

able to do in the latter part of it what one could not do in the earlier portion.

I have still another memory from my early reading of the great books. In the opening book of Plato's *Republic*, a conversation occurs between Socrates and the old man, Cephalus, in whose house the dialogue occurs. I cannot refrain from quoting the whole passage:

I [Socrates] replied: There is nothing which for my part I like better, Cephalus, than conversing with aged men; for I regard them as travelers who have gone a journey which I too may have to go, and of whom I ought to enquire, whether the way is smooth and easy, or rugged and difficult. And this is a question which I should like to ask of you who have arrived at that time which the poets call the Threshold of old ages—Is life harder towards the end, or what report do you give of it?

I will tell you, Socrates, he said, what my own feeling is. Men of my age flock together; we are birds of a feather, as the old proverb says; and at our meetings the tale of my acquaintance commonly is—I cannot eat, I cannot drink the pleasures of youth and love are fled away: there was a good time once, but now that is gone, and life is no longer life. Some complain of the slights which are put upon them by relations, and they will tell you sadly of how many evils their old age is the cause. But to me, Socrates, these complainers seem to blame that which is not really in fault. For if old age were the cause, I too being old, and every other old man, would have felt as they do. But this is not my own experience, nor that of others whom I have known. How well I remember the aged poet Sophocles, when in answer to the question, How does love suit with age, Sophocles—are you still the man you were? Peace, he replied most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master. His words have often occurred to my mind since, and they seem as good to me now as at the time when he uttered them. For certainly old age has a great sense of calm and freedom: when the passions relax their hold, then, as Sophocles says, we are freed from the grasp not of one mad master only, but of many. The truth is, Socrates, that these regrets, and also the complaints about relations, are to be attributed to the same cause, which is not old age, but men's characters and tempers for he who is of a calm and hap-

py nature will hardly feel the pressure of age, but to him who is of an opposite disposition youth and age are equally a burden.

CONCEIVING LIFE AS A WHOLE

Later in my career of reading and rereading the great books, I reflected on a point that is made in Book I of Aristotle's *Ethics*. Aristotle said that it was ill-advised to give lectures on ethics to the young. Their immaturity prevents them from understanding with their hearts as well as their minds what must be done to lead a good human life.

The more I have thought about this, the more I have come to appreciate the difference between youth and age with regard to making prudent choices about the means to be employed in the pursuit of happiness, which means the effort to make a good life for oneself.

Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. Aristotle added that the unplanned life is not worth examining. But the one thing that the young can never think about or plan for is life as a whole. I would almost define youth or immaturity as that state of the human being in which it is impossible to think at all about the long future of one's life as a whole.

Paradoxically, that is the very time when one has a long future ahead to think about. As people grow much older and have less and less of a future to hope for and look forward to, only then are they more and more able to think about their whole life and plan for what future is left to them.

That is the reason why Aristotle thought it impossible to teach ethics to the young, by which he did not mean giving them lectures on moral philosophy that they could memorize and pass back verbally on examination papers. He meant that the young are simply unable to do the kind of practical thinking that is requisite for pursuing happiness properly.

In addition, they cannot restrain their desires for the sake of deferred gratification. They want what they want in a hurry—next week, next month, or at the most next year. Only as people grow older and habitually acquiesce in deferred gratification can they make choices in favor of remote goods instead of immediate pleasures, and only then are they inclined to suffer pains for the sake of

achieving remote goods instead of trying to avoid hardships here and now.

George Santayana expressed this insight very eloquently. In *My Host the World*, he wrote:

Old persons . . . have an intrinsic vitality of which youth is incapable; precisely the balance and wisdom that comes from long perspectives and broad foundations.

The only sound moral judgments are long-term judgments. Almost all short-term judgments are likely to be unsound and to end in the frustration or defeat of the goals people ought to seek. But youth is the time when humans are incapable of making long-term judgments. That they can do only when they have become genuinely mature.

WISDOM IN YOUTH: NO SUCH THING

If practical wisdom consists in aiming at the right long-term objectives in life and in making the right choices for achieving the distant and remote goals people ought to seek, then a wise young person is, like a round square, a contradiction in terms. To be both wise and young is a sheer impossibility.

It is also impossible to be both young and educated. I cannot find, this said anywhere in the great books, but it is the first principle of my own educational philosophy.

No one can become a generally educated person in school, college, or university. One can be trained there in some technical or professional expertise or specialization, but that is quite different from becoming a generally educated person. If schools and colleges were at their best, which they never are, then the young might get from school and college the preparation they need for the continued learning they must engage in for all the years of their life in order to become generally educated in the final years after the age of 50 or 60. I think I am now at last a "generally educated" person. But that did not begin to happen until after I turned 60.

The reason why general education can be begun in school and college but can never be completed there is the same reason as the one that explains all the other deficiencies of youth. Immaturity is the insuperable obstacle. To speak of a generally educated young per-

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son is as much a self-contradiction as to call young men and women wise.

To turn once more to what the great books have to say about the advantages of growing old, I would like to quote the following passages from Cicero, Seneca, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Jonathan Swift.

In his treatise on *Old Age*, Cicero puts the following three passages into the mouth of the elder statesman, Cato. In the first, Cato says:

The great affairs of life are not performed by physical strength, or activity, or nimbleness of body, but by deliberation, character, expression of opinion. Of these old age is not only not deprived, but, as a rule, has them in a greater degree.

In the second, Cato continues:

The course of life is fixed, and nature admits of its being run but in one way, and only once: and to each part of our life there is something specially seasonable; so that the feebleness of children, as well as the high spirit of youth, the soberness of mature years, and the ripe wisdom of old age—all have a certain natural advantage which should be secured in its proper season.

And in the third, there is this from Cato:

The fact is that old age is respectable just as long as it asserts itself, maintains its proper rights, and is not enslaved to any one. For as I admire a young man who has something of the old man in him, so do I an old one who has something of a young man. The man who aims at this may possibly become old in body—in mind he never will.

The great Roman stoic Seneca expressed sentiments similar to those of Cicero. In *Letters to Lucilius* he wrote:

We should cherish old age and enjoy it. It is full of pleasure if you know how to use it. Fruit tastes most delicious just when its season is ending. The charms of youth are at their greatest at the time of its passing. It is the final glass which pleases the inveterate drinker, the one that sets the crowning touch on his intoxication and sends him off into oblivion. Every pleasure

defers till its last its greatest delights. The time of life which offers the greatest delight is the age that sees the downward movement—not the steep decline—already begun and in my opinion even the age that stands on the brink has pleasures of its own—or else the very fact of not experiencing the want of any pleasures takes their place. How nice it is to have outworn one's desires and left them behind!

In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in "The Knight's Tale," one finds the following lines:

For true it is, age has great advantage;
Experience and wisdom come with age;
Men may the old out-run, but not out-wit.

Finally, there is the following marvelous witticism from Swift in his *Thoughts on Various Subjects*:

No wise Man ever wished to be younger.

BEMOANING THE TWILIGHT YEARS

Now, of course, one would expect to find some negative voices among the authors of the great books. They are there, but they by no means counterbalance or outweigh the sober wisdom in favor of life's final years.

Martin Luther in his *Table Talk* says:

Young fellows are tempted by girls, men who are thirty years old are tempted by gold, when they are forty years old they are tempted by honor and glory, and those who are sixty years old say to themselves, "What a pious man I have become!"

Much more adverse to aging is what Michel de Montaigne wrote:

Old age puts more wrinkles in our minds than on our faces: and we never, or rarely, see a soul that in growing old does not come to smell sour and musty. Man grows and dwindles in his entirety.

And there is the English poet Lord Byron, who, in a poem entitled "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," calls attention to one serious depri-

vation that cannot be avoided in old age and that must be acknowledged as one of its chief disadvantages:

What is the worst of woes that wait on age?
What stamps the wrinkle deeper on the brow?
To view each loved one blotted from life's page,
And be alone on earth, as I am now.

AS THE BODY FAILS

To the cornucopia of wit and wisdom that one can find by plumbing the great philosophical minds contained in the great books, I have in this short essay only a few things to add of a serious nature.

One is an insight from a paper in a medical journal in which a physician argued persuasively against retirement, if that means the relinquishment of important work to do. He summed up his argument pithily by saying that people do not wear out; they rust out.

I would also add that, if people retain the unimpeded use of their intellectual faculties, even though limbs may falter, desires may diminish, and senses may fail, then they become more educable, not less so.

The loss of sensory acuity, even the loss of sight or hearing, does not weaken the imaginative powers and, in my judgment, tends to increase intellectual powers. As the body weakens in any or all of its corporeal organs, the intellect grows stronger, one can think better, more clearly, more soundly. The loss of immediate or short-term memories that inevitably accompanies advancing years is an annoying practical disability, but it in no way diminishes the power of creative, analytic, and reflective thought.

People do not think with their brains, though they cannot think without them. A healthy brain is, therefore, an indispensable condition for intellectual activity at any time of life. Given that condition, the power to think reflectively and analytically never diminishes and, on the contrary, appears to increase with age.

SOME NOT-SO-SERIOUS REMARKS

To conclude this essay, I would like to depart from its serious tenor and report a speech I made on my 80th birthday at a party given for me by my friends and associates—officers, editors, sales people, and others—at Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. It follows:

From the vantage point of 80 years, here are ten rules and recommendations for achieving both success and happiness—according to Machiavelli, not Aristotle, the general maxim being: Do whatever is honorable as well as expedient in order to succeed, and if not completely honorable, at least appear to be virtuous in doing it.

1. With regard to health, vigor, and vitality: never exercise. As for dieting, eat only the most delicious calories.
2. With regard to marriage: if at first you don't succeed, try again.
3. Never work more than seven days a week or 12 hours a day, and sometimes a little less. To grow younger with the years, work harder as you get older.
4. Never take money for work you would not do if you did not need the money.
5. If you have the inclination and ability, the best way to spend time is to write books; the next best is to edit them; and if you cannot do either, then sell them.
6. Never write more than one book a year, because it doesn't pay; but edit as many as possible, and sell them by the hundred thousands.
7. Have a secretary who thinks she understands what you are up to as well as you do.
8. Surround yourself with friends and associates with whom you can be almost as honest as you are with yourself.
9. Get over the folly of thinking that there is any conflict between high living and high thinking; asceticism is for the birds.

10. Never give up; never say die; always say "If I die," NOT "When I die."

A FINAL CONFESSION

Now permit me one additional serious reflection. Eighty years can be neatly divided into four periods of 20 years each. Virtue may be necessary for honorable success, but the blessings of good fortune are more important for happiness on Earth.

It has been my good fortune to have the four quarters of my life arranged in ascending order: the first 20 years, the hardest and the worst; the last 20, the easiest and best. Indeed, of the second of my 40 years, the last 20 were the best of all. I confess that my greatest fortune of all was finding Caroline, who was foolish enough (at age 26), courageous enough, and tolerant enough to marry me.

Monty Adler