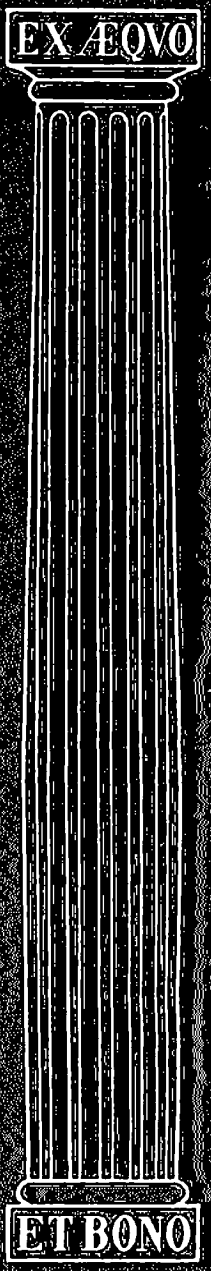
# The University Bookman

A Quarterly Review

Edited by Russell Kirk

Winter 1975



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## Notes on Contributors

William T. Couch has been editor-in-chief of *Collier's Encyclopaedia,* and director of the University of Chicago Press and of the University of North Carolina Press; with a foundation grant, he spent several years in writing *The Human Potential.*

Victor M. Cassidy, who has been an assistant editor of *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica,* is now completing a thorough biography of Wyndham Lewis.

Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, professor of philosophy and politics at the University of Dallas, is the author of *The War in Man: Media and Machines* (University of Georgia Press, 1970), *The Metaphysics of Love* (Sheed and Ward, 1962), and other books.

# Far from Attaining the Human Potential

*An Editorial Note*

A DISTINGUISHED scholarly editor of much experience, Mr. W. T. Couch, discusses in this number of our quarterly the shortcomings of *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* in particular and of encyclopaedias in general. We need urgently, he argues, to seek vigorous means for striving toward the human potential: if we fail in this, we will sink swiftly deeper into personal and public disorder.

Two able critics, in this number, discuss Mr. Couch's very recent book *The Human Potential*—differing from him in some matters, but agreeing that intellectually and morally our culture is badly confused nowadays. One may add that the American failure, so far (with some honorable local exceptions), to develop imaginative plans for celebrating the bicentenary of the United States is dismal evidence in support of Mr. Couch's argument that the human potential seems remote of attainment.

The first number of this little *University Bookman* appeared in 1960. Over the past 15 years, we have achieved a circulation of more than 100,000 copies. It has been our ambition to help (in a small way) to leaven the lump of intellectual apathy and mediocrity in this land. In our pages, we hope, from time to time a conscience has spoken to a conscience. With Mr. Couch, we are aware that much grander efforts must be undertaken, if an understanding of the human potential is to be renewed in our nation and our world. Yet if our readers sometimes have wondered what this tiny quarterly stands for—why, it is the human potential, expressed through right reason and imagination, that we seek to sustain.

—RK

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# What Can't Be Found in the New Britannica

THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, 15th edition, in 30 volumes. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1974. $598/$798.
Reviewed by **William T. Couch**

THE NEW *Britannica* consists of three parts. There is a one-volume "Propaedia: Outline of Knowledge and Guide to the *Britannica*," with a Foreword by Robert M. Hutchins, Chairman of the Board of Editors; a Preface by Warren E. Preece, Editor; a discussion of the reasons for the Outline and Guide, under the caption "The Circle of Learning," by Mortimer J. Adler, Director of Planning; and lists of staff editors, advisers, contributors, and consultants. There are ten volumes of "Ready Reference and Index" or "Micropaedia," consisting of short articles, definitions, and references. There are 19 volumes of "Knowledge in Depth," or "Macropaedia," consisting of 4,207 articles, most of them several pages long, some of book length.

This set was designed to serve functions as diverse as "to discover the birthday of Marie Antoinette or obtain a summary of the work of Isaac Newton." The first of these functions, the provision of facts, the informational function, was to be served by the Micropaedia. The second, the purpose of understanding, was to be served by the Macropaedia.

Since both the Micropaedia and the Macropaedia are alphabetically arranged, they could have been put together in 29 volumes. It might be held, however, that the mere fact of their physical separation serves a purpose of basic importance, by emphasizing the basic differences between the merely informational and the genuinely educational functions that are possible for encyclopaedias; and that the separation on this account alone is justified. But it might be held also, on the contrary, that there is not and cannot be any genuine understanding that dispenses with facts; that if the separation stands for a realm of fact, on the one hand, and a realm of knowledge in depth, materials serving understanding, on the other hand, then the thing stood for involves a most serious misrepresentation of the relations among facts and reasoning, knowledge and understanding. There is no possibility of understanding that does not involve facts, but facts alone are not enough for understanding. Reasoning also is necessary. Furthermore, the notion that all facts stand out, vouch for, and establish themselves is a notion that will not stand serious examination. The separation of the *Britannica* into the two parts, the Micropaedia and the Macropaedia is new in that it has never been used before in an encyclopaedia to divide the presentation

of facts from discussion that is intended to cultivate understanding. This division in the new *Britannica* is not adequately justified in the Foreword by the Chairman of the Board of Editors, or in the Preface by the Editor, or in the discussion entitled "The Circle of Learning" by the Director of Planning.

If the makers of the new *Britannica* had considered including an article on fact, and if they had been able to secure a discussion that reflected any real understanding of the subject, I think they would not have made this division. They would have learned from such an article that any attempt to separate facts from matter that serves understanding reflects deep ignorance of both. This ignorance is especially common and serious in the United States. They would have learned that understanding may determine fact as well as the other way around. It is well known that much that has been held to be fact in the past is today held to be error. There is no way of knowing that this will not happen in the future with much of what today is held to be fact. Mere sense observation is not a reliable means of determining some facts of great importance, such as the motions of the heavenly bodies. To understand facts is to understand theories that perhaps as far as is possible explain the facts, as, say, in the theory of evolution. The fact that none of our encyclopaedias, including the new *Britannica*, contains an article on fact that attempts to explain its relations to observation, theory, and understanding is highly significant. This fact is discussed in my book *The Human Potential*. The fact that fact has been the chief stock in trade of our encyclopaedias, and that the makers of and traders in encyclopaedias ought to be as much interested in what they are making and trading as any other makers and traders, seems not to have occurred to our encyclopaedia makers and traders.

IF WE TAKE the trouble to think about the revolution in thought that was started by Copernicus concerning the motions of the heavenly bodies, we discover that what appears to be real is not always so. In this case, what appears to the observer on earth with normal vision to be fact is not fact but mere appearance. We may not yet know the reality because our reasoning also may be deceptive and may present us with a new appearance that is no more real than the old. When we think about this conflict and especially when we discover many conflicts among what are all appearances, whatever else they are, we may begin to understand the principle that was stated for the first time by Aristotle as the most certain of all: the law of contradiction in logic. This law as stated by Aristotle in Book Gamma of his *Metaphysics* is: "It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same thing in the same respect."

Now if this law had had no great influence in human thought, if it had not been a part of universal practice in every advance that has been made in science and human thought, if it were a mere dictum of Aristotle's that had

had no revolutionary effect on human thought and action from the time of Aristotle to the present, I would not have given it the central place that I did give it in *The Human Potential.* No one who has thought at all seriously about the cultivation of human knowledge and the principles that are necessary to that cultivation will disagree with Bishop Berkeley that "Aristotle hath said it" is not sufficient authority for the acceptance of anything.

Is there any discipline that is, more than any other, necessary to the cultivation of knowledge and particularly the distinguishing of it from error? Yes, says D'Alembert in his famous "Preliminary Discourse" to the great French encyclopaedia that Diderot and he inaugurated: logic is "rightly considered the key to all our knowledge" ("Preliminary Discourse," tr., R. N. Schwab and W. E. Rex, 1963, p. 30). I would agree if the meaning "determining factor in" were given to the words "key to"; for observation, unchecked by reason, says the sun moves, whereas checked by reason, it suggests that the earth moves. If it is assumed that the suggestion made by reason is true, then if the same weight is given to observation and reason, as D'Alembert appears to do ("Preliminary Discourse," pp. 6, 7, and 30), both are true. But both cannot be true at the same time and in the same way. The understanding of this is what forced further observation and reasoning. This is the role that the law of contradiction plays in the human thought that has been necessary to the cultivation of knowledge.

EVERY intellectual discipline that is a genuine discipline, rather than a mere regurgitation and possibly an elaboration and playing with whatever appears, has the law of contradiction embedded in its practices. The specialist in any scientific field may never open a book or take a course in logic, but when somebody in one of the fields of biology claims that he has proved the inheritance of acquired characteristics and tells of experiments he has made, others may repeat the experiments. If their experiments are negative, the claim is rejected. Even one such claim that is rejected by other experiments is enough to do severe injury to a reputation. The repetition of such claims brings the conviction of charlatanism, even if the charge is not openly made. This standard is maintained in all disciplined practice today except in those parts of the world where science is kept subservient to ideology.

Most of us today are specialists, even extreme specialists; and when we have to form judgments on problems outside of our specialty we are helpless if we do not have conscious knowledge of and skill with the law of contradiction in logic. In our specialty, as we have said, the law is normally embedded in practice, especially in experimental work. We cannot know the practice, we cannot repeat the experimental work in other fields. If we do not have knowledge of and skill in the conduct of mental experiments that use the standards embodied in all disciplined practice, we are helpless when we are faced with problems in other fields that involve possible completely

discrediting contradictions. And without this skill we can be helpless in many of the ordinary affairs of life.

The new *Britannica* has four separate articles, all under the caption logic, all comprising a total of more than fifty pages. Why separate articles? Are there no principles common to all logic that hold the subject together? If there are such principles, it would seem well to state them at or near the opening of what should be, if the new *Britannica* follows its own principles as stated in the Editor's Preface, only one article that relates all aspects of the subject. The new *Britannica* does not have just one article on logic that does this job. It has, as I have said, four; and none does the job that most needs doing in a manner the layman has a good chance to understand.

THE ARTICLES on logic in the new *Britannica* are not quite as unintelligible to the layman as the article "Logic" in the 1967 *Britannica*: but so much of them is unintelligible to the layman that one has to ask: for whom are these technical portions provided? The specialist in the field? But in his Preface the Editor says articles should not be written for specialists. He also says that in the case of articles that involve "irreducibly difficult" technicalities, "communicable only in a language understood solely by specialists," there should be portions that can be understood by the layman. So here we have the Editor saying both that articles in the set should be written for the layman and that portions of articles may not be written for the layman. The technician in the field, the only one who is equipped to understand the technicalities, does not need these portions. The layman cannot understand them. So, we repeat, for whom are these technical portions provided?

There is some evidence that, as the machinery of logic is made more and more complex, and as the specialist focuses his attention on the machinery—and he alone has the time to do this in a serious way—his attention is diverted from the basic principles of logic and he loses skill with them. His principles are in his machinery so he doesn't have to think about justifying them or bother to concern himself with skill in their use outside of his machinery. Bertrand Russell has probably done more than any other person in the last hundred years to develop the vast machinery of modern logic—the logic to which the new *Britannica* gives by far the most attention. Here is the sample that I give in *The Human Potential* of Russell's reasoning on a subject that requires only the most elementary but absolutely necessary skill with logic if the reasoning is to be other than absurd. This example is taken from Russell's "Reply to Criticisms" in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P. A. Schlipp. On page 731, Russell says "there is something Hitlerite in objecting to people on account of accidents of birth," obviously meaning by "something Hitlerite" something viciously false. On page 739, eight pages later, he says: "Consider one simple fact: that the wheel was unknown in America until white men introduced it. No doubt

the wheel was the product of an evolution which took a considerable time, but each step required brains, and among the Indians the necessary brains did not happen to occur."

It might be highly significant that the vast and complex machinery of *Principia Mathematica* did not save Russell from this error that anybody of normal intelligence can see without benefit of Russell's machinery—and without benefit of any of the great additions made by others to this machinery.

I HAVE discussed so far fact, observation, logic, and understanding in only a most elementary way. The discussion of these subjects should be carried in ordinary language far beyond what I have said, but never with the use of machinery that the layman does not have time to understand, much less to gain skill with. The layman should be told about the machinery and its uses; and if it does not serve infallibly in the way it is intended to serve, or if the way in which it is intended to serve is patently false, he should be told about this too. The new *Britannica* does not even attempt this. J. O. Urmson's little book *Philosophical Analysis* deals mainly with Russell's mathematical logic and his metaphysics, logical atomism, and is almost a model of nontechnical exposition and criticism, still probably too far above the layman's level but in the right direction. The reader has the right to know all the more important pros and cons of what claims to be logic, and if these pros and cons cannot be conveyed in ordinary language, we have good grounds for believing that either our expositor does not understand them, or that they are beyond understanding by anybody.

Another subject on which a good article secured before more than preliminary planning was done, and which could have been immensely helpful in further planning, is that of objectivity as fairness in the treatment of a subject. One of the principles that the Editor states in his Preface is that "articles should be so written that they avoid expressions of bias or prejudice on any matter about which a respectable and reasonable difference of opinion exists." This statement occurs under the caption "Objectivity and Neutrality," and there is no further discussion of this subject.

Now if there is anything certain in this world, it is that notions of respectability and of reasonable opinion change from time to time; and if there are no standards, no principles that do not change from time to time, no trustworthy principles by which better and worse, or by which the true can be sifted from the false, then there is no basis for determining whether any notion is biased or prejudiced or not. The very notions of bias and prejudice assume something from which there is deviation. This something traditionally has been called "truth." The notion that there is any truth of any great importance that can be known or even approached has been generally given up in the world of learning of our time. Mathematics and

especially Euclidean geometry had been for centuries the model for truth in other fields of knowledge. When it was realized that certain axioms of Euclidean geometry could be abandoned and non-Euclidean geometries constructed, self-evident truth became suspect, and Euclidean geometry as a model for truth was abandoned along with systems of thought and being based on propositions previously held to be self-evidently true. This led to the gradual abandonment of truth as an object of knowledge in physical and human nature. In earlier times, the system builders were not concerned with the achievement of mere consistency. They were concerned with consistency that was also true. Today system building in mathematics and mathematical logic generally has abandoned the notion that there is truth to be discovered, and that this is the most important of human activities—that when this notion is abandoned, human life loses the orientation that is necessary if the quality of this life is to be raised and kept above that of the mere animal. Whatever the "authorities" of this time have to say on this subject, truth remains the great human quest, the quest necessary to the discovery and cultivation of the human potential. Some truth is known. Food, we know, is necessary to human life. This is known in two ways. One way is inductive. We do not seriously doubt evolution today because our knowledge of evolution is wholly inductive. The other way is the way that traditionally has been called "self-evident." This way has never been thought by anyone with any understanding to be self-evident on the mere utterance or reading of such words as that food is necessary to life. This statement has instead been self-evident only on understanding the part that nutriment plays in the sustenance of all forms of life, a part that in the strictest sense is absolutely necessary. When this understanding is achieved, its truth, in the context, and only in the context, in which this truth operates is self-evident.

THE CHIEF consequences of giving up in our time truth as an object of quest, and in some respects as an object of genuine knowledge, have been, first, the loss of the orientation necessary to the improvement of the quality of human life, or even of the maintenance of the existing quality; and, second, the obliteration of any difference between truth and prejudice, or perhaps more clearly said, the reduction of all statements about human beings and the universe to mere statements of prejudice. Charges of prejudice then become mere weapons with no more truth in them than the notions that the charges label as prejudice. The meaning of "objectivity" as fairness in the treatment of subjects in this situation means acceptance, under the guise of authority, of the opinion that happens to be current and dominant in the world of learning.

It would have been difficult but not impossible to find persons in the world of learning qualified to write with genuine authority on this subject

and delighted to have the opportunity to do so. The subject is of tremendous, wide-reaching importance. The new *Britannica* has no article on this subject, and, so far as I have been able to discover, no illuminating discussion of it under any caption.

THERE IS no way of dealing with human knowledge without making large or small divisions of one kind or another in the subject matter of the universe. Divisions may be made and instructions given in such manner as to lead toward better rather than worse presentation of subjects—and the opposite is also possible. According to the Editor in his Preface, outlines were provided to authors to help them avoid duplication and they were instructed to treat one subject without duplication mainly in one place. We have seen that the subject logic is dealt with in four articles instead of one. The new *Britannica* has an article "Human Cultures: Primitive and Non-Urban." It also has an article "Slavery, Serfdom, and Forced Labor." It has articles on other subjects that come up in primitive cultures. Slavery, like, say, religion and many other subjects comes up in some, perhaps all, primitive cultures so far as I, the reader, know. I read the article "Human Cultures" to find out what comes up. Slavery certainly occurs in some primitive and non-urban human cultures. In the new *Britannica* its nonoccurrence is not noted, and its occurrence is not noted and discussed. I, the reader, am as much interested in nonoccurrence as in occurrence and the possible whys involved in both. Why this omission? The reason, I suppose, lies in the instructions that were given to authors. Since slavery is being covered in another article, it may have been considered unnecessary duplication to deal with it also in the article "Human Cultures." But the article "Human Cultures" is made up wholly of such subjects and should deal with all of them in their interrelations. The same reasons that call for the treatment or the omission of any one, call for the treatment or the omission of others. The correct solution of this problem seems clear: to treat the subject human cultures properly is to treat all of the more important subjects that come up in human cultures in their interrelations, that is, in one context. To treat the subject slavery properly is to treat it as it comes up in different cultures and take up other subjects only if they are so related to slavery that slavery cannot be correctly represented without dealing with them also. The context in the two cases is different, and full treatment in both is necessary if the purpose of cultivating understanding is to be served as well as is possible.

It would take a lot of time to see how far the new *Britannica* reflects the consequences of ill considered instructions, and, despite weeks of study of the set, I have no strong opinion on this question.

Finally, I shall mention a few less general problems, most of which I have discussed in *The Human Potential.* Gertrude Stein's "rose is a rose is a

rose" still is a mystery in the new *Britannica.* Anarchism is still treated without showing the self-contradictory principle in it. "Balance of Power" is not indexed under "Power." It is given a whole page—a half dozen or more would have been justified—in the 1967 printing in an article by the great contemporary authority, Hans J. Morgenthau. This article is probably as good as is possible in the one page that it occupies. In the new set, "Balance of Power" is given one-third of a page in an inferior, unsigned article and consigned to *Britannica*'s limbo, the Micropaedia. The subject "pacifism," under the title "Pacifism and Non-Violent Movements" is given eight and one-half pages in the Macropaedia. There was a separate and excellent article of about nine and one-half pages on democracy in the 1967 set. There is an inferior, unsigned article of a little less than half a page in the Micropaedia under the caption "Democracy." There is an article of eight lines under the caption "Equality" in the Micropaedia. It deals with equality as this subject comes up in arithmetic. There is no article in either the Micropaedia or Macropaedia on equality as it has been a problem among human beings from the earliest known times and as it has been discussed from the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle through Locke and Jefferson and many others to the present. There is no index reference to discussion under any equivalent or closely related caption. Liberty, with half a page in the 1967 set, has four lines in the new set, these four in the Micropaedia. This lapse is not made up by discussion under any other caption or captions that the reader is helped to locate by means of the Micropaedia. There is a long article on slavery in the new set, but, unlike the article in the 1967 set, there is nothing in it on slavery in Africa south of the Sahara where slavery has been endemic for at least two thousand years. The caption "justice" is in the Micropaedia with only a reference to the articles on ethics; human rights; law, Western philosophy of; natural law; and procedural law. The subject "justice" is involved in all these subjects, but it is not identical with any one or all of them. Each of the subjects listed is involved in all the others just as justice is. Justice is just as much a separate subject as any one of them. The same reasons that justify separate articles on each of them justify a separate article on justice.

I HAVE FOUND in the new *Britannica* many articles that I consider excellent, but even among these too many are written at a level beyond the layman and focused entirely too much on current authority rather than on the authority of all time in language the layman has a chance to understand. I have also found much that in my opinion is not worth the paper it is printed on, much that indeed in an encyclopaedia for the layman is of only negative value. I regret that the report that I have to give on the new *Britannica* is so largely a negative one. Still, I have to say, it is probably the best encyclopaedia now existing in the English language.

# Does Couch Demand Too Much of the Britannica?

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL: AN ESSAY ON ITS CULTIVATION, by William T. Couch. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1974. $9.95. Reviewed by **Victor M. Cassidy**

IN TODAY'S COLLEGES, the "important theories of man and the universe" remain untaught and largely misunderstood. Students specialize too soon, absorb miscellaneous facts, emerge schooled but ignorant. Graduates in consequence often employ their technical skills unintelligently and choose mischievous or inept political leaders. A truly educated person has studied widely and read classic works themselves, not commentaries or summaries. He possesses sufficient understanding of the great questions to set specialists' facts into broad context, while maintaining a clear sense of proportion. He knows right from wrong and is armed against charlatans.

If we wish our intellectual life to grow and advance, we must at once revive general education, first by establishing an institute dedicated to that end; and, second, by producing an entirely new encyclopaedia. Laymen seeking information turn most often to the encyclopaedia; the best encyclopaedias we have today are "helter-skelter collections" of facts, thrown together without plan or purpose. The new institute would produce a reference work carefully organized and edited to advance general education.

Such, in somewhat telegraphic form, is the thesis of William T. Couch's *The Human Potential*, a book published within weeks of an entirely reorganized and rewritten *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Having worked on this *Britannica* as an associate editor in technology, I can describe its creation from the inside; elsewhere in this magazine Mr. Couch reviews the new set.

The previous edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* appeared in 1929. Some time later, continuous annual revision began: the staff evaluated two or three volumes each year, reedited most articles, dropped a few, and commissioned some new ones. As prominent persons died, new political leaders arose, and national borders changed, the staff made routine corrections. Though this procedure assured a reasonably up to date work of reference, *Britannica*'s basic organization changed little. Dissatisfied with the *Encyclopaedia*, management began, in the late Sixties, to plan a new edition. The editors found even more flaws in their product than does Mr. Couch.

Organization was the most important problem. Much information appeared in hopelessly fragmented form—little articles dribbled through the set. A reader interested in sound reproduction, for example, might locate

entries for microphone, loudspeaker, phonograph, high fidelity, tape recording and stereophonic sound. Nowhere, however, would he find a general description of sound recording and reproduction systems. If this reader took all the little articles and placed them side by side, he would discover considerable overlap—the same elementary background material repeated again and again. Mr. Couch views fragmentation in humanistic rather than directly editorial terms, but I find him and *Britannica*'s management in general agreement on this point.

To improve its organization, the *Encyclopaedia* was divided into three parts. The first, a single volume called propaedia, contains an elaborate outline of human knowledge, along with a text that describes it as a "circle of learning." From this outline the editors derived a list of topics considered major in importance and interest; e.g., Electricity, Ancient Rome, Abraham Lincoln, Common Law, Switzerland. These articles, which range in length from 1,500 to 80,000 words, appear in the Macropaedia, bulk of the new set. All Macropaedia articles were commissioned.

The Micropaedia, third part of the set, grew out of the second; it contains several thousand short (750 words or less) entries on minor topics, capsule summaries of all long articles, plus index material. As we received and edited the big manuscripts, we decided which short entries were needed and wrote them. I remember editing our 13,000 word "Livestock and Poultry Farming" article, then writing up a barnyardful of pig, cow, and chicken breeds.

THE NEW *Britannica* thus provides the reader with information of three different sorts. For facts in ready reference form—dates, scientific names, and so forth—he looks in the Micropaedia. For a general article on some major topic, he reads the Macropaedia, and for an overview of all knowledge, he consults the Propaedia. Fragmentation and duplication have largely disappeared. If nothing else, the new *Britannica* is far more carefully planned than any previous edition.

A second great shortcoming of the old encyclopaedia was its inconsistency. Anyone could follow most technical articles; others seemed written, as Mr. Couch puts it, "by specialists for specialists." The editors aimed the new set at the "curious, intelligent layman," assuming (correctly) that no expert consults the encyclopaedia for information in his own field. We defined unfamiliar terms as they appeared in a text, expressed in words any formula or equation, and—most important of all—simplified or dropped much dense technical copy. Depending upon one's point of view, we either produced an encyclopaedia truly accessible to the general reader or bowdlerized authoritative work. Several contributors, upon receipt of their edited manuscripts, took the latter view and wrote us to that effect. In all cases we sought compromise; in most we arrived at one. At any rate, the new *Britannica*

certainly approaches technical subjects in far more consistent fashion than before.

Mr. Couch makes no mention of one problem to which we devoted considerable effort. The editors considered the old *Britannica* parochially Western in outlook and sought to make it international. Accordingly they allocated far more space than previously to articles on non-Western history, culture, geography, and biography; chose contributors from all over the world; and, wherever possible, gave each article an international outlook. In theory this sounds rather simple and obvious, but in practice it created tremendous problems. Once the editors decided, for example, to have an "Islamic Mysticism" article, they had to find someone to write an outline for it, to suggest possible authors, and comprehendingly to edit the manuscript. We endeavored always to have geography articles authored by a native of the subject nation; Belgium and Japan caused no problem, but Gambia, Yemen, and similar countries did. In editing manuscripts we watched very closely for parochialism, often asking our author to supply information from Japan, the less developed countries, and the Soviet bloc. Language and political barriers sometimes defeated us; I know of no one who feels the set succeeds completely in its attempt to be international.

Mr. Couch has written, of course, more than a guide to better encyclopaedias. He believes that our educational system and intellectual life are in a bad way and urges action now. Though quite correct in much of what he says, Mr. Couch overstates his case and makes impractical proposals. *The Human Potential*, furthermore, is abominably written and organized—any editor could shorten it by a hundred pages.

Most good colleges require undergraduates to follow some sort of general program. At Columbia, for example, where I took my degree, we read (among others) the Book of Job, *Don Quixote*, Galileo, Newton, and Ruth Benedict. We took special introductory courses in music and art, two years of laboratory science, a foreign language, plus English composition. The administration discouraged students from early specialization and insisted that top scholars teach at least one college course each year. This program began at Columbia during the Twenties and continues to this day. It goes without saying that such undergraduate curricula vary in quality from one school to another. Even so, I find it hard to believe that no college today provides its students with a truly integrated understanding of the great questions.

After suggesting that colleges offer little general education, Mr. Couch goes on to claim that "encyclopaedias as sources of information are grossly inadequate. And *all other sources* are scattered and practically impossible for the layman to use" (p. 44, italics mine). This is utter nonsense. An encyclopaedia is a general reference work intended for use in the home;

most people buy one for their children. In all but the most remote areas there exists a public library with books selected for the layman and personnel trained to help. Thousands of classic and elementary texts may be purchased paperbound. Series such as the Life Science Library provide readable accurate information. The curious may begin with the encyclopaedia, but need not stop there.

Mr. Couch proposes an institute for promotion of general education located in a university town, presumably for access to a good library and college faculty. But since he would found this institute on the premise that the colleges have failed, I cannot predict for it a hearty welcome; people would call Mr. Couch an impertinent busybody. He is not that, of course, but simply a man who underestimates the human potential for nastiness and envy.

Once firmly established, the institute would plan and compile a new encyclopaedia. Mr. Couch, who directed *Collier's* for several years, must know very well what such an undertaking would involve. He offers no cost estimate, a prudent course under the circumstances. With experienced personnel and a complete publishing facility, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. spent seven years and some $30 million on their new edition. An institute starting from scratch would surely take longer and spend more.

Though his proposed institute and encyclopaedia will probably never move beyond the pages of *The Human Potential*, Mr. Couch does have something to say. I learned a great deal from his account of the "theories or myths" that underlie much academic work. The pages on Robert Hutchins are both intelligent and gracious. Many passages dealing with *Encyclopaedia Britannica* articles hit home. Perhaps as a series of short articles, the best material from this book might reach a wide audience.

# Couch on McLuhan

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL: AN ESSAY ON ITS CULTIVATION, by William T. Couch. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1974. $9.75. Reviewed by **Frederick D. Wilhelmsen**

MR. WILLIAM T. COUCH, the distinguished encyclopaedist and university press editor, advances a venerable thesis which today appears novel precisely because of its antiquity. Mr. Couch would have us return to the encyclopaedia. Were I to sum up Mr. Couch's thesis in a few words, knowing all the while that a summation cannot do justice to the rich tonality with which the thesis is orchestrated, I would nonetheless nail down the argument as follows:

Increased technological specialization in our industrial society has heightened rather than lessened the need for general education, without which society cannot talk to itself across the fences that scientific and academic differentiation have built. Even more, the specialist himself must perforce have at hand through the matrix of a general education the tools which will enable him to come to terms with issues which transcend his own discipline. Universities largely have failed to supply this need for a general education, and the need can be filled only by competently executed encyclopaedias. But the encyclopaedias available today, despite excellencies found in them, have failed. Therefore we need a new encyclopaedia, the work principally of scholars who know how to generalize their disciplines and thus lay before the public that treasury of wisdom which constitutes the inheritance of our common civilization. Mr. Couch is looking for what the French call "high vulgarization," which is far tougher and more exacting than specialist jargons.

Mr. Couch attempts to demonstrate his thesis by illustrating the failure of going attempts to supply this need. The nerve center of his thinking involves a rejection of the positivists' denial of absolutes, and an affirmation of a need to return to philosophical orthodoxy (minimal, at least), which would permit common agreement on certain basic issues that have engaged the attention of civilized men. Couch's defense and use of the principle of contradiction is illustrative of his method. The denial of the principle involves its very exercise, and therefore a respect for consistency is something which the generally educated man can demand in his evaluation of any philosophical, political, or scientific system.

The editor of *The University Bookman*, in putting together this symposium, asked me to concentrate on the two chapters (actually the materials spill over into a third) in which Couch comments on the work of Dr.

Marshall McLuhan. I presume that I was asked to take on this pleasant task because of my interest in McLuhan's work and my brief association with him at the Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.

I confess that I had to read and reread the chapters several times in order to get the sense of their role within Couch's book. A first reading by someone inattentive to the author's overarching thesis looks like the usual attack on McLuhan which we have come to expect in recent years. The idol of the mass media in the last decade today is taking the full brunt of the revenge wrought upon him for having been popular in circles considered less than respectable by the academy.

But a deeper study of Mr. Couch's truly polemical chapters tells a different story. This is no ordinary attack on McLuhan or "McLuhanism." In fact, Couch regrets Fordham's loss for not being able to fulfill its contract with Marshall McLuhan. "Any university that makes McLuhan's talk available to its students is, we can be sure, making a treasure beyond monetary estimate available to them." Couch's critique of McLuhan cuts more incisively than the conventional anti-McLuhan tract. Under electric conditions, according to Professor McLuhan, the whole of man's history is rendered simultaneously present to the contemporary age. That "whole" resonates in such fashion that each age acts and reacts on all ages. (We can detect here the influence of T. S. Eliot.) The return to an acoustic space and to an aural and tactile bias in the senses reduces the book to simply one among many media of communication. Understanding the past is totally dependent upon understanding the present and this requires keeping an ear to the ground, not an eye to the page. But if the book loses the preeminence it exercised since the invention of movable type, then an encyclopaedia simply cannot enjoy the privileged role in general education claimed for it by Mr. Couch.

IN ORDER to hammer home his contention, Couch must destroy a number of McLuhan's central positions. I shall comment on the more significant of these positions and Couch's reaction to them, but I shall comment in a very linear and hence un-McLuhanish fashion:

1. McLuhan has used Bishop Berkeley to buttress his contention that "tactility" is an "interplay among the senses." This thesis (McLuhan would call it a "probe") is advanced in both *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media.* Couch quotes Berkeley to the effect that "The *two distinct provinces of sight and touch* [Couch's, not Berkeley's, emphasis] should be considered apart, and as if their objects had no intercourse, no matter of relation to one another, in point of distance or position." This text and others cited by the author do seem to establish that McLuhan has misread Berkeley. But Couch's apparent endorsement of Berkeley against McLuhan leads him into deeper waters and some trouble: he must face Aristotle on this issue.

And the facts meditated on by the Stagirite tend to buttress McLuhan's insight if not his scholarship. Berkeley writes, again quoted by Couch, "In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must be these also, to wit, in the mind and nowhere else."

*Sed contra:* Aristotle pointed out that it is precisely extension, figure, and the like that *can be*—in fact *are*—abstracted from sense qualities and understood by the mind without adverting to any sensible matter in which they might exist. This abstractive act lies at the very foundation of mathematics: i.e., the mathematician can consider a triangle and its properties without adverting to a triangular pie; in fact if he does the latter he will not be doing geometry but eating the pie. A mark of mathematical maturity is the capacity to consider extension and its relationships in abstraction from what McLuhan calls a "unified field of sensation." But, added Aristotle (and St. Thomas Aquinas after him), although extended quantity and their relationships *can be thought of* apart from a unified sensorial matrix (qualitative), they *cannot exist* in the real apart from some concrete material thing. Quantity is the first accident of a material substance and sense qualities follow on the quantified substance: e.g., I can think of a box-shaped figure without thinking it as colored but I cannot think any color without thinking it as being in this or that colored qnantified thing. This peculiar relationship between quantity and sensible qualities permitted the divorce of the former from the latter and the Cartesian rationalist universe of the modern age. And Marshall McLuhan has certainly caught the meaning of *that* revolution: he calls it the "fragmentation" of man's sense life and the divorce of the visual sense (heavily important in mathematics) from tactility. Couch does not have to agree with Aristotle on this issue but he ought to be aware as a good generalist that Berkeley and Aristotle contradict one another. Both could be wrong, of course, but both cannot be right.

McLuhan's insistence that number, on the contrary, is linked to touch is condemned by Couch as "oracular." *But all mathematical illiterates count with their fingers*! There is nothing particularly "oracular" about that. We encounter here one of those instances where McLuhan's powers of observation, which are often truly uncanny, are not buttressed by the authors he cites in his own defense. Couch also seems to think that McLuhan totally divorces sight from tactility. But the rods/cones relationship in sight is such that whereas perspective and motion are abstractly visual, the perception of color is highly tactile. The blind can feel colors, as Harley Parker, an associate of McLuhan, has pointed out. The perception of colors is a "rubbing together" process in the eye.

2. McLuhan insists that a "new medium [technology] is never an addition to an old one" and Couch demurs. Both men agree that there often are "gradual developments within any one technology" but Couch insists further

that every new technology uses "materials and processes from old technologies" and *on those grounds* denies any sharp discontinuity between different technologies. Even more, Couch insists that every technology is "an addition to or subsumption of that which previously existed." Couch, who is an evolutionist, opts for a progressivist or evolutionary, hence linear, theory of technological history. He denies McLuhan's contention that history is often discontinuous, lacking in "links" between old and new.

Let us test this contention of Couch by an example I have used before: the difference between the steamship and the sailing vessel. (The example is mine, not Dr. McLuhan's). There is a carryover from sail to steam in the sense that both modes of sea transportation involve hulls, keels, rudders, etc. But this is not the point: the principles of motor power are cleanly distinct from those of sail power. Motor power did not emerge from sail power as does a butterfly from a cocoon. We simply cannot deduce this new technology from the old one. The same truth applies to McLuhan's insistence that electronic technology is not potentially preexistent in mechanical technology. Both exist side by side in our contemporary world; each buttresses the other peripherally but both represent distinct sets of ontological principles in their operation and in their being. Technological breakthroughs are not the consequence of drawing the new out of the old as though the new preexisted in the old in an inchoate state. Braces and halyards lift and move sails. The nature of the brace forms part of the Jarvis brace winch, but the Jarvis brace winch is not included in a simple brace. This handy little invention needed a man—namely Captain Jarvis—who had the wit to combine judgments about barrels with judgments about rotating barrels and both with judgments about braces that lift and move sails around rotating barrels moved either by steam power or manually. This happy synthesis is novel, creative, and hence human. This invention could never have been reasoned to or deduced by simply meditating on possibilities presumed to be inherent in the three distinct elements going into the invention *as distinct*, as isolated. Technological breakthrough is integration not differentiation, synthesis not analysis. Or as Hilaire Belloc once put it: the bowline had no ancestor; it was simply made up out of some sailor's head: "Note you, that forming fours is something which must have been invented at one go."

3. Couch's evolutionary theory of technology, like all evolutionary theory, is built upon a high visual bias that seeks "connections" in everything and between everything. This accounts for his objection to McLuhan's teaching that media are "extensions" of man. Couch tells us that "if we begin by imagining they [media] are literally so, we simply deceive ourselves." This self-deceit is "to pile metaphor on metaphor." It is commonplace "McLuhanism" that if I phone New York from Los Angeles I am in New York, but I am not "connected" to New York (the good or bad "connection" is in the

phone, not in me. And this too is a metaphor. If I am not in New York, then the man on the other end of the line simply does not hear my voice. Although McLuhan does not use the phrase "literally" I think it apposite to qualify the teaching to read: I am *literally* in New York, but *not metaphorically*. The "metaphorical" man is what Couch is talking about, whereas McLuhan (he might not agree with me) is talking about the "literal" man. I *am* at the other end of the telephone *being heard* but my *being there* cannot be expressed metaphorically, only metaphysically. It is in this sense that electronic conditions have put man everywhere in a "space" without peripheries, better yet, in a space whose center is its very peripheries. Couch complains that McLuhan thus attributes to man attributes hitherto restricted to God. "But," as I once heard McLuhan answer the same question when put to him by a student, "this is to suggest that man approaches the condition of the angels. God has a few more tricks up His sleeve." McLuhan calls electronic man "discarnate man" and his recent work, not discussed by Couch, suggests that McLuhan is not at all happy with a man who lives—literally—outside of his body. The genius of McLuhan—nobody else has seen this, to my knowledge—here consists in his having spotted the sinister danger to an incarnated religion—Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity—lived by men who are disembodied, thanks to their own technology.

COUCH'S SHOCK at McLuhan's insistence on discontinuity and a lack of connectedness in things (as suggested, connections are visual) is converted into mystification when he confronts modern science where apparently there are no "connections" at all. William Couch thinks that philosophy has not come to terms successfully with this natural "mystery." McLuhan, borrowing a term from physics, speaks of "interfacing" and likes to say that "the interval is where the action is." We truly live in a discontinuous world and I—as a Thomistic philosopher—tend to think that interfacing is ultimately Aquinas' *esse* as composing or synthesizing act. In any event, McLuhan's description of the real is no more "oracular" than is Werner Heisenberg, who confesses himself to be astonished at the lack of "connectedness" in the subatomic world.

But this new world of ours, in which nature itself becomes an art form, according to McLuhan is no happy hunting ground or gnostic paradise. When McLuhan wrote that "the computer . . . promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity," he certainly opened himself to attack by his critics, Couch here included. "I am forced to wonder, does McLuhan really believe what he says?" Mid-McLuhan might have believed it but I gravely doubt whether late-McLuhan does. The meliorist tone encountered, if but rarely, in *Understanding Media* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, seems to be totally absent from McLuhan's more recent work.

4. Mr. Couch objects to Professor McLuhan's thesis that "specialist technologies detribalize. The nonspecialist electric technology retribalizes." Couch tells us: "This *is* news. Why does McLuhan say this? He cannot possibly be unaware that 'electric technology' . . . is among the most highly specialized of all disciplines that are cultivated today, and there is no evidence whatsoever that it will have tribalizing effects." I am reminded of that man who turned to G. K. Chesterton at a banquet and whispered: "But you dont *really* believe all that stuff you wrote in *Orthodoxy*, do you?" Couch does two things here which, in this instance at least, *are* typical of anti-McLuhanism:

A. Couch confuses causes with effects. What tribalizes and decentralizes and defuses is not the hardware skills going into electronics but the *effects* that the hardware produces culturally. McLuhan looks to causes *as producing effects*. Generally he is not interested in the formal structure of causes as such. His game lies elsewhere, not in what or who makes a rifle a rifle but in what does the rifle do to the animal?

B. And Couch, altogether despite his obvious intelligence and learning, is simply blind on the business of tribalization and retribalization. "There is no evidence," he pontificates—and the evidence is everywhere: the hippie youth tribe; the Black tribe; the Indian tribe (think of Wounded Knee); the Chicano tribe. The country is torn to pieces by tribes. And what about the older tribes that have come back: the Breton tribe that today demands independence from France after having been dormant for 500 years; the recrudescence of Basque and Catalan separatism in both France and Spain; the last plot to steal the Stone of Scone by Scottish nationalists; the violent retribalizing of Ireland; the return of the tribes in Africa (they come back with the drums—beating today their message on radio); the heating up of Quebeçois French separatism in Canada? The signs that the old-fashioned national state, built around the citizen and democracy, is collapsing everywhere are all around us. None of this could have happened without electric conditions, most especially radio and television. The last tribal manifestation of Breton nationalists took place in north Italy. Electric conditions permit instant identification with one's own wheresoever they might be. As McLuhan might put it, the old spatial boundaries, today dead as a cultural and technical *ground* of society, have come back as aesthetic *figures* retrieved from the past. (Couch might look to some of Professor McLuhan's more recent work on figure-ground relationships.) We need only think of the pullulation of occultist sects on Sunset Boulevard. Even the Druids get TV time nowadays. The citizen in the old-fashioned sense of the term is so obsolete that he too will come back on the electric screen as an aesthetic figure, as a tribesman, another alternative lifestyle within a world that truly does resemble Poe's maelstrom. McLuhan offers a survival kit not a hymn book.

5. William Couch's most profound disagreement with Marshall McLuhan centers around the role of the Word, the Name. If McLuhan is right that media of communication shape cultures, that the *word*, principally the spoken word, is the principal human medium of communication; if there is magic in the word; if, further, McLuhan is right in his insistence that words are not neutral instruments for the communication of "ideas" but that "ideas" themselves are shaped in the words we use; if, on the contrary, Couch is correct in his insistence that Cratylus' teaching on the preeminence of the word is wrong and Socrates' teaching is correct: i.e., that words are subsequent to intellection and therefore neutral tools for communication, then it follows that the reader must make a decision. Both cannot be right on this issue. Couch's constant appeal to the principle of contradiction must be taken seriously here. If it be true that we are returning to a basically *spoken* culture—possibly even a barbarian culture in which everything is spoken out loud—then it does behoove us to note that Mr. Couch's plea for general education based on the encyclopaedia could be at best only a bandage covering the wounds of alienation.

But let us move to Mr. Couch's argument. The author locates the *status quaestionis* in the famous medieval debate between nominalists and realists. "The nominalist position insisted that universals were reducible to the words which themselves designated the so-called universals, so-called because nominalists held that ultimately there were no universals." Couch argues, following Socrates, that "the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names."

But would Coca-Cola, if called "Schlunk" be—better yet intend, signify —the same thing? How well would it sell? Couch objects to "modes of communication" determining "modes of cultures." Couch recurs to evolutionary theory and quotes Rousseau in his favor: "If men need speech to learn to think, they must have stood in much greater need of the art of thinking, to be able to invent that of speaking." But Couch knows his Aristotle better than Rousseau ever did and hence Couch ought to know that causes can cause one another: intelligibility is not reduced to media of communication but media determine intelligibility to be as it is. Were it otherwise, a translation would equal the original. Genuflecting in church is not principally a sign of a preexistent reverence but a way of making a man reverent.

In a few paragraphs the extremely crucial issue raised by Mr. Couch cannot be settled, but it does seem fair to point out that Couch is totally innocent of the rich tradition in Christian theology on the preeminence of the word—the Word spoken. The medieval rhetorical and theological tradition saw the world as a tissue of words spoken by God through His Word: The Son of God. The nominalist-realist controversy had to do with the relation of words to concepts, not of words to things, not of *dicere* to *esse*. But

millions of us proclaim out loud on Sunday (or did until recently): "In the beginning was the Word," and we go on to affirm that "The Word was with God and the Word was God." Now the Greek *logos* is that original "gathering together of the real" which is *heard*. This is as old as Heraclitus. Because "heard," the *logos* which "togethers" became subsequently the "word" itself. Aristotle spotted this when he said that synthesis in grammar is prior to analysis. But the Christian use of *logos* in St. John's magnificent prologue to his Gospel places the Word as the very utterance of the Father, God—as *arche*. (The formula is Athanasian.) Therefore the older rhetorical tradition spoke of the universe of things as being composed of subsisting words, each one of which *spoke* the Eternal Word in whom they were created. This is the original sense of "The Book of Nature." Richard of St. Victor taught that "to be a person" is "to be named," even "to be a name."

CONTEMPORARY psychology is aware of this preeminence of the word in human life. Pedro Lain Entralgo has traced the history of the curative or therapeutic function of the word in medicine. The word heals. Now the meaning or intelligibility—Couch, Socrates, and Rousseau to the contrary —is not indifferent to the symbolic matrix in which it is both incarnated and discovered *and formally determined* (the phantasm specifies intelligible content, according to Aquinas). All meaning or significance is formally and strictly *caused by* (*causa formalis*) man's media of communication which thus structure his culture. A proposal for education that not only ignores these truths but positively denies them cannot yield that community of communication that William Couch so earnestly desires. Show me what a man is ignorant of —Marshall McLuhan said somewhere—and I will be able to understand what he knows. What our educational establishment is ignorant about, does not want to hear about, is even frightened of, is any education that seriously addresses itself to modes of communication, to media—be they mass media or any other kind of media. I conclude, therefore, by expressing my conviction that I remain unconvinced by Mr. Couch and that I decidedly prefer Professor McLuhan's road to illuminating the darkness in which we live.

But once having expressed my preference, I would like to close these polemical pages by again congratulating Mr. Couch for having written one of the few significant books on general education that has been published in recent years. Like Belloc's knot, *The Human Potential* came forth from nothing but the fertility of William T. Couch's mind. It bespeaks fertility: intelligence: novelty: in a word, the author's book is a Word. And I thank him for it.