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## International School of Paris

### Discours prononcé par S.A.R. la Princesse de Hanovre à l'International School of Paris



Ladies and Gentlemen and most of all, dear fellow parents

A couple of years ago, when Gareth Jones asked me to be a speaker here today for Graduation, I could not quite figure out what he was after. Did he want me to give the girls in the school useful tips on needlepoint and housekeeping or some other mundane advice? After all, we did not know each other. Or had he understood at that very first interview that I was just a parent, a concerned parent. My husband and I are so grateful to the ISP. Two of our sons have 'made it' and it is thanks to you, Gareth, and your amazing team.

So, why am I here? Perhaps to share with you mixed emotions: first of all joy, because our children have graduated, and a bit of sadness, I am sure most mothers here will understand me, because our little ones are no longer little, and a very significant page of their life is turned and they must move on without us. Of course, in the future, they will still need us for a cosy bed, a decent meal, clean laundry and most probably extra cash. Nevertheless, exit little ones, enter class of 2003. You are now young adults. Some of you know what you want to do with your lives, who you want to be, or perhaps and this is very important, who you do not want to be and what you do not want to do.

We, your parents and educators, have little to offer today apart from our love, support and encouragement. What we are leaving you with, against our will, is a messy and sad planet: A world where success rhymes with selfishness and opportunity with injustice and somehow most of us expect you to get on with it, get a job and get a life just as our parents did to us. This is what I call a negative repetitive pattern.

To prove to you that nothing has changed, I shall quote Thomas Carlyle's Inaugural address in Edinburgh on 2nd April 1866: For I need not hide from you, young gentlemen, that you have got into a very troublous epoque of the world; and I don't think you will find your path in it to be smoother than ours has been though you have many advantages which we had not (...). I am but saying in other words that we are in an epoque of anarchy. Man is becoming more and more the son, not of Cosmos, but of Chaos. He is a disobedient, discontented, reckless and altogether waste kind of object and the wise kind of man, - the select few of whom I hope you will be part of, has more and more to see to this, to look vigilantly forward; and will require to move with double wisdom.

He could have been speaking to you here today.

Whether we like it or not we have been using the same way of thinking for hundreds of years, it seems to have worked more or less or at least not to have done any major damage in our privileged little western world. In the 60's Bob Dylan sang 'The Times They Are A Changing', but it was Einstein who said that everything had changed except our way of thinking. Where we can use mathematics it is a superb thinking system, but getting to the moon is easier than solving urban poverty, juvenile delinquency or even a simple strike. In space things remain constant, we have mainly been successful with static systems in which the variables do not change, and do not interact, and space is a perfect example of this. (I hope your science teachers will agree with me here). We can translate the situation into definite symbols and relationships and then deal fluently with these.



On the surface of the Earth, however, most situations are vague, interrelated, subjectively defined, shifting in value and dependent on human whims.

God does not need to think: Thinking is used only to supplement inadequate knowledge. Too often, there is a God like attitude in education. Montaigne, in his essay 'Education of Children', tells us that Socrates made his scholars speak first and then would speak himself. He also quotes Cicero: Most commonly the authorities of them that teach, hinders them that would learn .

If only we could increase knowledge then we would throw out doubt, indecision and problems. Knowledge is easy to teach and knowledge is there. Indeed knowledge is growing at such a rapid rate that there is little time to teach anything else. Statistics have almost wrecked science because statistics seem to generate knowledge. It is felt (quite wrongly) that if you generate enough data an idea will emerge. In most of the practical situations of life, knowledge is never going to be complete (if only because so many situations deal with the future). Knowledge is the past so thinking is going to be needed.

We often mistake fluency and argumentation for thinking skills. Fluency and the power of coherent expression are tools of thinking - not thinking itself. Error-free thinking is not necessarily good thinking. We also confuse debating skills with thinking. I can prove you wrong, therefore I am right.

We come now to the major deficiency in our traditional approach to thinking. Above all, education prides itself on its success in training critical intelligence - if we can find faults in systems and ideas we may escape the tragedy of being dominated by them - but does this enable us to construct more usable systems?

And here I am quoting Professor de Bono:

There are three reasons for our adoration of the critical intelligence:

1. Criticism is easy, possibly the easiest form of intellectual achievement and it is a joy to operate since there is something definite to get to work upon and some definite result.
2. Critical thinking allows us to work in the comfortable self contained environment of available data without having to worry about getting fresh data. We look for internal validity, internal consistency.
3. Education was for a long time in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities and so established the traditions of education. Critical thinking is of paramount importance in the ecclesiastical world since it is the only weapon against heresy and deviation and since that world consists of concept edifices which must have internal validity if they are not to collapse.

But all this is very far from the practical messy world in which people have to live and think with very inadequate data in order to solve problems. Passive, descriptive, contemplative thinking, no matter how subtle or acute, is not the same as generative thinking. Generative thinking has to deal with the world, even if knowledge is incomplete. Active thinking (generative) and passive thinking (scholarly) are not mutually exclusive. We need both.

There was a time when society was comparatively stable and since things did not change much, repetition was a good substitute for thinking. The political systems tended to be elitist and few people did the thinking for the rest.

To make personal decisions and problem solving easier, there were guidelines laid down by religious doctrine and moral codes. Much as we may like to revert to the good aspects of those more stable times, we must acknowledge that society is no longer so stable because the rate of change, fuelled by technology and social aspirations has accelerated.

We have more freedom and freedom represents a tyranny of opportunity since each opportunity is a potential decision. Yet the powerful substitutes for thinking (habit, doctrine, dogma, someone else doing the thinking) have



been much weakened. In their place has emerged only one aid to thinking: thinking by slogan. A slogan is not part of a general system of attitudes, but just an encapsulated attitude to a particular circumstance that has not emerged because of its intrinsic merit, or even its general acceptability but because it has those characteristics which suit the media. Just as an attractive television personality is of more use to a politician than economic understanding, so a media powerful slogan is more effective than a wise one. It is not the fault of the media or anyone else, it is simply due to the structure of the system.

On a personal level, people have to do more thinking and make more decisions than ever before. There are more opportunities and more pressures. There is more social mobility, there are more career opportunities, there is more money to be spent, divorce is easier, and emotional expectations are higher; authoritarian control systems are weaker and so much that used to be ordered in society are taken for granted has now become material for individual thinking.

On a political level, many countries enjoy or seem to enjoy a democratic system. It doesn't really matter whether the party machines allow those elected to be truly representative of the electorate.

What does matter, is that once they are in power politicians do have to pay heed to the opinions, attitudes and preferences of the electorate in order to keep themselves in power. It should be the individual thinking of the electors that determines their attitudes. If they do no thinking then habit or party line or instant television persuasion are the only available substitutes. (FOX NEWS) At either extreme of the political spectrum, we have elitism in which a self-designated elite class determines the thinking of the rest who cannot be trusted to think for themselves.

Some people will undoubtedly do more thinking than others (provided it is thinking and not party doctrine), but it is desirable that the rest do enough thinking to decide for themselves whether the special thinkers make sense or not. All this has been said before, let me quote: The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it; and a state which postpones the interests of their mental expansion and elevation, to a little more of administrative skill or that semblance of it which practice gives, in the details of business; a state, which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished. Essay on Liberty - John Stuart Mill 1858.

So what have we done about this? What are you class of 2003 ready to do about this?

The very excellence of our technological achievements serves to highlight our lack of progress in human affairs.

We can communicate instantly with billions of people at once by a television, the net and satellites in orbit. We can fly faster than sound. We have the nuclear power to annihilate all civilisation several times over.

Had we not been constrained by some aspects of our thinking system, we would have made even more progress. I believe that by now we should have achieved control of aging, cancer and virus infection; cure for most mental illnesses; unlimited pollution free energy from nuclear fusion; abundant food supply; much more effective means of transport and a superb education capacity.

Our scientific system is not as perfect as it might be and has been held back by our traditional thinking habits.

If we look at the area of human affairs, we see poverty, wars, racism, prejudice, ecological disasters, violence, crime, terrorism, greed, selfishness and short-term thinking. Our habits of war are the same, only the weapons are more powerful. We spend, worldwide, about \$2,000 billion a year on arms. Our habits of government (both democracy and tyranny) were used in the same way by Greek civilisation. Much is the same. So lets look first at our traditional excuses:

- Basic human nature will not change. Human nature is selfish, greedy and aggressive and will always be so. There is also a claim that older and basic animal parts of our brain dominate emotional behaviour.



- The world has become too complex and we just cannot cope.
- We cannot cope with the rate of change brought about by technology. Curing childhood diseases causes population explosions, industrial development although creating jobs threatens the environment through local pollution and global effects, and yet so called 'leader' nations still refuse to sign the Kyoto protocol.
- The rate of progress in the world is uneven. Some countries have stabilised their populations, others are victims of explosive population growth. In some countries there is great concern for ecology, yet between 27 -29 million acres of rainforest are destroyed annually and at least 50 life forms disappear every day and our attitude towards war is medieval.
- Our structures are inadequate to cope with the situation. Political thinking is, by its very nature, short-term and selfish, especially in a democracy.

So, please let's forget these excuses and start thinking differently, because here is a little resume of the state of the planet today:

- 53 countries are at war or in conflict
- 84 countries apply the death penalty
- In 2001, there were 3048 capital executions, 90% of which were in China
- 1 % of the rainforest is destroyed each year
- Malaria kills 1 African child every 30 seconds, so by the time I will have finished speaking approximately 30 children will be dead
- Each year 4 million little girls are sold as slaves, prostitutes or wives
- Domestic violence is the 5th cause of female mortality. It affects 10-50% of women
- The US defence budget is \$1 billion dollars per day
- In 2002, 3 men were decapitated for being homosexuals in Saudi Arabia
- In the US, CEO's salaries are 531 times superior to that of their employees
- 6,000 children die every day from illnesses linked to poor hygiene
- 130 million children do not attend school
- In the EU we have 14 million unemployed and 68 million under the world poverty level. (I doubt that any of these people will ever buy cars or computers.)
- There are 42 million people infected by HIV and among those 29.4 million are Africans and among that 15 million are women
- Aids kills 3.1 million per year, 2.4 million are Africans
- There are 8 million prisoners in the world, more than half are in the US
- 2 billion humans suffer from malnutrition and 18 million die of hunger every year
- There are 20 million refugees in the world, 10 million are children
- Since 1990, 2 million children were killed in armed conflict
- 800,000 are, this very minute, enrolled as soldiers
- Americans represent 4% of the world population and they produce 25% of fumes responsible for global warming

This is your world. As Michael Moore puts it, Nice planet, nobody home.

So if any of you have any hesitations about what to do with your life, if you are still indecisive about your future, if no field of study really inspires you, I hope the above list makes you think in a different way and therefore act differently. It's a huge task, a seemingly impossible one, it is as if I would ask you to try and put out a volcano with a paper cup.

In the past generations there have been good people who tried their best to cure and help and to put an end to suffering. We were dealing with consequences, but we were certainly not informed enough, or brave enough, to tackle the causes. This unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, will be up to you. And I sincerely hope that some of you by efficiently rejecting any form of imperialism (military, economic, humanitarian, moral, intellectual) will put all the strength that youth gives into making this a safer and just world.

Just remember being good you are wise, and not, being wise you are good.