The reason why a historian should keep a journal, an intimate personal record, is that contrary to what is often supposed it is a historian's first business to understand himself. Although the historian studies the world in general, his starting-point is his own relation to this world. All historians, whether they are conscious of it or not, are really concerned not with the world as an objective thing apart from themselves but with their own orientation to what seems to be external to them. A historian tries to explain the universe in terms that mean something to him personally, though he may disguise the fact by identifying himself when he writes with humanity or with the modern man. And incidentally, what I am saying here applies not just to historians but to all men, for the historian is simply a professionalized version of everyman. All men formulate an attitude to life or a philosophy of life, no matter how rudimentary or little-considered, which serves to explain to them their orientation to the external world. The historian, whose field is the widest and most human of all disciplines of study, differs from other men merely in that he tries to approach this general human problem scientifically, with the most extensive tools and knowledge he can command, and to express his findings in as exact and generalized a form as possible. Any historian is primarily a historian of himself. A historian who fails to grasp this fact, or denies it, is thereby imposing a limitation on both his scope and his degree of insight.

It is unreal for an individual to shut himself off from society and deny that he has any concern with politics, for an individual's chief activity is political and social. It is the nature of men to be so, and man is a political animal. But it is equally unreal, and this is less generally perceived, for an individual to suppose that the affairs of the world, whether politics or the realm of thought, can be approached by him objectively, as if they were abstract matters which he could satisfactorily resolve without taking stock of his own relation to them. The most important question about anything in the world for each individual is, "What is there is it for me?" --how it affects him. This may seem a truism. Yet it is a statement whose truth is not generally appreciated, and men act and argue as if all this were not so.
It is curious that my drinking excesses some years back have caused me more mental distress just recently than I think they did at the time. Perhaps I have forgotten some of my former concern. However, I seem now at times to experience anxiety on the subject, i.e. distress at my past behavior, quite out of proportion to its bearing on my life now.

I attribute, now, this occasional heavy drinking to three things: (1) inexperience, which led me to drink too fast or, more important, to drink when I was tired—also I believed that this kind of extremism opened the way into a new world, not realizing that this phase of avant-gardism had become obsolete with the end of the twenties; (2) the desire to escape from my father, to follow a way of life that was not his, to do what he would disapprove; (3) the desire to place myself in an irretrievable or irremediable position. This last was very strong. I later found something on it in a passage by Dostoevsky, which struck me forcibly as applicable to my own motivation.

Now that my life is so much pleasanter, a career of my own, away from my father's control, marriage, children, I no longer have an urge to place myself in an irretrievable position, and it may be this that so sharpens my feeling about past excesses.
I think I have been able to make certain contributions to the job of the chairmanship of a quality and on a level that not many other people I know could have produced. First in importance is my talent, which now seems unmistakable, for sizing up the abilities of others. Second only to this is the fact that I have been able to supply, in certain difficult or complex situations, a certain amount of judgment, a sense of what the general situation really adds up to, of what is important in it. Third, I believe I have sometimes shown some tact in dealing with people in peculiar or difficult situations, a kind of imaginative readjustment to psychological undercurrents.

All this, despite the fact that I have at times in the past greatly over-rated or under-rated people, shown singular absence of judgment in my personal affairs, and have acted in some situations very unskilfully and with an extraordinary absence of tact. I believe, though, that I was able to learn from my mistakes. Certainly I have been vividly conscious of them, or many of them, after they were made, and have brooded over them, to an unhealthy and exaggerated degree. Perhaps from these unfortunate experiences, and the reflections they have occasioned, I have to some extent gained wisdom and judgment, and have in the long run been able to turn my mistakes to good account.

I speculate also, though I am not sure that the speculation is justified, that my mistakes may have come from the same kind of ultimate source as my successes. I think that my mistakes, bad as they were, may have been the fruit of a certain sensitiveness, awareness, concern, a desire to improve a particular situation which greatly exceeded my ability to cope with it. These qualities, when properly educated and directed by the assimilation of experience, may have become the basis of my principal strength, just as they were at one time the basis of my principal weakness.

This speculation could be perhaps developed a good deal further. Thus, my difficult relations with my parents and with other children may have had something to do with my concern about psychological questions and, as my experience increased, my insight into them. My doubts about my own proper role in the world may have an important connection with my present concern about the motivation of behaviour and the deeper existential questions about human life. The fact that I had an unhappy and maladjusted childhood may have set me thinking about certain problems of human affairs which most people do not inquire into very much, and one which they tend to accept ready-made answers.