. I am more likely to use the intellectual traditions of ancient historiography even though this has become unfashionable in today's institutionalized historical scholarship. For me, the concept of desire carries just as much historical force as, for instance, the concept of interest.

The essay, however, is an unfettered form of writing.

For this reason the essay is not controlled by the "new sources" regarded as sacred by the positivists and it is also not governed by the "constructions" and "narratives" of the postmoderns. My purpose is to understand and to make my ideas understood even though I am uncertain about a multitude of things. I am not even sure that I am using the proper composition of words to designate what I want to write about.

I believe that to think is a right. To argue is an intellectual obligation.

To err is a characteristic of our human frailty.

The essay is truly an unfettered form of writing. Its freedom consists of allowing us to think, to argue and to be wrong all at the same time.