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BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL

"Mind at Large: Adler on Aristotle"

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Transcript of "Mind at Large: Adler on Aristotle"

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(Tease.)

MORTIMER ADLER (various clips of walking with Bill Moyers in meadow): The point is that in the course of a good life there are many moments of real contentment, there's no exclusion of good times and pleasure and joy. Those are essential parts of happiness. But parts of it, not the whole. The great error is the people who confuse having a good time with leading a good life.

A good life contains many moments of good time, but the playboy who is out to have a good time all the time is a fellow on the wrong road. You're either aiming at the right end, in which case you have all virtue, or you're aiming at the wrong end, in which case you have no virtue. That was the most difficult lesson for me to learn from Aristotle. I used to think, oh, well, I was temperate but not courageous, or I was courageous but not just; you had some virtues and some vices. Aristotle says no. You either have all virtue or no virtue. That's why there are probably so few people who are virtuous.

(Interior scene): By the way, you can treat Aristotle and me, for the purposes of this discussion, as Siamese twins.

(Laughter from discussion group.)

BILL MOYERS (over Adler's discussion group): Viewer beware. You are about to meet a man fiercely determined to assault your prejudices with his own. His name is Mortimer Adler. Like his twin, Aristotle, he's a disturber of the peace.

(BMJ opening.)

ADLER (in discussion group): You can have too much wealth. You can have too much pleasure. You can have too much food. You can have too much drink. You can't have too much knowledge. You can't have too much moral virtue.

MOYERS (over discussion group): Mortimer Adler is seventy-six years old, one of America's most prolific and controversial thinkers. Years ago, he was a founding father of the Great Books programs, and he is still passionately committed to making people think.

ADLER: I'm not derogating passion. I'm only saying that passion is an indispensable motive power that must be controlled. I mean, imagine having a motor that's out of control. The glory of man is his intellect; the perfection of the intellect is the highest thing you can achieve. But the moral virtue is indispensable in doing that.

MOYERS (over group scene): Adler's first love is adult education, and for twenty-five years he has been leading seminars at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, provoking the people who come here to wrestle with ideas of philosophy, education, economics and ethics, all subjects he has written about.

ADLER (in group): This bag is a list of all the authors contained in the Great Treasury of Western Thought.

MOYERS (over group scene): His most recent book is called Aristotle For Everybody, or, Difficult Thought Made Easy. I came to Aspen to ask him about this audacious assumption.

(On camera with Adler in Aspen, by river and walking in meadow): Let's start with, as you friend Aristotle would say, first things.

ADLER: Indeed.

MOYERS: Why philosophy? By your own admission, philosophy bakes no cakes and builds no bridges. Why philosophy?

ADLER: Because philosophy is concerned with the basic ideas that everyone must use to understand the world in which we live, nature and man and society. Philosophy, as properly conceived, is the study of ideas and the kind of understanding one gains through applying those ideas to the world about us.

MOYERS: The real world, the ordinary world?

ADLER: The ordinary world, the world of ordinary experience, the world that all of us experience.

MOYERS: Why philosophy, then, for everybody?

ADLER: Because everybody, I think, has a moral obligation to make the best use of his mind, and simply knowing is not enough. Aristotle -- you do want an Aristotelian answer to the question, don't you?

MOYERS: I'm not sure where Aristotle ends and Adler begins.

ADLER: Treat them as continuous for the time being.

MOYERS: (Laughs.)

ADLER: Aristotle made the point that the mind has three basic goods, just as the body has the goods of food, shelter and clothing. And so the mind has three goods: one is knowledge, another is understanding, and the third is wisdom. Now, the sciences give us knowledge of the world, but not understanding of it, and certainly no wisdom about it or wisdom about our lives. Philosophy's importance, and why I think it's superior to science, is not that it provides or gives us more knowledge of the world, but without it we wouldn't understand the things we know.

MOYERS: Pragmatism would ask, how do I make money? Philosophy would ask...?

ADLER: Why should you? Not -- let me see if the question can be put another way. Philosophy would ask, what do you make money for? Is money, is wealth -- not necessarily money, but economic goods, wealth -- is wealth an end or a means? The greatest mistake a man can make, I think, the greatest distortion and misdirection of a life is a life directed toward making, acquiring wealth -- endless acquirement of wealth as an end in itself. Wealth is a real good. One can't lead a good life without wealth, but wealth is a means to that end, not an end in itself, and a means that must be moderated, it must be limited. The excessive accumulation of wealth can often be a heavy moral burden.

MOYERS: But is it fair to ask people who are caught up in the mere

business of living and of making a living to think beyond the daily criterion of life to the large question of, okay, what's the end of all this?

ADLER: Well, I -- you know, that's why I think the Greeks, the Athenians, gave Socrates the hemlock. Philosophers ask those difficult questions that most men don't ask themselves and that many men don't want to have asked because it's disturbing. Philosophers are disturbers of the peace, the peace of mind that people like to have by not asking themselves questions about their lives, questions about the world in which they live; and all these questions are questions that require the mind to enlighten itself, to gain understanding of the world, and most of us in the modern world are -- curious; I don't understand this, really, myself -- are content with knowledge, with information, and with not trying to understand what we know. And that's philosophy's main contribution.

MOYERS: For everyone.

ADLER: For everyone.

MOYERS: Well, why Aristotle, then?

ADLER: Aristotle, of all the philosophers in the whole Western tradition from the fifth century B.C. down to the present day, is the eminently common-sense philosopher, a man whose wisdom is based upon the common experience that we all share and have. There is no other philosopher in the whole history of Western thought that I would recommend as a guide to wisdom and understanding other than Aristotle.

MOYERS: Did he have a corner on the truth?

ADLER: Aristotle? I think so.

MOYERS: He did?

ADLER: I think so.

MOYERS: Wait a minute...

ADLER: By a corner, I mean in his day his philosophical works contained, I think, the largest mass of philosophical truth so far accumulated. That was the fourth century B.C. I think in basic human wisdom and basic human understanding we've added very little to the ancient wisdom of Aristotle. Now, I know that's an extraordinary statement, but I'm willing to back that one up.

MOYERS: How?

ADLER: By -- well, what I try to do in the book that I wrote about Aristotle is to show all the wisdom that is to be found in his works on which there's no -- I think no improvement to be made.

MOYERS: If I'm a farmer in Iowa or a shoemaker in New York, what does Aristotle have to say to me?

ADLER: Well, he'd tell you both, for example, I think the first thing he would say to both of you is that you're artists, which might surprise you; you think you're craftsmen. But he'd call each of you an artist because the artist is distinguished by the skill he has, and I think the one kind of

labor that Aristotle thought was menial and degrading was unskilled labor; unskilled labor he looks down upon.

MOYERS: But there are a lot of unskilled laborers in our society.

ADLER: Unfortunately. And I would say that wherever there are unskilled laborers machinery should take over. The great advance in automation is removing the need for unskilled labor.

MOYERS: But then what happens to the unskilled laborer?

ADLER: Then we must give them the kind of education that would provide them the skills to do a better sort of work. They're doing the wrong -- an inferior -- anything a machine can do a human being should not do.

MOYERS: Doesn't that get to the heart of the criticism of Aristotle for a modern world; that he really is irrelevant to people caught in circumstances they cannot control?

ADLER: No. It seems to me he's saying to modern society, do whatever you can to remove the need for unskilled labor, and we're going a great -- we've made many advances in this direction. He's making a moral point that's quite relevant. He hasn't solved the economic problem, I admit that, of how to employ the people that are disemployed by technology. But he is saying there's a hierarchy of occupations, the highest of those that use the mind at its fullest. Those which use the body only, as in the case where men are doing what animals might do or machines might do, is degrading for human beings to engage in. Coal mining should be, for the most part, done by machinery.

MOYERS: What do you do with the coal miners, though?

ADLER: Find other walks of life for them, better walks of life. We are talking now about the improvement of human life.

MOYERS: But did he say anything or write anything bearing on this modern point?

ADLER: Yes, there's an extraordinary passage, Bill, in the Politics, the first book of the Politics, in which Aristotle expresses a vision of the almost completely automated industry. The words are as follows -- the words referring to a Greek situation are as follows: "If the shuttle could weave by itself, or the plectrum pluck the lyre without a hand to guide it, then chief workmen would not need assistants nor masters slaves." And if you understand that passage, it's saying if you had automation, machinery that produced things, you wouldn't have any form of menial labor at all.

You do understand, of course, Bill, that I think Aristotle has to be restated in contemporary terms. The Aristotelian texts, if you read them themselves, would, I think, defeat you. They're very difficult, they're very difficult writing and they're written in a language and with imagery that is not contemporary. It's the basic, essential truth that is there that can be restated, without any loss of wisdom, in contemporary terms.

MOYERS: Do you think philosophy is taught this way in colleges today?

ADLER: No, unfortunately. Philosophy has become a highly technical form of scholarship, highly specialized, almost as specialized and tech-

nical as logic and mathematics. It is not taught as an understanding of the great ideas, it is not taught as the pursuit of wisdom. And as a matter of fact, the clearest example of what I'm saying is that most professors of philosophy today write their articles and books only for the eyes of other professional philosophers. I think I'm almost alone of my generation who tries to write books, philosophical books, intended for the general public, because I think that's what philosophy's intended for.

MOYERS: Is that why you're criticized by professional philosophers?

ADLER: I think in large part it is because I have not been, in their mold, a writer of books that they would read.

MOYERS (sitting with Adler on terrace overlooking valley): You wrote a lot in here about Aristotle's uncommon common sense. How can common sense be uncommon and still be common? What do you mean?

ADLER: I simply mean that Aristotle's philosophy begins with the same kind of common sense that all of us have, based upon our common experience. But because he thought more deeply and more penetratingly about our experience he elevates common sense to a higher -- deepens it, broadens it and elevates it, and in that respect his common sense is uncommon.

MOYERS: But do you think most of us can swim that deep or fly that high?

ADLER: Yes, I do.

MOYERS: You do?

ADLER: With instruction, not by ourselves. I mean, Aristotle is a master thinker, but he's also a master teacher, and so since he starts where we start, with common sense, we can, shall I say, with his help raise our own common sense to that higher level.

MOYERS: In Aristotle's view, what is the most important question a human being has to ask?

ADLER: In the practical order, which is the order of action, the most important question a human being has to ask is, what is the goal of my living, what should I aim at in life, how should I live in order to live well as a human being? That, I think -- and second to that, what are the conditions under which society fulfills its mission? What is a good society? In other words, the questions about a good life and a good society are in the order of action the most important questions.

MOYERS: Does Aristotle believe there is one answer to that question, A good life is: _____?

ADLER: He believes that though each man, different from another individually in a variety of ways, in inclination and temperament, may follow a somewhat different path, nevertheless he thinks the end they should all aim at is the same. The content of a good life is the same for all...

MOYERS: The same?

ADLER: It's the same; and the factors involved in achieving a good life are the same for all. Let me now support those three statements.

First, for him, happiness, which is another name for a good life as a whole, consists in a whole life, from birth to death, so lived that a person accumulates successively in time all the goods, the real goods that a human being should have; not all the things he wants, which are only apparent goods, but all the things he needs, all the things that satisfy his natural desires.

MOYERS: Wouldn't we have to all desire the same thing for there to be one good life?

ADLER: But that is precisely what the doctrine of natural desires says, not that we consciously desire the same thing. All our wants -- your wants, Bill, and my wants -- are different; the wants of every human being differ from those of others. It's our natural desires, our needs that are the same. Let me talk about the biological needs. We all need food, clothing, shelter, rest, play, and sensuous pleasure on the biological level. On the human level, spiritually and intellectually, we all need friendship and love, we all need a good society to live in, we all need knowledge and wisdom. These are the things our nature seeks, and our nature being the same in all of us, what we seek not consciously but naturally. And the good man is one who desires what he ought to desire, or desires what conforms to his natural desires.

MOYERS: What if you desire some but not all of those? What if you do not desire knowledge?

ADLER: Then you're deficient. You're deficient in that respect.

MOYERS: That's very arbitrary.

ADLER: No, because the good life is defined, properly defined, as seeking all the things that are really good for you. Now, you're not going to tell me that knowledge is not really good for you.

MOYERS: I'm saying to you that if I don't desire it...

ADLER: You're bad. Knowledge is good and you're bad.

MOYERS: (Laughing.)

ADLER: You're failing yourself. You're stunting your own growth. Your mind, your intellect, Bill, seeks knowledge as much as your stomach seeks food. And for you to deny that knowledge is good for yourself would be as silly as to deny that food is good for your body.

MOYERS: Is this what you mean when you say there are lots of wrong plans for living well, and only one right plan?

ADLER: Precisely.

MOYERS: Isn't that dogmatic?

ADLER: I don't know why you use the word "dogmatic."

MOYERS: I mean, what possibly can make one plan for living the right plan and all others wrong?

ADLER: The answer to that question I've already given, and I'm going

to repeat it again. If human nature is as Aristotle describes it -- I said if -- if we do have in our nature a certain set of potentialities common to the species, and these create tendencies or natural desires, then there can only be one plan for fulfilling one's nature, living according to nature.

MOYERS: You say then that happiness is the ultimate or final end of all our doing in this life.

ADLER: Yeah.

MOYERS: Do you mean that I'm on this earth to find happiness?

ADLER: To answer that question I have to step back a moment and say that is a pagan or naturalist answer to the question. The Christian, a devout Christian, would not say that. A devout Christian would say you're on this earth in order to achieve eternal salvation. The kind of happiness that Aristotle's talking about is temporal, earthly happiness. He is not talking about an afterlife. If man has an immortal soul and there is an afterlife, then you're not on this earth solely to achieve happiness here and now. I said if.

MOYERS: If. And temporal happiness is a life that achieves these...

ADLER: Real goods.

MOYERS: Real goods. The goods of the body?

ADLER: Goods of the soul, goods of the spirit, goods of the mind.

MOYERS: Aristotle says moral virtue is essential to a good life. What is moral virtue?

ADLER: Moral virtue consists of habits of good choice. Virtue aims at happiness as the end of life and is the habit of choosing the right means to it, choosing real goods and avoiding apparent goods.

MOYERS: Make that more specific for us.

ADLER: Let me take the most obvious virtue, temperance. Temperance consists in the habit, the settled frame, disposition of forsaking, avoiding, giving up certain very seductive pleasures that tempt you here and now -- more food, more drink, more play, more sleep, all things that human beings tend to -- in order to achieve remote and difficult goods that would be interfered with if you played too much, slept too much, drank too much, ate too much. Temperance is a habit of modifying your bodily desires. Perfectly good desires -- you should have a certain amount -- but modifying them, moderating them for the sake of the total life.

MOYERS: So to be virtuous I have to be temperate...

ADLER: Yes, you do.

MOYERS: ...in the choices before me.

ADLER: That's right. You have to be courageous and just. The three cardinal virtues are temperance, fortitude or courage, and justice.

MOYERS: What is courage?

ADLER: Well, courage is the very opposite of temperance. Temperance is resisting seductive pleasures for the sake of a greater good, and courage is taking, willingly undergoing, suffering pains and hardships for the sake of a greater good.

MOYERS: Give me an example of this.

ADLER: Soldier on the battlefield is the most obvious example, but I prefer the example of a good student. The good student -- studying is hard, studying is very hard, it's painful, and the person who lacks courage shirks the hard work of study; but the good student has the virtue of courage or fortitude, bears up under the pain of long hours of study.

MOYERS: So he has courage.

ADLER: That's right. Without temperance and courage, one doesn't pursue one's studies well.

MOYERS: What is justice?

ADLER: Oh, that's a virtue in a totally different direction. Temperance and courage are self-regarding virtues. They are virtues that order my life with respect to my own happiness. Justice is the virtue which orders my life with respect to the good of everybody else in a society. And in fact the most difficult question raised is, I can see why I should be temperate and why I should be courageous because if I'm not I may not lead a good life myself; I may not achieve my own happiness. But why should I be just, when justice is concerned with your good and the good of society? That's a hard question.

MOYERS: What's the answer? You're making difficult thought easy.

ADLER: The answer is that justice, temperance and courage are not three distinct virtues. They are all aspects of Virtue. Virtue is one. Hence, you've got to say that a man cannot be a good man, a virtuous man in his own private life without at the same time being virtuous in his public life, and the reason for that is, virtue aims at the end. If you're aiming at the right end -- if you're aiming at the right end, which courage and temperance says you are doing -- you can't aim at the wrong end but by injustice. There's only one end; you're either aiming at the right end, in which case you have all virtue, or you're aiming at the wrong end, in which case you have no virtue. That was the most difficult lesson for me to learn from Aristotle. I used to think, oh, well, I was temperate but not courageous, or I was courageous but not just; you had some virtues and some vices. Aristotle says no. You either have all virtue or no virtue. That's why there are probably so few people who are virtuous.

MOYERS: Doesn't the fact that we all fall so far short of what Aristotle says is a good or virtuous life, doesn't that make him largely irrelevant?

ADLER: No, because -- if I may now use the closing line of Spinoza's Ethics -- "All things noble are as difficult as they are rare."

MOYERS (over shot of Aspen Institute at foot of mountains): At the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Mortimer Adler has found a compatible forum for his conviction that adults ought never to stop learning. He's become as much a fixture at the Institute as the mountains around

it. The Institute's technique is to bring together a variety of people to challenge and confront their ideas in an intellectual free-for-all. At Adler's discussion of Aristotle, the participants include America's current ambassador to Italy, the chairman of a large corporation, the president of the Aspen Institute itself, a writer, and a poet, a professor of history, a professor of criminal justice, a journalist from South America, a doctor, a graduate student in architecture, a scholar of law and an emeritus executive of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

(At Institute.)

ADLER: Slater?

JOSEPH SLATER, President, Aspen Institute: In many people's judgment, one of the breakdowns of contemporary morals in politics is the attempt to get in the short run at the expense of the long run, whether it's an elected official who's thinking only of the next election or a businessman who's only thinking of the bottom line in the next period, or the people who would ignore the environment or things for the future. Could you elaborate a little bit on what you and/or Aristotle would think about the question of notions of the future, the long term, who speaks for the conscience of the future?

ADLER: I think -- by the way, you can treat Aristotle and me for the purposes of this discussion as Siamese twins.

(Laughter from group.)

ADLER: Aristotle's concern is that the person who is trying to lead a good life, trying to achieve a good life for himself, must think about his life as a whole and not about immediate pleasures and pains today, tomorrow and the next day. In fact, I think the essence of moral virtue, as Aristotle conceives it, is always sacrificing the immediate, apparent goods for the long-term real goods. In that sense, the long-term point of view is the fundamental moral point of view and the short-term point of view is not. Now...

Sir HUW WHELDON, Emeritus Executive, BBC: Does it really go as far as that? I mean, it's going very far, isn't it, to think of your life as a whole. There's another great precept that says, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. It's not Aristotle's, God knows, but nevertheless the notion of having a total plan of operation does seem a bit thick on behalf of your Siamese twin.

ADLER: No, I don't think so, Sir Huw, because when you are making a film, you've got to think about -- before you start, you've got to think about the film as a whole. Now, in any of the performing arts, whether it be a concert, a great symphony concert, or a ballet or the making of a film or the writing of a book, in any art that takes time -- and life takes time -- you have to think about the whole, though the whole is never achieved at any time. I think the hardest message here is that for Aristotle the end is not a terminal end -- this is very hard for people to understand -- but a normative end.

WHELDON: But you don't think of the end all the time, you think of the part frequently...

ADLER: Most people, I agree with you...

WHELDON: ...and if you're an actor, you're speaking your lines in

Act Two. You're not concerned with Act three.

ADLER: But the director has to think of the whole. I do think the long-term point of view is required if you take Aristotle seriously as meaning that the end that one should be aiming at is a good life as a whole.

WHELDON: I know that Aristotle isn't saying that to be cheerful, to be contented and to be tranquil and to be satisfied in your wants in a perfect situation. On the other hand, there must be something between that and talking about a man when he's dead as having been blessed. There is a condition of life that I have personally seen in people which I regard and profoundly enviable to which I'm prepared to give some name...

ADLER: May I -- may I...

WHELDON: Yes.

ADLER: St. Augustine, in a little treatise on happiness, I think not only sums up the Aristotelian insight but adds a very good point to it. He says, "Happy" -- the phrase is exactly this -- "Happy is the man who has everything he desires provided he desired nothing amiss. Virtue is the habit of not desiring anything amiss or desiring awry." So Aristotle would say that in the course -- if a man in midstream has the moral virtues -- I have to add one more point -- he is likely when he's finished living to have lived a good life; if he is also blessed by good fortune. Sir Huw, the most extraordinary thing about Aristotle is that he's the only moral philosopher in the whole of Western thought who recognized that a life can be ruined by bad fortune.

WHELDON: ...like that.

ADLER: Virtue is not enough. Virtue is an indispensable but not a sufficient condition.

WHELDON: That's right.

ADLER: The most virtuous man can lead a miserable life because he's beset by all kinds of bad fortune, and that double insight explains the relation of society to happiness. Without that, you wouldn't understand, I think, any of the reasons why we ought to have a good society.

JAMES SLOAN ALLEN, Writer: Were Aristotle here, would he find this to be a good or a bad society?

ADLER: I don't know that -- could I ask you: you asked the question, you probably had an answer in mind. What answer would you give?

ALLEN: You mean if...

ADLER: Yes. If you were Aristotle. Anyone can be Aristotle today. You be Aristotle now.

ALLEN: I suspect that Aristotle wouldn't know what's wrong, you see. I tend to disagree with you in your claim that he is as pertinent to our day as you are. I think that he probably wouldn't understand what the hell is going on. I think you probably have an idea when in the history of culture people lost the way and ceased to be able to find the road to happiness or something of this sort, but I doubt that Aristotle would under-

stand.

ADLER: May I say, I take a different view of that, Mr. Allen. In no society is the majority of human beings virtuous. By and large, most men are morally -- shall I say -- of weak fiber. This is not new. The Christian doctrine of original sin may explain this, or there may be other explanations, so that I don't think, by and large, the number of good men, the number of men who are virtuous enough to do what is necessary, the hard things necessary to lead a good life, varies from time to time.

SIDNEY HYMAN, Professor of Criminal Justice: I think he would recognize at least one part of this world and one of the problems of it, what you don't have occasion to mention in your book, but there in the original Politics there's a whole section on revolution, the study of the causes of revolution. As I can remember, he ascribes to one of the central causes of revolution this lust or desire for equality, and I think that the idea of equality is a very difficult idea to get hold of, but so many of the contemporary revolutions somehow or other are addressed or have their roots in or...

ADLER: There isn't any question about that. That motion in the world today, not only in the United States, among our people, but among all the people we're talking about, is, I think, the dominant factor in our lives, and society must satisfy this desire that men have for equality of conditions. Now, there is here a distinction that I make in my own thinking which I can't find a basis for in Aristotle. The egalitarian, whom I think is wrong, wants flat equality, uniformity, equality in degree. I think that -- I now speak in Aristotelian terms even if Aristotle himself does not speak to this point -- that the only equality we can achieve is an equality in kind rather than equality in degree. That is, put it this way, a society should create the equality of conditions that justice requires, no more equality than justice requires. Now, how much equality does justice require? My answer to that one is the answer of the Declaration, "securing to all men equally their natural rights." There are two Marxist statements that I think, curiously enough, both in Karl Marx, that state the whole truth there. I'm going to change Marx a little bit, because I think he misstated the first one.

He shouldn't have said, "to each according to his needs," because needs are common to all of us and the same. He should have said, "to all according to their common human needs, and to each according to his contribution;" because our contributions are different, our needs are the same. Those two principles of justice, with the first one first, because until you've given all what they need you have no right to make the differential distribution in terms of contribution. If all have what they need, then you can have mores and lesses in terms of differential contribution. Yes.

MANNING MARABLE, Professor of Southern History: You're excluding the issue of revolution that was originally...

ADLER: Of revolution?

MARABLE: Yes, let me get back to this.

ADLER: Please.

MARABLE: Let me read something, Martin Luther King's letter from a Birmingham jail, a quotation. "We have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the

long and tragic story of the fact that the privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up an unjust posture, but as Reinhold Niebuhr has permitted us to say, that groups are more immoral than individuals."

Two questions: in the pursuit of the good life, when the majority violates the will of the minority, does not the minority have the natural right to revolution, either nonviolent or violent? How would Aristotle respond?

ADLER: He thinks that revolutions arise. In fact, he says, as Plato said before him, there is always a war between the rich and the poor, between the oligarchs and the democrats, and he thinks that revolutions happen through those natural causes. I would go further and say that when men have serious grievances, suffering injustices, they are justified, if they cannot -- if they cannot redress their grievances by peaceful, nonviolent legal means, in taking up arms to do so.

CARLOS CABALLERO ARGÁEZ, South American Journalist: If the satisfaction of the natural needs of human beings leads to the happiness of everybody, are we not compelled by a moral imperative to redistribute wealth in the world to assure that the biological needs of the people are satisfied, at least to a minimal extent, as you said in the book, independently of any ideological considerations?

ADLER: Yes. If I understand Aristotle's notion of the good society, it is one which tries to provide all its human beings with the conditions -- the external conditions -- prerequisite to their pursuit of happiness. Poverty, destitution, ill health, lack of education -- and I think of all the goods that the welfare state tries to provide its people -- are parts of the conditions of the pursuit of happiness, and a good society is one which will distribute wealth and handle the distribution of wealth to assure that every human being has those conditions. So if that's socialism -- if that's socialism -- then how remarkable it is Aristotle's a socialist.

RALPH E. ABLON, Chairman of the Board, Ogden Corporation: Is it not possible in an imperfect society to set out on a journey and never get there? You start to redistribute wealth in the direction of the people who are entitled to it, and they never see it.

ADLER: That's the failure. That's the weak point in socialism. You can't say, we will give you the conditions of leading a good life only if you promise and prove that you can use those conditions well. You can't get that assurance from the person you...

ALBON: I wasn't looking for that. Just, how do you get the conditions to -- in terms of redistributing wealth, which is not changing conditions except temporarily.

ADLER: You know, Mr. Ablon, as well as I do, what the provisions and measures of a welfare society are. All Western societies in varying degrees are now welfare states. They're all socialist not in means but in end. They're concerned with seeing that the whole population or a very large part of it participate in the general economic welfare, have some minimal share at least of the economic goods required for a good life. We're all agreed upon that. We disagree when the communists say they will do that by the abolition of private property and we will say we will do it by a free enterprise society which mixes the public and the private sector. We're differing about the means, not the end. I don't think there is a modern society in the West that is not socialist in this

sense.

ROBERT McKAY, Scholar of Law: I'd like to get back to the equality issue. I think there's still an ambiguity when you talk about guarantee of natural rights. That's hard to define; and when you talk about equality of condition, that really breaks down into two parts that we often call now equality of opportunity, in which I guess everybody believes, and equality of result. And that's where the revolution comes.

ADLER: By equality of condition, I really mean what you mean by the phrase equality of result.

McKAY: Equality of result.

ADLER: And that's the hard one.

McKAY: That's the hard one. And the way it comes now in our present context, in the inequality that exists -- the discrimination, the racism, as you've said, that continues in the United States as elsewhere -- the obligation, or at least so believed, of government to take some action to redress that imbalance -- and that's affirmative action, and that's special admissions, it's the Bakke Case and it's all those questions -- in which there is -- somebody pays a price for that, somebody who is himself or herself innocent and does not get the advantage that might otherwise have accrued to that individual. Now, would Aristotle have an opinion about that kind of redressing of the balance to help those who've been disadvantaged at the expense of those who are in a sense innocent?

ADLER: I do not think so.

McKAY: It's an issue he didn't face.

ADLER: I don't think he faced it, no.

McKAY: How would his twin face that issue?

ADLER: The hard choices are where there's good and evil on both sides. And either choice is really an undesirable choice, but you are compelled by the circumstances to make a choice. So in society we often have to redress a grievance -- in jobs, the Bakke case is one case in point.

McKAY: And that is not injustice.

ADLER: No. Not injustice.

JOHN L. LEWIS, Jr., M.D.: You've chosen the analogy of a Siamese twin. I would like to know where you're joined. Are you joined...

ADLER: I hope in the head, not the hip.

(Laughter from group.)

LEWIS: But see, this is very important, because in your book we get the cerebral cortex. We don't get anything else of Aristotle, and the question is -- it's easy to know how he thinks -- it's difficult to know who he was.

ADLER: What would you like to know? I'd be curious to know what you'd

like to know about him.

LEWIS: Well, it's interesting. Earlier you said that he wasn't interested in the subconscious or the unconscious.

ADLER: That notion, I have to say, the notion of the unconscious, does not appear anywhere in human thought until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

WHELDON: With the greatest respect, you did add that although you were clear that Aristotle had no knowledge of the unconscious, you also said that you didn't think much of it yourself, either.

ADLER: I didn't say...

WHELDON: I wrote it down.

(Laughter from group.)

ADLER: I said I didn't think much of unconscious thinking about means and ends. Let me say, now as myself, not as Aristotle, I am making a very definite effort to leave a certain amount of time every day idle; awake, but purposeless and doing nothing, in order to let my unconscious pop out. I've found it very fruitful indeed to sit idly staring at the wall at the end of a day of work, sitting down and intentionally doing nothing, intentionally being at rest and idle, and then suddenly, because the unconscious is there, all kinds of things I hadn't thought about before pop into my mind, particularly a day in which I've done a lot of work. If the whole days' been idle, it isn't purposeful to be idle at the end of it. If you've worked hard all day, lots of little things drop into the unconscious that you don't notice, and then you sit back and sort of -- I'm usually idle with a pad next to me, because...

WHELDON: Of course!

(Laughter from group.)

ADLER: Because things that pop into my mind I have not searched for by thought, by any deliberate effort. All I'm doing, Sir Huw, is indicating that I have some respect for the unconscious.

(Laughter.)

LEWIS: On page seventy-seven you say, "As we get older we become more and more purposeful. We also become more serious and less playful." I think the most recent modern nonphilosopher writing on philosophy is George Sheehan, who's best known as a runner and physician, and he has made a very large point in relation to the importance of play if one is going to work in a dedicated manner over a long period of time.

ADLER: So does Aristotle make the same point.

LEWIS: I missed it.

ADLER: Aristotle -- I didn't make it in the book, because I was not concerned with the parts of life -- but Aristotle names four main parts of life: sleep, which is all the biological activities...

LEWIS: Which is also the very active use of the subconscious.

ADLER: Play, which is the activity which is inherently pleasant, is purposeless, and he says its end is in itself, it doesn't have an end itself; work for subsistence, what we call toil or labor; and leisure, by which he doesn't mean free time, but learning, all the creative acts. And he says play is for the sake of work as work is for the sake of leisure. In other words, play, the recreational, the reviving effects of play, are indispensable and children, to my observation, are essentially playful. I mean, they play a great deal, they make games of everything and play. As we get older, I think we still play but we take many more things seriously than children do. And the unfortunate thing is, in my way of looking at it, I think it would be better if children were serious and their elders were playful.

(Laughter.)

ADLER: Dr. Lewis.

LEWIS: Well, I think it's important. I think you've outlined...

ADLER: Okay, okay, okay.

LEWIS: ...a series of problems that if we really face up to every day and say we not only have to work through our government, we have to make our own personal decisions -- by God, sometime during the day I'm going to want to play.

ADLER: The play you're talking about is sheer enjoyment for its own sake.

LEWIS: Right.

ADLER: I would say such play comes as near in human life to what religious people call contemplation. It really is -- abstracted from all practical purpose, intrinsically enjoyable, with reference to nothing beyond itself, it comes as near to what the religious mean by rest.

WHELDON: Even activity has got a playful side. I personally would much prefer to be in the hands of a politician who regarded himself as being in the great game. I mean, Churchill and Truman, LG (Lloyd George) and FDR, all these people, they knew that they were doing. And when you look at Stafford Cripps -- with all due respect to a great man -- but in our country all you got was earnestness. I mean, not a laugh.

ADLER: Dull, very dull.

WHELDON: But I think we're coming back to...

ADLER: Ms. Anderson?

DARLENE ANDERSON, Graduate Student in Architecture: How do you describe leisure, then?

ADLER: Leisure is like work. In fact, I never use the word leisure except to say leisure work, because leisure is not play, it's the very opposite of play. It's the most serious of all human activities, intensely difficult, fatiguing. It's the opposite of the American conception of leisure, which is having a good...

HYMAN: "Leisure" and "school" mean the same thing in Greek.

ADLER: The Greek word for leisure is the same word for learning, you see. Leisure is the two kinds of work, serious activity for an end beyond itself, a leisure work; and subsistence work. By the way, this Aristotle, the amazing thing is that he had all these distinctions toward the end of the Politics and the Ethics. And the difference between leisure work and subsistence work are the kind of goods they aim at: subsistence work the production of economic goods, wealth; leisure work the goods of civilization, the arts and sciences. Mr. Gardner.

RICHARD GARDNER, U.S. Ambassador to Italy: This book is called Aristotle for Everybody. Its subtitle is Difficult Thought Made Easy. Now, these are rather controversial assumptions. Most -- many scholars, many educators in this country, and particularly in Europe, in Italy, the country in which I'm currently living, would say Aristotle isn't for everybody, difficult thought should not be made easy. In fact, aren't you and your twin at odds on this?

ADLER: I have to say, if I may, that I don't think the subtitle is correct. The thought, Aristotle's thought, is not difficult. What I made easy was the writing. It should have been, thought written in a difficult manner, rewritten to make it easy. It's the writing I've done.

WHELDON: When you say it's for everybody, it perhaps should be difficult for everybody. When I was a boy, I learned a Chopin nocturne. I can't remember -- in G minor. (Hums melody.)

ADLER: You sing well, Sir Huw.

WHELDON: I remember it very well, fourteen, twelve years old, I learned this thing, and I remember vividly being in somebody's house and hearing somebody, not at a concert at all, play this thing and I realized that what I'd been playing was a simplified version. And I was deeply shocked; and I was shocked on behalf of two people, me and Chopin.

(Laughter from group.)

WHELDON: I had been doing him down, and I'd done myself down, because I thought that I'd taken it in. Now, Chopin is supposed to be difficult; and although the language may be part of the thing, Aristotle is supposed to be difficult, too. I speak as one of Mr. Gardner's Europeans.

(Laughter.)

ADLER: I think, curiously enough, if I compare Aristotle with either his own ancient Greek colleague, Plato, or with any modern philosopher -- let's say Kant or Hegel -- he is very much easier to understand.

GARDNER: Would 215 million Americans, really would their lives be enriched, would they be more virtuous, would they approach excellence if they read this, and if so, what does this mean for our educational system? Should there be more philosophy? Is the implication of all this that we should build into the primary and secondary school system speculative philosophy?

ADLER: Not the primary schools. I think that philosophy thus expounded -- not philosophy as now taught in our colleges, which is as highly specialized and technical a subject as logic and mathematics are -- philosophy thus expounded as an extension of common-sense wisdom should be taught in the up-

per years of high school, junior and senior year of high school. I think children of that age are ripe for it. So I think I'd answer your question by saying this belongs in the high school curriculum. Mr. Ablon.

ABLON: I think the point lies elsewhere. The most impressive thing in the book to me was the inference -- and I think I have it correctly -- that thinking is a skill.

ADLER: Yes.

ABLON: And that thinking as a skill ought to be developed. I am less impressed, frankly, by whether the various theories of Aristotle are right or wrong than I am impressed by the enormity of his ability to think, to think clearly, to think accurately, and to arrive at conclusions that in a sense prove themselves. Now, somewhere in the book you said that philosophy won't build bridges or make soup, but let me ask you whether you think somebody who has not been taught philosophy but has become a philosopher by being taught to think will make better soup or build a better bridge.

ADLER: No. I don't -- I think the...I think...let me say...

(Laughter.)

ABLON: I do!

ADLER: Let me say why I do not.

ABLON: I disagree with both of you.

ADLER: I think the difference between the application of science and the application of philosophy is profound, a profound point. Science -- scientific knowledge, applied science -- is productive, makes better things, builds bridges and makes soup. Philosophy is not productive but directive. It gives us directions for leading our lives and conducting our society. It doesn't produce things.

ALLEN: But when you describe what the good life is, you and Aristotle, you list the good life as consisting of the satisfaction of all these natural goods.

ADLER: Natural needs.

ALLEN: Is it not true, though, that the intellectual need is the most important, and that the emotional needs are, in your opinion and Aristotle's, less important for the fulfilled life?

ADLER: I don't think so, though I think Aristotle would say that the intellect is man's highest power and therefore the thing most to be perfected. I would say that he regarded love and friendship, which are on the level of the emotions, as a good of equal importance to knowledge and understanding. I think it would be difficult, in terms of the amount of time consumed, to have a large number of very close friends, because I think friendship is a very taxing and arduous form of leisure work. I really think friendship -- cultivating friends and being friends -- is not easy. You can't have a lot of very close friends, but I think he would never say you can have too many friends. For real friends, you can't have too many of them.

ALLEN: Are philosophers then the happiest of all men because they can

use their minds principally rather than having to divert their energies and time on other things?

WHELDON: You can't tell until they're dead.

(Laughter from group.)

ADLER: I want to take the Fifth at this point.

(Laughter.)

MOYERS (Walking in meadow with Adler): Is happiness the same thing as contentment?

ADLER: Well, as most people in the modern -- especially in the contemporary world -- use the word happiness it's a synonym for contentment; but as Aristotle uses the term happiness, having the meaning whole, good human life, it is the very opposite of contentment, for contentment is a psychological term. A man is contented today if he has what he wants, his desires, his particular desires are satisfied. Tomorrow he may be discontented for lacking something that he wants and so one can shift from time to time from being contented or discontented.

MOYERS: But if he's happy?

ADLER: You see, contentment and discontentment are experienced, but a whole good life -- happiness now in the sense of a whole, good life -- is never experienced because you never experience it at any one moment in your life. Contentment and discontent are psychological terms.

MOYERS: But do I have...

ADLER: Happiness is an ethical, purely ethical term.

MOYERS: Say that again?

ADLER: Happiness is a purely ethical term; it has no psychological connotations at all, as contentment and discontent have. You can experience the one, you can't experience the other. And that's contrary to what most people mean by happiness.

MOYERS: Wait a minute, you can't experience happiness?

ADLER: No. The point is that in the course of a good life there are many moments of real contentment and there's no exclusion of good times and pleasure and joy. Those are essential parts of happiness, but parts of it, not the whole. The great error is the people who confuse having a good time with leading a good life. A good life contains many moments of good time, but the playboy who is out to have a good time all the time is a fellow on the wrong road. He's not going to have a happy life.

MOYERS: In other words, you can have good times and bad times and still have...

ADLER: A good life. Precisely. In fact, I would say that on this earth, human beings being as they are, there is no one who has a good life that isn't also a life filled with good times and bad times.

MOYERS: Whose obligation is it to provide the real goods all of us

need?

ADLER: The individual has the obligation to do everything he can to acquire them for himself. That's his job in pursuing happiness. But when he's hindered, hampered, impeded by the accidents of misfortune, then organized society must step in and help him do what he can't do for himself. Abraham Lincoln said, and I think it sums the thing up, "Society, government should do for the people what they can't do for themselves."

MOYERS: For all of us, for society to organize to help those who aren't able to help themselves assumes a certain virtue that appears often to be lacking.

ADLER: No question about that. The good society is probably as rare as the good life. In most cases, the most we have are approximations to it. I would say, by the way, that America, the United States in the twentieth century, is a closer approximation to a good society, with all its faults, than any society that ever existed before.

MOYERS: Why?

ADLER: Because I think it's making an effort to do what it can to provide a very large number of people -- if not all, a very large proportion of the population -- with the external conditions they need to lead good lives.

MOYERS: I find, Mortimer, that I need -- I think I need -- beauty for happiness. I need these mountains and this blue sky...

ADLER: Yes.

MOYERS: ...and these trees. What is the role of beauty in Aristotle's and Adler's view of life?

ADLER: Well, beauty is the highest form of intellectual pleasure. Aristotle makes pleasure one of the real goods, the pleasure of the senses. But the pleasure of the mind, the pleasure we get from apprehending beauty, is the highest form of pleasure. Aristotle's greatest disciple, St. Thomas Aquinas, defines beauty -- his Latin phrase -- as "id quod visum placet," that which pleases us upon being seen.

(Indicating river, water running over stones, grassy banks): As we look around us, aren't you pleased to see this? Doesn't it please you? Not just your eye, but you're seeing something which is more pleasant than the mere surface colors and shapes. If I may jump from Aquinas to the Old Testament, at the end of the first chapter of the book of Genesis, God, having finished creating the world, rests and on the seventh day says it is good, very good. It is good to behold and that's what beauty is, that which is good to behold.

MOYERS (sitting by river): You bring in the Old Testament and God. What did Aristotle believe about God?

ADLER: Before I answer that question, Bill, let me tell you Aristotle's views about infinity and eternity, because they have a bearing on his conception of God. He thought there could be no actually infinite anything, there could be an actually infinite number of atoms, or an actually infinite physical world, or an actually infinite space, because for him the actual had to be definite and the infinite is indefinite; but he did not deny potential infinities: the infinity of addition, such as

the endless series of numbers...

MOYERS: One forever.

ADLER: Forever, or the infinity of division, to continue to divide infinitely divisible things; and he thought that time was endless, potentially infinite. Go back to anything you call the first instant, there was an instant earlier than that. Come to any instant you think is the last instant of time, and there's an instant after that. And that's why he thought time was everlasting and the world was everlastingly in existence and everlastingly in motion. And his conception of God as the prime mover is as the everlasting cause of the everlasting motion of the universe.

That is quite different from the Christian conception of God. I don't know what Aristotle would have said to the first sentence in Genesis, "In the beginning..." because Aristotle would have been startled by that word "beginning." "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth." He'd be startled by the word "created," because the notion of beginning, the world's beginning or the world's being created, was foreign to him.

The Christians -- the Christian conception of God corresponds to the Aristotelian in this sense. Where Aristotle thought the everlasting existence of the world needed an everlasting cause of its existence in motion -- of its motion particularly, not its existence -- the Christian conception of God as creator is as a cause of the being of the world. And the Christian conception is quite compatible with the view that the world always existed because the creator is required to keep the world in existence at this very moment to sustain its existence. At any moment of its existence the creative cause is required for its continued existence.

MOYERS: What God do you believe in?

ADLER: (Pauses.) You use the word "believe," and that's a difficult word, because it means both an act of natural belief and an act of supernatural faith. So that I'm going to have to say first that I think the conception of God as the creative cause of the world is a valid conception, and although I do not -- I'm not sure yet that I will be able by purely rational steps to prove God's existence, though I'm going to try to do that -- I think the reasoning for the existence of a creative God is so strong that I'm willing to make the leap of faith -- of natural faith, not supernatural faith -- the leap of belief beyond the evidence...

MOYERS: What do you mean?

ADLER: Well, if I could prove God's existence, there'd be no need to say I believe in God, because what you prove you don't have to believe. Belief and proof are incompatible. You only say you believe what you can't prove or know on rational grounds. So my statement here is a little more complicated than that. I think the evidence, the reasons I have for thinking that God -- the creative God that the Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in -- exists are very strong, but not final and conclusive; and so I need an act of belief to go beyond what I know by reason. So, to answer your question with no further quibbling, I do believe in God.

MOYERS: You were born of Jewish parents. You taught Aquinas at the University of Chicago so efficiently that many of your students -- Jewish, Protestants, agnostics, atheists -- were converted to Catholicism. Your wife is Episcopalian. Your children have been baptized into the Episcopalian faith.

ADLER: One of them has been confirmed recently.

MOYERS: Where do you come out personally?

ADLER: Well, it's a very difficult and probing question, Bill. In my recently published autobiography I reported the fact that many of my friends, good friends, in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Church have been puzzled by my not becoming a convert to one or another form of Christianity in view of my deep interest in Aquinas, and my only answer is that when one voluntarily accepts a religion one must be prepared to live the life that that religion recommends. For example, to become a Christian one must be resolutely determined to walk in the path of Jesus Christ. I just don't know that I have that will. And, short of having that firm will to be a good Christian, I don't want to become a Christian at all. That may be wrong. I'm troubled by that, but that's my only explanation for not -- shall I say -- entering the religious communion whose intellectual structure I understand so well.

MOYERS: Are you afraid of the price you might pay? Are you afraid of having to give up what you enjoy?

ADLER: I think that may be the case. I think that may be the case. Though I don't want to probe that too far, for I may discover in myself things I don't like very much. I think what I'm saying is that all my reasoning, all my understanding leads me almost up to the conclusion that it's demonstrated, but not quite; and that gap between the reasoning that is insufficient, and the final conclusion I must make by a leap of faith, a leap of -- by an act of my own will. So when I say I believe in God, I'm going beyond my reasoning to a conclusion that I can't prove. Now, I hope -- the next episode in my life is to write a book about God's existence, and I may a year from now have reached the point where I think I have proved God's existence and I won't say I believe God exists any longer.

MOYERS: You can be an infuriating man, you can be a provocative man. You can also be a man of charm and a man of warmth. And I'm wondering if Mortimer Adler, the man, is satisfied without a warm heart, or a heart that is warmed, by belief, by faith, as a commitment instead of just an intellectual exercise.

ADLER: It is warmed by a variety of things, such as good friends, loved ones, loved wife and loved children. It's warmed by those things. It's warmed by the beauty that we have around us here. It's warmed by the intellectual excitement of discovery and thought. Beyond that warmth you're talking about lies the warmth of the peace of mind that comes with deep religious commitment.

You know, let me put it another way. We talked about the seventh day of the creation of the world, the day on which God rested. I think, I really firmly believe, that what I lack is not warmth but rest, that rest is religious. I think the heavenly -- you know the phrase, heavenly rest? My understanding of heavenly rest is the joy that the saints, the blessed have, in the vision of God. That's heavenly rest. On earth, the remote, inchoate approximation to heavenly rest is, I think, the religious experience, so what my life lacks is not warmth but rest. Now, whether I shall achieve rest in my life I don't know.

MOYERS (over still shot of Adler): From Aspen, Colorado, this is Bill Moyers.