

CHALLENGES OF PHILOSOPHIES IN COMMUNICATION

Mortimer Adler

*The director of the Institute for Philosophical Research says perfect communication is only for the "angels." He suggests some ways to improve "human communication." **

As I look at the program for Communications Week, I am aware that I am the eccentric member of the group. Everybody else is talking about communication in a perfectly normal way. Mass communication, television as a means of communication, communication that involves various technical facilities, communication in the fields of politics or economics—that is the way the program reads.

If there are philosophies of communication, I do not know what they are. I am going to change the title to the singular to give you my own philosophical reflections on the meaning and nature of communication. You can multiply that by any number you want. I am concerned with communication as an attempt by a person to convey thoughts or feelings to one or more other persons. It makes no difference to me whether there are any technical facilities or not, whether it is done directly or indirectly, in the open air or at the bottom of a pit.

I am interested in the whole tradition and history of the great ideas in our Western civilization. Communication is not among them. Communication is a word about as recent in anybody's vocabulary as "salesmanship." Some time in this century words like "communication" became important words in our vocabularies. I cannot imagine *any* of our academic ancestors alive prior to the beginning of this century even able to *imagine* what a School of Communications would do. It was not an academic subject.

Although the word is new, what that word stands for, in the deepest sense, is not new, nor are the problems new either. As I look back at the tradition of Western thought, philosophers have from the beginning, from Plato and Aristotle on, been concerned with the process of communication. If you ask a philosopher today what he means by "communication" I think he will take the question as a very easy one. It is the kind of question in which he would expect agreement among all persons offering answers (unlike many other ideas which are much more difficult than that). He would say communication is the process whereby one person transmits to other persons—another person—thoughts and feelings that he wishes the other person to have, to adopt, to consider, to act on. But this is an inadequate definition of communication because it is one-way communication. Propaganda is of this sort. I may not adopt or act on ideas or feelings that I wish you to adopt or act on; this is a failure in communication in which I, the *communicator*, am not becoming one with you, the *communicatee*. The process is one in which *two* persons come to share the *same* thoughts or feelings; they become in a sense *assimilated* to one another, in un-

derstanding, emotion, judgment or decision.

This is a widespread human difficulty. Angels have no difficulty at all about communication; angels communicate telepathically. I think telepathy should be reserved for angels. In the angelic hierarchy, every angel understands perfectly the mind of every other angel. There is no other medium of communication. Human communication unfortunately involves media—physical media—language, signs, gestures. And since telepathic communication involves no machinery, there are no *techniques* of communication among angels.

What are the main problems in communication? I think they are three. *First*, to understand the nature of the *obstacles* to communication and to make a sober judgment as to how far they are surmounted. *Second*, to know or develop the techniques and *means* for overcoming these difficulties as far as that is possible. And *third*, estimate the *importance* of communication in the personal life of the individual and of mankind at large. Of these three concerns I think we in the 20th century have, better than our ancestors, an understanding of the *importance* of communication. I do not think we have a better understanding of the intellectual *means* of communication, and I do not think we have a better understanding than they did of the *obstacles* or difficulties.

The first difficulty is that *every language* is imperfect as a medium of communication. The ideal of the perfect language is *absolutely illusory*, semantics to the contrary notwithstanding. The great 17th century philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, had this ideal, but the very clarity with which he stated it illustrates how illusory it was. He said if we had a “universal characteristic” for every idea—a unique symbol that represented that idea alone—communication would be facilitated to a high degree. From Leibnitz down to Bertrand Russell, the whole tradition of logistics, of mathematical logic, of symbolism has been bothered by this ideal. If only we could invent an ideal language that would be free from ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings, our problems would be solved.

Any conventional language, whether the language of mathematics or any other kind of language, because it is humanly instituted, will have the basic imperfections of language. One of these basic imperfections that will never be removed and will only be partly surmounted is that a given symbol has more than one meaning, and that for a given object there are two or more symbols. What Leibnitz had in mind was one symbol, one thing.

Our language habits are just as individual as our eating habits, our walking habits, and our dressing habits. The interesting thing about each person is that he is attached to his own vocabulary and to his own idiom as to his own flesh. Every person has a persistent, almost *unconquerable* desire to use words in his own way. I know this from many, many years of lecturing and discussion in which I have often said to an audience, “Please, now, for this evening let me use the word X (whatever the word is) in this sense and only in this sense. I know you have other meanings for it, but let *me* use it *for this evening* in this *one* sense. And when *you* use it, use it in this sense, too.” People will not do it. It violates the sanctity of their verbal habits.

Another difficulty is the fact that unlike the angels who are purely intellectual beings, we unfortunately are, so far as we are rational animals, (a lot of accent on the “animal” part) full of emotions and feelings as well as of thoughts and judgments, and the *same* language expresses *both*. Now this is not a figment of the modern semantic distinction between the emotive and ideational use of words, I assure you. It is basically important because ideas and feelings are, and often should be, associated and even fused. But it *is* confusing when words that seem to express *thought only* do express *feelings*, or when words that seem to *convey thought* only *arouse feeling*.

There is a still further complication in the use of language. We use our minds for two different purposes: to think in order to know, and to think in order to act. Action and knowledge are the aims. The *theoretical* order is the order in which *knowledge* is the end; the *practical* order is where *action* is the end, and language serves both purposes. We sometimes address ourselves to our fellow men not to get them *to know*, but to get them *to do* something. It is very important to know what you are doing, and for the person to whom you are talking to know which you are doing. These two dimensions—the theoretical, with knowledge as an end, and the practical, with action as an end—are often confused.

There is still another difference. It is perfectly obvious that for any two or more persons to communicate effectively, they need a common background of experience or knowledge as the general context for coming to terms with one another. Why is it difficult to communicate certain things to children? The answer is they do not have the experience from which the meanings are formed. You have to wait until they get the experience before the words take on the meaning. Talk to strangers whose knowledge of you is unsure,

who do not know what you know. Clearly, if you had someone alongside of you who had very much your own experience, whose experience paralleled yours, overlapped it, whose knowledge was like your knowledge, communication would be easier, would it not? Ideally, if two-thirds of us could have identical knowledge, communication would be easier still. But this difficulty exists in the relation of any two persons, however similar they may be in their background, for their experience and knowledge are never identical, and not being identical, they have a difficulty of discourse.

All of you are aware that on any university faculty there are failures in communication. The degree of specialization is so great. You have educated specialists who are so much specialists they have nothing in common with one another. At professional meetings people are broken into sub-sections and sub-sections of sub-sections to get a few people together who can talk to one another. Otherwise, it is just not possible.

There is also the need for self-understanding as a basis for understanding others or being understood by them. By definition, of course, communication normally applies to two or more persons—the self and the other. Freud's greatest insight, in my judgment—and the formative insight which underlies all of psychoanalytic theory and psychotherapy—is that neurosis and psychosis always involves schizophrenia or split personality. It is a personality split that is represented by imperfect communication between the thoughts of the self. The reason Freud began to call his cure the "Talking Cure" was that he saw that what he was doing by getting the patient to talk to him was eventually going to produce a translation from one language that the patient used to another. Let me illustrate that very quickly for you:

There are two languages that all of us who are neurotic (and all of us are) use. There is the language of the repressed id, and the language of the ego. The language of the socialized ego is the *social* language of the country. The language of the repressed id is the language of dreams, of symptoms, of all kinds of lapses, of the whole machinery of aberration. Manifest concepts are the *symbols* of dreams and not what the dreams *say*. If that were the case, you could say it and you would not need a dream. So you have one person talking two languages and trying *not* to communicate with himself.

That split condition has been present in every form of neurosis and psychosis. Psychotherapy is nothing but a process of getting at

these two languages and translating one into the other, producing communication. When you get such communication it is what the Greek wise men long before Socrates said was the highest wisdom: namely, Know Thyself. The basic point is, the Ideal Communicator or the Ideal Communicatee is the person who perfectly understands himself. Since none of us really do understand ourselves, we are all imperfect as communicators or communicatees.

Communication also requires a great deal of energy. It takes great effort to say what we mean. Speech is easy, as you know, but careful, precise, clear thoughtful speech? Very difficult. It is as hard as thinking, than which there is nothing harder. Most of us are lazy about thinking, and most of us in consequence are lazy about thoughtful speech. I think you will find as you go back in your life that only when the need is very great do you really make the effort. Normally you just slither through the day, in clumsy, sloppy fashion and communication is very poor.

To what degree are these difficulties surmountable?

How far can we overcome the imperfections of language?

Only slightly.

How far can we keep the relations of our thoughts and our feelings in good order?

Very slightly.

How far can we go to create a common background of knowledge and experience for all men?

Not very far.

How much can we attain the ideal of each man perfectly understanding himself without psychosis or neurosis to any degree?

Not very much.

How many of us are willing, every time we talk to another human being, to expend the effort to really do it well?

Few of us or, if ever, few times.

How many of us are free from all neurosis and in perfect possession of the moral and the intellectual virtues?

As you answer *that* question you will see that I am not exaggerating when I say that a *fifty* per cent success in the process of communication would be very good, indeed. We probably do not come near that now.

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Hearing the difficulties, and my estimate of their insurmountability, how does one approach them? Let me give you the answer in general, and then in particular.

The answer *in general* is three things: In order of difficulty, you overcome them by *psychoanalysis, training in the liberal arts, and general education.*

If there really were effective psychoanalysis (which I doubt); if everyone were *really* well trained in the liberal arts; and if everyone had a sound general education, I think we might lift communication to a somewhat higher level. These are the only means and techniques I know for doing anything about the problem.

One reason I think that all of us have the feeling that communication is more difficult today—and in fact, why we have schools of communication—is that we live in a century when training in the liberal arts has almost disappeared, and even when it is present, is very inadequate. I want to be sure you understand the liberal arts are not the humanities. The liberal arts are grammar, logic, and rhetoric. These arts, when mastered and practiced, help the person to use language more effectively for clear purposes at hand.

I am not talking about ordinary courses in these subjects. I am talking about training in reading, writing, speaking and listening from the point of view of the grammatical and logical aspects of those processes. We can leave an audience out entirely. The question is: Can I get the statement to say what I mean? Can I get conformity of the statement in my mind—forgetting now communication with anybody else? It is terribly hard to put on paper in words *what you mean.* Grammar and logic are the tools for doing that. Rhetoric uses grammar and logic, but it goes further than that, not only to get a statement that says what I mean, but to get it to say what I mean in a way that will add to an understanding of the meaning. It is the controlling office, so far as communication is concerned.

Take a look at the men who went to school in our colonial col-

leges. Those young people were trained in grammar, logic and rhetoric in its artistic sense of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Look at the kind of political communication that took place in the 18th century. Look at the basis of our Constitutional Convention. If you listen to Adams speak to Jefferson or Jefferson speak to Adams in a letter—you will find nothing parallel to it today. They were not geniuses, they were not any brighter than we, they were not better educated in the sense of being more learned, but they wrote and talked, listened and responded much better than we. I can only attribute it to the fact that they were better *liberal artists*.

Now take my third general point, and that is *general education*. By “general” I mean something that everybody shares before he starts to specialize. I would if I could remove every elective from the educational program. I would outlaw specialization prior to the Bachelor of Arts degree. The degree would signify not only training in the liberal arts but a common general education for everyone, *exactly the same*. I do not mean it would be administered in the same way at all levels, but its content and aims would be the same, so that the total population would have a common background of intellectual experience. When John Erskine finally persuaded the Columbia faculty in 1920 to put into the curriculum in the junior and senior years what was called the General Honors courses—the beginning of the Great Books reading—his reason for it was very simple. It was designed to find some common concept of learning, to form an intellectual community.

I said also I would give you the answer *in particular*. Let me do it very quickly:



In particular, listening is important and much more difficult than talking. Let me describe to you what many conversations that you and I have are like:

Jones and Smith meet. Jones makes some remarks, and Smith

waits for Jones to stop talking; he is polite and quiet. When Jones finishes talking, saying what he has to say, Smith begins. It is not necessarily relevant to anything that Jones has said, but it is his turn to talk. He has not been listening, he has been thinking of what he is going to say; his ears have been cocked to catch the time when Jones' voice drops and he can begin. Jones will then stand politely by while Smith delivers himself of whatever he has. This is the way many conversations go, for many hours. I have heard them in planes, in drawing rooms, at dinner parties, and in classrooms. The reason is as I say, *talking* is easy, but *listening* is very hard. It requires an effort at attention, at sympathy, at interpretation, with all the attendant difficulties about words and differences in the other person's idiom.

Most of us, by the way, do not speak *interrogatively*. Most of us use declarative sentences. You often say, "Don't make a statement. Ask a question." A statement comes back. When you make a statement you are really demanding that the other person listen to you. When you ask a question, you are obliging yourself to listen to what the other person says. Some people ask questions and do not fulfill the obligation. You can not ask a good second question without listening to the answer to the first question. The wonderful thing about the Dialogues of Plato—which, of course, is idealized communication—is that Socrates always understands perfectly everything that everybody says to the Gods, which of course is inhuman. But Socrates' questions are absolutely relevant to the previous things; he knows what to ask to get an understanding of them.

Now let me turn from the narrow world of our personal lives to the larger intellectual and political worlds and then conclude:

Before I came out to San Francisco I spent eight years in producing the Synopticon, which was an effort to find out whether there were any common themes of conversation in the great tradition of Western thought. The work convinced me there *were* common themes, so much so that we even coined the phrase, "The Great Conversation" to represent it.

What this study did, actually, was to discover how very *bad* the "Great Conversation" was among the best philosophers, how *little* they addressed themselves to one another. Not only was there little real agreement and disagreement about the most important questions, but when there was disagreement, there was little real disputation of thought on the subject. Perhaps this is all right. It has only been twenty-five hundred years and that is not a very long

time in any tradition. Maybe we will grow up intellectually and do better millions of years ahead. I think we will take that much time. I do not look for improvement tomorrow.

“Is language not a science? Particularly when you find that the man-language has just been cracked by electronic computers? Is mathematics not language? How can we segregate these things? We are trying to show that you cannot put science off in a corner. It is part of all our lives and part of all our enjoyment. “What are the things that stir curiosity? These you have observed—the great phenomena of nature: the earthquakes, the volcanoes—the gentle things that give you life: the seasons, the budding of a tree in the spring, the soaring of a seagull. How does a child satisfy his curiosity? He picks the thing up, he bites it, he rattles it, he smells it, and he tries to break it. That is exactly what a scientist does, only a scientist calls it analysis. A child does not have instruments; he is restricted to using his natural senses, but that was how science began too. People used their natural senses as best they were, to satisfy their curiosity about the phenomena of nature. But they found their senses were sometimes inadequate. The eye only has a narrow window in the total electromagnetic spectrum. The ear, touch and all senses can deceive. And so we have devised instruments for two purposes: first to sharpen our senses, and secondly to extend them. After you have instruments you have the need to order your observations. When you can measure just three things—cold, hot, and warm—this is ordering your observations. As soon as you start ordering things, you find the need for mathematics.”—DEAN ATHELSTAN SPILHAUS in welcome address at Communications Week.



Symposium: The Challenge of Philosophies of Communication

Chairman: Dr. Arthur Smullyan, Professor of Philosophy; Chairman, Department of Philosophy, University of Washington.

Principal: Dr. Mortimer J. Adler, Institute for Philosophical Research, San Francisco, California.

Panelists: Merritt E. Benson, Professor of Communications, School of Communications, University of Washington; Rev. Francis J. Greene, S.J., Head, Department of Journalism, Seattle University; Dr. Patrick Hazard, Professor of English and Humanities, Beaver College, Glenside, Pennsylvania; Dr. Irving Lieberman, Director of Librarianship, University of Washington.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY DR. SMULLYAN:

Dr. Adler last night took the view that communication was not a conspicuous fact in philosophical controversy. I hope he is wrong. He also seemed to suggest that a prerequisite for progress in communication was a system of education in which the humanistic and liberal subjects were the exclusive concern of undergraduate training. If this is indeed a prerequisite for progress in communication, the outlook for progress is somewhat dim, since I do not see any prospect that anything like that can be envisaged for an indefinite future.

ADLER: I would like to respond to Dr. Smullyan's second question first. I hope that what I am going to say *partly* removes some of the pessimism that he feels. When I say "liberal" and "humanistic" I certainly did not mean the exclusion of the sciences or mathematics. The part of the curriculum I would leave out of general education is the so-called social studies, which fall below the level of intelligibility for me for the most part. All the good sciences, mathematics, history and the humanities should be included.

The worst thing that has happened in our environment is that most people confuse liberal arts training with poetry, English and history. It is a very restricted notion of the liberal arts and humanities. The only thing that is excluded in what I would call a humanistic or liberal training is technical specialization. The study of the exact sciences, as sciences, for the sake of knowledge, is as much a part of liberal general education as the study of poetry and of philosophy.

I do not see why it is impossible to hope for a revival of general and liberal education. My conception of what is required is something that can be accomplished in the first 12 years. I am two years more radical than my old friend Dr. Hutchins. I would eliminate the four-part division of education, which is overburdened, full of water and a waste of time, and have only three parts, as they have in Europe and have had for centuries. I would have a Primary School, a Secondary School, and then professional or technical training. The Bachelor of Arts degree would come at the end of the Secondary School, which is where it belongs—that is, purely novitiate, licentiate, saying, "This fellow is able to read and write; he should be able to study now." And the University is the place where he studies. Whenever I say common general education and a liberal training for all children, with no specialization, it is only in the first 12 years. I know I am talking about ideals far removed

from the dreams cherished by the National Education Association, but I have never been friendly with the NEA.

SMULLYAN: In the study of physics and mathematics, it seems strange to say you will study these things without ... “technicalities.”

ADLER: Any good subject matter is full of technicalities. I do not mean that. I mean only that for general education we are interested in the understanding of science, not in the technical application of science. As Mr. James Conant said at Harvard, the *layman* in our society must understand science. He doesn't have to be technically competent to perform in any of the sciences, but he must have an understanding of its principles, its methods, its great experiments, its history.

If the population shared some broad base of general reading, such as science, some broad base of intellectual experience, communication would be facilitated. Let me just state the opposite for a moment. Three or four years ago I was invited to address a forum at the University of Wisconsin. The 12 or 15 brightest students at the university were my hosts. Before the lecture I asked them, “I wonder if I can get a list of 10 books that all of you have read.” These were seniors. I could not get *one* book.

Now, I would like to return to the question Professor Smullyan asked about the level of communication in philosophical thought and the degree to which the ideal of controversy has been achieved. The two volumes of The Institute for Philosophical Research are, I think, a very fair, patient study of most of the outstanding thought from the Greeks to the 20th century on the subject of “freedom.” I can tell you what we found in general. The evidence itself is too detailed and complicated.

We found that the word “freedom” can represent at least five different subjects. Maybe many more than five, but there are at least five *clear* subjects. Many writers write only about one or two of these five subjects, although they do not indicate which subjects they are writing about. Very often you will find writers thinking they are talking about the same subject other writers are talking about and appear to be disagreeing with them when they are not talking about the same thing at all. For example, the subject which in philosophy is conventionally called “free will” is quite a different subject (the conditions of talking about it and the questions that are raised by it) from another freedom.

Most of us, when we use the word “freedom” are describing the *lack* of it—when a man is in chains—a freedom which means *exemption* from coercion and constraint by exterior forces, environmental or human. It is a purely circumstantial freedom; it is not natural or free will. These are only two of the five freedoms.

The conception of freedom built by Marx and Engels is another one. Another is the moral conception of freedom which is the root issue between Protestant and Catholic theology. The question of the conditions of freedom with or without grace—which by the way has secular as well as theological meaning—thus freedom is within a man and has nothing to do with external circumstances or his nature. It has to do with his reason and his will on the one hand and his passions and animal inclinations on the other.

These are the different freedoms. Now, what happens when we take any one of these and say, “Now what questions are asked about it?” and “Do a number of authors ask and answer the same question?” We find a great many questions only one or two authors have asked and many others have never faced. Obviously there can not be much controversy if in the history of thought on this subject only one author or a few authors have asked a specific question.

In some cases we find that only a few authors have asked the question and they have all given the affirmative answer. Though a negative answer is quite possible to give, no one has given the negative answer. Or the reverse, you see. Of the five subjects, the only one that is really elaborated is free will. The other four, the more obvious examples of what we call political freedom—social freedom or economic freedom—the ones you would think would be the most discussed, are the most seldom discussed.

HAZARD: Could we go back a moment to this problem of causality? I was really bothered by your statement of a few moments ago that the social sciences have no place in a liberal education. I was trained in the humanities and have learned to despise the clichés that the humanists throw around about the social sciences. They are still impressed by Auden’s sneer that “Thou shalt not commit a social science.” It seems to me that a book like Daniel Lerner’s collection, *The Human Meaning of the Social Sciences*, has more to say to the student of mass communication than many other disciplines. If you tell us, as a philosopher, that we cannot have a sound theory of causality, you are making it impossible for us to assign books like Joseph Klapper’s *The Effects of Mass Communication*, you are letting us drift out to sea on the problem of multiple causation with no rationale for analyzing short-term and long-term

effects of the media.

ADLER: I did not say that there is not a sound theory of causality, I simply said that in the controversy about freedom, there are quite disparate theories of causation, and these differences are not argued. I do not think the existence or non-existence of a sound theory of causation has any bearing on my remark about the social sciences. I would have no competence to say whether or not what social sciences do is of interest or of use in the technical field of mass communication.

HAZARD: They are indispensable.

ADLER: That may very well be. I was saying I did not think very much enlightenment came from them for the purposes of general and liberal education. On a much lower level, I am saying the social studies should not appear in the first twelve years of the curriculum, that is all I am saying. The social studies, for the most part, deal with complex moral, political, economic problems that children do not have enough experience to deal with. I would postpone the social studies to the graduate school.

HAZARD: What about anthropology? Do you think this is a science of some relevance for a liberal education?

ADLER: I think it is a graduate subject again. To the extent that general liberal education has some basic interest in the study of man, I think that the basic anthropological facts about the diversity of the human tribes should come somewhere into the picture. But not the details of anthropological knowledge, no. I am talking only about general, liberal schooling, which is a matter of the first twelve years. The main job of those first twelve years is two-fold: To teach the children how to read, write, speak and listen, which would take almost the twelve years if you did a good job at it; to get some preliminary introduction to the whole field of learning. The notion that children, in the first twelve years of schooling, should get any real competence in any technical subject matter is out of the picture.

BENSON: May I ask a question in a different direction? We have recently had some significant changes in two of the great books in our literature: the new issue of the dictionary, and the King James version of the Bible has been rewritten. The idea seems to be that one word is as good as another. Last night you were rather discouraging about the hopes for increasing precision and clarity in communication. As we broaden the democratic process and make

one word as good as another in many contexts, are we making precision in communication more and more unattainable?

ADLER: That is really the answer to that question. I think one word has always been as good as another. I do not think the new, the Third Edition of Webster's did that particular thing. The only social institution that I know that operates in the opposite fashion is the French Academie. And I suspect that most people in France do not pay full attention to the French Academie. But words are absolutely conventional counters; anyone has a right to use any word any way he wishes.

BENSON: Yes, but we are throwing the conventional uses away.

ADLER: The problem is above the level of words. I have some meanings for the word "cause." You may have different meanings. Professor Smullyan may have different meanings. I have no right to say that my meanings for the word are correct. No one has a right to appropriate a word. But if our aim is communication, then our effort should be to take a blackboard and say, "Mr. Smullyan means by *cause*, X, Y and Z. Now I mean by *cause*, X, Y and A. I do not have his Z meaning; he does not have my A meaning. We do agree about two of the meanings." You may come along and say, "You are all wrong. *Cause* means just this—W." Now at that point, no one is right. All you are doing is saying, "I am trying to say what I mean." For the purpose of communication what we have to do is say, "Look. If we go on talking, if we really want to get at this, we have to take the word *cause* and add a whole series of sub-scripts so you can say, 'Now, I am in Cause Sense 3,' Professor Smullyan says, 'I am in Cause Sense 4,'" and we can keep open the discourse.

BENSON: You are now saying that we will not set up standards, and then you are saying that we are Aristotelian enough to say we must.

ADLER: But never standards that say "This is the right way to use a word." Never that. Standards of procedure for clarity and precision, but never any rules, any legislation about words. That is impossible.

BENSON: Can people agree to meanings of words?

ADLER: For a time, yes.

BENSON: Well, why cannot they extend that agreement? Why

cannot they establish a community of discourse that will endure over and beyond the length of a seminar?

ADLER: They could; it is unlikely, that is all. Everybody in this room could leave here saying, “We have a pact with one another to use the word ‘love’ only in the sense where it is identified with ‘sex.’” What would be the good of our agreeing? Any one of us going out of the room might meet somebody else who said, “What do you mean? Brotherly love, motherly love, love of God? Then when we say God is love, we mean God is sex?” You cannot own the word. You can only say, “Oh, well I see you are using the word now in its quite different sense.” The reason that Leibnitz’s ideal of a perfect language is impossible is if you take any of the thousand absolutely basic terms listed in the Syntopicon, any one of them has a range of meaning so large that you could not possibly have a perfect *language*. If you had a word for every meaning, it would be so large that it would be unmasterable.

GREENE: Most of your comments seem to be on education. Presumably you feel that one of the main purposes of communication, if not the main purpose, is educating everyone so that they can be communicated with. What do you think the communications industry might do to foster more clear communication? Maybe that is a little too practical?

ADLER: It is not too practical if there is a practical answer. There may be a practical answer to the question and I may not know it. In fact, I am sure I do not. I can only say that if what I said last night is even in the direction of the truth, I do not think they can do anything. Professionals in all branches of the communications industry—newspapers, radio or television—might write more clearly and speak more clearly, but this might not improve the reception. The reception depends on educational backgrounds. Greater excellence by the *communicator* will not by itself effect a greater level of communication if the *communicatee* is inadequate.

LIEBERMAN: I want to take a totally different subject area. In the *Post-Intelligencer* this week there was a full page article by Jenkin Lloyd Jones headed “We Have Reached the Summit Turning Point.” He is taking issue with our present educational system and all of the communications arts in terms of taste, standards, censorship, etc. Do you want to comment on the idea of taste and standards, perhaps touching on the idea of censorship?

ADLER: Are you asking if we have standards of excellence in television broadcasting, radio broadcasting and journalism? I think

we do have standards of excellence. The best critics in the country—there are a few good critics in the fields of each of these media—are applying standards by which they are saying, “that is good” and “that is bad.” People of good taste, on the whole, find the judgments of the critics are pretty sound.

LIEBERMAN: He is pointing out that we are on the verge of going downhill and we had better catch ourselves pretty fast. I question the point of view that was expressed in this thing.


ADLER: Why does he think so?

LIEBERMAN: He gives examples in terms of the films we are looking at right now. He picks up some literature that is being written and published.

ADLER: Well, for a number of years I worked in the Hays Office in Hollywood, I spent some time with Mr. Breen watching them actually censor films, and I took part in the actual writing of the annual report for a number of years. I was interested in the aesthetics of the movies among all the popular media. This was at the height of the industry, by the way, when 90 million people a week were seeing the movies. There were 500 feature films produced a year. I got a list of all those films. There was not a year for 10 years that I could not pick out 25 absolutely fine films. People tend to look at the other side of that picture. To get 25 good films you had to produce 500. The notion that you could produce just 25 good films and not 26—one bad one—is, I think in the nature of the industry, economically and technically in any way, unthinkable.

LIEBERMAN: It wasn't so much the standard of excellence that he was concerned with, as I read the statement. What he was getting at was that the whole fiber of the country was questionable in terms of what we are producing in creative literature and ...

ADLER: I am as guilty of looking at the dim side of the picture as anybody else. “The revolt of the masses” (using Ortega's terms) is a matter of the past 75 years, at the most, perhaps of the past 50. For a mass society, you go back to 1900. When the number of hours most men worked a week was 58, 60, *the society did not exist*. A mass society, industrial society, democratically organized, is one in which a whole series of things are going to come down before they go up. Education is going to be weakened; taste is going to be weakened; this is perfectly natural. But that is no reason for general pessimism. The thing that must happen in that society is

the cultivation of that mass. I am an optimist. I do not believe that mankind, taking them per capita, has so far in the history of the race used more than a quarter of its intelligence. The one untapped resource is the human mind. We have split the atom for energy. But the tremendous energy latent in the weakest intelligence—not the brightest intelligence—the 85 I.Q.—has many times more intelligence than we have begun to use. When you get the masses of mankind with all that intelligence really operating, you cannot imagine what the future may hold. 

* Introductory remarks to Dr. Adler's address were made by Dr. Henry Ladd Smith, professor of communications, School of Communications.

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