

# A Summary of the “Great Ideas” and the “Great Conversation” from Mortimer Adler

The Six Great Ideas: From Mortimer Adler (1981)

Truth—Goodness—Beauty—Liberty—Equality—Justice

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The *Syntopicon*’s 102 Great Ideas, by chapter:

Volume I:

Angel, Animal, Aristocracy, Art, Astronomy, Beauty, Being, Cause, Chance, Change, Citizen, Constitution, Courage, Custom and Convention, Definition, Democracy, Desire, Dialectic, Duty, Education, Element, Emotion, Eternity, Evolution, Experience, Family, Fate, Form, God, Good and Evil, Government, Habit, Happiness, History, Honor, Hypothesis, Idea, Immortality, Induction, Infinity, Judgment, Justice, Knowledge, Labor, Language, Law, Liberty, Life and Death, Logic, and Love.

Volume II:

Man, Mathematics, Matter, Mechanics, Medicine, Memory and Imagination, Metaphysics, Mind, Monarchy, Nature, Necessity and Contingency, Oligarchy, One and Many, Opinion, Opposition, Philosophy, Physics, Pleasure and Pain, Poetry, Principle, Progress, Prophecy, Prudence, Punishment, Quality, Quantity, Reasoning, Relation, Religion, Revolution, Rhetoric, Same and Other, Science, Sense, Sign and Symbol, Sin, Slavery, Soul, Space, State, Temperance, Theology, Time, Truth, Tyranny and Despotism, Universal and Particular, Virtue and Vice, War and Peace, Wealth, Will, Wisdom, and World.

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What is the great conversation?

*What binds the authors together in an intellectual community is the great conversation in which they are engaged. In the works that come later in the sequence of years, we find authors listening to what their predecessors have had to say about this idea or that, this topic or that. They not only harken to the thought of their predecessors, they also respond to it by commenting on it in a variety of ways.*

— Mortimer Adler: "The Great Conversation Revisited," in *The Great Conversation: A People's Guide to Great Books of the Western World*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., Chicago, 1990, p. 28.