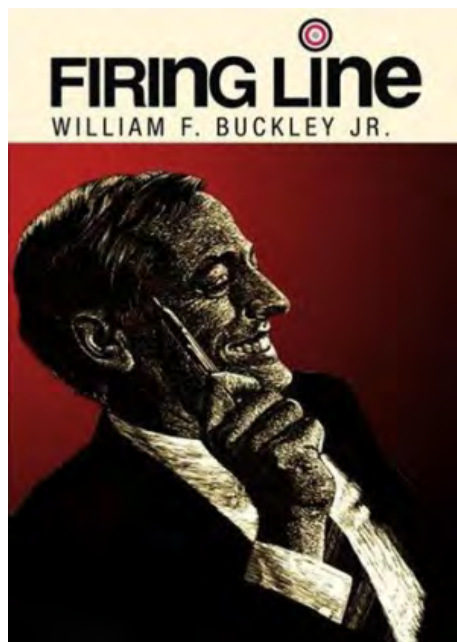


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GUEST: Mortimer J. Adler

Part 2 of 2

BUCKLEY: Well, leaving Presidents aside, then, because it's probably unfair to ask about them, since we know from reading about them something about the nature of their education. But just people in general, for instance, other professors, or businessmen, or journalist, or whoever, it is possible for you instantly

ADLER: I think I can from their speech, I think I can from the way they handled themselves in sentences. I mean, I can tell, I can tell the mind that has some refinement and precision in the use of its critical terms from the mind that is undisciplined.

BUCKLEY: And from that do you think you can infer what reading that person has done?

ADLER: Yes, I think I can for the very simple reason, and I say this with some hesitation, because it's a risky thing to be, to make one point, but you cannot teach a person to read well, unless you, par-

ticularly if he has a fine intelligence to begin with, a native aptitude, unless you make him struggle with texts that are very difficult and over his head.

BUCKLEY: At a very young age, or you mean even

ADLER: That's right, and he goes, as he, that is, the person who is reading, however widely it is, has dealt with readily intelligible stuff, stuff that he doesn't have to struggle to master, struggle to understand, is a person whose mind will not be pulled up to its full capacity. That's the only reason for the great books, really. Not only that, I shouldn't say that, the reason over and above their content is that it's a sharpening stone, it's something you have to sharpen your mind on. Stringfellow Barr, when he was defending the Great Books Program at Annapolis under attack by his fellow educators, who said, being that do you think that the young people at St. John's can understand these great books at their age? And Stringfellow Barr used to say, no, of course they can't. In fact I would say there are books that are over the students head and they're over most of our heads, all of our heads all the time; but the Great Books function at St. John's the way a large bone functions given to a small puppy, who wrestles with it, gnaws at it, agitates it, and even if he gets no meat off it, is sharpening his teeth in the process.

BUCKLEY: now, would you say that there are no congenital limitations there?

ADLER: Yes, there are.

BUCKLEY: For instance, some people have a terrible time understanding science, myself for instance, is this for failure to grapple with it?

ADLER: I think so. But I thought you were going off, may I anticipate another direction you might have been going off in?

BUCKLEY: Yeah, sure.

ADLER: Let's take the normal distribution of intelligence in other words, and even admitting all of the dubiousness of what the intelligent quotient means, certainly it does I think, we're clear enough now, that it does measure some difference in innate aptitude

BUCKLEY: Even if you're just talking cyclometrically.

ADLER: Aptitude for learning, and aptitude for the use of one's mind, with a certain degree of competence. Now, let's take the

lowest third of that, or at least between 90 I.Q. and the cut-off point, where you've got low grade morons, idiots and imbeciles who should be in hospitals. Now that third, I think would not be able to get much out of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, or Critique of Practical Reason. I doubt if that third could read John Stuart Mills Essay on Civil Representative Government, or could read Paradise Lost or the Divine Comedy, with any, I mean, that's kind of, hence, when I say liberal schooling for all, do I mean that all children, regardless of their innate aptitude, should be exposed to the same reading matter? No.

BUCKLEY: Umhm.

ADLER: My image is the image of a gymnasium in which the fundamental exercise is the chinning bar. But you wouldn't set the bar at the same height for children of different stature and different strengths. In every case you would set the bar

BUCKLEY: Just high, just where he can reach.

ADLER: High enough so that he had to reach up, not so high that he couldn't reach it at all, and not so low that they couldn't pull. So, for a given level of innate aptitude, you want reading matter difficult enough to challenge that mind, and give it the training it needs. For example, it may be that in place of the Great Books in basic schooling, trying to understand the editorials in the New York Times might be difficult enough.

BUCKLEY: I think it's impossible.

ADLER: Well, the Nation, or the American Review, anything you want for the moment. But that would suffice. Similarly, to make another point, I think for the very good mind, innately, the study of Greek is a fine discipline. Greek and Hebrew, among our Western languages are the syntactically most subtle and complex, and tackling them really gives sinews to the linguistic ability of anybody. But I can imagine children for whom the study of Greek becomes impossible. All right, let's take Ogden Richards Basic English, from a vocabulary of 700 words. What's the basic exercise in studying Greek, Greek into English and English and Greek? Very well. We will do translation exercises, into basic English and out. You see? It's the analogous exercise for that inferior mind. What I'm saying is that an often used, a metaphor I've used many times, is that children come to us in so many different size containers. There is the half pint child, and the pint child, and the quart child and the gallon child, and that's their innate capacity. Now the maxim of equal educational opportunity is not merely the same quantity of education but the same quality of education for all chil-

dren. One, all those containers should be full to the brim. They're equal, by the way, proportionately equally full for the half pint container full is as full as gallon container. Secondly, the filling in each of the containers should be the same, that is, if you're pouring cream into the half point, into the gallon container, or getting, trying to get cream in there, cream is what should be trying to get into the pint container, not dirty water, or skim milk. Now, when I said this to teachers and educators across the country, their response goes something like this. Why, Dr. Adler, you really don't know anything about what's going on in the schools, and I say, no, I've never taught in a municipal high school. They say, you know, you don't realize that when you try to get cream into those small containers, the aperture at the top is very narrow. Cream is a very thick substance, you try to get it, most of it goes over the side, doesn't go in. And my answer to that is get a funnel. And that is the answer to me. What we have to do is invent the funnels for getting cream into the small containers.

BUCKLEY: And that's pedagogy, isn't it?

ADLER: Yes. Well, it's devices like this business of using easier reading material, but making the attack upon the child, treatment of the child analogous, instead of taking the child with a low IQ, and saying well, let's give him lathe work, let him do Manual Training, give him some kind of non-educational material to keep them out of harm's way and out of mayhem. That's not the solution. That's the solution the teachers have tried in despair, because they don't know what to do with it. We have to invent techniques, in fact, the only educational problem consist of handling the children under 100, not over 100 in IQ. I mean, we aren't doing too well with them either, but there is no solution there is no problem, I mean, what is of insuperable difficulty in doing the right thing with the gifted Child. The hard thing is to do the right thing with the

BUCKLEY: Dr. Adler, you said we need a fundamental revolution, both moral and educational, in fact, that you can't get the one without getting the other, and I know that in your book, you ask yourself rhetorically is this, our century, a good time to be alive. Now, I also know what answer you give, but like to hear you give it, and also to reconcile it with the fact that apparently the quality of media and education has slipped over the past 200 years.

ADLER: Let me first give you the answer, and explain the apparent inconsistency. When I say the 20th century looked at retrospectively, on the 20th, from 1970 backward, is the best century so far. It may not be the best century before we end, because we may have made the planet uninhabitable. But supposing that we survived, supposing that we solve the ecological and population crisis, which

I think we will, my reason for saying it is a very simple one. No, but it takes this whole book to explain it really. A good, the good society, ideally, now, the upper limit to be approached properly but never

ADLER: Is a society which provides the conditions of the good human life for all its people. All, without exception. Now, that is a meaningful statement, only if you know what the conditions of the good human life are, what a good human life is and what external conditions must be provided. But let's suppose we understand that for a moment. Secondly, I say, if you look at the whole past, starting 2 million years ago, coming down to 30, to Paleolithic time, coming down to the early civilization, 6 to 7,000 years ago, coming down to the last 5,000, 2,000 years to the present. You will find that we really have crossed a threshold in the 20th century. An extraordinary threshold. I think it's largely because of the Socialistic, the Democratic and technological revolutions that have taken place, but it's a remarkable threshold, and I think those unobserved, most extraordinarily unobserved, The improvement is that if you take the measure of a good society, as when I've just stated, and then say relatively speaking one society or one age or one century is better than another in proportion to the number of people alive, who are given by the social institutions and arrangements the conditions of the good human life. Whether they make good use of those conditions is educational and moral. And I would say in the 20th century a larger fraction, a larger percentage of the total population on earth has the opportunities, given the conditions, and I'm not saying, this is far from perfect, there's still a vast number of people who are prevented by deprivations of all kinds, from leading good human lives. Let me say that in the most striking way. Until the 20th century and what I think the best societies of 20th century are, the United States, Russia, Sweden, the Low Countries, England,

BUCKLEY: Why is Russia an appetizing society,



ADLER: Not perfect, but I'm going to say what's common to these societies, though I think I would say among all of them the United States is either the best or as good as, if not better, than any society in the world today, is that we pass from a society in which we have an oppressed majority to a society in which we have an oppressed minority. Now, this is far from being just, for an oppressed minority is still an oppressed and unjustly treated number of human beings. But where in every other society the privileged group, and by the privileged I don't mean the special privileges of great wealth and power, but the privilege of having the conditions under which one can make a good life for oneself, the privileged group was a very small fraction of that society. In the underprivileged, the underprivileged, the private group, was a very large majority. Look at America today, and take the percentages, let me, let me increase the 15% to 20%, 15% was called under the poverty line. That is, the 15% black or white who really are underprivileged, deprived in serious ways so that their lives are defeated, ruined almost from the beginning. Let me take the other, the other extreme, the 5 to 7% of the overprivileged, who, I think, whose lives also could be morally hurt by the extreme advantages they have. In between, now that's about 25%, let's say, that's 25% of the population the conditions of whose life, in the case of the 25, the lower 25, are seriously interfered with and at the top end, seriously threatened. But there's 75% of the population who, if they were properly oriented morally, and if they were properly schooled, could make good lives for themselves. Now, that's an extraordinary achievement. If you asked me, having praised America for that I look around and see that they're not doing so. You know, the vast mass of American people, given the opportunities, are not using them. Why? Their values are wrong. By the way, even here, Mr. Buckley, the current nonsense about ours being a sick society, the criticism of America as opposed to the criticism that of many other countries is kind of silly, because American materialism is by no means as great as German materialism, or Italian materialism or French materialism. Our wrong sense of values is worldwide. You went to Yale, Didn't you?

BUCKLEY: Umhm_

ADLER: Well, the memory of William Graham's grandson, that wonderful piece he wrote about 1890 what, _____ the classes of each other (?) (Both talking simultaneously)

ADLER: will challenge the facts, in which he said, you know, everything could be improved, every aspect of society where it not for human folly and vice. That's absolutely true. What is wrong with America is wrong with the world. Human folly and vice. We ha-

ven't

BUCKLEY: Yeah, but

ADLER: We have no special corner on folly and vice.

BUCKLEY: I remember the manager of Sonny Liston said one time, you know, he has some very good qualities, it's his bad qualities that are not so good (laughter) sorry.

BUCKLEY: Mr. Greenfield.

GREENFIELD: There are those who join with you in your critique of education, who also state that perhaps the idea of a classroom itself is out of date, that the Socratic Method, or what's now called the Socratic Method, is really, in effect, more manipulation, that it's not so much a Socratic dialogue as a wrenching of people towards a preconceived position.



ADLER: That is not Socratic, all I can say, it isn't Socratic at all.

GREENFIELD: Okay. Well, always when I read Socrates, I always had the feeling that if one of those guys ever stood up and said, wait a minute, buddy, it might have taken a different turn.

BUCKLEY: But you haven't read it 15 times.

GREENFIELD: Yeah. No. Only about three or four.

ADLER: I can refer you to some texts, too.

GREENFIELD: Right. Well, I, when he was debating the _____, if anybody had just up and said, wait a minute, wait a minute, in the latter third, instead of saying that seems sound, Socrates, I thought

they were (both talking simultaneously)

ADLER: I have to admit there are some yes-men in

GREENFIELD: and there are sort of stooge men there.

ADLER: Yeah.

GREENFIELD: You know, like an audience that claps

BUCKLEY: Somebody said that the Socratic manner is not a game in which two people can play.

GREENFIELD: That's what I had in mind. Yes, that seems sound, Socrates, or (both talking simultaneously)

ADLER: I agree with you about that. That's the parody of the Socratic

GREENFIELD: But the question is whether you would agree with those educational critics who say that what we need now are not schools but resource centers, the idea that a student comes in almost has a free form of education or whether you think that the classroom is a place

ADLER: Well, let me answer your question, by apparently contradictory things. I think that the curriculum for liberal schooling should be completely fixed, there should be no electives at all. I don't think that the student is in any position to make choices about what he should study. I don't think his interests make any difference. All, they are all human beings, but they're going to become citizens, they're going to be free men, they'll they are all going to have lots of free time, but I think

BUCKLEY: Not yet.

ADLER: Electives, the choice of specialization should come after the liberal arts degree. I want to add one more thing. Here I think the Liberal Arts Degree is given four years too late. I would take American schooling and cut it down by, make it European in this sense, six years of elementary schooling, six years of secondary, the college degree coming at the end of the, and then I do something else. At the end of 12 years, I might extend that by taking the differences in the population, I might have for the very brightest, 12 years, for the next level, 13 and the least 14, but not more than 14. At the end of the Liberal Arts Degree, I would absolutely make it mandatory that everyone leave school, for at least four years, that no one be allowed to go on in school. That there be a four year

break.

BUCKLEY: You have certainly read your Plato.

ADLER: That's right. I'm only making at times a little shorter.

GREENFIELD: Do we all have to be soldiers?

ADLER: No, no, no, no. I do think compulsory public service, not soldiers, but compulsory public service would, with Plato's notion of going out and doing the work of the state. Compulsory public service, whether it be the Peace Corps, or Vista, or something else.

BUCKLEY: You're being alone little bit paternalistic, aren't you?

ADLER: I'm completely paternalistic. Then, the young man, having had good liberal schooling, his mind being opened up and not taught what to think, but how to think, the old business of not what but how, able to read, which, by the way gives him access to anything he wants to read, then comes back, and if he doesn't come back at all, but goes on, I think you know that the schools are unnecessary, really, and he could learn anything for himself, if you work hard enough, so that, and most of the main learning one does in adult life, by oneself, you know, the major portion of learning comes well after 30 or 35. All the rest is mere preparation anyway.

GREENFIELD: That's good to know, yes.

BUCKLEY: Sounds good, yeah.

GREENFIELD: I'm with you, (?)

BUCKLEY: That's very helpful.

ADLER: It's preparation anyway. Now, add one more thing about it. In that, though I would make me, though I would make the schooling of required curriculum, I would make the teaching as flexible as possible. I think the regimentation of so many boys in the class for teacher is wrong. I think some young men and women need much less teaching, much less teachers, in other words, it is, the infirmities of the mind, the privations and the infirmities of the mind vary. Some minds need more teacher help. Some minds need less teacher help. The notion of the uniform access to the time and energies of the teacher is wrong.

BUCKLEY: The dosage should be unequal, yeah.

ADLER: the dosage should be administered individually, you see.

For example, I was teaching Aristotle's Ethics, with one young man and I would say go off and read it, write me a paper, come back, and let's talk about it. Another young man, I would sit down and say let's go over the text together, and I mean, you can't do it with two people in the same way.

BUCKLEY: True. Miss. Duffy

DUFFY: Well, it would seem to me, Mr. Adler, that the problem that you're going to encounter with this format and curriculum etc., is not the idea, but where are you going to find the teachers who are that gifted? I mean, that's going to take people who are exceptional, and lots of them.



ADLER: Right.

DUFFY: Well, where do you expect them to come from?

ADLER: You want me to have all the solutions this afternoon?

DUFFY: So, you just

ADLER: I will give you the answer in the first place give you the answer in the long term. Education, we already know, is the most expensive of all social institutions. Just look at our budget. And yet, I say, it probably isn't half, half as expensive as it should be, when you have, our budget for education should be twice or three times, and national budget, should be twice or three times. Let's imagine for a moment, we have, you know, we have human resources, supposing again we solve the population and the basis for your problem, we have about 100 million years to go on earth. We've only been at it for about 1 million, which is a very short time proportionately. Now, don't think of 100 million years, which

you can't think of any way, but think of the next 5,000 for a moment. 5,000 is about the image, the reverse image, of the 5,000 we've been through since the rise of civilization has been underway. In that next 5,000 years we are going to do away with war, no question about it, we're going to have, I think, Mr. Buckley could predict, we're going to have a world Federal Government. We're going to do away with, our technological advances, if we control them properly, will emancipate the time of larger and larger numbers of persons. More people are going to be less and less involved in the production of wealth because the machinery is going to be adequate to do that, and will be engaged in what we call the service functions, the most important of which, the two most important of which are teaching and healing. Teaching and medicine, psychiatric and physical medicine. Hence, more and more people will have to be, more and more people will have to be recruited for teaching. And we'll all be able to, we are not adequately, were completely understaffed at the moment, and secondly, the question Mr. Buckley asked me earlier, what is the proper training for teachers, or not training them properly now. We're not, were producing research people, producing Graduate School people, not teachers, you see. I think these are all soluble problems, but not easily, you understand? And the reason why you shouldn't be pessimistic, I don't want you to be pessimistic about it, is that we've only been at this new turn in affairs for a little less than 100 years. I repeat. Take the figure in 1900 and will that less than 10% of the eligible children were in high school, in 1950 over 85% were, in 1970 over 95% were. Now, we have the reverse problem we have dropouts. We have failures. Does that indicate, what does that indicate? An honest failure on the part of the school system. I assure you the dropout is not students fault. It's what we've done with them, you see. And I have to add the further thing, the study made by the Department of Education.

BUCKLEY: Is anything the students fault?

ADLER: Yes.

BUCKLEY: What?

ADLER: A lack of docility. The lack of the virtue of being teachable.

BUCKLEY: Well, maybe I dropout is not docile enough to

ADLER: Unfortunately he isn't. Unfortunately, however, they have to go back. What caused the indocility, and the indocility is often caused in the case of the dropout by a home environment that is strictly anti-education, I mean, if a child is, let's go back. The best

evidence now is that when a baby is born he starts to learn language immediately. If the parents speak English well, and speak English fluently and correctly, over the child, talk to the child, even though the child doesn't understand it, talk around the child, that child is learning English from the moment of birth. He can't speak, but he's learning. Now, think of the child that grows up in a linguistically deprived home, as most, many children do, linguistically deprived home, in ghettos, that child is by the time it's three or four, hopelessly disadvantaged. Hopelessly disadvantaged. I don't know what you

BUCKLEY: Plato had a solution to that.

ADLER: Yes, that's Plato's had

BUCKLEY: But I hope you wouldn't say it (both talking simultaneously)

ADLER: I think it's a difficult situation, but he did have a solution.

BUCKLEY: Mr. Ardrey.



ARDREY: I'd be more inclined to share your optimism about the next 5,000 years if I saw some evidence that students and parents and teachers were eager to see your ideal become a reality. But, I think, the instincts are just the reverse. I mean, more students, given their behavior today, would prefer truancy to incarceration in one of your schools and parents would prefer

ADLER: (Laughter) I like the words you use.

ARDREY: Parents would prefer better basketball teams, I would think.

ADLER: Parents are largely at fault, I think. The average American parent

BUCKLEY: Can we replace them, while we're at it?

ADLER: Well, Plato did. Plato did. He removed them from the care of a child. But the average American parent since, well, thinks he's doing a great thing by scrimping and saving to send his boy or girl to college. We have placed a high value on education. Then if you ask the parent why he's doing all of this to send his son or daughter to college, he'll give you the wrong answer. He'll say, oh, I don't know, to get a good job, to get ahead in the world, to make a lot of money. Now, I say that the young person who goes to college for the wrong reason, had better, is better off not to have gone at all, and most young people go to college for the wrong reason, or is sent there by their parents for the wrong reason.

GREENFIELD: _____ is also designed for the wrong reasons.

ADLER: I think, I agree. Parents, the schools,

BUCKLEY: Are you then saying that most of the people who have gone to college today might better never have gone?

ADLER: I think for the colleges they went to and the reason they went to, yes. Yes.

BUCKLEY: And they should have spent that time more profitably learning to weave better baskets?

ADLER: Well, I don't know. I would hope, I would hope that having not gone to college and having to face the problems of life, which, with their intelligence, they would have found some way to educate themselves.

BUCKLEY: Thank you very much, Dr. Adler, I appreciate your coming. Thank you ladies and gentlemen, members of the panel. 

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