

The Atlantic Ocean: Other Uses

An interesting rubric to a sub-section of an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* - 'Other Uses'. The verb 'to use' in itself has connotations - mankind uses tools, land, rivers, minerals, other species, other members of the human race - so why not the oceans? Use or abuse, use up, misuse, re-use, refuse, confuse - all manner of uses for the verb 'to use'.

What would be the 'other uses' of an ocean? Not fishing, of course, as that will have been covered as a normal use; similarly the extraction of minerals from the water or from the land which lies beneath. The encyclopaedist has in mind the leisure pursuits such as swimming, sailing, sport-fishing; and the exploitation of tidal power or temperature variation. Arguably the last two are not abuses, but uses.

But the concept of 'other uses' adequately sums up the crude and the exalted imaginations of *homo sapiens*. Supplement almost any noun you wish with the two words 'other uses'...

'The North Sea: Other Uses' - it would actually be hard to imagine another use to which that tired pool of water had not been subjected over the years. It is a sewer and a rubbish dump, from which fish are taken with no thought of conservation, from which oil and gas are extracted, on whose beaches we may sport and play, over which we may gaze, frozen-jowled in the teeth of a Polar gale.

'Ben Nevis: Other Uses' - climbing up, falling off, sitting on top, studying the weather, admiring from below - limited usage and not much scope for anything else, one would imagine (although no one has yet attempted to quarry stone from it - or have they?)

'Yaks: Other Uses' - straightforward enough, there is probably a large, but limited number of uses to which a yak can be put, from the practical - milking, clothing, eating, carrying, racing - right through to the unmentionably esoteric.

'Eels: Other Uses' - similarly. Not racing, or carrying perhaps - depends on the size of eel. And if it's an electric eel, there are certainly uses to which it could be put that you could not possibly put a yak. But does anyone ask the eel, or the yak?

'The Night Sky: Other Uses' - this would be stretching things a bit; the Human Race has so busily concentrated on the use and abuse of the terrestrial globe, with such a greedy and single-minded passion, that the conquest of the night sky is likely to elude it. But you have to admit that there could be an unlimited number of other uses for the firmament and all the stars and angels that dwell therein.

'Life on Earth: Other Uses' - no, I think we've already covered that. There are no other uses left, except one of the grandest of all - leaving it alone; which is not likely to happen. But while we are busy wiping out whole species of animals, plants, fish, trees, birds, micro-organisms, and covering the earth acre by acre with concrete and tar and rubbish and cattle and bio-fuel crops, have we stopped to consider to what 'other uses' these minor items could have been put? Medicinal, engineering, scientific, environmental, even social? No idea. We have no idea. Squelch! - ah, perhaps we should have? - oh well, too late... We see the large items and use them up as we see fit; in doing so, we fail to see the small items, and are maybe covering up the nuggets of gold with piles of slag, putting out the candles of life with the snuffers of progress.

'Humanity: Other Uses' - not necessary a rubric from the *Encyclopaedia Galactica*, for the edification of extra-terrestrial exploiters (but that possibility has been explored by writers of wit and imagination). Perhaps it could be adopted as a slogan for a renewal of true human values. The 'other uses' one could come up with

would probably flatly contradict such uses as those which have been the norm for the past few thousand years. But such a move would not be totally impossible, as various - and rare - flashes of recorded human brilliance have shown.

'Word Definitions - Other Uses' - 'Humanity' - a double-edged word: firstly as the collective term for humans, and secondly as a desirable moral quality, not frequently associated with the first term. Curious, is it not, that moralists of every genre use the word 'humanity' to describe something that humans rarely possess. And the adjective 'humane'? - now there's a conundrum. The Germans, normally pretty damned efficient at making clear distinctions between words, have fudged it here - 'die Menschheit' - humans, the human race; 'die Menschlichkeit' - the moral quality of possessing humanity: different words, but same root, the same smug outlook on life.

Doubtless the Ancient Greeks had some good terms for the two concepts; but, since Ancient Greece was a society founded upon slavery, one would have to cast some doubt upon their words. What about the native peoples of the Americas, Australia, the Pacific, Africa, India? Perhaps there is a pair - or more - of words in some non-European spot that makes a more rigorous distinction between the human race and the moral supremacy to which it aspires, but rarely reaches with its fingertips?

The four classical virtues of 'Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice' were supplemented for Western Man by the three Christian ones of 'Faith, Hope and Charity': four or seven Virtues - does it matter which, because even for Virtues, there must be 'Other Uses'.