



The Great Ideas: A Lexicon of Western Thought

Mortimer J. Adler

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Forty-five years ago, Mortimer Adler sat down at a manual typewriter with a list of authors and a pyramid of books. Beginning with "Angel" and ending with "World," he set out to write 102 essays featuring the ideas that have collectively defined Western thought for more than twenty-five hundred years. The essays, originally published in the *Syntopicon*, were, and remain, the centerpiece of Encyclopaedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*. These essays, never before available except as part of the *Great Books*, are, according to Clifton Fadiman, Adler's finest work.

This comprehensive volume includes pieces on topics such as "War and Peace," "Love," "God," and "Truth" that amply quote the historical sources of these ideas -- from the works of Homer to Freud, from Marcus Aurelius to Virginia Woolf. These essays evoke the sense of a lively debate among the great writers and thinkers of Western civilization. It is almost as if these authors were sitting around a large table face-to-face, differing in their opinions and arguing about issues that are acutely relevant to the present day. Now available in a handsome Scribner Classics edition, *The Great Ideas* also contains Adler's own essay explaining why the twentieth century, though witness to dramatic discoveries and technological advances, cannot understand these achievements without seeing them in the larger context of the past twenty-five centuries.

Adler's purely descriptive synthesis presents the key points of view on almost three thousand questions without endorsing or favoring any one of them. More than a thousand pages, containing more than half a million words on more than two millennia of Western thought, *The Great Ideas* is an essential work that draws the reader into our civilization's great conversation of great ideas.

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