

THE TRICORN

NEWSLETTER published jointly by the BOSTON +
LONG ISLAND + PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS
February, 1985

Colby 1985: Plato — The Republic

Everywhere in the world around us we see a struggle between different forms and philosophies of government. The relationship of government to the people is everywhere in question, whether in the relatively pacific differences of the Republicans and Democrats in America, or in the bloody repressions in South Africa, or the murderous episodes in Central America.

Many if not most of the basic questions in this political area are raised in the great books. One of the greatest of the great books is Plato's The Republic, the most important of the Socratic dialogues. It presents us with Plato's construct of the ideal state. In it the relationships between morality, philosophy, politics, social structure, education, and even the immortality of the soul are explored and delineated. The questions raised are as alive and relevant to our contemporary world as to that of Socrates and Plato, and repeatedly challenge our own values, assumptions, and loyalties.

A book of The Republic's length must be discussed in parts, but should be taken whole to appreciate its grand design and scope, its unity and coherence. No circumstances could be more ideal than the Colby Great Books Institute to appreciate and benefit from the concentrated discussion of this marvelously vital book. With each group meeting, the resonances and relationships developing in and between the group members and the book will grow in intensity and depth. Only at Colby could this almost transcendental experience be possible.

Twenty-five years ago, The Republic was the sole reading at Colby. That experience remains a high point in Colby history. This year we repeat, for the first time, a previous selection, this book The Republic, for those few who will happily resume the exploration they began at that first reading, and for those many for whom their first reading and discussion will create a special awareness of what complete absorption in a very great work can mean.

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never rest from their evils, — no, nor the human race, as I believe, — and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.

The Republic, Book V

The Annual Great Books Institute will be at Colby College the week of August 4, 1985. The all-inclusive cost is \$265.00, \$165.00 due with registration. Send checks to I.S. Wachs, 1521 Walnut St., Phila., PA 19102. Please see the insert for further registration information. Some full and partial scholarships available.

TRICORN
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Wilmington Spring Seminar

Saint or sinner? Why not join those who make an annual spring pilgrimage to Wilmington for a day of stimulating discussion and good companionship? This year, on Saturday, March 30 at Archmere Academy, St. Joan by George Bernard Shaw and Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe will be the focus of the saint-sinner theme of the day. Your \$18.00 fee covers books, lunch, and refreshments. Send your check payable to GB Council of Delaware to Susanne Jacoby, 24 Brandywine Falls, Wilmington, DE 19806. Phone: 1-302-658-8978.

Bartleby

Bartleby nimble,
Bartleby quick,
Bartleby nice so the lawyer won't kick.

Why is he silent?
Why won't he rave?
What does it take to make Bartleby have?
Claire Gerber

Philadelphia's 26th Annual Spring Seminar

South Africa is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Against this glorious natural background never-ending dramas of fear, rage, oppression, and distraction are enacted. The contrast between providential nature and grasping humanity finds expression in some of the finest writing being done in our language. Two such South African writers are Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. In Gordimer's The Conservationist and in Coetzee's The Life and Times of Michael K the relationships of man to man, of man to land, and most important of all, of man to himself are examined. One protagonist is white, the other black. Both books stir the heart and disturb the mind through their exceptional telling of their exceptional tales.

Sense of Self is the theme for the 26th Annual Spring Institute on Sunday, May 19, 1985, from 10 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. at Germantown Academy, on Morris Road in Fort Washington, PA. The \$18.50 fee includes books, luncheon, and refreshments. For further information, call Etta Nussbaum, 886-5955.

Please enclose check for \$18.50 per person, payable to Phila. GB Council. Mail to Harold Moll, 7657 Wyndale Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19151.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Total Amount \$ _____ for _____ registrations @ \$18.50 each.

Philadelphia News

Annual Membership Meeting

On Sunday, March 31, 1985, at Elkins Park Library, Church and York Roads, Philadelphia area Great Books members will meet to elect a new slate of officers. The meeting begins at 1:30 P.M.

Leaders Club

Last December 1, Fred Brenner, a wildlife painter and fashion/illustrator, engrossed his audience of local leaders with his talk on the topic, "You Are What You Wear." His art and advertising background enabled him to demonstrate through the showing of slides of the best fashion illustrators just how what you wear is a message to the rest of society. Annabel and Phil Lindy were hosts for the evening, and Bob Blumenthal, chairman of the Leaders Club, made all the arrangements.

New Groups

In the Wilmington area, Delaware Council President Cyra Gross is leading a new group meeting at Goldy Beacom College.

Several new groups have started in the Philadelphia area: at Bucks County Community College (led by Sylvia Perelman); at Pennswood Library (led by Dorothy Wilkins); at Gladwynne Library (co-led by Liz Eidelson and Sue Ludlow).

In New Jersey, at Galloway Township Library, Claire Gerber has started a second group.

Philadelphia Leaders Training

Sibyl Cohen, local leader trainer, has revamped totally her Philadelphia course. Trainees will attend three long sessions, instead of a greater number of shorter ones. On February 10 and 17, the class will meet at Sibyl's center city apartment from 11-4. Trainees will then be assigned a leading experience in the field. Then a final Sunday 11-4 session will take place at Sibyl's in mid-April, when trainees will assess their experiences and review material presented earlier in the course. The \$25.00 fee includes all materials. For further information call Liz Eidelson, 667-2284.

Stand Up to be Counted (Or Sit Down if You Prefer)

Either way, leaders or group secretaries, please send your up-dated group list to Liz Eidelson, 550 Greystone Rd., Merion, PA 19066, so that your people can receive all GB mailings and so that we can make our membership list as current as possible.

Under Milk Wood — Sunday, March 17

It's not too late to order tickets for McCarter Theatre's production of Dylan Thomas's splendid choral verse play about the inhabitants of a Welsh town. The curtain rises at the Princeton performance at 2:30 P.M. and the play will be followed by refreshments and group discussions. For information about transportation or anything else, call either 569-1696 or 333-4627. Tickets are \$12.00 (\$14.00 for front seats). Mail checks (payable to Phila. GB Council) to Sylvia Kasser, #503 William Penn House, Phila., PA 19103.

Toward a Good Discussion

I would like to see a dialogue in The Tricorn on what factors make a good discussion, and how to prepare these factors to achieve success. What are the factors that lead to excellent Great Books interaction? There are five that come to mind:

1. The selection to be read and discussed
2. The preparation of the participants
3. Good discussion procedures
4. The preparation of the leader
5. The meeting location and room arrangements

The five are not equal in weight or influence on the discussion, and probably differ in effectiveness from meeting to meeting.

The value of the selection can hardly be overstated. It is the single most important factor. Without a good reading to discuss, a worthwhile meeting is impossible. I would rate the selection as contributing 40% to the discussion. Therefore, great effort should go into the selection of books.

Probably next in importance is the preparation of the participants. I rate the participants' preparation at 25%. If the selection is good and the participants well prepared, we are two-thirds of the way to a good discussion.

The next most important factor is following good procedures of discussion. We'll have fun debating what constitutes good procedures in following issues of this newsletter. This third factor I rate at 20%, bringing us 85% of the way to a good discussion, even if the leader isn't well prepared!

Needless to say, the leader should be prepared. Why else is he a leader? Though it may hurt the ego of some leaders, I rate the leader's preparation at only 10%. No matter how well a leader prepares, if the selection is poor or if the participants haven't prepared, the discussion will be a bust. But if the first four criteria have been achieved, we are almost guaranteed a good discussion.

The final 5% I assign to the location and arrangements. While a combination of the first four factors can go far toward overcoming a poor location or inadequate arrangements, a lapse in this last matter can reduce what would have been a good discussion to a mediocre one.

I am interested in hearing the opinions of others. Are there further factors? How important are they? How do we control these factors? What constitutes a good selection? How should participants prepare? And leaders? What are the best discussion procedures? And what is the best environment for a good discussion?

ANSWERS, ANYONE? But, as always in a Great Books dialogue, be prepared to back up your opinions.
Dennis Scully

A Zen Lesson for Great Books Participants

The master Nan-in had a visitor who came to inquire about Zen. But instead of listening, the visitor kept talking about his own ideas. After a while, Nan-in served tea. He poured tea into his visitor's cup until it was full, then he kept on pouring. Finally the visitor said, "Don't you see it's full?" "Just so," replied Nan-in, stopping at last. "And like this cup, you are filled with your own ideas. How can you expect me to give you Zen unless you offer me an empty cup?"

Boston News

Is Wachs Honored

The Board of the Boston Council enthusiastically voted Is Wachs an Honorary Member of the Council. His contributions to the Great Books Program have been extraordinary, and Boston wanted to acknowledge them.

Starting New Groups

A continuing concern of the Boston Council has been the development of leaders and new groups. Bill Rossi has devised a protocol for starting a group; anyone wanting a copy should contact Rae Auburn. Boston has also instituted the practice of asking experienced leaders (or getting a commitment from people taking a Leaders Training Course) to participate as a co-leader for one session during the first two years of a new group's existence. This should make the transition from new group to viable ongoing group an easy one, and may stem the attrition that occurs during the first two years.

Another suggestion for starting new groups: Pres Brown of Philadelphia says, "Looking for new members? Try scanning the letters to the Editor page of the local paper for interesting letters from people in your town. Check the phone book, and send them a letter about Great Books."

Boston Spring Institute Weekend

Last year, The Hawthorne Inn in Salem, Massachusetts proved to be a perfect setting for a Great Books Weekend. What could be more appropriate than a hostelry just down the street from The House of Seven Gables? Not surprisingly then, a return trip to the same inn in Salem is in store this year. The dates this time are April 12-14. The theme: Masks and Mirrors. The books: Richard II (Shakespeare), Masks (Fumiko Enchi), and Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (John Ashbery).

The \$148 double occupancy charge covers books, discussions, 6 meals, and all gratuities.

To register: Fill out and mail tear-off with \$48.00 per person deposit before March 10. Cancellations before March 25 will bring refund less cost of books and mailing. Send this form and check (payable to Spring Institute Committee) to: Virginia Thurston, P.O. Box 299, Harvard, MA 01451.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Roommate Preference _____

Ed. note: Don't take this Roommate Preference request too seriously. The Editor knows personally of someone who requested Paul Newman as a roommate last year and did not have her request filled.

Woody Allen: A Parable

(Inspired by Hermann Hesse's Journey to the East?)

A man approaches a palace. Its only entrance is guarded by some fierce Huns who will only let men named Julius enter. The man tries to bribe the guards by offering them a year's supply of choice chicken parts. They neither scorn his offer nor accept it, but merely take his nose and twist it till it looks like a Molly screw. The man says it is imperative that he enter the palace because he is bringing the emperor a change of underwear. When the guards still refuse, the man begins to Charleston. They seem to enjoy his dancing but soon become morose over the treatment of the Navajos by the federal government. Out of breath, the man collapses. He dies, never having seen the emperor and owing the Steinway people sixty dollars on a piano he had rented from them in August.

Long Island News

Long Island Council Annual Meeting

Reelected to serve in 1985 were Chuck Ferrara, President; Lucretia Harrison, Treasurer; and June Ferrara, Secretary. The Council is seeking a paid coordinator. Anyone interested in applying or recommending an applicant should contact Chuck at 516/581-5082.

L. I. One-Day Institute

The Theme: Can This Be Love?

"To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't appeal to me, who wasn't even my type."

Swann in Love

The Readings: Swann in Love by Marcel Proust

This part of Remembrance of Things Past is a penetrating analysis of the psychology of love.

The Four Loves by C.S. Lewis

This essay explores the possibilities and problems of loving experienced in affection, friendship, erotic love, and the love of God.

The Place: The Welwyn Conference Center and Woodland Preserve at Glen Cove, L.I.

The Date: Sunday, June 16, 1985

The Cost: \$17.00, which includes books, coffee at registration, lunch, and post-discussion refreshments.

Mail to: Long Island Great Books Council, P. O. Box 821, Port Washington, NY 11050
Please mail before April 1, 1985.

Please reserve _____ places at the Long Island Institute at \$17.00 each enclosed.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

On "Follow-Up" Questions

When you prepare (as leader) for discussion of a reading, do you try to have several basic questions (each of which can lead to extended discussion of what you consider a main idea or action or character in the reading) together with (for each) a cluster of follow-up questions? How do you choose the follow-up questions? Are they designed to direct the thinking of participants along lines you think will prove fruitful in the exposition of the work?

There is a danger in this practice: the leader might fail to allow the participants to share in determining the course of the discussion.

It was of considerable interest to me, in reflecting on this, to review the "summary statement" on follow-up questions in A Manual For Co-Leaders (Great Books Foundation, 1965), for comparison with the orientation suggested in my first paragraph. "Follow-up questions examine the responses of participants." (They do not merely develop thinking along your predetermined line.) "Follow-up questions are asked by either you or the participants, with these purposes in mind: 1) to introduce some of the implications of the basic question." (Your original objective) "2) To require a participant to substantiate a statement or opinion with a quotation or a paraphrase of the book." (You may not have anticipated this response!) "3) To elicit more opinions about the subject being discussed." (This helps to get the discussion going among the participants — leaving you where you might well prefer to be, on the sideline.) "4) To clarify a statement." (To discourage irresponsible observations, to probe the respondent's views.) "5) To develop what you think is the most important idea in the participant's response." (Whether or not it happens to agree with your idea.) "6) To encourage the participant to examine his remarks in terms of their consequences and consistency." (To stimulate critical thinking.) "7) To bring the discussion back to the book."

Is it likely that in your prepared follow-ups you will have questions which will serve purposes 2, 4, 5, and 6 when you get one or more responses to your basic question? I think it most unlikely. Accordingly, no matter how well you have prepared, if you wish to facilitate fruitful and satisfying discussion for the group, your primary concern must be with what is going on out there, among the participants, rather than with your own agenda.

Aaron Bechtel

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Writing in Psychology Today (September, 1984) David Shannahoff-Khalsa reports finding a "link between the nasal cycle and hemispheric dominance rhythms" of the brain. More exactly, he found that by forcing breathing with the right nostril only, electroencephalographic activity of the left hemisphere of the brain increased markedly, and consequently verbal ability also increased markedly.

This finding has great implications for Great Books: if we stuff a small wad of cotton in our left nostril just before a meeting we can all become better participants! One caution, however — by doing this, performance of the right (spatial) hemisphere declines. We could have trouble turning the pages of the book.

Pres Brown

Dear Editor:

Flash! News item for The Tricorn gleaned from a recent copy of The New York Times.
Mae West - A Great Bookie!

When a judge finds Mae West guilty of corrupting the morals of youth in her 1927 show, Sex, she retorts, "That's what they got Socrates for, aint it?"

Marilyn Apelson

Dear Editor:

I'd like to add a P.S. (parallel situation) to your item on Aaron Heller. Our Mainland Great Books group, which meets at Stockton State College, was also invaded by reporters and photographers. Features appeared in the Atlantic City Press and in the Mays Landing County Record. Both reporters wanted to join after this first exposure to our meetings, and the Press lady is now a regular member of our evening group.

Another result was a reader response great enough to warrant forming a second group, which meets in the daytime. They have the same agenda and I enjoy moderating both.

Claire Gerber

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