

A handful of decades ago, Mortimer J. Adler, the noted philosopher from the University of Chicago, compiled a list of sixty-four ideas that constitute the vocabulary of philosophical or human thought. Subsequently, out of the sixty-four, all of them essential ingredients in defining any human endeavor, the list was narrowed to just six ideas that divided into two categories which are elemental to everything that humans think.

Why just six, why just Truth, Goodness and Beauty, Liberty, Equality and Justice? Well for Americans, one answer jumps off the page. All, with the exception of Beauty, are pivotal terms in the opening lines of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths.... all men are created equal; unalienable rights (the heart of justice); among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Likewise, if you turn to the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, you see the same ideas or goals being set forward as the responsibility of the government. As if that is not enough evidence of the fundamental nature of these six great ideas, Abraham Lincoln, uttered them again in his famous Gettysburg Address.

If you look at the two groups, each trio contains ideas that belong together. For example, Liberty, Equality and Justice belong together since they illuminate a larger set of ideas; in fact, they represent together the manner in which the philosophical principles embedded in each are made into a reality in everyday life. Unless you put the three of them together, neither of the other two can become a reality. These three ideas are the ones we live by in society. They represent ideals which a considerable portion of the human race has sought to realize for themselves and their posterity.

The solitary individual, provided with a comfortable life on a tropical island, would not be moved to cry out for Liberty, Equality, and Justice; nor would he have any occasion to engage in a struggle to achieve them for himself. Only in human society, in which the individual is associated both cooperatively and competitively with others, is there any articulation of claims for Liberty, Equality, and Justice. If we recoil from slavery and other forms of human subjection, if we are concerned with violence and war as illnesses that weaken the fabric of society, if we hope for a peaceful resolution of the differences that bring people into conflict with one another, if we engage in thinking about these matters, we cannot get very far without finding that at the turn of every thought lies an understanding of Liberty, Equality, and Justice.

So, the three great ideas of Liberty, Equality, and Justice are the ones we live by, and, as such, involve thinking about I and Thou, the relationships between oneself and other humans. The other sub-set of great ideas, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty represents the ideas that we judge by. Unlike the ideas we live by, these function for us in our private as well as in our public life. The solitary individual enabled to live comfortably by himself or herself would still have occasion to judge something to be true or false, to appraise this to be good and that evil, to discriminate between the beautiful and the ugly.

Thinking about Truth, Goodness, and Beauty involves thinking about the entire world in which we live, about the knowledge we have of it, the desires it arouses in us and the admiration it elicits from us. Here it is the relation of the self to everything else, not just other human beings, which is brought into focus. For example, the very act of making judgments asserts something to be true or false. But it is not that simple. Truth is the Truth, and it must not be confused with personal experience or formulated opinion. The Truth found in poetry is not the same as the Truth found in history, science or philosophy. When we pass from mathematics to the empirical sciences, and on to philosophy, theology and religion, that which constitutes the truth changes dramatically.

Likewise, the idea of Goodness has its own sphere of influence. We cannot think of the good without thinking of the desirable or of the desirable without thinking of the good. When one uses phrases such as "good person," and "a good life," our understanding involves a comprehension of the virtues of good habits, good will and happiness that make up a "good life." Among the good possessions are certainly wealth, honor, love of friends and family, knowledge, wisdom, and a whole host of other attributes that make one's life peaceful, just and rewarding.

Lastly, there is Beauty, which has the smallest circle of related ideas. We expect to find Beauty in works of art, poetry and music. While defining Beauty is pretty much a matter of individual taste and

experience, Beauty has the power to move and motivate us like few other things. As such, Beauty, like Goodness, is thought to inhere in objects that we desire or love. It affords us a certain experience of pleasure, one that occurs in the sphere of our knowing rather than in the sphere of our actions. Therefore, Beauty enriches life, brings pleasure and fulfillment and is an object of human desire.

For religious people it should be obvious that all these great ideas are embedded in both the philosophy of religion and its practice. For the Judeo-Christian tradition, all the above is contained, in some fashion, in the Ten Commandments. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is a paradigm for Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Living in love and charity with our neighbors, is the poetic statement about Liberty, Equality, and Justice. It is remarkable that just about everything we are, do, or stand for, can be reduced to how we think about six great ideas.

*In His Service, Will*