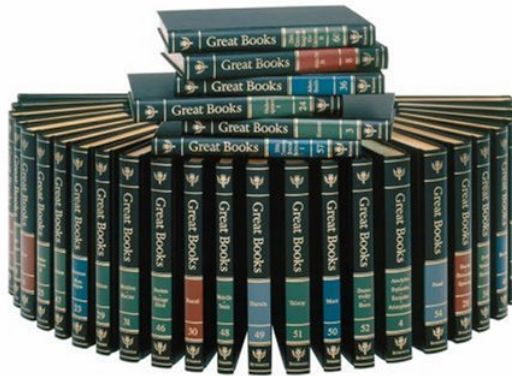
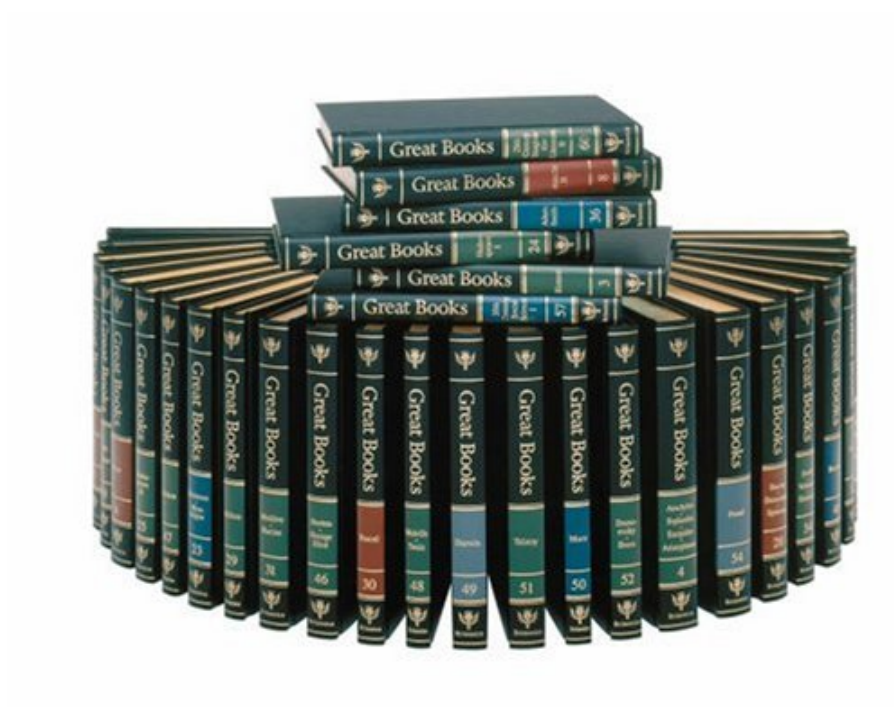


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Here's what you're buying....

By Hermogenes

Let's be honest about these books. The print is cramped, the translations are hideous, and the selections are indeed rooted in a view of Great Books and Great Ideas that, while still quite vibrant, is less robust than it was in 1955. But no one in full control of their senses would sit down and read from cover to cover the Dante, the Homer, the Aristotle found in this set.

All true. But none of that matters. What you are buying here is the first three volumes (especially volumes 2 & 3) and their attendant reference set. I've owned the set for 20 years and found it invaluable because of those three first volumes. Here's how they work:

Volume 1, The Great Conversation, is essentially an inspirational text centered on the importance of a broad Liberal Education, as set against other views of education. You may take or leave it. The treasure house is the next two volumes.

The Syntopicon (volumes 2-3 of the set) is an index of 100 fundamental concepts that built the Euromerican mind and cultural vision. To give you an idea, here is a sample of the Great Ideas:

Art, Beauty, Cause, Chance, Democracy, Desire, Emotion, Eternity, Family, God, Good and Evil, Government, Habit, Happiness, History, Immortality, Infinity, Justice, Labor, Language, Life and Death, Love, Mathematics, Matter, Memory, Oligarchy, Progress, Prophecy, Quantity, Religion, Rhetoric, Sin, Soul, State, Time, Truth. War and Peace, Wisdom.... you get the idea: Big Ideas.

Each of the 100 ideas is introduced with a brief essay that explains it and attempts to sketch out how it has been viewed throughout Western history. The essays are not dumbed down, but most of them are perfectly accessible to most of us. After this introductory essay, there follows an index of virtually every significant reference to that idea in every author in the set; you are given page numbers within this set of books.

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74 of 79 people found the following review helpful.

Great content, poor production value

By R. Hartnett

This edition of the great books contains a welcome inclusion of some of the most important thinkers and writers of the 20th century. However, the manufacturing quality of the books themselves leaves a great deal to be desired. First of all, the block of pages is glued to the binding and has started to separate from their spines after just a few (and I mean no more than 3) reading sessions.

The book pages are thin and somewhat flimsy. I owned a set of the 54-volume cloth-bound first (1952) edition and the bookcase which came with them. I still have the bookcase and put this 60-volume set in it. The 60 volumes of this second edition take up much less shelf space than the 54-volume set. That's how much thinner is the paper on which the books are now printed.

The covers of the books feel like they are made of some kind of paper board. They just feel cheap in my hands.

In short, you might want the set for its content, but don't expect a production quality reflective its intrinsic value.

23 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

Not for the faint of heart, but worth your time

By Cutedeedle

This is the second edition of the compendium of Great Books. The first volume titled "The Great Conversation" -- updated by the Editor in Chief of The Great Books, Mortimer Adler -- explains why the 60 volume collection is organized as it is and what the three criteria were, established over several years' compilation, for inclusion in the set. "Influence" was not a criterion for selection, otherwise Hitler, Stalin and Lenin would have been incorporated, among other notable authors who were omitted. Unless you read "The Great Conversation" and the two volume Syntopicon you will undoubtedly be bewildered about the

organizational structure of these books. Be aware, this is not like a set of college textbooks. These are original works, dating from Homer in 900-800 B.C. through mid-20th century's Samuel Beckett. Much of it is difficult reading. It's a collection of the great ideas of western civilization, not simply books that encompass only one subject each. If you are looking for such a thing you will not only waste your money and time but you'll be very disappointed and your set will probably end up on eBay.

The general organization of The Great Books is by date written, but there are so many cross-references of the "great ideas" and "great authors" that you can find any subject, idea or author by using the Syntopicon as your guide. Adler and the editors have narrowed what they consider the great ideas of western civilization down to 102. Astonishing, when you consider the writing and authors span about 2800 years of western thought.

The readings include virtually all of the subjects considered the liberal arts: literature of all kinds; philosophy and theology; mathematics and the natural sciences; history, biography and the social sciences; and economics, sociology and anthropology. If you're not in a college program that uses the Great Books in their curriculum, Adler provides a ten year reading plan for the books in "The Great Conversation." Again, not for the faint of heart, but I guarantee if you manage to get through all 60 books you will truly be educated.

As an FYI, I'm currently in what seems to be the sole graduate program in the country that uses only the Great Books in their curriculum. It is also a distance-learning program and uses the Socratic method for discussions, which are held by telephone with tutors (what teachers or professors are usually called when using this method of inquiry and discussion). Check out my Amazon profile for some details.

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