
EDITOR'S NOTE

We have received numerous requests to describe what the book *Great Treasury of Western Thought* is all about. We will endeavor to fulfill those requests [in 3 parts] by providing the Contents, the Preface, the Introduction to a specific idea—**Self-Knowledge and Self-Love**, the actual quotations from that section and some book reviews.

GREAT TREASURY OF WESTERN THOUGHT

***The next best thing to owning the
Great Books of the Western World
and the Syntopicon***

Never before have 5,000 years of wisdom, eloquence, wit and drama been distilled so master fully, presented so fully, and made so readily accessible between the covers of a single volume.

Here are some 9,000 memorable passages by 200 of the most brilliant minds of Western Civilization. Here are their thoughts on the most enduring, perplexing, and exciting themes. Not snippets—the ideas are presented in full context so they reach the reader with all their subtlety, power, and original intent.

Outline of Contents

MAN

Man in the Universe: The Grandeur and Misery of Man. The Human Condition. The Ages of Man: Young and Old. Self-Knowledge and Self-Love. Honor, Reputation Fame or Glory. Human Greatness: The Hero. Woman and Man. Life and Death: The Fear of Death. Suicide.

FAMILY

The Institution of the Family. Parents and Children. Marriage.

LOVE

The Nature, Kinds, and Power of Love. Hate. Sexual Love. Friendship. Charity and Mercy. Love of Country: Patriotism.

EMOTION

The Passions: The Range of the Emotions. Fear. Anger. Desire. Hope and Despair. Joy and Sorrow. Pleasure and Pain. Greed and Avarice. Jealousy. Pride and Humility.

MIND

Intelligence and Understanding. The Senses and Sense Perception. Memory. Imagination. Dreams. Madness. Will: Free Choice.

KNOWLEDGE

The Characteristics and Conditions of Human Knowledge. Experience. Truth. Error, Ignorance, and the Limits of Human Knowledge. Opinion, Belief, and Faith. Doubt and Skepticism. Reasoning, Demonstration, and Disputation.

LANGUAGE

The Nature of Language. The Arts of Language.

EDUCATION

The Ends and Means of Education. Habit. The Arts of Teaching and Learning.

ETHICS

Moral Philosophy and Morality. Custom. Moral Law. Moral Freedom. Conscience. Good and Evil. Right and Wrong. Happiness. Duty: Moral Obligation. Virtue and Vice. Courage and Cowardice. Temperance and Intemperance. Prudence Honesty. Wisdom and Folly

POLITICS

Society and the State. The Realm of Politics. Government: Its Nature, Necessity, and Forms. Government of and by the People: Republic and Democracy. Citizen ship. Despotism and Tyranny. Slavery. Classes and Class Conflict. Revolution.

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LAW AND JUSTICE

Law and Lawyers. Justice and Injustice. Rights—Natural and Civil. Crime and Punishment.

LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Freedom in Society. Freedom of Thought and Expression: Censorship. Equality.

WAR AND PEACE

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HISTORY

History: The Record of Events. Progress, Regress, and Cycles in History. Fate, Fortune, and Destiny.

ART AND AESTHETICS

The Realm of Art. Books and Reading. Poetry and Poets. Tragedy and Comedy. Music. Beauty and the Beautiful. Criticism and the Standards of Taste.

PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND MATHEMATICS

Philosophy and Philosophers. Science and Scientific Method. The Discipline of Mathematics.

MEDICINE AND HEALTH

The Art and Science of Medicine. The Practice of Medicine: Physicians and Patients. Health and Disease.

NATURE AND THE COSMOS

Nature and the Natural. The Nature of Life. Cause. Chance. Motion and Change. Space. Time. The Universe or Cosmos.

RELIGION

The Distinguishing Features of Religion. Judaism. Christianity. Church. God. Gods and Goddesses. Angels and Devils. Worship and Service. Heresy and Unbelief. Prophecy. Miracles. Superstition. Sin and Temptation. Redemption and Salvation. Heaven and Hell.

P r e f a c e

In the field of standard reference materials—dictionaries, encyclopedias, books of quotations, and the like—a mark of rare distinction belongs to those that not only perform their reference function efficiently but also serve another important purpose as well. By this criterion the great *Oxford English Dictionary* and the new Fifteenth Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* stand out among all other works in the categories to which they belong. Because it is constructed on historical principles, the *Oxford English Dictionary* not only enables its user to look up the meaning, spelling, etymology, or pronunciation of a word, but also to descry the history of the word, amply documented by statements and examples that exhibit the growth and alteration of its significance. Because it is accompanied by a systematic outline of human knowledge that serves as a topical guide to its contents, the new *Encyclopaedia Britannica* not only enables its user to look up single items of information or obtain knowledge about a single subject, but also to pursue in a systematic fashion the sustained study of almost any field of subject matter.

The editors believe that *Great Treasury of Western Thought* will be recognized, in the category of books of quotations, as possessing the mark of rare distinction that makes the *Oxford English Dictionary* stand out among dictionaries and the new *Encyclopaedia Britannica* among encyclopedias. Its alphabetical Subject and Proper Name Index, containing upwards of 50,000 entries, enables it to serve as an efficient reference book, in which particular passages on particular subjects can be looked up. In addition, its carefully constructed Author Index allows the reader to discover whether favorite works or parts of works by particular authors have been mined for quotation, and where such quotations appear. At the same time, its organization, which consists of twenty chapters, each concerned with a set of related great ideas, totaling 127 sections, each prefaced by explanatory text, makes *Great Treasury of Western Thought* a book to be read for enjoyment and instruction as well as a reference book.

Great Treasury of Western Thought can be read with both enjoyment and profit primarily for two reasons. One has to do with its intellectual progenitor, as it were. The other has to do with the criteria employed by the editors in their choice of passages to be quoted.

When, just a quarter of a century ago, *Great Books of the Western World* was published, that collection of the most worthwhile books to be read both for pleasure and enlightenment was accompanied by an innovation that enabled the set to be used also as a reference work. The *Syntopicon*, or topical guide to passages in the great books wherein are discussed the fundamental ideas in the tradition of Western thought, allowed the user to look up the whole discussion of an idea or of one or more topics under it, as well as to be entertained or instructed by reading the great works contained in the set. The *Syntopicon* was hailed as a reference book in the sphere of ideas comparable to a dictionary in the sphere of words and an encyclopedia in the sphere of facts.

The publication of *Great Treasury of Western Thought* is a fitting and proper celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication in 1952 of *Great Books of the Western World* and of its *Syntopicon*. Without the years of intellectual labor and the 400,000 man-hours of reading that produced the *Syntopicon*, the present work would probably not have been possible. In fact, without the *Syntopicon* in existence, both as a comprehensive chart of the great ideas in Western thought and as a systematic guide to their discussion in the great books, the present work might never have been conceived; and, even if it had been conceived, it could not have been produced with the thoroughness that the conception deserves.

This leads us to the second reason for this book's special character. Other books of quotations—among them are some notable works of recognized excellence consist mainly of short passages, often no more than a line or two. These passages are often well-known or familiar; they have been quoted again and again; they are memorable and should be remembered, but the individual who fails to remember them must have recourse to such books of quotations in order to recollect and quote them. The purpose behind the desire accurately to recall such memorable quotations is usually to enliven the style of a speech to be delivered or an essay to be written.

However, it is a striking and notable fact about *Great Treasury of Western Thought* that many if not most of the passages quoted in it are not either generally familiar or readily memorable. For one thing, the quoted passages are typically longer than those that appear in other books of quotations, running to more than 100 words on the average. For another thing, as many as three-quarters of the passages selected for quotation do not appear in other current books of quotations and may indeed never have appeared in

such books, because the principle of selection that guided the editors was that each passage quoted should be a seminal statement about one of the great ideas in the tradition of Western thought. If the passage was either memorable or familiar, so much the better; the editors insisted that each passage had to be interesting and important in its own right; but they also demanded that it should be significant in relation to other passages on the same subject.

In a sense, then, the passages here assembled and quoted from the great books are precisely those to which reference is made in the *Syntopicon*; and *Great Treasury of Western Thought* is therefore a concrete realization of the *Syntopicon* and may satisfy those readers—not a few—who have regretted that the *Syntopicon* was “only” an index and did not contain within its pages the passages to which it referred. In another sense the passages from the great books that are gathered here are the very heart and soul of the Western tradition, that small part of it that will almost certainly survive any disaster, any holocaust, that can be imagined in the future. All of the great books, in their entirety, may not survive; many great works have already been lost in the vicissitudes of human history; but the essential things that the great books say, the irrecoverable insights that they offer us, are more likely to endure because they are collected here, “that he who runs may read.”

Of course, not all of the passages referred to by the *Syntopicon* are quoted here; many such passages are inappropriate for a general audience (for example, technical discourses in science or philosophy), and others are too long. Nor, indeed, are the writers from whose works quotations were selected limited to those appearing in *Great Books of the Western World*. Almost twice as many other writers are included, and they are drawn not only from the literature of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, but also from the literature of modern times. Consulting the Author Index (pp. 1431-1449) and examining the Contents on pp. vii-xi should enable anyone quickly to appraise the scope and the characteristics of the present work, which will distinguish it among all other books of quotations.

The possessor of *Great Treasury of Western Thought* may still wish to resort to those other books of quotations for the special purposes they serve—as aids to the memory or as stylistic aids. It is not the memory of the user that this work seeks to stimulate, but rather the user’s intellect and imagination—the user’s understanding and intuition of the greatest thought on the most important

subjects. It is not the reader's style, either in speech or writing, but his mind, that *Great Treasury of Western Thought* aims to enliven, and enlighten as well in the process.

The editors of *Great Treasury of Western Thought* have been reading and teaching the great books, and other works quoted in this anthology, for many years—one of them for more than fifty years, the other for more than thirty. Nevertheless, they confess their own delight and fascination at being able—for the first time—to read in appropriate sequence (for the most part chronological) the passages that are here collected under each of the 127 subject headings that constitute the divisions of this book. They have found such reading to be both highly instructive and immensely enjoyable. They can think of nothing simpler and more truthful to say by way of recommending this book to those for whom they made it—as a work to read with pleasure, to dwell on, to learn from, as well as to refer to when that need arises. The more time that is spent with it, the more valuable it will become, for it is, literally, a compact treasury of the best thinking and deepest wisdom of the West. It reflects and epitomizes the intellectual tradition on which every cultivated person must build.

The editors wish to express their indebtedness to the many persons who worked on this book over a period of almost a quarter of a century. They especially wish to thank three friends without whose help the book could not have come to be: Marlys Allen, George Ducas, and Wayne Moquin.

Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS
Founded in 1990 by Mortimer Adler & Max Weismann
E-mail: TGIdeas@speedsite.com
Homepage: TheGreatIdeas.org
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