
United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *107th* CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

VOL. 147 WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2001

No. 100

Senate

TRIBUTE TO DR. MORTIMER ADLER

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to a great American who passed away on June 28, at the age of 98 1/2—an American whose life spanned virtually the entire 20th century and whose work influenced the course of the century.

Dr. Mortimer Jerome Adler, author, educator and philosopher was born in New York City and subsequently moved to California where he lived a great portion of his life.

Mortimer Adler devoted his life to the pursuit of wisdom, understanding, truth and knowledge, and to sharing what he learned with others. After having read John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* at age 14 and learning that Mill had read Plato by the time he was five, he hit the books and never looked back.

A prolific writer, Adler authored well over 50 books, including *How to Read a Book*; *The American Testament*; *The Common Sense of Politics*; *Aristotle for Everyone*; *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*; and *Art, the Arts and the Great Ideas*. It is readily apparent, Mr. President, that his interests

were wide ranging and extensive. As editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica, Adler was responsible for revamping the encyclopedia in the form we know it today. He was also editor of the 60 volume set, *The Great Books of the Western World* and was also instrumental in devising the Great Books reading program, a book discussion program with chapters throughout the United States in which participants read and discuss classic texts.

A professor at several universities including Columbia University and the University of Chicago, Mortimer Adler was probably the only person in America to receive his PhD before receiving his high school diploma, bachelors or masters degrees. As part of his unending quest to reform the American education system, he wrote, on behalf of the Paideia Group, *The Paideia Proposal*, a book explaining how and why the education that the best receive should be the education that all receive.

Known as “Everyone’s Philosopher” or “the Philosopher of the Common Man”, Mortimer Adler spent a lifetime demonstrating that philosophy was not a field only for some, but an endeavor for everyone. As the title of a journal that he published since the early 90’s puts it succinctly, “Philosophy is Everybody’s Business.”

He was also the founder of the Institute for Philosophical Research and was instrumental in founding the Aspen Institute, an organization which engages leaders in business, academia and politics in discussions of perennial ideas using classic texts to facilitate discussion.

Only rarely does a person of Mortimer Adler’s intellect and ability come along. We are fortunate that Professor Adler was with us for as long as he was.

Senator Barbara Boxer

Note: A framed copy of the actual printed version was kindly sent to us by Center member Michael B. Weiss, Scheduler for Senator Boxer.

SCIENCE AND CONSCIENCE

by John Polanyi *

The American who most clearly brought the concepts of science and conscience together was Linus Pauling. Science was his passion. He did not have much to say about conscience, since to talk about it would have been to philosophize, and philosophy held few charms for him. It was not conscience but conscience-at-work that interested Pauling. His was a world in which consequences flowed from actions. It was the sort of robust view one associated with the American West, from which he hailed.

This is both a strength and a weakness in the American tradition. It gets things done. Quite often they are the right things. However, a European, living (figuratively) within walking distance of Athens, is more likely to take the view that philosophy, whether we acknowledge it or not, underlies what we do.

My own roots being in Europe, I feel bound to reflect on the meanings of words. The first such is “science,” which comes, of course, from scientia knowledge. We use it to denote knowledge derived from observation of the outside world. The second word is “conscience,” with which I have linked science. Con-science has the same root as science, but is the knowledge we carry within us.

The type of knowing that we call science is inevitably linked to the type we call conscience. The reason is that our observations of the outside world can only be transmitted to one place, which is to our minds, that harbor conscience.

It is true that as scientists we try, in the interest of objectivity, to separate these aspects of our being; to

separate what we see from what we know. We don't want, like the early painters in Australia whose training had been in England, to paint elm trees in a landscape dominated by eucalyptus. At the same time we know that without our inner compass we cannot hope to navigate the outer world. We have no choice but to bring our science into touch with our conscience.

Indeed, science is itself a cultural activity akin to painting. A painter makes a record of nature. So does a scientist. In doing this, scientist and painter are both engaged in making statements about the world they see. The fact that scientists most often paint with symbols and numbers does not alter that.

In their quest for patterns scientists have been sketching nature in recent times to such effect that they have transformed the accepted view of matter, energy, space, life, death and the universe. Through this, they have reshaped the world we live in, extending and enriching human life and, at the same time, furnishing the ultimate machinery of death. There has never before in history been a renaissance that so fundamentally and so speedily transformed the world.

Happily, the nature of the transformation has been the opposite of that predicted by the past century's major prophets: Aldous Huxley and George Orwell. Rather than the individual becoming the prisoner of technology, it is the tyrants who are being imprisoned and the people who are being freed as, one by one, the borders that divided them erode. This is not to say that equity and tranquillity prevail, only that the need for both has never been more evident.

Because of the power of science to change our world, many look for magic in it. They call this "scientific proof," and think of it as incontrovertible. Happily for mankind there is no such thing. There is always room for doubt. It is the achievement of consensus that is the best test we have of truth. And this is the moment at

which we judge that a scientific proposition has been “proven.”

The achievement of that consensus is made possible by the fact that we respect not only our own experience but also that of others. We arrive at an agreement as to the nature of creation, on the basis of values we hold in common. “This,” we say after long debate, “is how it is.” This fits what we know.

To move with assurance from science to conscience it is necessary to take a closer look at the scientific community that makes this judgment. One distinguishing thing is that it is international. But what makes it function as a community is its ethic. It has a shared ideal, which is to put the truth ahead of personal advantage.

Any scientist who did not believe that objectivity, to such an extent as it can be achieved, takes precedence over self-advancement would not belong in science. If a scientist put such unethical ideas into action by, for example, falsifying data, he or she would be banished from the community of science forever. The same is, of course, true not only of science but of any scholarly pursuit.

This commitment to truth, it should be stressed, is at the same time a commitment to the tenets we call “human rights.” For the truth, being no monopoly of one race, religion or nationality, is open to all and deserves our respect from whomever it comes. Moreover, the devotion to truth is the commitment to an endless journey, at every step of which we must be willing to tolerate dissent, for it is the dissenters who will point the way ahead. What I am describing is, in fact, the functioning of a democratic society.

From the acknowledgment of human rights, which lies at the heart of a democratic society, there should flow a sense of responsibility to safeguard those rights.

As individual responsibility has flowered in society at large over the past decades, so it has among scientists. It is no longer considered ethical to don a white coat and lead a life of monastic devotion to one's calling. Scientists are citizens. Better yet, they are global citizens. Conspicuously, though, they still too infrequently act as such.

Linus Pauling became a scientist in the pre-Atomic Age, before the advent of nuclear power and nuclear weapons. The prevailing view at the time was that scientists should not get involved in debating social issues. If they did so, it was thought, they would contaminate the pure stream of scientific logic with the value judgments that inform politics.

But I have been arguing that value judgments are a part of science. I doubt that Pauling acknowledged this. But he might well have noticed that his values as a peace activist mirrored those as a scientist: visionary, principled and fearless. For he was unquestionably brave. In his campaign for a ban on nuclear testing he risked his career, his research grants, his job and his reputation. He showed that the true visionary in science can have something comparable to offer (fallibly) to society at large.

What is it, then, that scientists have to offer as citizens? They are numerate, and they are literate. They belong to an international community with a commitment to objectivity and with bonds of trust. But they do not have a certain path to truth. And they are not all-wise. Neither are any other citizens.

I have not dwelt on the remarkable nature of the community to which scientists belong. It is a real community with leaders, laws, fellowship and history. Amazingly, it has held together for centuries without formal government, without inherited privilege and without violence, police or prisons. It is sufficiently tolerant to actually invite dissent. Its heretics are not

burnt at the stake but hailed as heroes.

This is not, of course, a society of angels. Personal ambition is a major driving force. But to a substantial degree this force is harnessed to a shared goal. That goal is not a venal or cruel one, but the humane goal of understanding. If the society of science could, through example, give humans this as their common destiny, it would make its greatest gift to mankind.

** John Polanyi won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1986. He is presently a professor at the University of Toronto and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences study group on "joint data exchange" between the United States and Russia on nuclear weapons. This essay salutes the 100th anniversary of the birth of Linus Pauling in 1901.*

=====

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Fellow Members,

An innovative way to explore The Great Ideas

The Great Ideas collection represents a most comprehensive body of knowledge, but uncharted territory for those unfamiliar with the classics. Especially at risk of being turned off are the casual browsers who surf to the TGI website for a "quick look". They can be quickly overwhelmed by the data overload situation provided by the current alphabetical keyword listing of the 102 ideas. Even veteran TGI explorers would benefit from a visual/graphical (mindmap-like) interface to this body of knowledge. It would utilize their visual learning capabilities in combination with textual reading skills, for a more "whole brain" approach. The Great Map would provide a unique, engaging user environment for exploring TGI Information landscapes and "islands of information". Both innovative and practical, it could provide an alternative navigation approach to supplement

the standard alphabetical index currently provided.

Why it is beneficial?

Allows one to see all The Great Ideas at a glance (high-level overview) mapped to one or more of the eight categories. It's easy to survey the relevant and interesting alternatives before choosing to zoom-in on what is initially most significant or interesting.

Facilitates click-through to the highest value content (as determined by each individual user). Providing this capability recognizes that each site visitor has different Information wants and needs, priorities, urgencies, and expectations.

Makes it easy for explorers to find the appropriate level of conceptual detail. The reader can determine whether they prefer to start “deep and narrow” or “wide and shallow” in their TGI exploration. In addition to this directed exploration of TGI, philosophers can discover (via context proximity) concepts that are closely related, inter-connected, or over-lapping.

Highlights connections among various TGI content and concepts (and hopefully makes mental links to disparate references and notions). Supports a more open minded exploratory approach to discover what best fulfills philosophers’ information syntheses interests (finding new valuable information that they would never have thought to search for in sources never initially sought out).

While helping users wade through the increasing volumes of (potentially) valuable online resources, it draws on their natural curiosity that taps into native “way finding” capabilities.

How it works?

Though TGI content is primarily keywords and text, navigation to these passages is best provided visually/spatially via a graphical information map.

I've drawn the base map at:

www.1-900-870-6235.com/eLearning/TheGreatIdeas.htm

where one can get an overview of the 103 ideas and how they have been clustered into 8 areas.

If one wanted to investigate “Happiness” for example, they could simply click on it (at map coordinates approximately K-32 near the right edge of the map). Doing so would bring up an information map showing the issues related to “Happiness” located at:

<http://www.1-900-870-6235.com/eLearning/GreatIdeas/HappinessMap.htm>

If you wanted to learn what Wisdom contributes to Happiness you could:

<http://www.1-900-870-6235.com/eLearning/GreatIdeas/WisdomMap.htm> see all the great authors that have written on the subject.

Again the map is screened into the background to provide context continuity, overlaid with new information, for which further details are available (by rolling mouse over “Kant”, for example; a pop-up list provides some information about the author’s full literary “landscape” that relates to the Great Ideas. The highlighted publications apply directly to the domain you are currently exploring. By clicking on one of the references you can go directly to an online originating source document, where such exists:

<http://www.library.adelaide.edu.au/etext/k/k16prm/>

For more information contact Ron Wild, Tel: (780) 448-0842 or rwild@1-900-870-6235.com

Re: INSIGHT Magazine

Excellent reminders. I just forwarded Berlau’s essay to

my six smart professional but classically uneducated (like myself, partly) progeny.

Also I printed it out for my busy spouse of 45 years who, after seducing me with her charms and impelling me to marry her for love and beauty, I found to have minored in Philosophy! at Maryville College. She is interested because over the years she has taught Language Arts to Junior High students, and then organized and ran the local school district's Gifted Students Program... but is now retired.

A few years ago, employing the Socratic method to our discussions, we found that in the absence of a course entitled "Logic" in our schools, the essence of this discipline is being taught within Language (of which I insist ours is 'United States American', and not 'English'). And as some languages are more 'logical' than others, an invisible and unsuspected impetus to the development of culture and technology is thus facilitated for more fortunate nations having the more logical languages. But *Logica Parva* would be better.

We also are now reading and re-reading some of the Great Books, from the bargain sale of five volumes of same TGB had several months ago.

I fervently hope Max will continue to publish 'reruns' of the wonderful, crystal clear Adler essays for years to come.

Terrence O'Neill

=====

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Kerri McLean

Charles Noll

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

is published weekly for its members, by the

Center for the Study of The Great Ideas

Founded by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann (1990)

E-mail: TGIdeas@speedsite.com

Homepage: TheGreatIdeas.org

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) organization.

Donations are tax deductible as the law allows.