

THE TRICORN

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LONG ISLAND + PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

AUGUST, 1980

Colby's Silver Anniversary

The 25th anniversary of the Colby Great Books Summer Institute will take place at Colby College during the week of August 10, 1980. It will be a spectacular, with a program of commemorative activities scheduled. There is already the usual full house of advance reservations with a large number of regulars plus a healthy infusion of newcomers. The array of stimulating readings for the week is as follows:

The Sea Around Us by Rachel Carson, The Principles of Psychology by William James, The Voyage of the Argo told by Apollonius of Rhodes, Typhoon by Joseph Conrad, Riders to the Sea by John Synge, Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold.

Twenty-five years accumulates a lot of unforgettable memories. We've asked some of our regulars who have participated in most of those Colby years to express some of their feelings and thoughts about the "Colby experience." Here is a sampling.

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- Twenty-five years ago, 50 Great Bookers descended upon the Colby College campus for a week of the "good life." Now, in 1980, Colby is still hosting Great Bookers for the annual Summer Institute, only the number has grown to 250, which is capacity.

Several years before Colby, week-long Great Books Institutes had been held in several universities in various parts of the country. Originally sponsored by the Great Books Foundation in Chicago, they were used primarily for leader training and later for trying out readings for "Great Issues in Education" and "Great Issues in Religion." Then in 1956, there was a simultaneous discovery of Great Books and Colby, and they've been meeting ever since.

In those early days there was no modern Dana Hall, and Mudd was only a gleam in an architect's eye. Our Colby life centered around Mary Low where most of us ate and slept. But for those of you who didn't have the good fortune to be with us, try reminiscing with someone like Trudy Drucker or Helen Wolfson who might recall the lovely bouquets of flowers we had on each table at Mary Low; or ask Betty Pelzer to tell you about Lorna Feeley climbing in the window of Iz Wachs' and Charlie Djerf's room in Averill because it was so crowded one couldn't get through the door; or have Iz recite the saga of Judge McDevitt.

What did we read way back then? Under "Great Issues in Education" we read parts of Plato's Republic, plus Jacques Maritain, Montaigne, John Dewey. Under "Great Issues in Religion" we read Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, Paul Tillich's The Religious Situation, Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. One year was devoted to science and, among others, we read Schrodinger's What Is Life? and Malinowski's Magic, Science and Religion, and Cassirer's Language and Myth. Another year we discussed war and used Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents, Kant's Perpetual Peace, as well as some pamphlets from The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. The year 1960 was memorable, when we read the entire Republic of Plato.

In 1961, the Great Books Foundation in Chicago decided to cease holding any Summer Institutes. It was then that the three Councils of Philadelphia, Long Island and Boston decided to maintain the continuity of this popular event. Iz Wachs was unanimously elected chairman of the "Colby Committee" and has served ever since as our fearless and beloved leader. Over the years we watched Colby and our Summer Institute grow. We expect that 25 years hence it will still be growing and so will our week of "the good life." (Helene Kohn).

- One memory picture, snapped from the porch of the Mary Low building, from my first Colby -- the first Colby nearly a quarter of a century ago -- keeps coming back to me, as though to sum it all up. In the afternoon sun under a blue sky, several groups of three or four people sit on those gray Colby blankets in front of the dorm (all 60 of us slept and ate together there on the grass). With a backdrop of far-reaching forests and hills, with Waterville crouching and smoking a little in the foreground, our lives and dreams seem to hang in space. We read, we talk quietly, companionable and comfortable, a family together in intellectual probing.

Right there were the elements of the unchanging Colby magic: the idyllic setting, the stimulating books, the congenial people. It exuded a wonderful sense of freedom, and at the same time a warm affirmation of our bond to others. What Martin Buber finds "Between Man and Man" is clearly reflected at Colby.

How powerful an experience is a whole undiluted week of it. Over the years, how marvelously the readings have stretched us, opening new realms of thought and feeling, bringing us closer to ourselves and others. Each work insists that we spend time on something important, meaningful, infusing our groups with a special vision, and building to a unique, unpredictable drama.

Time at Colby acts strangely. Through Wednesday, all is leisurely, time moving at a stately pace, agreeable and controlled. Then the flood of thoughts and feelings that has been rising abruptly overwhelms us. And the rest of the week goes in an instant.

Much has changed since that first Colby. The campus and its surroundings take on a new face. Dana beetles over Mary (Very) Low. The modern health center building attends the chapel, as though ready to take over what the old lady can't manage. The woods by the pond conceal a regiment of blockhouses for living, standing there like architectural guerillas menacing the Colonials of the clearing. But all the magic is still there. The simple formula, kept simple, still works.

Like all great human experiences, Colby has many dimensions. A closeness to friends intensifies. But then there is the loss of some of those friends. At the side of Runnels, by the walk between Mary Low and Dana, stands a sundial. It is in memory of Mort Charleston, and of Charley Djerf, and of many others who won't be back. Their loving link with Colby makes their absence hard to bear. But the quality of grief demonstrates the quality of love, and the Colby experiences refine this powerfully. I always visit the sundial. It keeps me in mind of the many special times and friends, urging me both to look back and to look ahead. (Gus Soderberg).

- Colby has bequeathed an example to live with us always: that we can create the institutions and attitudes necessary to live together constructively, creatively and peacefully; that we are not the helpless, self-centered and aggressive creatures that our consumer society would have us believe. Long live Colby! (Rosemary Porter)
- My nine annual weeks at Colby have given me some of my greatest learning experiences. (Bob Blumenthal).
- I return to Colby for a week of Great Books discussions -- to read and talk with people about seminal books. Whatever peripheral pleasures accrue, the hours I spend in group discussions are the center of this special week. As a participant in the leaders' group discussions and a leader of the regular discussions, the pyramiding intensity that generates from one solid week of directed conversation is a revivifying experience that calls me back year after year. It is the work that is the most important pleasure at Colby. (Sibyl Cohen).
- To me, Colby means people, an extended family. Friendships that are formed in this one week are deeper, closer and more meaningful. When we meet again, it is as if the fifty-one weeks between were a single night. So, each year when the invitation comes, I eagerly respond to being with my family again. (Hank Cohen).
- We like to talk and we like to drink, and to do both at Colby is I-Thou. (Rita and Aaron Heller).
- How to spell the magic of Colby: "C" is for intellectual Challenge; "O" is for One and Only; "L" is for Literature and ("middle-aged") Love-In;" "B" is for Bargain; and "Y" is for all of You who make it great. (Emil Bix).

Great Books in France

Andre Juliard, a devoted Great Booker and a longtime participant at Colby, has in recent years been living in France, though he is now planning to return to the U.S. While residing in Aix, France, he decided to launch a Great Books group there. Here, in the following, he cites the experience:

In the eye of a Frenchman, trying to establish a Great Books group in France is like attempting to import lobster into Ogunquit, Maine, because the intellectual-minded Frenchman supposes he is fully informed about classical readings. Having suffered through many hours of composition writing about Racine, Rousseau, Balzac, Camus and others during his high-school or college years, he thinks he has nothing further to learn about the classics.

No wonder, then, that it was somewhat difficult to find in France a kernel from which a Great Books group could develop. Nevertheless, we succeeded, thanks to the aid of a few American students on the Institute for American Universities in Aix en Provence, who took this opportunity to improve their conversational French.

We started about ten years ago as a 6-member group, including two French ladies, by discussing John Fowles' "The French Lieutenant's Woman." It was a successful meeting, which encouraged the two ladies to invite some of their French friends to the next discussion. The group grew slowly by word of mouth, despite our gradual loss of the American students.

During the past five years we kept a membership of around nine people. We met regularly once a month, for about two hours at the home of one of our members. We avoided any open promotional exposure of the group in order to maintain its original high intellectual and personal standards. We also wanted to retain the advantage of a small group.

The quality of the discussions improved with the standard of the readings. At the beginning we selected old French best-sellers recently published in paperback and English, or American novels recently translated such as Vonnegut's "Cat's Cradle." Then we moved slowly toward more classical material such as Marguerite Yourcenar's "Hadrien Memoirs," Herman Hesse's "Steppenwolf" and "Siddharta." We finally took on Plato and Sophocles, alternating with some contemporary novels. Just as I left France, the next discussion was to focus on Waltara "The Egyptian," a fascinating 600-page novel by the gifted Finnish author.

The future of this group is now in the hands of two co-leaders who, I hope, will maintain its established dynamism. While the group was in operation, we followed the discussion ground rules set forth by the Great Books Foundation. As the group gathered experience, however, we allowed the discussions more latitude to give the participants' views broader and deeper expression.

Philadelphia News

Leader's Training. To satisfy a constant demand for trained leaders, the Philadelphia Council has initiated a summer session. Based on the new "Philadelphia Leader's Training Manual" the course runs for six sessions. A wide variety of short reading selections including fiction, philosophy, poetry, and the Bible, provides an opportunity for trainees to deal with and lead different kinds of topical material.

The primary aim of the course is to develop leaders who can help a Great Books group work together to reach deeper levels of understanding of the readings. To this end there is an emphasis on group dynamics as well as on question-formation skills. The Manual explains which questions aid and which

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Fall Institute. The tenth anniversary Philadelphia Fall Institute will be celebrated at the charming Pocono Manor Inn on the weekend of November 21-23. A gala program has been planned. The theme of the event: "Commitment: Putting Yourself On the Line." The three readings are: Existentialism Is A Humanism, by Jean-Paul Sartre; The Power and the Glory, by Graham Greene; Journey to the East, by Hermann Hesse.

Total weekend charge is \$105 per person (double occupancy). Send a deposit of \$35 per person with your registration, made payable to Fall Institute Committee, and mail to: Sylvia Perelman, 8214 Marion Road, Elkins Park, Pa. 19117. Specify if you prefer a non-smoking group. If you must cancel after registration, the deposit (less charge for books) will be refunded if notification is received by or before Saturday, October 25.

APPLICATION FOR PHILADELPHIA FALL INSTITUTE

Enclosed is deposit check for \$ _____		Non-Smoking Group
First name _____	Last name _____	_____
First name _____	Last name _____	_____
Address _____		Phone _____
City _____	State _____	Zip _____

hinder discussions. Practice leading and critiques instruct by baptism under fire and special group-dynamic exercises help cultivate listening and other skills needed to promote creative group interaction. In addition, discussions on goals and problems in leading facilitate a deeper understanding of the function of Great Books leadership. A Great Books program is only as good as the groups that constitute it, and the groups are only as good as the leaders who help them to become good Great Books discussion groups.

New 1980-1981 Officers: President, Hank Cohen; Vice President, Marty Weiss; Recording Secretary, Rita Heller; Corresponding Secretary, Miriam Weiss; Treasurer, Harold Moll.

Executive Committee Meetings. This year, a number of Executive Board members will serve as liaison with area groups. They will transmit information back and forth and will give new groups whatever support they need. Coordinator Fran Jacobs feels that by keeping in close touch, ailing groups can be doctored before they become obit notices.

All 1980-1981 Executive Committee meetings of the Philadelphia area Council will be open to all members of Philadelphia Great Books discussion groups. Meeting dates (all Sundays) will be Sept. 7, 7 P.M.; November 30, 2 P.M.; February 8, 2 P.M.; April 5, 2 P.M. Members who want to become acquainted with the behind-the-scenes activities of the Philadelphia Council are invited to come on September 7 to the Perelmans, 8214 Marion Road, Elkins Park, Pa.

Long Island News

One-Day Spring Institute. Based on a survey of participants, this year's Spring Institute was unusual, due chiefly to the provocative nature and content of one of the readings -- The World According to Garp, by John Irving, selected by Time Magazine as one of the best novels of the past 10 years. The book evoked strong feelings, pro and con, and hence resulted in a lively discussion. The second reading was Joseph Conrad's preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, which was unanimously acclaimed and led to a more reflective than emotional response. The piece dealt with the author, his work and the art of fiction. Conrad's standards were applied to the stories of the fictional Garp in an effort to understand what makes a writer, what makes him write, and what makes his writing art. Conrad's conclusion: "Art is long and life is short, and success is very far off." John Irving would have agreed if he had listened to the heated discussions.

Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting of the Long Island Council will be held at 8 PM on Friday, October 17, at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Library on Old Country Road. The business meeting, which includes the election of officers for next year, will be followed by a discussion of The Fragments of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. Copies of the reading will be sent to all discussion leaders, along with an invitation to bring a member of their respective groups. Others interested in attending can obtain the reading by calling one of our coordinators: Helen Mascia

212-672-2487, or Jan Ojalvo 516-271-8899. A few evocative excerpts from The Fragments:

- * You could not step twice in the same river; for the other and yet other waters are ever flowing on.
- * War is father of all; and some he made gods and some men, some slaves and some free.
- * The name of the bow is life, but its work is death.
- * Gods are mortals, men are immortals, each living in the others' death and dying in the others' life.
- * Opposition unites. From what draws apart results the most beautiful harmony. All things take place by strife.

West End Temple Institute. Jesse Plutzer is again holding his special one-day seminar at the West End Temple in Neponsit, October 26. The theme: What Is It Like To Be A Jew In America Today? The two readings: Jewish-Christian Relations In Today's World, a series of essays by Jewish and Christian theologians; and Portraits of the American Jew, consisting of thirteen short stories by American-Jewish writers. The charge is \$13.50, which includes books and lunch. Those interested can contact Jesse H. Plutzer, 314 Beach 148 St., Neponsit, N.Y. 11694 (212-634-1739).

Thomas Malthus -- Prophet With Delayed Honors

Today the world becomes increasingly anxious about its burgeoning population and its impending impacts upon this planet, politically, socially, economically. While we grow apprehensive about thoughts of a nuclear war, such an event may prove a mere skirmish compared with the explosive effects of our mounting world population which is growing at a phenomenal rate.

In the year 1 A.D. the planet had an estimated 250 million people. It took 18 centuries before it reached one billion. Only a century later, in 1930, the count doubled. It took only 30 years (1960) to reach the third billion, and a mere 15 years to reach the fourth billion in 1975. Another eight years (1983) will bring us to five billion. And by the end of the century the total should be seven billion. Who dares to think of the year 2050 and a world population of 12-15 billion? This is called geometrical, in contrast to arithmetical, growth -- growth by multiplication instead of addition. The demographers believe the planet is already near the limits of human population capacity. But the human population ignores it and continues to propagate like a rabbit farm.

The potential and visible prospects? Well, if you're thinking of or hoping for a more peaceful or better world for the decades ahead in the belief that men and nations will learn to become more reasonable, rational and cooperative, you are more likely living with illusion than reality. A wide array of scientists foresee a world of more darkness than more light. For example, many psychological tests, plus historical experience itself, clearly demonstrate that the more crowded any living space becomes, the more it is accompanied by violence, tension and open hostilities. Not only does the planet and mankind appear headed in this direction, but we received the clear forewarning almost 200 years ago.

The man was Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834). In his time he was referred to as "the voice of doom." Today he is increasingly regarded as a socioeconomic and sociopolitical prophet. Today he is being re-read and re-studied with expanding respect. He is considered the father of modern demography, the science of population trends and analysis.

Born in England of educated and well-to-do parents, he was an honor student at college and soon after graduation became a professor of modern history and political economy at East India College, where he remained until his death in 1834. He almost went into the ministry but, caught in the vortex of England's economy, he decided to follow a more pragmatic career. Thus, by a mere flip of fate a concept of stupendous historical importance was to emerge.

In 1798, he published the first edition, some 50,000 words, of An Essay On the Principle of Population As It Affects the Future Improvement of Society. This was to be followed by six further editions, repeatedly revised and enlarged, until the final one in 1826. Prior to then, no one had ever made a deep or serious study of population growth and its relation to human affairs. His parade of economic facts and historical data on population trends, plus his insightful analysis of the potential effects of these trends, had a shocking impact that left almost no institution -- political, economic, academic, church, military, social, scientific, etc. -- unaffected. His "forecasts" touched every segment of society, and none could remain silent, whether in praise or condemnation, for he became the target of both.

Essentially, Malthus' proposition (to become known as the Malthusian Theory) said and demonstrated the following:

1) Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometric ratio while available subsistence (food, employment, etc.) increases in only an arithmetical ratio. In short, inbridled population grows much faster than the world's ability to support or feed it.

2) Population always increases up to the limits of the available means of subsistence, but is prevented from increasing beyond this by the counter-checks of wars, famines, pestilences, and by growth of poverty, misery, vice and violence. (Note: We see this as a "natural" process in nature. When the food supply diminishes, the population of the various dependent species or creatures automatically falls by attrition such as starvation, fewer births, more deaths, more violence in competing for the limited food supply, etc.).

3) For the "haves" to support the "have-nots" is eventually self-defeating. Malthus charged that England's "poor Law" system (like our modern dole or welfare system), with its bounties for poor and large families, actually aggravated the very evils it was supposed to remedy by encouraging further

procreation by the poor. This further burdened the haves and added to the miseries of the have-nots. (Note: Is this charge any different than we frequently hear today?)

Thus his concluding principle: Over-population without matching means of subsistence results in the population out-pacing its ability to survive by even modestly decent standards. This inevitably sets in motion a host of destructive consequences -- wars, disease, unemployment, poverty, vice, violence, famine, misery, hostilities, etc.

Well, how did Malthus propose to resolve the problem? It seemed insurmountable. He said resignedly, "The power of population is infinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man . . . Towards the extinction of the passion between the sexes, no progress whatever has been made."

Nevertheless, he proposed a remedy that seemed both radical and naively simplistic. He labeled it "moral restraint." In short, voluntary chastity. Marriages would be delayed, and among married couples sexual continence, or what he termed "controlled passion," would prevail. He really didn't have much confidence in this idea, but he reckoned that it was better than no proposed solution at all. He was castigated from all sides for "denying one of God's human rights to the less fortunate," and for "the presumption of halting nature's own procreative force." (Note: Time has changed little. Today these same charges are leveled against the pill and other contraceptive devices, or against abortion, from many regions of the world.) Ironically, Malthus himself was opposed to an "unnatural" means of birth control, and hence his advocacy of "moral restraint."

Malthus was both an idealist and a pragmatist. He had genuine concern for the lot of the poor. He was one of the first to propose that the poor be employed at "public works" to provide means of subsistence. But here again he was severely criticized by the liberals of the day who termed this "forced labor" and who insisted that the existing "poor law" or dole was more "humane." Then Malthus, in a revision of his essay, switched from reformist and idealist to realist. He accepted the idea of "class stratification." While he condemned the wealthy and employers for holding down wages, he also denied the "natural right" of the poor to receive public aid which he regarded as self-defeating to the objective of reducing population growth. He declared:

"A man who is born into a world already possessed (property, etc. owned by others), if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, he has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is." Thus, if the poor would not practice moral restraint, then they and their children should suffer the consequences of abject poverty, a condition of their own making. (Note: This is not an alien attitude among many people today).

Malthus repeatedly used the term "struggle for existence." In fact, it inspired Darwin to apply it to his own theory which he labeled "survival of the fittest." Malthus suffered the dilemma of moral concern for the poor, but also frustration with their "unreined passions." He often regarded them as shiftless, with nothing better to do than procreate, which was "working against their own good."

Today, Malthus can be judged from many points of view -- political, economic, social, moral, etc. Modern critics credit him for his innovative work in demography, but say he fell short on economic realities. They cite that he lacked the ability to foresee the vast expansion of modern technology and its absorption of employment, or the enormous advances in world food supplies, etc. In short, Malthus was too much of a doomsayer, and the cataclysms he foresaw have yet to happen on the scale he anticipated.

But defenders of Malthus insist that his principles are no less valid today. While the industrial nations of the world have managed to maintain a balance between population growth and a wholesome level of subsistence, they have achieved this largely by the methods advocated by Malthus -- that is, by population control. However, this is not working out with most of the rest of the world -- South and Central America, Africa, large segments of Asia, the Middle East. In these areas population continues to outpace the means of subsistence, with the consequences, as Malthus predicted: wars, misery, starvation, poverty, disease, violence, etc.

Today's demographers and other social scientists say that by the year 2,000, 80% of the world's population will be in poor or have-not nations. Population growth between 1975 and 2000 will be low in the industrial nations. For example, Russia 21%; the U.S. 16%; Japan 19%. But for the poor countries the projected growth will be much greater. Some examples: China 42%; India 65%; Brazil 108%; Indonesia 68%; Bangladesh 100%; Pakistan 111%; Nigeria 114%; Mexico 119%; Thailand and Egypt each 77%. In the poor countries it isn't as though The Pill hasn't yet been discovered. It has -- and is firmly rejected.

Malthus' "laws" are at work in other ways. For example, female life spans in the industrial countries range between 76 and 78 years (Sweden, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, U.S., Canada, Denmark, Switzerland, etc.). But in the poor countries where 75% of the world's population lives, female life spans average only 40 to 60 years (India, Iran, Kenya, Uruguay, Morocco, Brazil, Pakistan, China, etc.) The same contrasts exists with the infant mortality rate.

One significant point remains to be made. It might be called the ultimate moral dilemma. Throughout all nature with its tens of millions of species, the law of supply and demand has applied with inexorable consistency. Through eons of time the population of these species has risen and fallen in direct ratiōn to the available food supply. In short, nature has imposed its own process of birth and population control. (Note: Interestingly, this same process worked during the Depression Thirties when the birth rate fell precipitously and when marriages were delayed, as Malthus proposed. And those were times of no Pill, no mass abortions, no sophisticated contraceptives).

Well, if nature's laws of population control apply to all other species, why not to the human species which is part of the same natural order? We are now hearing openly from a growing number of responsible social and other scientists who are openly advocating "benign triage" which allows nature to take its own course without human and "humane" interference. In short, allowing the process of de-population to occur by natural attrition when and where massive over-population severely outpaces available means of subsistence.

For many persons this may seem cruel and inhumane. But, say these social scientists, which is the more cruel or inhumane: To allow abject poverty, misery, starvation and suffering to occur for the semi-living, or to allow a "natural release" from these conditions by natural attrition? Granted, it is a ponderous and vexing moral question. But the confrontation with this moral dilemma will intensify in the immediate decades ahead with a burgeoning world population and limited resources on a limited planet. How would Malthus, as moralist, humanist and scientist, have answered?

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