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A Guidebook to Learning: For a Lifelong Pursuit of Wisdom

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Book Review

A Guidebook to Learning: For a Lifelong Pursuit of Wisdom,
by Mortimer J. Adler. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.
163 pages, \$13.95.

As the excitement generated by the National Commission on Education report of 1983 takes a needed (and welcomed) hiatus, educator and philosopher Mortimer Adler appears on the scene with yet another of his ponderous analyses of cognition. In **A Guidebook to Learning: For a Lifelong Pursuit of Wisdom**, the author examines the nature of man's learning process in an effort to provide "needed philosophical insights and distinctions" which will "enable us to lay out the geography, as it were, of the realm of learning." In so doing, Adler faults the trend toward specialization of learning which fosters vocational marketability while doing little to cultivate the skills necessary for the continual and progressive acquisition of knowledge. To ensure that learning is maintained, the author suggests a general, liberal, and humanistic approach is in order.

The four-part text examines various facets of the structure of learning and reveals a basis which inhibits the desired generalized continuity by virtue of its fragmented nature. Drawing on the alphabetical organization of everything from dictionaries to college catalogues, Adler argues that man has stalled at the "intermediate stage of specializa-

tion." To remedy the condition, post-secondary schools are urged to include in their programs "the kind of teaching that involves the enhancement of the understanding." Seminars are cited as a vital means by which students read and express ideas and encounter the opinions and insights of others through discussion.

In this time of global technological competition, Adler is quick to emphasize the need for a humanistic approach to knowledge as well as a scientific approach. The reading of historical, philosophical, and biographical works cultivate the formulation of ideas and enrich man's understanding of himself and his environment.

Adler concludes his text with a list of recommended readings for earnest autodidacts. Divided into three categories of "imaginative literature, history or biography and philosophy"; "how-to" books; and "some books of mine about the great ideas" the titles offer a wide and varied sampling indeed. While Adler's suggestions for lifelong learning are sound and generally feasible, one cannot help but puzzle over the obvious omission of this title in the author's list of "some books of mine about great ideas." Hmmm . . .

review by—Susan Day Harmison
Book Review Editor