# *Introduction*

BY DEAL W. HUDSON

## Adler's Legacy

Mortimer J. Adler calls himself a "Philosopher at Large."[1] The description no doubt suits the man who is currently Chairman of the Board of Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, Co-founder of the Great Books Foundation, Chairman of the Paideia Project, Honorary Director of the Aspen Institute, and the author of fifty books on topics ranging from politics to ethics, education, law, art, metaphysics, anthropology, language, economics, religion, and philosophical psychology.

Yet Adler has also been for the past forty years "at large" from the academy itself, where professional philosophers are usually to be found. This is not to say he did not serve his time. Adler taught at Columbia University for ten years and at The University of Chicago for twenty-two years before establishing the Institute for Philosophical Research in 1952. Adler's stated reasons for leaving the university—the deterioration of intellectual interchange and the need for a "more congenial and supportive environment"—might have encouraged some of his former colleagues to glean still another meaning from Adler's being "at large."

The rancor surrounding his divorce from the university may, in part, explain the relative silence on the subject of Adler among academicians.[2] One would have expected by this time a gamut of critical reconsiderations of Adler's huge contribution to twentieth-century intellectual life, but none has yet appeared.[3] Why? To this day no American is more identified, in the eyes of the general public, with the vocation of philosopher than Mortimer J. Adler. Perhaps his being mistakenly thought of as a "popularizer" is to blame. Those who identify him with books like *Aris-*

*totle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy* (1978) may not realize that Adler was well along in his academic career, having published his first book, aptly entitled *Dialectic*, in 1927, before he began writing exclusively for the general public. Years of scholarly research and countless classroom conversations enable Adler to translate difficult ideas into an accessible idiom. Any reader of Adler who is hungry for footnotes can consult, say, his remarkable series of articles entitled "The Theory of Democracy" published in *The Thomist*,[4] a work which underlies much of Adler's thinking on ethics and politics. A complete bibliography of books and articles has been published in the latest volume of Adler's memoirs.[5]

It should also be asked what is wrong with writing books that can be read by intelligent people without specialized training. What is wrong with breaking the academy's near-gnostic hold on intellectual conversation? Indeed, in a cultural climate where deliberate obscurity and self-contradiction are often taken as signs of profundity, Adler's clear "common sense" approach ought to serve as a guide for academic rhetoric. Obscurity defeats rational discourse and encourages muddy thinking. Whereas some writers appear to take pride in not being understood by the average reader, Adler is never satisfied until all his students "get it." Anyone who has ever sat in one of his seminar rooms will testify to his almost maniacal determination that everyone grasp the essential points of discussion. His unforgettable power as a teacher has been in evidence every summer at the Aspen Institute in Aspen, Colorado, where he has been teaching seminars for the past forty years.

It is fortunate that Adler's influence *as a teacher* can still be detected throughout American education, especially in those liberal arts curricula that stress primary reading in the classic texts of Western civilization. Wherever there is a Great Books Program or an emphasis on the classic texts of the Western tradition, wherever there is still insistence on seminar-style teaching and the cultivation of civilized interchange, credit should be given to the man who has fought steadfastly against the educational currents of specialization, professionalization, relevance, and, now, multiculturalism that have whittled away at the foundation of liberal education. In all the hubbub over E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* no one mentioned that Adler fought these battles many years before.

Adler's name is rightly identified with the "Great Books" movement which began quietly in the 1920s and eventually swept the United States in the 1950s, luckily infiltrating many college curricula, and leaving behind, for example, the programs at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico; St Mary's College in Moraga, California; and Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California. But it has been his many public television appearances, including his Aspen seminars on the "Six Great Ideas" and his recorded conversations with Bill Moyers about the existence of God, which have ensured his continued recognition into the 1990s.

In fact, Adler's popularity continues unabated at a time when the intellectual currents of academic life have flowed away from the authorities, the kind of philosophical realism, and the core curriculum he has advocated: Aristotle, St. Thomas, the "Great Books of the Western World." Adler himself has risen to challenge the contenders to his "common sense" realism—existentialism, Marxism, positivism, phenomenology, and deconstruction. But Adler learned long ago that his best student is the American public, which is under no obligation to identify with the latest academic fashion. His *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education* (1940) made him the best-selling author he has been ever since. In addition, his editorship of the *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), *The Great Ideas Today*, Great Books of the Western World (60 volumes), and The Annals of America (21 volumes), among other projects, has earned him the further gratitude of his public as an organizer of knowledge, who has provided them access to a world of ideas and learning previously available only in large personal or public libraries.

That his books can be read, and are read, by the intelligent lay person as well as the scholar is, thus, no accident. Adler has always desired the marriage of accessibility and probity, because he has always been committed to the principle that philosophy, like education, is for everybody. This commitment stems from his conviction that the cultivation of a philosophical habitus is necessary to a democratic people's maintaining their grip on freedom and self-determination.[6] A genuine liberal education, therefore, does not need relevance tacked on to it through the consideration of social issues. A sound education shapes people who will be prudently disposed toward grasping the moral significance

of social conditions regardless of circumstance. Such students do not need to be catechized in the correct opinions about today's headlines. In fact, issue-oriented education can make today's students helpless in tomorrow's world; without the foundation to articulate the reasons underlying their present commitment to the homeless or to the environment, they have no way to appraise the arrival of the unforeseen—these are minds ripe for the demagogue. Adler's constant appeal to the fundamental relation of liberal education to the good life and democratic government may be a key to his popular appeal.

Thus, even his early works, like *The Dialectic of Morals* (1941), written when he was still among the academics, display Adler's characteristic concern for common sense reflection on everyday experience and the requirements of responsible citizenship. In the sixties and seventies Adler tried his hand at writing books that would appeal to both public and professional audiences. He stakes his philosophical reputation on the five books written during this period.[7] Though largely ignored by academics, these books were widely read by the general public: *The Conditions of Philosophy* (1965), *The Difference of Man and The Difference It Makes* (1967), *The Time of Our Lives: The Ethics of Common Sense* (1970), *The Common Sense of Politics* (1971), and *Some Questions About Language: A Theory of Human Discourse and Its Objects* (1976).

With *Some Questions About Language*, Adler's attempt to encompass both academics and the general public came to an end. There was simply too much specialization, too much jargon and in-talk, too little respect for Aristotelian realism, among the academicians. So, turning his back on the academy once again, he devoted himself to books he had always wanted to write but never could find the time for.[8]

But Adler did not turn away from education. He recognized that colleges and universities were unable to rehabituate students whose intellectual habits have been shaped by twelve years of previous schooling. The target of educational reform should be elementary and secondary education. In 1982 Adler announced the Paideia Program, a comprehensive plan to reform the pedagogical approach taken in the first twelve grades. Paideia's purpose was not to impose a new curriculum but to mandate the kind of teaching that would inculcate intellectual skills, impart general knowledge, and foster good lives.[9] Students should spend as little

time as possible passively listening to their teachers. The Program distinguishes between three kinds of teaching—lecturing, coaching, and questioning—and employs the appropriate method for each subject matter, attempting to keep the students in the most active, participatory posture possible throughout the school day. In doing this, the Paideia Program treats the student as the primary cause of his or her learning, not what not is done to them by a teacher. "Memorization of what teachers tell their students in classroom lectures is not genuine learning at all, precisely because it does not engage the mind in mental activity."[10]

In making students more active learners, the Program aims to cultivate students for whom adult learning, whether from the Great Books or otherwise, will not be a drudgery, due to lack of basic literacy, the inhibition of imagination, or the inability to converse critically about ideas. Adler and the other distinguished members of the Paideia Group consider this program, twelve years of compulsory education without any electives, as holding promise for the realization of the democratic ideal—true equality in education. Not only would all students get the same course of instruction but they would also be graded individually based upon their own potential rather than on the bell-shaped curve that requires a certain rate of failure measured by a single standard. The Paideia Program has been implemented with success at a limited number of public schools across the United States.

One imagines, however, that America's infatuation with the grandiose promises of multiculturalism will have to pass if the good sense of Adler's proposals can ever be widely recognized. In fact, multiculturalism is merely a single symptom of a culture that is not likely to recognize or to celebrate Adler's legacy: his steadfast advocacy of Western thinking; his willingness to discriminate between the "great" and the not-so-great in that tradition; his reliance on the established wisdom of past thinkers; his rejection of specialization and professionalization in education; his insistence on close examination of primary texts, as opposed to secondary reflection on that literature; his emphasis on examining ideas through rational arguments, rather than through expressions of emotional reactions to them; his optimism that rational conversation among people can lead to beneficial consensus, regardless of considerations about gender, race, or ethnicity; his view that the human mind can grasp through its

concepts knowledge of extra-mental reality, that consciousness is not trapped like a ghost within a machine; and his conviction that because of intellect human beings can operate free of physical determinism, and are naturally endowed with rights that cannot be extended to other animals. It is easy to see that Adler's positions are no longer taken for granted in contemporary culture, and, in fact, are often called passionately into question in the name of such ends as cultural diversity and psychological self-esteem. As will be seen, Adler's treatment of human nature grounds the fundamental optimism of his vision, one that has not been darkened by the history of social injustice, injuries that concern him as deeply as anyone else.

## Adler on Human Nature

There are a number of reasons why *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*[11] should still be read. Foremost among these are Adler's philosophical defense of the thesis that human beings differ in kind rather than in degree from other animals, and his delineation of the practical consequences that follow from denying this thesis. This defense is sorely needed at a time when this question has become polarized between those who follow the scientific consensus that humans differ only in degree and those who, on the basis of religious convictions alone, maintain that humans differ in kind. The Judeo-Christian view that humans are created *imago Dei* entails for a them a difference in kind that becomes dramatically apparent when Adam in his loneliness "gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Gen. 2:20). In these days of animal rights protests and ecological congresses many believers find it hard to claim for humans the role of the "higher" animal, and even harder to provide a philosophical account of the difference. Helpless to defend their beliefs on purely rational grounds against the evidence of scientists, believers resort to fundamentalism and to pseudo-science to fight back. Adler gives philosophical reasons to affirm the humanist view of a difference in kind and to reject the animalist position of a difference in degree or superficial difference in kind.[12]

But perhaps just as important as this defense is Adler's demonstration of how philosophy and science must cooperate in seek-

ing answers to questions which require both their methods of investigation. It might be objected that the philosophical position that Adler defends was developed in a period which predates modern science, the roughly sixteen hundred years between Aristotle and Aquinas. Although he identifies with a pre-modern tradition and challenges the present scientific consensus, it does not follow that Adler rejects the legitimacy of scientific investigation into human nature. The scientific evidence is so decisive for this issue that whatever conclusions are drawn in *The Difference of Man* must be considered as awaiting further experimental confirmation.

Whether the philosopher or the scientist exerts an *a priori* claim on a subject depends on the kind of questions asked. Mixed questions, such as that of human nature, require the cooperation of both disciplines.[13] The crucial point about understanding human nature is that in order to know the human *qua* human it is not possible for each of us simply to look within ourselves; introspective knowledge makes good confessional literature but not good philosophy or science. The actual behavior of human beings must be observed and analyzed. This is especially true if human nature is to be compared with that of other animals, because the investigator does not have access to the introspective findings of the apes. The playing surface must be even, so to speak.

To study human nature cooperatively with science, philosophy creates a theoretical framework, such as the distinction between degree and kind, to organize and interpret the evidence gathered by the empirical methods of the scientists, and establishes the criteria to be satisfied for a demonstrated conclusion. Adler argues that this framework is missing in Darwin's work, that Darwin's materialist assumptions about human nature and its origin ensure that his reasoning begins with a decisive conclusion about the continuity of human nature with natures of other animals. Darwin's investigation, therefore, was insulated from the start from recognizing counter-examples or even considering the humanist hypothesis.

Adler's treatment of Darwin and the animal researchers reveals the need for philosophical accountability in the sciences that claim to give us knowledge about human nature. Toward this end, he shows how it is possible to weigh together the claims to truth made by both philosophers and scientists despite the fact that

both make claims to provide knowledge and not simply opinion, and both base their truth claims on appeals to experience. The contradiction between claims is only apparent; the real issue is how each discipline encounters and cognizes experience itself, how closely each kind of reasoning can approach the nature of the thing under consideration.[14] Science uses an investigative method and philosophy does not; scientists measure and observe with instruments in the light of an hypothesis, while philosophers start from ordinary experience. But if scientists assume either a difference in degree or a superficial difference in kind between human and non-human animals, then they will inevitably affirm a continuity among animal natures and corroborate the phylogenetic unity regarded almost as an article of faith by biologists. This is the faith which leads Darwin to posit the required as-yet-unknown intermediaries in his evolutionary theory.

Against the animalists Adler insists that a difference in kind is demonstrable because non-human animals (and computers) are incapable of duplicating the operations of the human intellect. Thus, humans cannot be said to differ only in degree, if this means that they merely possess more of a certain characteristic than other animals do. Humans differ in kind because they possess one characteristic that other animals totally lack: conceptual thinking. But is this difference in kind radical or superficial? A superficial difference in kind means that conceptual thinking, which is not observed in non-human animals, could be exhibited by these animals if they possessed, say, greater brain size. If, however, a radical difference in kind exists, then conceptual thinking cannot be possessed, even potentially or to any degree, by other animals. The ability to think conceptually, Adler argues, cannot be explained by brain size alone; it requires the presence of an immaterial power, which alone can account for the way intellectuality transcends the determinations of the sensible. This is not to say that the intellect operates without sensible input, but to say that its three characteristic operations take from sensation far more than is "seen" in the percept. Abstraction of quiddities from sensible data, judgments of existence or non-existence of these quiddities, further reflection on judgments—each of these operations provides knowledge that is not supplied by perception, that is, by the presence of the sensible singular, alone.

Thus, the specific difference of the human species arises from

the power of the human intellect to operate in ways impossible for animals who possess only perceptual, not conceptual, thought. Non-human animals are capable of forming rudimentary generalizations based upon perceptual experience. But thinking in and through concepts enables the intellect to recognize that individual things are of a certain kind and to understand what that kind of thing is. And, even more important, concepts allow the human mind to reflect upon these objects of thought while they are out of sight, so to speak, not being perceived, and even when they are intrinsically imperceptible.[15]

Non-human animals do not exhibit any behavior that requires the presence of concepts in their thinking. As Adler says, it would be a breach of the principle of parsimony ("Ockham's razor") to posit anything more than perceptual thinking in animal intelligence. The perceptual generalizations of non-human animals, made possible by the disposition to perceive a number of sensible particulars as the same in kind, occurs only in the presence of sensory stimuli. The immaterial concept, thereby, transcends the material percept,[16] by providing knowledge of quidditative aspects of the thing known, an intelligibility that continues to function in the absence of the sensible. And, of course, many concepts do not relate directly to sensible things at all; they are abstracted by the mind through its experiential encounter with finite beings—think of concepts like "beauty," "goodness," "truth," and "justice."

This characterization of thinking also provides the necessary insights to settle the debate about the relation between human and non-human language. Human language is distinctive precisely because it employs concepts as well as percepts. This accounts for the fact that human utterance is not predictable in the same way as the signs employed by other species. For example, children acquire language not only by seeing things but also by having things described to them. But, above all, it is the unique human ability to employ propositional language that clinches the humanist position. This requires a distinction between categorematic (name-words, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and syncategorematic words (particles, such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions).[17] The former makes it possible to refer to objects, both perceptible and imperceptible; the latter, to put these words into propositions.

Animalists refuse to accept these and other distinctions between human and non-human language, the most important of which is the distinction between signs used as signals and signs used as designators. Signals are implicative in their meaning—*if* smoke, *then* fire—and they imply particular things, objects, or events. But designators are denotative in such a manner that an object is never denoted as a unique individual but as a particular belonging to a class, as in the use of the word "smoke." The speaker may be objecting to a particular puff of smoke coming from the next table but must employ a class-word, "smoke," in order to get the cigar put out. As a result, the denotation of an object by a designator always involves connotative significance. Connotation can work in several ways. In the case of smoke, it can lead one to meditate on matters as diverse as health, human rights, and courtesy. It could also lead one to think of a certain vintage Port. Connotative significance can also work logically as the utterance of a broad term like "furniture" could lead one to think of a "chair," "table," or "bed." Conceptual thinking even changes the way humans respond to implicative signals, evidence for which can be seen on any interstate highway.[18]

What Adler calls the "inseparability" of denotation and connotation cannot be explained without concept formation. First of all, class-names are derived, not from the particular, but from a whole class of objects; classes themselves, like "furniture" or "smoke," are not objects of perception. The difference between perception and conception, between implication and denotation/connotation, is the difference between recognizing *that* and knowing *what*. Perceptual abstraction cannot produce the designative meaning of common names, with its wide range of connotative significance. Concepts are meanings, therefore, in ways that percepts cannot be. Conceptual meaning provides the key to understanding the uniqueness of the designator in relation to the signal, especially how its mode of signification arises out of a triadic exchange between the sign, the object, and its significance.[19]

Although this summary only skims Adler's argument, it can be seen that the distinctions he considers necessary to establishing a continuity between human and non-human animals have given the animalists some tough questions to answer. Even though he has consistently maintained the humanist position, Adler insists the question must remain open to further scientific research.[20]

Yet, for the present, whether or not this difference in kind is recognized has tremendous practical consequences. *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* ends with an examination of these consequences. It is a tribute to the continued relevance of this volume that the practical ramifications Adler mentions in Chapters 16–18 are even more pressing today. For example, if there is no actual difference in kind between animals and humans, if there is only a difference in degree, then we lack any justification for ascribing personhood to human beings and for bestowing upon one another the special moral and political respect of having rights. If one agrees that human nature is only different in degree, then proponents of animals rights are correct in maintaining that withholding rights from non-human animals is merely an unjustified preference, buried under unexamined rationalizations.

Adler suggests, however, that we reflect upon the unique character of a human life, that we not describe animals as engaging in the pursuit of happiness, that only humans can pursue happiness as a "remote goal and hold it before themselves." The ability to reflect upon and pursue objects like "happiness," when they are not and cannot be presented to the senses, is made possible by conceptual thinking. Happiness, the final goal of living, can be pursued only by animals who can think beyond the percept, who can intend that which is beyond sense data alone. It is the immateriality of the human intellect which empowers it to transcend the individuating determination of matter. Consequently, only an immaterial intellect can make free choices or direct voluntary behavior, neither of which proceeds from the direct influence of physical causes. Intellect creates a distance between us and the involuntary urges of our appetites. But it is only a distance, and those same instincts cannot be mocked. They must be satisfied, but these satisfactions are ordered by the manner of our own choosing.

The guarantee of an inalienable right to pursue happiness makes no sense, of course, if human beings are not free to seek it. The obligation to pursue happiness should be understood as the source of all our rights, if one views happiness properly, not as a feeling-state, but as the *totum bonum*, the total of all real goods.[21] Rights, thus, which belong naturally to every person, obligate us to allow one another access to the basic goods that make life com-

plete and happy. Thus, the human difference in kind, a difference conferred by the immaterial power of the intellect, justifies the unique moral status of human beings as possessors of natural rights. Other animals, because they cannot be said to pursue happiness voluntarily, or even to think about it, do not possess rights. The prodigous survey of the scientific literature in *The Difference of Man* revealed no evidence, in spite of the scientific consensus, to justify allotting non-human animals a share in the political privilege of rights.

The distinction is crucial in the political sphere, as Adler shows. It is a justifiable practice to subordinate an inferior kind to a superior kind, the way humans make use of plants and animals, but it is a violation of moral principle to subordinate an inferior human being to a superior one, that is, to treat this difference as one of kind rather than degree. Of course, there are individuals who are naturally endowed with greater gifts of physical strength, intelligence, and beauty. But the principle of human equality rests upon the recognition of difference in kind, not degrees within a kind, which rebuts arguments for slavery, natural or otherwise, along with those for totalitarianism and racial superiority.

The type of intellectuality that we call "human" makes possible all the properly human goods. Not only does it make distinctive modes of thinking possible but also distinctive forms of emotion. Those who think a closer alliance with the world of non-human animals would provide an occasion of recovering a more "wholistic" and affective account of human nature should remember this. Intellectuality provides the freedom to choose objects of love from among the multitude of possible objects in our experience. As an illustration, one might go so far as to point out that intellectuality enables us to become something that appears the opposite of "rational": to be romantics and to seek expansive passion over everydayness, making our lives into a series of passion-eliciting obstacles to be overcome. But such romanticism, which often poeticizes itself as being opposed to intellect, requires it.

Those who propose the animal option are put in an odd position. Although human intellectuality is put in a continuum with other animal intelligence, it is clear that concepts enable us to create theories about the nature of animals. Thus, the animalists are writing books about human nature and arguing that human

beings are on a phylogenetic continuum with non-human animals—animals who cannot read or write books.

Adler would argue that what the reader is doing at this very moment—reading, reflecting, weighing, judging—is an exercise of the unique human drive to know.

> Only human beings live with the awareness of death and with the certain knowledge that they are going to die.
>
> Only human beings use their minds to become artists, scientists, historians, philosophers, priests, teachers, lawyers, physicians, engineers, accountants, inventors, traders, bankers, and statesmen.
>
> Only among human beings is there a distinction between those who behave ethically and those who are knaves, scoundrels, villains, and criminals.
>
> Only among human beings is there any distinction between those who have mental health and those who suffer mental disease or have mental disabilities of one sort or another.
>
> Only in the sphere of human life are there such institutions as schools, libraries, hospitals, churches, temples, factories, theatres, museums, prisons, cemeteries, and so on.[22]

This human drive to know extends toward the Absolute, toward God. As Adler shows at the conclusion, a denial of the distinction between degree and kind directly affects our attitude toward religion, and the notion of creation, because the hypothesis of an immaterial intellect is consonant with belief in the existence of a divine person. If there is nothing immaterial in human nature, then everything that we are is continuous with the rest of physical nature, and human aspiration and action can be explained by brain size and complexity. Personal immortality becomes an impossibility, except, one supposes, by some kind of absurd divine fiat.

Since the mid-sixties another issue of practical relevance has arisen: the need for greater global cooperation among nations. *Haves Without Have-Nots: Essays for the Twenty-First Century on Democracy and Socialism*[23] was written by Adler in response to the breakup of the Soviet Empire. Here he returns to a concern for world federalism as a means to achieving a lasting world peace.

The argument of *Haves Without Have-Nots* reaffirms the principles of the *Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution*[24] published as the result of years of deliberation at The University of Chicago by Hutchins, Adler, and other distinguished scholars during the Cold War, with its threat of nuclear holocaust.[25]

The basic convictions that lead him to pursue a practical solution to world peace through world federalism can be traced back to possibilities of human cooperation inherent in human nature:

> Civil government produces civil peace. Anarchy, or the absence of government, is identical with a state of war: either the cold war of the diplomats and of espionage or the actual war of the generals with guns and bombs. To identify the state of war with the violence of actual warfare is to misconceive the state of peace in purely negative terms as the absence of fighting. Civil peace, positively conceived, consists not in the absence of fighting but rather in *conditions that make it possible to settle all differences without recourse to violence or bloodshed.* Civil government, by providing that set of conditions, establishes and preserves civil peace [emphasis added].[26]

Thus, the impetus to world government is derived from an understanding of the positive meaning of peace and of the conditions necessary to bring it about. A common human nature is, in fact, the central condition that makes peace a possibility, just as it makes just government and other forms of human cooperation possible. In fact, the most serious obstacle to a peaceful society is our increasing notion of fragmented humanity. The cause for this fragmentation is exemplified in claims now being made on behalf of ethnocentrism. This theory, which ignores the formal properties, or potentialities, common to all human beings, suffers from what Adler calls an "inveterate attachment to locality," and places too much emphasis on the differences between human beings that are generated by differences in nurture.[27]

The best hope for human cooperation is the universality of human nature as specified by the uniqueness of human intellectuality, evidence for which can be found in our recognition of the transcultural character of mathematics, natural science, and technology. The continuing recognition in these domains that truth

is not culturally relative corroborates the understanding of humanity that Adler has developed out of the tradition running from Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to Jacques Maritain. Humans are defined by their common species and the natural powers belonging to that species; this common nature establishes the foundation for understanding their moral lives and their need for political cooperation. Human intellectuality, therefore, is the condition of possibility for free action and the claims to human rights and personhood. Success in the moral and political spheres, the very happiness of the individual and the state, is judged on the basis of how a human being exercises this intellectuality in growing toward completion and, it is hoped, wholeness. Thus, without a common rational nature, and our ability to apprehend it, the force of these kinds of moral and political discriminations would be reduced to matters of convention or power relations.

Nothing could be more at odds with the postmodern rejection of human nature as an hierarchical and essentialist view in service of elitist and oppressive interests.[28] The postmodern view, of course, tends to be localized to the extreme—factors of gender, race, sexuality, wealth, and class each shape the contour of the particular rationality seeking its "correspondence" with reality. Adler recognizes that different human communities and societies, whether differentiated along ethnic, religious, or class lines, are capable of actualizing their human potentialities in differing ways. The "babel" of different languages itself attests to this diversity. Once attention has returned to the remarkable sameness of human potentialities, the issue of diversity will seem superficial by comparison.[29] But those who celebrate cultural diversity can blind themselves to the more important issue: that these languages themselves are unique to the human species and bespeak a uniquely human potential differing in *kind* rather than *degree* from other animals. By overlooking the crucial difference between what belongs to human beings by nature and what belongs to them by nurture, or acculturation, we risk losing the foundation that justifies our respect for human rights in the first place. The political consequences of Adler's conversation with anthropology is immediately apparent.

In the nearly thirty years since this book was published the cultural climate has changed: what began as a protest for equality

in the name of human rights on the part of women and minorities has evolved into theories of multiculturalism and feminism that sometimes deny the very notion of a shared human nature which over the past two centuries has ensured those rights. As Adler writes,

> If a world community is ever to come into existence, it will retain cultural pluralism or diversity with respect to all matters that are accidental in human life. . . . [But] we will have at last overcome the nurtural illusion that there is a Western mind and an Eastern mind, a European mind and an African mind, or a civilized and a primitive mind. There is only a human mind and it is one and the same in all human beings.[30]

Feminist scholarship over the past decades has documented how the notion of rational difference has been used to exclude women from full participation in society.[31] Because women have traditionally been viewed as having less capacity for intellectuality than men, they have been labeled "mutilated" or "deformed" versions of the male, the human paradigm. Adler recognizes and rejects the prejudice against women being expressed in this tradition, but does not see any necessity to change the understanding of the human difference. The problem does not lie in the principle of a distinctive intellectuality but in its application. There is no need to assume guilt by association. And, it may be asked, on what grounds are feminists going to be able to claim injustice if not by some similar appeal? If not on the basis of rational difference, then what else? Other claims, whether love, personhood, or freedom, will all lead back to the powers of intellection that make them possible. Aristotle's view of natural slaves was justified on the same basis, but history attests that there is no necessary relation between a principle of intellectual difference and the continuation of slavery as an institution. To insist upon this association is to be caught in an uncritical historicism. In fact, the appeal to human equality, which has such a central role in challenging the legitimacy of both slavery and women's subordination is dependent upon this difference for its justification.[32]

Without human beings as "rational animals" there would have never been human beings with "inalienable rights." One wonders

if it is now being suggested that the designation "rational animal" is getting in the way of human rights. If so, it can be suggested that the foundation of human rights is being ignored. What is at stake is a struggle between justice and power. Again, someone may respond that such an option is illusory, that historically so-called justice has been wielded by the powerful for the sake of their privilege. This cannot be denied. But what is there to gain by overthrowing the norm of human nature? What recourse will anyone have the next time civil justice is corrupted by power? To what, to whom, will he or she appeal? The obvious answer is the law, of course. But the same cynics who distrust appeals to justice will argue that the law itself is subject to the same corruption. So, is there no final appeal except to rival forms of power?

It is our shared norm of what a human being is and of what he or she deserves that enables us to be shocked by injustice and to seek proper redress. If we forget the norm of nature, will we cease to be shocked? If so, then we will have become less human. If we continue to be shocked, what are our grounds? Convention? Habit? The now-rejected norm of nature? Adler's optimism is founded on the conviction that what human beings are makes itself known to the human mind in unconscious ways. So, regardless of our consciously held theories about human life, we are continually being bombarded with data that can wear down and correct our bad ideas.

Thus, for human cooperation at any level to be feasible there must exist some degree of common understanding about the nature of human life, its basic ends and purposes. A new cultural unity and world community will begin to emerge when a consensus forms concerning what are matters of *truth* and what are matters of *taste*. The former will always be transcultural; the latter, indigenous. Controversies over matters of truth are, in theory, capable of resolution, while disagreements over taste are not. Hence, the attack on the classical ideal of human nature, in the name of correcting historical injustices, is politically dangerous. Certainly, Aristotle made a mistake in considering both natural slaves and women as inferior beings, but the apparent antidote—the wholesale deconstruction of the idea of human nature—sets the stage for perhaps even worse crimes in the future, a future in which the ground of human rights and dignity has been lost.

Adler's insistence on the reaffirmation of human nature as the

transcultural basis of world community, and eventually world government, may seem overly abstract and optimistic. Indeed, one may read the recent outbreak of ethnic enthusiasms as a reaction against totalitarian regimes who also operated from a very abstract, albeit entirely different, view of human nature. But even if one wished for a bit more appreciation for the *local* in Adler's thought, one must agree that in the main he is right to direct attention toward the only sound philosophical basis for governance.[33] Those nations who seek a greater degree of cooperation with their neighbors around the world had better take a more active interest in what their children are being taught in school about nature and nurture. Cooperation that remains solely pragmatic will usually move us when the accidental conditions warrant it, and toward the merely negative kind of peace as Adler understands it. To move further toward genuine peace at any social level requires something more than pragmatic tolerance; it requires philosophical agreement about the purposes of human life. Although human nature continues to reveal its own basic dynamism to the human mind, we need the aid of a proper education and the established wisdom of the past to grasp it clearly. With this republication of *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, we now have yet another chance, thankfully, to benefit from the author's creative conversation between the "two cultures" of science and the humanities. Undoubtedly, this book represents the fulfillment of a purpose Adler announced nearly sixty years ago when he wrote, "One can be an Aristotelian or a Thomist only by being a philosopher facing contemporary issues in the light of reason and experience, as they did in their day; and, as they were, through being respectful of the tradition of human knowledge wherever it bears witness to the truth."[34]

## Notes

1. *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 260.

2. One exception is *Freedom in the Modern World: Jacques Maritain, Yves R. Simon, Mortimer J. Adler*, ed. Michael D. Torre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press/American Maritain Association, 1989), which contains six essays on Adler. Some useful comment on Adler's career is made by longtime associate Otto Bird in his memoir, *Seeking a Center: My Life as a "Great Bookie"* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991).

3. Several studies have already been devoted to Adler's longtime collaborator Robert M. Hutchins, who as president brought him to The University of Chicago: Harry S. Ashmore, *Unseasonable Truths: The Life of Robert Maynard Hutchins* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989); Frank K. Kelly, *Court of Reason: Robert Hutchins and the Fund for the Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1981); William H. McNeill, *Hutchins' University: A Memoir of The University of Chicago, 1929–50* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Milton Mayer, *Robert Maynard Hutchins: A Memoir*, ed. John H. Hicks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

4. Written with Walter Farrell, O.P., "The Theory of Democracy," *The Thomist*, 3 (April 1941), 279–379; 3 (October 1941), 588–652; 4 (January 1942), 121–81; 6 (April 1943), 49–118; 6 (July), 251–77; 6 (October 1943), 367–407; 7 (January 1944), 80–131.

5. *A Second Look in the Rearview Mirror: Further Autobiographical Reflections of a Philosopher at Large* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 303–14.

6. See the essays on this and related themes throughout Adler's *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

7. *Philosopher at Large*, p. 316.

8. Since 1978 Adler has published (in order) *Aristotle for Everybody*, *How to Think About God*, *Six Great Ideas*, *The Angels and Us*, *The Paideia Proposal*, *How to Speak/How to Listen*, *Paideia Problems and Possibilities*, *A Vision of the Future*, *The Paideia Program*, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, *A Guidebook to Learning*, *We Hold These Truths*, *Reforming Education*, *Intellect: Mind Over Matter*, *Truth in Religion*, *Haves Without Have-Nots: Essays for the Twenty-First Century on Democracy and Socialism*, *A Second Look in the Rearview Mirror*, *The Great Ideas: A Lexicon of Western Thought*, and *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*. The *Great Ideas* volume is of particular importance since it represents a rewritten and updated version of the 102 essays written for the *Synopticon* to the Great Books of the Western World but never before made available separately. *Some Questions About Language* has recently been reprinted (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1993).

9. See Adler's comments on the program, and especially on the influence of John Dewey, in *Second Look in the Rearview Mirror*, pp. 61–120.

10. Ibid., p. 73.

11. This book was based upon the Encyclopaedia Britannica Lectures given at The University of Chicago and was originally published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1967. Two of Adler's earlier works relevant to this study are *What Man Has Made of Man: A Study of the Consequence of Platonism and Positivism in Psychology* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1937), which will be reprinted by Transactions Publishers (Rutgers University) in 1994; and *Problems for Thomists: The Problem of Species* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940). The reader may also want to consult the entry on "Man" in *The Great Ideas: A Lexicon of Western Thought: A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), pp. 461–71.

12. In a 1975 addendum to the human nature debate, Adler adopts this vocabulary; see "The Confusion of the Animalists," *The Great Ideas Today, 1975* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1975), pp. 72–89.

13. On the nature of the "mixed question," see Adler's *The Conditions of Philosophy: Its Checkered Past, Its Present Disorder, and Its Future Promise* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), pp. 200–27; and *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 49–71.

14. It was his reading of Jacques Maritain's *Distinguish to Unite, or, The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerard Phelan (New York: Scribner's, 1959), first published in 1932, that showed him how to wed his conception of philosophical knowledge to the empirical sciences; particularly important were Maritain's distinctions between perinoetic, dianoetic, and ananoetic knowledge (pp. 202–16). Adler wrote as early as 1937, "I discern in Maritain's *Les Degrés de Savoir* the outlines, at least, of a synthesis of science, philosophy and theology which will do for us what St. Thomas did for philosophy and theology in the middle ages. In that synthesis, philosophical wisdom will be enriched. The understanding of science will make for an improved Thomism, as the understanding of theology enabled St. Thomas to improve upon Aristotle. Whether or not Maritain has accomplished this or merely forecasts it, he seems to me the only contemporary who has deeply sensed the movement of history and the point at which we stand. More than that, he has divined the principle of intellectual progress. It is a maxim which can be used as the title for the whole historical drama: *distinguer pour unir*." *What Man Has Made of Man*, p. 242. Adler and Maritain were close friends for many years; he edited a book of Maritain's essays entitled *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), with a number of essays germane to this topic, especially "Science and Philosophy." Adler gives an account of his "neo-Thomist" phase and his reasons for calling himself an "enlightened Aristotelian" in *Philosopher at Large*, pp. 296–317. A tribute to Adler by Maritain can be found in Maritain's introduction to *Problems for Thomists*. For comparisons between Adler and modern Thomists on the topic of freedom and related issues, see *Freedom in the Modern World*, ed. Torre.

15. *Intellect: Mind Over Matter* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), p. 35. *Intellect* is an important companion to the present volume.

16. For a critique of Adler's account of human sensibility, see John N. Deely, "The Immateriality of the Intentional as Such," *New Scholasticism*, 42, No. 2 (Summer 1968), 293–306. Adler's response is found in "Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas," ibid., No. 3 (Autumn 1968), 578–91.

17. "Confusion of the Animalists," p. 85.

18. For further reflections on these issues, see Adler's *Some Questions About Language: A Theory of Human Discourse and Its Objects* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976; repr. 1993).

19. Compare Adler's account with a more recent apologia for the humanist view based upon human language: Walker Percy's "A Semiotic Primer of the Self," *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York:

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), pp. 85–126. Another defense comes from William Barrett in *Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987).

20. "Confusion of the Animalists," p. 86.

21. For Adler on the subject of happiness and its relation to the political order, see *The Dialectic of Morals: Towards the Foundations of Political Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1941), pp. 108–17; *The Time of Our Lives: The Ethics of Common Sense* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 170–84; and *The Common Sense of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 18–40.

22. *Intellect*, p. 38.

23. (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

24. (Chicago:The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

25. See *Philosopher at Large*, pp. 216–34, for the fascinating account of this project.

26. Ibid., pp. 221–22.

27. *Haves Without Have-Nots*, p. 262.

28. As evidenced, for example, in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 23–43. For an excellent survey of recent treatments of human nature, including the postmodern, see Christopher J. Berry, *Human Nature* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1986).

29. *Haves Without Have-Nots*, p. 234.

30. Ibid., p. 242.

31. See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Men of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983); and Nancy Tuana, *Woman and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Paragon, 1992).

32. In an essay cited in Adler's bibliography, Jacques Maritain argues that this can be accomplished without a false egalitarianism that ignores the real inequalities among social groups and individuals, and warns against ascribing social or biological "psuedo-essences" to social groups, a tactic that was always used by enslavers, to remedy the past social ills. "Human Equality" in *Ransoming the Time*, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Scribner's, 1941), pp. 7–9, 10–12, 22–23.

33. Aristotle himself appreciates the crucial role of locality, i.e., the family and the city, in the cultivation of virtue. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, he clearly states that without proper education in the virtues from an early age a person would be unable to possess them as an adult (see Book I, 1095B3–9). The issue is under what social conditions, or nurturing, is a person most likely to actualize his or her human potential in an ordinate manner. Adler's intention, obviously, is to provide a strong ontological account of human nature, its basic goods and rights. Russell Hittinger thinks Adler's ontological emphasis causes him to miscontrue the position of Robert Bork on human rights, and the debate between positivists and natural lawyers in general, which Alder criti-

cizes in *Haves Without Have-Nots*, pp. 187–217; see Hittinger's "Natural Law in the Positive Law: A Legislative or Adjudicative Issue?" *The Review of Politics*, 55, No. 1 (January 1993), 5–34.

34. *What Man Has Made of Man*, p. xix.