

November 1998 Premier Issue

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

A Syntopical Approach to the Great Books

“The ancients stole all our ideas from us.”—Mark Twain

Dear Members,

Welcome to the first issue of The Great Ideas Online, our new e-journal dedicated to ideas—The Great Ideas that underlie all aspects of our lives. As an extension of our print journal, *Philosophy is Everybody's Business*, we hope it will serve as an interactive resource that embraces a wide range of topics, issues, and information.

You'll find The Great Ideas Online to be timeless and immediate, energetic and thoughtful, serious and, at times, even humorous. It presents points of view that contribute to a deeper understanding of our world. Through articles, essays, letters to the editor, and question and answer forums, a “typical” issue of the journal may contain a mixture of political and social commentary, insights into philosophical issues, analyses of topics related to education, and in-depth discussions of ideals and insights vital to our moral and intellectual growth—as individuals, as parents, and as citizens in participatory government.

Some issues may only feature letters to Dr. Adler and his response, or a “resources” listing of items such as Dr. Adler's audio and video programs, articles, etc., available through the Center. For your reference, we also plan to maintain an archive of past issues, which you can search or browse at any time.

And, through our weekly exchange of information and

understanding, we hope to stay in closer touch with you. Toward that end, we invite you to contribute your thoughts, questions, suggestions, pertinent articles, or Internet links you may wish to share with other members—we value your opinion.

Our fervent hope is that you will profit from and enjoy the intellectual stimulation of The Great Ideas Online and that you'll look forward to finding it in your e-mail box. May it provide you with what Plutarch called "the refreshment of philosophy."

We thank you for your continued support of the Center.

Max Weismann, Editor

PHILOSOPHY IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

It cannot be too often repeated that philosophy is everybody's business. To be a human being is to be endowed with the proclivity to philosophize. To some degree we all engage in philosophical thought in the course of our daily lives. Acknowledging this is not enough. It is also necessary to understand why this is so and what philosophy's business is. The answer, in a word, is Ideas. In two words, it is Great Ideas—the Ideas basic and indispensable to understanding ourselves, our society, and the world in which we live.

These Ideas constitute the vocabulary of everyone's thought. Unlike the concepts of the special sciences, the words that name the Great Ideas are all words of ordinary, everyday speech. They are not technical terms. They do not belong to the private jargon of a specialized branch of knowledge. Everyone uses them in ordinary conversation. But everyone does not understand them as well as they can be understood, nor has everyone pondered sufficiently the questions raised by each of the Great Ideas. To think one's way through to some resolution of the conflicting answers to these questions is to

philosophize.

This journal aims to do no more than to provide some guidance in this process. We will limit the consideration of these Ideas to an elementary delineation that will try to achieve three results for you.

First, it should give you a surer grasp of the various meanings of the word you use when you talk about the Idea.

Second, the delineation of each Idea should make you more aware than you normally are of questions or issues that you cannot avoid confronting if you are willing to think a little further about the Idea—basic ones, ones that human beings have been arguing about over the centuries.

Third, in the consideration of each Idea, we are led to the consideration of other Ideas. How does our understanding of truth affect our understanding of goodness and beauty? How does our understanding of what is good and bad carry us not only to an understanding of what is right and wrong, but also to an understanding of justice, and how does that affect our understanding of liberty and equality as well?

If we succeed in these aims, we will have helped you engage in the business of philosophy, which is everybody's business not only because nobody can do much thinking, if any at all, without using the Great Ideas, but also because no special, technical competence of the kind that is required for the particular sciences and other special disciplines is required for thinking about the Great Ideas. Everybody does it, wittingly or unwittingly.

I hope I am right in believing that everyone would wish to do it just a little better.

Mortimer J. Adler, Chairman and Co-Founder,
Center for the Study of The Great Ideas