Robert McClintock
6 Frankfurt am Main 90
Robert Mayer Strasse 17
5/15/75

Patrick Suppes, President
National Academy of Education
Ventura Hall
Stanford University
Stanford, California

Dear President Suppes:

During the past few months I have been becoming familiar with the new edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica and reflecting on its value as an educative instrument. These reflections are drawing me deeper and deeper into a confrontation with present-day pedagogical possibilities. This has been most fruitful for me, and whereas you wanted me to write an essay, I have begun to want to write a book. What follows -- I apologize for its unseemly length -- should perhaps be thought of less as a letter and more as a progress report and project proposal, in which I outline the book I want to write and explain its potential significance.

Britannica 15 is a big set of tomes and there are many particular points to consider in reflecting on its value as an educative instrument -- I'm well along in considering a variety of these particulars. But the question I have found most fascinating and productive is simply -- How good is the theory of general education embodied in Britannica 15? To answer this question fairly, I have found it necessary to think through the more fundamental question -- What should the character and purpose of a good general education in the present-day world be, and how might such an education be imparted through an encyclopedia? The book I want to write will attempt an answer to this question, and in the course of doing so will provide a fundamental critique of the new Britannica. What I have in mind is a three-part essay, which I am tentatively calling Man and Judgment: Reflections on the Nature and Value of an Educative Encyclopedia. My hope is to write a book that will be responsively read, to imbue it with point and authority, to provoke with it a more fruitful pedagogical debate. In what follows, I sketch my ideas for this essay, with the hope that you will find them to be a suitable expansion of my undertaking for the Academy.

I call the first part "The Function of Judgment: Reflections on the Idea of an Encyclopedic Education," and in it I want to place the educative effort of Britannica 15 in the educational tradition that goes back to the early Greeks. An encyclopedic education, enkyklios paideia, has been considered the education suitable for free men, for men who will act, for better or for worse, in public and in private, in accordance with their considered personal judgment. In an opening chapter, I want to survey this tradition at its best, giving a lively yet authoritative summation of the educational ideal that has given rise to the tradition. As Homer put it in the Iliad, the aim of Achilles'

education, which was in the context of the time an encyclopedic education, was to learn to act effectively and to speak wisely, and in the endless transformations that the encyclopedic education has gone through since then, the raison d'etre for it has remained the imperative that the autonomous person needs to prepare himself as well as possible to judge intelligently his words and deeds in all matters affecting his well being. Insofar as the person lacks such power of judgment, he is not autonomous, for insofar as he cannot judge for himself, he is dependent on the judgment of others. The tradition of encyclopedic education has always worked through a many-sided body of learning because the demands on judgment that life puts to the autonomous person are many-sided. As the problems of life change, the circle of studies has continually changed, but it has always remained broad, and be it according to Plato or Aristotle, Cicero or Seneca, Augustine or Aquinas, Montaigne or Erasmus, Bacon or Comenius, Diderot or Rousseau, Kant or Hegel, Newman or Arnold, Spencer or Dewey, the ultimate aim of acquiring a range of knowledge is the formation of the power of judgment by which one must live: knowledge is the means, the conduct of life the end.

Only in the degenerated form of an encyclopedic education has the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge for its own sake become the end, and historically the waxing of such a purpose has been one of the surest signs of cultural sterility. In a second chapter, I want to examine the tendency of enkyklios paideia to degenerate into a quest for knowledge for its own sake, and to pay, in this context, particular attention to Britannica 15, for in it the editors have not dealt effectively with the problem of judgment. At best, they have simply made the current body of knowledge accessible to the curious reader, although I have, on testing the undertaking, some grave doubts about how accessible the body of knowledge will actually prove to be when the curious reader sits down to appropriate it according to the program put before him. But that is another issue. In defense of their purpose, and not their execution of it, the Britannica editors might well point out that there are serious questions, long-ago raised by the profoundest theorists of encyclopedic education, whether judgment can be taught. It can well be argued that no educative agency, be it an encyclopedia or a university, should venture to address the problem of judgment directly, that in doing so the educator would, on a grand scale, be converting knowledge into dogma.

In a third chapter, I want to take this problem up with the hope of developing the basis for an alternative to the program of general education embodied in Britannica 15. My argument will develop along the following lines. Within the tradition of encyclopedic education, the question whether judgment can be taught has been much discussed, with the usual conclusion that substantively judgment is always situational, and therefore the most that can be taught is an effective preparation for making one's continuous series of concrete judgments, which are one's course of life. Many have argued that therefore a comprehensive presentation of the body of knowledge in the manner of Britannica 15 is the best possible preparation for making such judgments. My intention is to argue, in part through historical interpretation and in part through theoretical reflection, that although judgment cannot be taught, it can be informed. The principle, I shall contend, by which judgment is

informed is that of speaking to the questions. By speaking to the questions, I mean something fundamentally different from giving pat, dogmatic answers to them. When one speaks to the questions of another, one leaves the question open -- it is his question about which he must decide. Instead of answering it, one speaks to it and in doing so one expands and deepens it by explaining what values one finds at stake in the question, by indicating what areas of comprehension one thinks pertinent to making up one's mind about the question, by suggesting what skills may be useful in translating into action possible answers to the questions. Such discourse fully respects the questioner's autonomy: one listens freely and attentively to someone so gifted with the ability to speak to one's questions, for it creates dialogue, not dogma. My contention will be that the art of devising an effectively educative encyclopedia at any historic juncture consists in anticipating accurately the questions that the man who would judge wisely can and should be asking and in finding the authorities who can best speak to those questions in an open manner.

With this contention, I come to the second part of Man and Judgment, which I anticipate calling "The Formation of Judgement: Reflections on the Possibility of an Educative Encyclopedia." In this section, I want to go beyond the simple observation that Britannica 15 fails to speak to the questions. Perhaps it does: one can only judge by specifying what the questions are that should be spoken to. In this section, I want to go as far as I can in an attempt to work out what these are, and even more importantly, to develop a method for putting the questions and justifying them as the ones of true importance. Ultimately, in practice, if a really good educative encyclopedia is to be developed, many well-informed people with diverse expert competencies should come together to work out a common understanding of the questions to which an educative encyclopedia should try to speak. What I want to do is to provoke such a larger effort, by venturing a singlehanded start and by trying to develop a rationale of questioning that would prove helpful in the larger effort.

Consequently, I would start the section with a chapter on the general principles by which one can determine what questions should be spoken to. The first principle is that one begins not with the body of knowledge -- what questions in it are currently most important -- but with the reader -- who is the reader whose questions are to be spoken to in an educative encyclopedia. Let us accept the conception used in Britannica 15, the reader is the intelligent general reader who can be expected to follow a clear, non-technical presentation of any subject. Such a reader could conceivably ask an infinite array of questions. To find which should be spoken to, one should look first to the problem of judgment. Each particular reader, no matter how nearly he approximates a perfect incarnation of the "general reader," will have a wealth of particular judgments to make -- not all of these can be spoken to in an encyclopedia designed to provoke general education in the general reader. But many of the judgments he will have to make concern general problems of judgment, pertaining either to such basic experience that each person encounters them or to such comprehensive experience that nearly all people are affected by them. And thus the basic criterion can be stated so: the questions that should be ~~spoken to~~ addressed in an educative encyclopedia are those that underly the formation of intelligent judgment with respect

to all matters of human action, that have effects which are significant for the quality of life people lead, and are general, either in the sense that they are so characteristically human that close to each person singly experiences them, or that they are of such comprehensiveness that nearly all people are touched together by their effects.

With this principle, I would then try to work out as best I can the circle of questions that the ideal reader of an ideally educative encyclopedia would or should be asking. I expect the Britannica 15 to be immensely helpful in this, in particular because it excels in the comprehensiveness by which it deals with the phenomena comprehensible to contemporary thought. My plan is to write a series of chapters, each devoted respectively to one of the ten parts in the system of knowledge in Britannica 15: "Matter and energy," "The earth," "Life on earth," "Human life," "Human society," "Art," "Technology," "Religion," "The history of mankind," and "The branches of knowledge." In each chapter I would reflect on what human actions pertinent to the domain of knowledge are having effects on the quality of life that are significant and that are general by virtue of their affecting either each or all. My assumption is that the free man, the autonomous person, the ideal reader, will want to make himself capable of forming a considered, personal judgment about the course that should be taken in these matters of generally significant action and that he will want to prepare himself to give some effect to his judgment in these areas by means of personal deed or public utterance. To develop such an active judgment, a spectrum of questions to which authorities could speak would occur to the ideal reader.

Imagine that the ideal reader has before him, not the assembled articles in the Britannica's division on"Atoms," but rather the assembled authorities who contributed the articles in this section. I find it highly improbable that the questioning of these authorities by the ideal reader would unfold according to the outline of knowledge offered by the editors of Britannica 15: "Who is the expert on the atomic nucleus? Ah, would you tell me all about it please?" I find the ideal reader in this situation putting something much more difficult to the assembled experts, something like this:

> I am aware that what is done in atomic physics is at once promising and portentous: It has opened vast sources of energy, both constructive and destructive. I am aware that it is one of the most subtle and costly fields of scientific research, dependent for its existence, and, notwithstanding the imponderables of scientific advance, perhaps for its direction, on public support through governments, foundations, and businesses. I realize that through its applications it has markedly influenced my life and the lives of my fellows, and I believe that as a member of the public that supports it and as a person materially affected by it, I am responsible for seeing that the proper support is provided, for understanding as best I can the research alternatives, their potential consequences, good and bad, and the means, if any, of intelligently controlling those consequences. Being an autonomous person, aspiring to make responsible judgments about the matters that affect me, I am going to try to make up my mind about how nuclear physics should

be supported, directed, and applied in the contemporary world. I don't want you to tell me what to conclude in this matter, but I would like you to speak as fully as you can to several questions that I feel are important if I am to inform my judgment on it effectively. First, what various values are at stake in considering the support, direction, and application of nuclear physics? Second, what should I comprehend about the subject and its applications in order to understand the actual alternatives? And third, what skills are accessible to me, an intelligent, concerned layman, that may help me give effect to the views I shall form?

Such questions, such real questions pertaining to actual problems of judgment, will, when spoken to, generate a powerfully educative encyclopedia. What I want to do in these chapters is to work my way through the system of knowledge in Britannica 15, generating fifty to a hundred such sets of questions; and in doing so, I want not only to state the questions, but to draw together as best I can an indication of what material there is at hand that does in fact speak to them. Were one to have to do this in a vacuum, it would be totally unfeasible, but it need not be done in one, for there are significant helps at hand. Britannica 15, itself, undoubtedly will be a great aid in finding material that speaks to the questions I put -- the real critique of its value as an educative instrument will unfold in the effort to find material that speaks to such questions. And as I have looked into recent "educative encyclopedias," I have found in addition to Britannica 15, two major efforts that are accessible to me linguistically -- l'Encyclopédie de la Pléiade and Rowohlts Deutsche Encyclopädie.

Together, these three encyclopedias offer very different responses to what appears to be a widely felt, contemporary desire to revive the educative function of the encyclopedia, and in an effort to identify the available material that speaks to the questions the ideal reader should be putting, they promise to complement each other well. Whereas the Britannica 15 is an attempt to adapt the alphabetical reference encyclopedia to educative purposes, which excels in the comprehensiveness of its coverage of knowledge, the Pléiade reverts to a thematic organization, substantially sacrificing the customary reference function in order to increase thematic integrity; it excels, so far as my experience with it goes, in making accessible to the general reader a comprehension of the intellectual processes that have given rise to the current system of knowledge. And whereas the Pléiade, like Britannica 15, deals largely with knowledge, rather than judgment, the Rowohlt makes use of paperback publishing technology to create an encyclopedic selection of books, in which the idea of reference is largely abandoned in an effort to speak provocatively to some of the questions a general reader will be asking in trying to interpret the contemporary world; it excels as a preliminary effort to inform the judgment of the general reader in a wide range of matters. Working with these previous efforts, I think I can show that a stimulating system of questions, which the general reader should want to have spoken to, can be generated, and that at least to some degree there exists a significant body of material that does indeed speak to these questions. In doing this my purpose will not be to weigh the respective virtues and vices of Britanica 15, the Pléiade, and the Rowohlt, although in the course of the argument, such comparative evaluation

will in effect be made. Instead, my prime purpose will be to work out and test the principles that I think should underly the editing of a truly educative, contemporary encyclopedia, one that if brought into being would be quite different from any of these three.

This last conditional clause, "that if brought into being. . .," brings me to the third section of the undertaking, "The Future of Judgment: Reflections on the Public Significance of an Educative Encyclopedia." In this section, through two chapters, I want to argue that it is of great pedagogical and political importance that such an encyclopedia be developed. In these chapters, I want to come out strongly against the political and pedagogical fatalism that has gripped us. Skeptics will argue that the encyclopedic education and the educative encyclopedia, for which I yearn, have ceased to be possible. They will intone the cliche that in the past few centuries knowledge has grown so much that no person can grasp all within it that is pertinent to his problems of judgment. Further, they will argue that the scale of action has reached such a plane of complexity that no person can hope to make a considered personal judgment about the matters that affect him. In addition, they will observe that it is most dangerous to suggest to the individual that he can and should judge of the most important matters for himself. In short, they will hold that the general reader I have postulated has become neither possible nor desirable, and that misguided efforts to bring him into being will only create more trouble in a world that has trouble enough.

Pedagogically, the problem is whether the encyclopedic ideal can be revived and whether anything significant will be achieved in doing so. It is true that we have allowed the encyclopedia to fall into decay and an encyclopedic education, in its best sense, is no longer available. But that something does not exist is not adequate proof that it cannot exist. Whether an encyclopedic education can be revived is problematic, and we will have a much better sense of the possibilities and difficulties after the effort outlined in the previous section has been made: the only way to test the proposition that an encyclopedic education is impossible is to try to revive it and to fail repeatedly. But the other part of the question -- what would be the significance of success in this attempt? -- is here more important. In two chapters, I shall seek to demonstrate, through historical interpretation and theoretical reflection, propositions that I can here state only as a credo: the principle pedagogical problem is that an effective encyclopedic education is unavailable, and the principle political problem is that citizens, whose judgment has been formed through an encyclopedic education, are lacking in the public.

The unavailability of an encyclopedic education is the principle pedagogical problem in the most serious sense, in the sense that it is the principium, the source, from which all the other problems stem. Our whole system of education is decaying, rotting away, first here, then there, because pedagogical skepticism has become the dominant mood of nearly everyone concerned. Teachers have lost faith in their instructional authority, students feel no personal commitment to a process the humane worth of which they do not experience, the diverse publics have become willing to support educational institutions only

for other reasons -- community pride, class snobbery, commercial interest, national defense, and so on. What is the source of this pedagogical skepticism? It is not disillusionment over a poor performance on the elementary level: Measured against ideal expectations, the performance has always been poor, and comparatively the performance on the elementary level, and all the other levels as well, has been significantly higher in recent decades than ever before. In recent decades, something more complicated and subtle has eroded general confidence in the system, namely the spreading realization that at the top the educative encyclopedia is missing. Its lack is the source of our pedagogical skepticism: without it we experience all the rest as something that ultimately lacks a telos. When present among men, the educative encyclopedia is invariably a matter for the few -- although open to all it is not mastered by many. But the mastery of an encyclopedic education by a few is crucial to everyone -- those who master it become the exemplars, the publically visible repositories of intrinsic cultural authority, who manifest in the quality of their words and deeds a demonstration that an education worthy of free men is attainable. All pedagogical authority ultimately derives from their exemplary presence in the public. Men are emulatory creatures -- without the complete education of a few as visible evidence of what can be attained, the will to attain an ever-more complete, partial education in the many disappears. Pedagogical skepticism is neither more nor less than the conclusion, drawn by us all on encountering around us no persons who seem capable of comprehensive, informed, considered judgment on the range of questions relevant in a full, present-day life, that a complete formation of judgment is a futile goal and that the efforts leading towards it are ultimately without purpose. When wisdom and vision seem unattainable, people rightly become skeptical of the institutions whose highest historic function has been the cultivation of these qualities. Thus, the commitment to popular education is faltering because the educated elite is faltering in the populace. The reform, invigoration, and extension of educative effort on every level depends finally on recreating an effectively educative encyclopedia, and when an effectively educative encyclopedia is recreated and spread through the public, when men of profound, considered, and informed judgment manifest themselves within the public, then the reform, invigoration, and extension of educative effort on every level will irresistably follow. Such is my pedagogical conviction.

If we need an educative encyclopedia to revive our system of education, we need it even more to revive our polity. There is an intrinsic connection between the liberal tradition in education and the liberal tradition in public affairs. And there is an intrinsic connection between the pedagogical skepticism sapping our educational institutions and a political skepticism eroding our polity. Insofar as people feel they do not have the capacity to judge intelligently of the issues influencing their lives, they do not feel they have anything significant to contribute to the resolution of public questions. When this is the case, liberal political institutions become meaningless: when they exist as they do in the West, they exist as vestigal organs that are no longer used for the purpose for which they originated. It accomplishes little in the face of misuses of these institutions to bemoan the vacuity of public deliberation on difficult issues, to decry

popular apathy, to deprecate the hucksterism of campaigning. These are but symptoms of the underlying political skepticism in both the public person and the private citizen -- both believe themselves incapable of putting forward informed, considered, personal judgments on the issues; further they believe no one capable of such judgments. In such a situation high standards of public discourse lose their meaning. At heart doubting that a liberal politics is either possible or prudent, both public persons and private citizens find it sensible to use public affairs as best they can to advance their personal interests and to employ experts in an ad hoc, self-perpetuating effort to keep a directionless process from collapsing from within. A vital liberalism will revive only when the conviction among the people revives that there are within the public, persons capable of intelligently judging the issues, that these can coherently articulate their judgments to their peers, and that therefore the liberal standards of political life perform a real function. Such persons will be found within the public only when an effective encyclopedic education is once again in operation. Therefore, the revival of a liberal politics depends on the revival of a liberal education, for persons endowed with a fully developed capacity for autonomous judgment will reappear in the public when an effective encyclopedic education has been revived. Then liberal political institutions would again be seen as truly functional and persons of independent judgment might begin to use them to bring long-ranged issues of great complexity into practical political focus. Hence, I believe that should an encyclopedic education be revived and have an effect in the public, it could initiate a period of immense historic innovation. Such is my political conviction.

In outline, then, the above sketches the book I should like to write. I am, frankly, surprised and somewhat frightened by it. Were someone to have suggested, eight months ago on my departure for Germany, that on the eve of my return I would be proposing such a project, I would have thought ~~them~~ mad. Sometimes when I consider what I am proposing, I wonder if I have spent too much time in leisured isolation here, away from the bracing criticism of colleagues and the mundane realities of a normal academic routine. But then I keep coming back to the thought that it all seems to hang together, that although not an easy project it is one that I believe can be done, and , most importantly, that it serves to bring together and give purpose to all the different things I've been working toward in recent years. Thus, transcending my misgivings, I find that Man and Judgment is a project in which I believe, in which I believe with real conviction. Hence I have decided to attempt it, and I should like to attempt it on behalf for the Academy if that is possible.

With a view to exploring the possibility of such sponsorship, I shall say something about how I foresee the project developing. The first part of the book, "The Function of Judgment," presents few difficulties. I am in control of the literature involved and plan this summer to draft much of this section in the form of the essay you originally commissioned me to write. Thus I expect to be able to fulfill your original commission within the space and time limits that we discussed. My only request with respect to it would be that at a minimum I be assured of the freedom to use a revision of it in the

larger book that I now contemplate. The last section, "The Future of Judgment," also presents few serious difficulties -- it involves writing two essays relating the ideal of an encyclopedic education to current problems in pedagogy and politics. I have a good general grasp of the controversial literatures involved and the relevant traditions of educational and political theory. Writing this section is basically a matter of several months spent in sustained concentration on composing the argument and expanding my command of the literature in accordance with the needs that appear as the argument unfolds.

So much for the easy parts: the middle section, "The Formation of Judgment," will constitute the bulk of the book and the bulk of the work. It is also the problematic section. What I propose to do is, as I have explained above, to work my way through the outline of knowledge offered in Britannica 15, articulating as best I can the significant, general problems of judgment before the ideal reader in each of these areas, stating the questions with respect to these problems that he should want to have spoken to, and assembling as much material as I can that speaks to these questions. The main pitfall in this endeavor is that it can become a never-ending undertaking, and to guard against that I plan to impose a fairly rigorous time-table on the work, at first devoting no more than a month of sustained concentration to each of the ten areas. Then I would have to take stock to see what had been accomplished and to decide where more work was needed. I might have to follow with another cycle of monthly periods of writing and research, but I want to hold the endeavor within such confines -- my purpose is not single-handedly to write an educative encyclopedia, but to demonstrate the need for one and the possibility of creating it.

Over-all, then, I conceive of writing the book I propose here as a two-year project running from this coming September. My financial situation is such that for the foreseeable future I shall either have to teach during summer sessions or find external research funding for a summer salary, and I should like very much to do the latter in order to devote as much concentration to the project as possible. Also, I should like to acquire sets of the Pleiade and the Rowohlt and certain other books that, as the project develops, appear central to it. Further, although I do not normally like to work with research assistants, in this case I anticipate their help being very fruitful in separating the wheat from chaff in the layman's literature pertinent to various questions. Finally, I expect that in working through the different areas the occasion for the productive use of consultants from particular fields will arise and will be important to achieving high quality in the results. Hence, I would ideally like to secure funding for the project over the two years roughly on the following level: $10,000 -- summer salary, 1976 and 1977, $20,000 -- employment of research assistants, $3,000 -- books, $3,000 -- consultants' fees, plus, inevitably, the Teachers College overhead charge. I realize that the Academy, itself, undoubtedly cannot provide such funding, but it is my hope that it could help find such funding, should it consider Man and Judgment worth encouraging.

Before closing, I should note that I have two substantive reasons for seeking sponsorship of this project by the Academy. First, in developing the crucial middle section, I should like to solicit help

from persons with diverse abilities, in articulating the major problems of judgment before the ideal reader. I think sponsorship by the Academy would facilitate my getting thoughtful help from persons whose ideas on these matters would be truly worth having, and getting the best possible assistance here is important to the success and quality of the project. Second, I hope that the finished work can have a substantial, constructive impact on current pedagogical discussions. Many of the positions presently attracting wide interest seem to me to beg the basic educational question. The fundamental problem of pedagogical judgment is to think through the human purpose of educative effort and to adapt praxis to the fulfillment of that purpose. Too much of what is being said about education currently is not grounded on considered, defensible judgments about the relation of pedagogical praxis to human purpose: too often one finds at the foundation of various positions, not reasoned judgments, but unreasoned, sentimental attachments, sentimental attachments to techniques of experimental psychology (Skinner et al.), to an a-theoretical, quantified empiricism (Jencks, Jensen, et al.) to neo-Marxian social dogma (Marcuse' et al.), to romantic anarchism (Illich et al.) to public schooling per se (a host of beleagured professionals), and to the idealization of childhood (Silberman, Kozol, Summerhill, and so on). There is much of value in each of these positions, but what seems strikingly lacking in them is a searching discussion of praxis in relation to purpose. My highest hope is that Man and Judgment will have an effect, not only through its internal argument that the formation of judgment ought to be the human purpose guiding pedagogical praxis, but further as an example of educational discourse in which the relation of praxis to human purpose is made inescapably articulate. To achieve such impact, it would greatly help, I believe, were the book to have support from the Academy, for such support would ensure that its argument, both in substance and in form, would be dealt with seriously.

Please accept my apologies for inflicting, unexpectedly, such a long letter on you. I hope it at least shows worthwhile progress in my critique of Britannica 15, and I would value greatly any comments you might have on the larger project or any suggestions you might have on how I should proceed in finding further support for it. I realize, however, that you have many demands on your time, and if this one should seem excessive, please ignore it.

With best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

Robert McClintock
Associate Professor of History
and Education