

PETER A. REDPATH

MEMORIAL EULOGY: MAX WEISMANN—ONE OF GOD’S GREAT IDEAS *

I begin my remembrances of Ronald “Max” Weismann with an expression of deepest and most heart-felt gratitude to Max’s unconditional-loving wife Elaine for inviting me to deliver this eulogy at this beautiful St. John Chrysostom Church to celebrate the exceptional life and accomplishments of this great man: One of God’s Great Ideas. This invitation is one *my life’s* greatest honors, one that, despite the ravages of old age daily besetting me bodily and mentally, I will never forget.

Shortly after Mortimer Adler had died on 28 June 2001, I was shocked when his partner in crime at the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas, and my friend, Max Weismann, had contacted me and asked me to pen a short eulogy in honor of Mortimer. Because parts of that eulogy equally describe Max’s nature, I take liberty to refer to them now in relation to Max: “Men were much bigger and wiser in those days,” I said, “not like they are now. Just as in the time of Odysseus breaker of horses, and honey-tongued Nestor, these were men bigger than life, men about whom and by whom great books are written.” Though Max is not with us in the sense of not jolting us out of lethargy

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by his living presence, he is gone in no other sense. To paraphrase Mortimer, to dismiss him as not being in touch with us in any other way “is to repeat the folly of the Ancient Athenians who supposed that Socrates died when he drank the hemlock.”

During the 20th century, Max Weismann was world famous as an inventor, consultant in the fields of architecture, construction management, and exhibit design and fabrication. His architectural and design talents enabled famous people like Walt Disney, Buckminster Fuller, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jacques Cousteau, and many others to have the good fortune to rub elbows with him; and for Max to work on celebrated projects like the Century 21 Exposition, and the 1964 New York World’s Fair and Expo ’67 (which I still remember). People in parts of Chicago have long known Max as somewhat of a home-town celebrity, for, among other things, overseeing design and construction of the Chicago botanical garden (which still flourishes), the Restoration of the Rochester City Hall in New York State, and for different newspaper articles written about him and his different doings.

For many years, going back at least as far as the 1990s (when Professor Curtis Hancock and I were hosting national conferences for the American Maritain Association), Max would help us organize sessions co-sponsored by the Center (suggest possible topics and, at no financial charge, provide us with Center materials), something that, on an international level, the Center continues to do to this day.

Shortly before Mortimer Adler died, Mortimer and Max helped Pat Carmack, Steve Bertucci, and several other colleagues from the Western Civilization Foundation establish the Great Books Academy and Angelicum Academy homeschool programs. These programs (which conduct live, online Socratic-style discussions from the 5th grade on) currently have more than 2000 students full- and part-time from approximately 40 different countries enrolled from pre-K through college, providing upper-level elementary and high school students

with a curriculum based upon the Great Books of the Western World at a cost tens-to-hundreds of thousands of dollars less than what would be spent at different American college and university campuses.

Since its inception, Max had been Chairman of the Board of the Great Books Academy and a member of the Board of the Angelicum Academy. A few years ago, Max helped these programs partner with Ignatius Press (whose founder is Fr. Joseph Fessio) to form the Ignatius-Angelicum Liberal Studies program. This program enables our students to graduate high school with an associate degree. Upon graduation, students are then able to enroll in Holy Apostles College and Seminary, where they may complete their Bachelor's degree totally online within less than two years.

Shortly after founding these home school programs, the Western Civilization Foundation established the Adler-Aquinas Institute, chiefly an international, renaissance academy, and "online-monastery of sorts," designed, in this age of educational, cultural, and civilizational decadence, just as in the early parts of the Middle Ages, to unite professionals throughout the world to help preserve the best of classical Western learning and Western culture and spread and pass these on to future generations. Without hesitation, when we asked him to join our group of Institute "Fellows" and promote our work, Max agreed.

While Max was internationally recognized apart from his affiliation with Mortimer Adler and the Center's work (and was greatly appreciated by members of the philosophically-inspired groups I have mentioned), during the 20th and 21st centuries, Max and the Center did not receive due recognition from many other "professional philosophers" for the great contribution they made to Western philosophy and preservation of the West's cultural heritage. Understandable. If the realist and personalistic notion of philosophy that Max and Mortimer had promoted through the Center was right, reasonable to conclude would be that what most contemporary philosophers do is not philosophy.

As I get older and more of my friends pass over to what Christians call the “Communion of Saints,” increasingly I get the sense of the reality of this organization. One reason I say this is because most of what I consider to be my best, most original, ideas tend to come to me while I am asleep. While this has been happening to me for decades, it has been increasingly occurring over the past few years. While I appreciate the fact that my great conversation with colleagues like Max and others continues unbroken as they immerse themselves in greater conversations to which, hopefully, some day, I might be invited to join, since I tend to have a weak memory, at times, I find this interruption of my sleep most annoying: I have to jump out of bed, find a pen and paper, jot down the thought before I lose it; and increasingly take afternoon naps to make up for nightly sleep deprivation.

In Max’s case, while awake, I had no problem thinking of 5 points to include in this eulogy, 5 prescriptive statements I knew he would throw my way: (1) “Don’t say anything stupid.” (2) “This is a Center-sponsored event. So, if you can, say something original related to one of the Great Books authors that will capture the audience’s attention, require them to stay awake, and think.” (3) “Don’t embarrass me or the Center. Make me proud of you!” (4) “If this eulogy ever gets printed and publicized, make sure that the Center’s complete title is spelled correctly. Make sure that the second ‘The’ is capitalized. The Center’s name is the ‘Center for the Study of *The* (with a capital ‘T’) Great Ideas.” (5) “Do not eulogize me without, also, eulogizing the Center.”

While the meaning of the first 4 points was clear to me, precisely what the 5th meant did not become exact until, while asleep one night, I connected what Max was telling me to what Socrates had told Criton and some other friends who, at the start of Plato’s dialogue the *Crito*, had come to encourage Socrates to let them bribe his guards and break him out of prison. Among other reasons, Socrates said he could not

allow them to do so because he owed his whole life to the laws of Athens. Disobeying these laws was something he was not entitled to do. In short, Socrates so much identified himself with Athens that he considered breaking her laws tantamount to suicide: an act so heinous he could not conceive committing it.

Just as Socrates could no more separate his identity from that of his beloved city of Athens, despite his many professional achievements in architectural design and as an inventor, separating the nature of Max Weismann from the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas is not possible. Max was, is, "The Center." In a sense, to Max, whatever greatness he might have, or ever had, is, by providence, essentially and existentially connected to this Center and its past, present, and future success. This personal identification of Max with the Center speaks volumes about the humility and boundless energy and charity of this man. Hence, his prescription to me: "Eulogize the Center, too."

What, however, precisely could this possibly mean? Certainly, it could not mean fondly to remember a now-departed Center. No, it must mean to speak well, say good things about, the past and existing Center, and the Center's future. But, how to do this? That became my problem—until again, while sleeping, I started to think about the idea of being "great" and how this idea relates to Max, Mortimer, and the Center.

Today, the idea of being and becoming great is part of a national and international conversation recently generated chiefly in the area of politics. But, decades ago, in relation to education and politics, Adler had started to recognize the crucial import of the nature of the idea "great," having "great" ideas, and doing "great" deeds. We strikingly see this recognition in his bristling critiques of American educational "snowflakes" in his 1940 lecture, "God and the Professors" and his *Harper's Magazine* article of the same year, entitled "This Prewar Generation." Therein, Adler savaged American college and university pro-

fessors and students for not recognizing the essential superiority of the classical Western conception of the human person and of Western political and educational institutions to those of Fascism and Nazism. Most odd, then, is that Adler appears not to have included this idea of “great” within the more than 100 ideas extant within the Great Books of the Western World program.

Not so odd, however, when we consider that this idea *actually is* contained within Aristotle’s understanding of the great idea of “quantity.” While most students of Aristotle are familiar with his division of the category of quantity that geometers and arithmeticians study (dimensive, or bulk, quantity) into the species of continuous (geometrical figures) and discrete (numbers), few are aware that Aristotle makes a more primitive, generic distinction between bulk quantity and intensive, or virtual, quantity (translated by later Latin thinkers as *quantitatis intensiva*, or *quantitatis virtutis*); by which Aristotle meant *qualitative* greatness or intensity (such as we notice in the heat of one thing being qualitatively greater than that of another, not in physical bulk, but in intensity). Analogously, Aristotle attributed this qualitative property (which contemporary physicists study, among other ways, in relation to physical properties like bodily “mass”) to a personal quality that Latin thinkers later rendered as “virtue” (*virtus*), or more precisely, to “greatness of soul” (what many people in the English-speaking world, especially in business today, call “gravitas” or “heft”).

I mention this peculiar property of greatness of soul (*megalopsychia*, *magnanimity*) because this is precisely the quality that I think best characterizes Max’s nature and accounts for some other great properties he possessed, and still possesses, including his unusual organizational abilities and common sense: qualities for which most academics and “Great Bookies” do not often tend to be known or celebrated. How do we explain Max’s speculative and practical organizational genius, his academic abilities coupled with possession of practical talents, what

many people call “common sense,” and many Americans refer to as “street smarts?” I suggest the answer to this question lies precisely in understanding qualitative greatness of soul, “gravitas,” “heft,” being an essential quality of any organizational genius and the property of virtual quantity likewise being an essential quality of any great organization.

For most of my life I have been fascinated by the nature of organizations and the nature of organizational geniuses. In part, I suspect this has been due to my being raised in a largely Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn where some of my friends’ families (and some of their Chicago relatives) were internationally famous for being great organizers. More than this, however, something is essentially fascinating about the existence of organizations and of organizational geniuses.

My decades of study of Western intellectual history have convinced me that the whole of ancient Greek philosophy was essentially an investigation of principles and causes of organizational activity, consisted in an organizational psychology that chiefly sought to understand the nature of qualitatively different organizations, the parts that essentially generate their specific operations (including the organization of parts of the human soul and its activities). What Aristotle famously called a “substance” today most of us in the West would call an “operational organization:” an organization equipped with all the parts needed to execute some chief activity.

This has convinced me, and some colleagues of mine as well, that, decades ago, when Mortimer Adler abandoned the study of modern psychology (which tends to think of psychology as a study of something called the “mind”), he did not give up the study of psychology altogether. He abandoned contemporary psychology in favor of the study of Aristotelian psychology, especially the psychology contained within Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. While many of us today incline to think of psychology as the study of the mind, in Greek, *psyche* refers the *soul*. Ancient Greeks considered psychology essentially to involve

study of the soul. Viscerally, like the ancient Greeks, Adler and Max were always convinced that philosophy is a psychological activity (an act of the human soul) differentiated by qualitatively-diverse habits of organizational interest. Knowingly or not, *both became Aristotelian psychologists*. To a large extent, this explains the unusual quality of psychological “heft” both men possessed.

Over many decades, I have especially noticed how reading the works of classical authors like Plato, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas often qualitatively transforms people (sometimes almost overnight) from being perhaps somewhat serious students, academics, politicians, or business professionals into intensely-driven leaders. Consider, for example, the great 20th-century Thomistic scholar Étienne Gilson (whose known publications amount to 935 works: including 172 individually-authored books [monographs], 8 edited books, 4 series editions, 2 anthologies, 307 scholarly articles, 36 prefaces, 296 general interest articles, and 104 book reviews) and what Gilson had to say in his intellectual biography, *The Philosopher and Theology*, about the day a person discovers that he or she has become a Thomist:

A man becomes aware of being a Thomist on the day he realizes that from then on he will no longer be able to live without the company of St. Thomas Aquinas. He feels in the *Summa Theologiae* as a fish in the sea; away from it he feels out of his element, and cannot wait to go back to it. More deeply, this is what gives the Thomist the joyous feeling that he is free. Essentially a Thomist is a free mind. His freedom does not consist in having neither master nor God but in having no master other than God. And indeed God is for man the only bulwark against the tyrannies of other men. God alone delivers from fears and timidities a mind that otherwise would die of starvation in the midst of plenty. Left to itself, it will be unable to choose and will die either from starvation or indigestion. The happiness of a Thomist is the joy he experiences in feeling free to welcome all the truth from whichever side it may come. The perfect expression of such liberty of

the Christian man is that of Saint Augustine: *Dilige et quod vis fac: Love and do what you will*. Like charity, faith is a liberator. Incidentally, this is why the Christian should willingly accept being considered as a rather unusual specimen by non-Christian thinkers.¹

This experience need not come from reading St. Thomas Aquinas. It could come just as easily from reading a host of classically-educated thinkers (like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, St. Augustine, the great Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides, or the great Islamic scholar Avicenna) from whom St. Thomas learned much. Whatever the case about its literary origin, I submit that this sort of life-transforming experience, which Gilson and other Thomists tend to have, is essentially due, among other factors, to a “psychological greatness,” “heft,” they sense about the organizational genius of St. Thomas Aquinas. Additionally, I submit that this is the sort of experience Max Weismann had when he first came into contact with the organizational genius of Mortimer J. Adler. Once he had experienced Adler’s psychological greatness, I suspect Max felt much the same way when reading Adler that Thomists like Gilson experience reading St. Thomas.

How else to explain the radical transformation of this exceptionally-talented man into a devoted, selfless, promoter of the work of another? As part of this tribute to Max and his beloved Center, I want to probe a bit deeper into precisely why I think this quality helps explain what causes ordinary people *to gravitate into* leaders and ordinary leaders into speculative educational masters and practical and productive organizational geniuses like Max Weismann.

To do this, at this point, I need to turn to a twentieth-century classic work in Christian wisdom: C. S. Lewis’s little book entitled *The Abolition of Man*. As Lewis explains in the first chapter of this book,

¹ Étienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), 204.

“Men without Chests,” without the existence of a reasoning principle existing within an embodied soul (a rational center of magnanimity existing within the body) essentially connected to the human body as a command and control mechanism able rationally to regulate and constrain the human passions so as to enable an abstract intellect to execute rational commands within the human emotions (*without a chest to connect cerebral man to visceral man*), “man is not man,” and, strictly speaking, “Christian” man can never be “Christian” man.

As Lewis says, “The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment” (what St. Thomas Aquinas considered to be an “animal rationality,” a specific difference unique to a human animal, allowing an immortal, rational soul to overflow into a sentient part of the same soul, where St. Thomas locates “common sense,” deliberative “choice,” and the moral virtue of “prudence”)—“these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man.”²

Lewis and St. Thomas maintain that, without embodiment, what is thought to be, and is called, a “human soul” is actually a disembodied spirit, or disembodied intellect. Such a disembodied entity does not correspond to the Christian understanding of a *human soul*. And a soul-less body (a body in which spirit is not an animating principle of life, growth, and development of a living, sentient, organic matter) does not correspond to a Christian understanding of a *human body*.

Lewis adds, “It may even be said that it is by this middle element (the rationally-sentient soul) that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.”³

While St. Thomas considers human reason to be a faculty of an immortal human soul, *remarkably*, like Lewis (who writes centuries

² C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of School* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 34.

³ *Ibid.*

after Aquinas), St. Thomas maintains the specific difference of a human being resides in the genus “animal,” not in the genus “spirit.” Strictly speaking, according to St. Thomas, *human beings are not incarnate spirits*. Human beings do not belong to the genus “spirit.” We are not differentiated in our genus by being on the lowest level of intellectual spirit, being the dumbest of angels. Essentially, we belong to the highest rank within the genus animal (the qualitative maximum [leaders, rulers] in and of the animal genus), which is specifically divided into rational and irrational. *St. Thomas locates our human, specific difference in an otherness, an animal rationality, existing within the sensitive, or animal, part of the intellectual soul:*

Sed tamen considerandum est quod ea quae sunt per accidens, non diversificant speciem. Quia enim coloratum accidit animali, non diversificantur species animalis per differentiam coloris, sed per differentiam eius quod per se accidit animali, per differentiam scilicet animae sensitivae, quae quandoque invenitur cum ratione, quandoque sine ratione. Unde rationale et irrationale sunt differentiae divisivae animalis, diversas eius species constituentes. Sic igitur non quaecumque diversitas obiectorum diversificat potentias animae; sed differentia eius ad quod per se potentia respicit.⁴

In the case of the human soul, St. Thomas understands the soul's relation to an animal body to consist in essentially connecting, through human sense faculties (like memory and imagination) of an animal body, an immortal intellectual soul and the activities of the whole human person to sense reality. He maintains that doing so enables the animal genus to become perfectly itself. The “sensitive soul” (the generic part of the human nature) causes *animal* rationality (a reason in touch with sense reality), not a disembodied, or abstract, rationality.

⁴ *S.Th.*, I, q. 77, a. 3, resp.

What had been reason acting abstractly, syllogistically, overflows into the appetitive part of the soul, and, through its activity, into the whole of material creation. In so doing, human reason exists in a concrete, uniquely-animal, command-and-control way (as a kind of appetitive, sensory, reasoning establishing personal relations throughout the material world). It is within reason existing as such a command-and-control principle of the sense faculties and emotions in the animal part of the human soul that St. Thomas most precisely locates deliberative choice, common sense, the moral virtue of prudence, and our specific, human difference!

The resulting composite, as Gilson has said (*Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*), is an animal that senses with its intellect and intellectualizes with its senses: an animal able personally to execute animal activity in its highest form: simultaneously abstractly (calmly), and commonsensically, deliberatively, passionately, with prudence, in touch with sense reality! By generating the faculty of sensory reasoning, sentient, command-and-control reason (a faculty St. Thomas calls “particular reason,” which he claims corresponds to “instinct” in brute animals,⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas maintains that the intellectual soul generates a personally-human rationality (one that reasons abstractly and syllogistically when not focusing attention on concrete, individual, animal activity) *to overflow through the sensitive part of the soul into the human body and sense reality as a personally-animal, command-and-control, ruling principle of the sensitive faculties, passions, and all their activities.*⁶

In so doing, the rational part of the soul enables the sensitive part to achieve its animal perfection as an acting, sensitive soul, an acting person (as St. John Paul II was fond of saying), something that no other

⁵ *S.Th.*, I, q. 78, a. 4, resp.

⁶ *S.Th.*, I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 5.

animal soul can achieve: being a deliberative (free) animal! More: Through the sensory part of the soul, the rational part of the soul inclines the whole of the created, material order naturally *to gravitate toward (not resist) being ruled by metaphysically-and-morally-virtuous human directive. It causes the morally-and-metaphysically-virtuous person to become the first principle of healthy social life and personal rule within and throughout the material universe!*

As Lewis prudently observes, “Without the aid of trained emotions, the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”⁷ To this sage observation, in words with which, *if I know Max*, he would unhesitatingly agree, Lewis adds:

In battle it is not syllogisms that will keep the reluctant nerves and muscles to their post in the third hour of bombardment. The crudest sentimentalism . . . about a flag, or a country, or a regiment will be of more use. We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the spirited element. The head rules the belly through the chest—as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments.⁸

Absent such training, Lewis maintains, “We make men without chests (what, today, we commonly call ‘snowflakes’) and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings to be fruitful.”⁹ As Aristotle realized centuries ago, to the extent that we take no pleasure in what we do, we can never develop into, or habitually remain, morally-virtuous agents, or into and long remain liberal artists, philosophers, scientists, completely-rational human beings: *men with chests*.

⁷ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 33–34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

In other words, without an embodied reason (*a reason in touch with sense reality* akin to what St. Thomas calls “particular reason” existing within the sentient part of the human soul) capable of rationally and rightly commanding and constraining (ordering) the human sense faculties and passions, a human being is not human. *Strictly speaking, the embodied, passion-related, soul inclined to be directed by right reason makes us specifically human, perfect as persons; and inclines the entire material universe naturally to gravitate to being ruled by healthy personal relations that virtuously-qualified, human reason establishes! Strictly speaking, human reason as our specific human difference is rightly-ordered, virtue-directed, reason acting in touch with sense reality as the chief principle of rightly-ordered personal relations, behavior, and rule throughout the whole of material creation!*

During the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas recognized that only a faculty psychology, and especially recognition of the faculty of a sentient, particular, reason in touch with sense reality, can enable development of the kind of self-understanding human beings (acting persons) capable of generating healthy educational institutions able to produce men like Max Weismann: “Men with chests.” And, as Lewis and Max have tried to warn us, the practical result of an education that denies such a reason and such a reality must be, as Lewis says, “the destruction of the society which accepts it.” Among other reasons, Max and Mortimer founded the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas to counteract the negative cultural and civilizational disorder that necessarily follows from habitual application of psychologically-unhealthy, mis-educational principles (human viciousness) to widespread living of everyday life. No wonder should exist, then, why those of us assembled here today in this beautiful Church should embrace as part of our tribute to Max to do what we reasonably can to insure that the Center Max so loved as part of his very being will survive and flourish well into the future.

Thank you, Max, my friend. See you soon. Hope I did not let you down.



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SUMMARY

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KEYWORDS

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