



Mortimer Adler
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THE
GREAT BOOKS
OF
2066

• PART 2 •

That being said, here they are—a baker's dozen of names, 13 men of thought who, in my judgment, will stand the test of time: Henri Bergson, John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Jacques Maritain, Jean-Paul Sartre, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Nicolai Lenin, John Maynard Keynes, Arnold Toynbee, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Before the shooting starts, let me try to defend my nominations. I have divided them into four categories: philosophers, natural scientists and mathematicians, historians and social scientists, and what category does Teilhard belong in? More on that in a moment.

In dealing with each category, I will refer to a number of also-rans—authors whom I considered but excluded for reasons that seemed sufficient and that I will try to express briefly but persuasively.

I. Philosophers. Although it is often said that philosophy has reached a dead end in our time, the present century has seen brilliant and memorable philosophical work. The five philosophers I have chosen for enduring eminence are the five who have most markedly addressed themselves to their fellow men, not just to their fellow philosophers. This criterion alone excludes such thinkers as Husserl, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Bertrand Russell has written books intelligible to the layman, but his penchant for being witty rather than wise makes them books we are finished with after the first reading. And while I find many facets of perennial wisdom in the writings of George Santayana, his effort to be timeless not only deprives his books of contemporary relevance but will, I think, also prevent them from enduring. None of these failings pertain to the works of Bergson, Dewey, Whitehead, Maritain and Sartre.

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was an Irish Jew who was born in Paris and became a naturalized Frenchman. A member of the *Académie française* from 1918, he did diplomatic work during World War One and won the Nobel Prize in 1927. His greatest works were published around the turn of the century: they include *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907). To these we must add a book he wrote late in life—*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932).

John Dewey (1859-1952) was a Vermonter who taught philosophy at several major universities, notably Chicago, where he established the Laboratory School, and at Columbia, with which he was associated from 1904 until his death. It is one of the supreme ironies that American education has been taken over in our time by men who conquered in Dewey's name but who failed to understand the central insights in his great and revolutionary book about education—*Democracy and Education*, written in 1916. The titles of his other major contributions reveal the scope of his mind and the importance of the problems with which he grappled, in a way that engages the minds of other thinking men: *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), *The Quest for Certainty*

(1929), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Art As Experience* (1934), and *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* (1938).

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was an Englishman who lectured on mathematics and philosophy at Cambridge University and at the University of London and became a professor of philosophy at Harvard in 1924. Learned in modern mathematics and perceptive of the philosophical significance of the revolutions that have taken place in 20th Century physics and biology, he transformed traditional conceptions to make the wisdom of the past conversant with the science of the present. His philosophical vision, compacted of insight, imagination and historical learning, is best expressed in *Science and the Modern World* (1925), *Religion in the Making* (1926), *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927), *Process and Reality* (1929), *The Aims of Education* (1929) and *Adventures of Ideas* (1933).

Jacques Maritain (1882-) was born in Paris, was educated at the Sorbonne and taught philosophy in France and in this country for 50 years. A student of Bergson, he became a convert to Roman Catholicism and is the leading liberal apologist for that faith. He is a deeply religious philosopher who writes in the ecumenical spirit of John XXIII. While, like Santayana, he writes from the vantage point of perennial wisdom, his thought, as well as his life, is immersed in as well as engaged with the most pressing problems of our day. He was the French ambassador to the Vatican at the time the present Pope was its Secretary of State; and during those years he courageously defended the cause of the Spanish Loyalists. The books of his that I think will live as long as Catholicism remains a puissant force in the world are *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), *The Degrees of Knowledge* (1932), *Freedom in the Modern World* (1933), *True Humanism* (1934), *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (1942), *Education at the Crossroads* (1943), *Existence and the Existent* (1948) and, most recently, *Moral Philosophy* (1960).

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-) is the *enfant terrible* of 20th Century philosophy. A Parisian, he was educated at the *École Normale Supérieure*, and published, with Albert Camus, an underground newspaper during World War Two. He refused the Nobel Prize in 1964. While not the founder of existentialism, he is the most forceful and eloquent exponent of that form of it which has rationalized the *Angst*, the despair and even the irrationalism so prevalent in our time. He has written many books on many subjects, philosophical, psychological, political and historical. He is the author of several memorable novels and plays, and has written penetrating criticisms of literature and of painting. His great philosophical work is probably *Being and Nothingness* (1943).

II. Natural Scientists and Mathematicians. In this, the age of science, the greatest advances so far have been made in mathematical physics. A comparable revolution is just beginning in biology and may produce equally great theoretical advances in the remainder of this century. My four nominations here are, therefore, confined to mathematical physics, and even here I have been compelled to limit my choice to the few, among many outstanding scientists, who have written books of broad theoretical scope. Most of the others have communicated their findings or theories in technical monographs or in the transactions of learned societies. In addition, each of the physicists I have chosen—Planck, Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg—has made the effort to explain his discoveries and theories to the layman in books that express this philosophy of science. It may be these books, rather than their more technical works, that will come to stand alongside the writings of Galileo, Newton, Huygens and Faraday.

Max Karl Ernst Ludwig Planck (1858-1947) was, in a sense, the intellectual father of the other three, for the quantum theory, which he proposed in 1900, formed the basis of the revolutionary work of Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg. Planck is sure to survive, for one of the basic physical constants is named after him. His masterpiece in theoretical physics is *The Origin and Development of the Quantum Theory* (1920); but it is to his more popular writings that men will continue to go for a basic understanding of modern physics: *Where Is Science Going* (1932), *The Philosophy of Physics* (1933) and *Scientific Autobiography* (1949), the last an engaging short book in a genre surprisingly rare.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was born in Germany and became a Swiss citizen in 1900, an American citizen in 1940. He won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921 (Planck won it in 1918). A handful of short papers produced before he was 25 years old generated world-wide fame for him and world-wide discussion of his theory of relativity, even though they were readable only by the very small number who were his peers. Those few pages read by few did as much to change our whole view of nature as anything ever written. Four of his books, in whole or part, are readable by the rest of us: *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory; A Popular Exposition* (1917), *Sidelights on Relativity* (1920-1921), *The Meaning of Relativity* (1922), *On the Method of Theoretical Physics* (1933).

Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885-1962) was a Dane who headed the Copenhagen Institute for Theoretical Physics from 1920 on. He received the Nobel Prize in 1922 and the Atoms for Peace award in 1957. The two awards indicate his two-fold approach to science—both that of a researcher and that of a citizen

aware of the dangers inherent in the scientific venture. His major works include *The Theory of Spectra and Atomic Constitution* (1922), *Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature* (1934) and *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge* (1962). Here again, the last is a broadly philosophical book intended for the layman.

Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-) was born in Wurzburg, Germany, won the Nobel Prize in 1932 and became director of the Max Planck Institute in 1946. His work in quantum theory, and especially his formulation of the uncertainty principle, have had a profound effect on later work in the field. His greatest book—a most difficult theoretical treatise—is *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory* (1930). More recently he has written two books of general intelligibility that illumine the ordinary man's understanding of the world of subatomic particles: *Philosophic Problems of Nuclear Science* (1952) and *Physics and Philosophy* (1958).

III. Historians and Social Scientists.

Our century has seen a vast efflorescence of writing in this field, but in this great mass of material only a few works stand out. I nominate Lenin, Keynes and Toynbee as the few who have a chance to endure for a hundred years.

Nicolai Lenin (1870-1924) was born Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov in Simbirsk (subsequently named Ulyanovsk) and received his law degree from the University of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad). Along with Trotsky the chief moving force behind the Russian Revolution, he led a minority group which he named the majority (*bolsheviki*) and by this ruse, in part, gained control of the post-228 revolutionary government. He was both a man of theory and a man of action—a far-ranging political thinker as well as a superb politician. Two or three among his many books are likely to survive even if Communism does not. If, as Khrushchev threatened, Russia buries us, then Lenin will be near the top of any list of great writers drawn up in 2066, and the books will probably be *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), *The State and Revolution* (1918) and “*Left-Wing*” *Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (1920).

John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) was born in Cambridge, England, where he was also educated. He taught at the university until 1919, when he resigned to write *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a book as amazingly prophetic in its way as Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. It predicted that the Treaty of Versailles would inevitably lead to a second world war. Keynes' most important work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), has profoundly affected subsequent economic theory and practice. It seems to me beyond question that his

influence will persist for the next hundred years and, perhaps, beyond.

Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-) was born in London and has been associated with its university throughout his adult life. (He was, however, schooled at Oxford.) *A Study of History* (in ten volumes appearing between 1934 and 1954) is probably the most controversial historical work of this century. Its qualities of scope, imagination and eloquence make it the bane of professionals and the darling of amateurs. Even if the professionals are to some extent right in their criticisms of Toynbee's scholarship, his *Study of History* remains, in my judgment, the greatest historical work of our time.

One author remains. I am referring to Teilhard de Chardin whom, as I said earlier, I find difficult to place. He started out as a reputable scientist and later became a poetical and almost mystical spinner of philosophical fancies.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was born in France, educated by the Jesuits and ordained a priest. He was known until his death only for his geological and paleontological studies in East Asia. In 1958 *The Phenomenon of Man* exploded on the scene, and this extraordinary work has been followed by the posthumous publication of other books and collections of letters and papers. *The Phenomenon of Man*, which is the only work of Teilhard's that will endure, is easy to criticize; yet the book has qualities of insight and imagination that shine through all its faults. I am not sure I can say why, but I think people will go on reading—and rereading—it for a long, long time.

In the practice of the Old Religion (called “witchcraft” by its adversaries), the *coven* or sacramental unit consisted of 13 persons (this is the origin of the modern superstition about that number). One of these, the leader, was sacrificed; and then there were 12. Teilhard is the 13th name on my list. I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

There remain but two remarks to make. I wonder, first, what effect lists like this have on the “creation” of classics. Can a reputation be artificially nurtured? Is there—to use another language—a positive feedback between nominations for immortality and immortality itself? Have Mr. Fadiman and I, by naming our candidates and defending our choices, done our part to insure that the authors we have named will be included in that hypothetical set, which I would very much like to live to see—*Great Books of the 20 Century?*

My answer to these questions is yes and no. Yes, we will have had a small effect; we and others like its may help to carry the freight of a reputation forward. But in a longer view, the answer is emphatically negative. Posterity will be the absolute judge, and against it there will be no appeal. This is as certain as that neither of us will be around in 2066 to object to the inclusion, on the list of great 20th Century authors, of names that are to us, here and now, unattractive, unimpressive or unknown.

GREAT BOOKS POLL WINNERS

The editors of *Great Books of the Western World* recently asked readers of *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* to respond to the question “Who Is Writing the Great Books of the 20th Century?” **PLAYBOY** here presents the first published results of the poll, listing the top 12 authors in order of total votes cast for them. We think you’ll enjoy comparing and contrasting this top dozen with those of experts Clifton Fadiman and Mortimer Adler, in the accompanying articles—and your own candidates for literary permanence.

1. George Bernard Shaw
2. Albert Einstein
3. T. S. Eliot
4. James Joyce
5. Jean-Paul Sartre
6. Ernest Hemingway
7. Albert Camus
8. William Faulkner
9. Eugene O’Neill
10. Thomas Mann
11. Arnold Toynbee
12. Franz Kafka

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