

# THE TRICORN

NEWSLETTER published jointly by the BOSTON •  
LONG ISLAND • PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOBBS COUNCILS

February, 1986

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## COLBY - 1986 The Mind's I

The Colby theme, "The Mind's I," is taken from the title of an anthology of essays collected by a pair of professors, one a computer scientist and the other a philosopher. Their book is subtitled "Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul," and is described by the Kirkus Review as "philosophical fun and games of a very high order." The essays are collected under the headings "A Sense of Self," "Soul Searching," "From Hardware to Software," "Mind as Program," "Created Selves and Free Will," and "The Inner Eye." The other works for the basis of Colby discussions are Meredith's "**Essay on Comedy**," Bergson's "**Laughter**," and Moliere's **The Misanthrope**.

A sampler of the delights awaiting participants:

*from Meredith:*

One excellent test of the civilization of a country I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy; and the true test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

We know the degree of refinement in men by the matter they will laugh at, and the ring of the laugh.

Where the veil is over the women's faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous and the Comic Spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst.

There never will be civilization where comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes.

*from Bergson:*

Art . . . has no other object than to brush aside utilitarian symbols . . . everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself. . . . Art is certainly only a more direct vision of reality.

Drama . . . whether it weakens society or strengthens nature, has the same end in view: that of laying bare a secret portion of ourselves.

The comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly *human*.

One of the main functions of laughter: bringing back to complete self-consciousness a certain self-admiration.

To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one.

from *The Mind's I*:

Spirit is the traveler, passes not through the realm of man. We did not create spirit, do not possess it, cannot define it, are but the bearers. We take it up from unmourned and forgotten forms, carry it through our span, will pass it on, enlarged or diminished, to those who follow. Spirit is the voyager, man is the vessel.

Laughter always fills the air at Colby during the Great Books Summer Institute. This year it will not only ring out all over; comedy and laughter, along with self and soul, will be the basis for group discussions. Colby will hear much of the "thoughtful laughter" of which Meredith writes.

The Annual Great Books Institute at Colby College, Waterville, Maine, will be the week of August 3, 1986. The all-inclusive cost is \$275.00, \$150.00 due with registration. Checks payable to The Colby Summer Institute Committee should be sent c/o Mr. I. S. Wachs, 1521 Walnut St., Phila., PA 19102. Please see the insert for further registration information.

## LONG ISLAND NEWS

### One Day Institute

The Theme: The Oneness of Life and Death

The uniformity of the earth's life, more astonishing than its diversity, is accountable by the probability that we derived, originally from some single cell, fertilized in a bolt of lightning as the earth cooled.

Lewis Thomas

*No man is an Iland, intire of itselſe . . . any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.*

*John Donne*

The Readings: **The Lives of a Cell** - Thomas  
Selected **Sonnets** and a **Devotion** - Donne

The Place: The Chelsea Manor House on the Muttontown Preserve, Muttontown, Long Island  
(Another in our series of gracious North Shore estates)

The Date: Sunday, June 8, 1986 (not Fathers Day)

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

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Mail to: Long Island Great Books Council, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, N.Y. 11050  
Please send before April 1, 1986.

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

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

# 1986 GREAT BOOKS SUMMER INSTITUTE



**COLBY COLLEGE CAMPUS**

*Insufficiency of sight in the eye looking outward has deprived them of the eye that should look inward.*

GEORGE MEREDITH

**CHILDREN:**

Families with children between 4 and 14 are welcome. The cost per child will cover room, board and supervised morning activities.

**SIDELIGHTS:**

Swimming, boating, tennis, golf, summer theaters, warm hospitality of a staff who look forward to our return, and a clambake.

## *What's Special About Great Books Summer Institute at Colby?*

One participant's impressions - - -

Our week at Colby melts away the walls we sometimes tend to build around ourselves in the pell-mell, competitive world in which we live the other 51 weeks. At Colby, it's safe to be open, even on first meeting. Laughter is always **with**, never **at!** Ideas are eagerly shared, and appreciated. The books, often illuminated by others' insights during the discussions, are a real, personal growth experience that builds from year to year. It is a week of renewal, an annual boost to my sense of well-being. There's also tennis, swimming, the corridor parties, the sing-alongs, classical concerts, talent shows where **anyone** can shine, and sunbaths on the lawn - but the deepest impression I take home with me is a warm, peaceful feeling of rapport with 250 marvelous beings, plus a heightened faith in myself that glows throughout the rest of the year.

**WHERE AND WHEN:**

**Colby College, Waterville, Maine — August 3-9**

**READINGS:**

Meredith — ESSAY ON COMEDY  
Bergson — LAUGHTER  
Moliere — THE MISANTHROPE  
Hofstadter & Dennett — THE MIND'S I

**COST:**

**\$275.00 which includes room, board and readings. Books, travel information and schedule of events will be sent upon receipt of deposit.**

**ELIGIBILITY:**

Any adult who desires to spend a relaxing week, which includes the reading and discussion of books.

**CANCELLATIONS:**

Your deposit will be refunded, less \$35, if you cancel before July 1, 1986.

**APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION**

Mail to: Colby Summer Institute Committee  
c/o Mr. I. S. Wachs Tel.: 1-215-496-0420  
1521 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19102

I/we prefer a group  with a leader  
 without a leader

Enclosed herewith is \$\_\_\_\_\_ for registrations of the following persons at Colby Institute:

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First Name	Please Print	Last Name
Address _____		
City	State	Zip Code

Deposit of \$150.00 required for each participant; balance may be paid at any time prior to or at registration at the College. Make checks payable to Colby Summer Institute Committee.

## Bechtel on Adler on Locke

In a recent book called **Ten Philosophical Mistakes** (Macmillan, 1985) Mortimer Adler discusses "Basic Errors in Modern Thought – How They Came About, Their Consequences, and How To Avoid Them." In the concluding paragraphs of the book he remarks that "Modern philosophy has never recovered from its false starts" (the Basic Errors). "To make a fresh start, it is only necessary to open the great philosophical books of the past (especially those written by Aristotle and in his tradition) and to read them with the effort of understanding that they deserve."

Any Great Books enthusiast would agree that the Great Conversation did not begin with the advent of the modern period. He might also agree that while philosophical mistakes have been numerous throughout the millenia of the conversation, those which characterize modern philosophical thought are of most importance to us. Accordingly, I approached Adler's book with eager and expectant interest.

I was quickly disillusioned and disappointed. In a prologue, Adler points out that "The mistake about consciousness with which the first chapter deals is, perhaps, the crucial one. It lies at the very foundation of modern thought." I quite agree that the subject matter of the first chapter, "Consciousness and Its Objects," is the very basis of Epistemology. I cannot agree, however, that it is John Locke who is in error where Adler takes issue with him. The issue is: what is it of which we are conscious when we receive sensory input from something outside our bodies? (About the consciousness of internal events there is no disagreement.) Locke considers that the "idea" evoked by the external event is what we are aware of. He says of the word "idea": "It being the term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the *object* of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express . . . whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking." He uses thinking, Adler notes, for all the mental activities which, when distinguished, go by such names as perceiving, remembering, imagining, conceiving, judging and reasoning, and also sensing and feeling. Similarly, for Locke the word "idea" covers percepts, memories, images, thoughts and concepts, sensations and feelings.

Adler agrees with Locke that for awareness of internal experiences (emotions, passions, pain) what Locke calls the "idea" (the neurophysiological event) is the "object of consciousness," "*that which* we apprehend." However, he asserts that this cannot properly be said about "cognitive ideas"—percepts, memories, images, concepts. He quotes Thomas Aquinas as emphatically asserting that cognitive ideas are not *that which* we apprehend, but *that by which* we apprehend objects that are not ideas. This means, Adler adds, that "we experience perceived things, but not the percepts whereby we perceive them." Yet, on the preceding page Adler has said that this view does not apply to "bodily sensations, feelings, emotions, and, in rare instances, *sensations generated by stimulation of our sense organs*. All these are conceded to be private experiences, in which we are directly conscious of the pain we feel, the anger we suffer, or *the sudden gleam of light, the unexpected loud noise, the strange odor we cannot identify* and that does not enter into our perception of anything." (my emphasis—A.B.)

If my perceptions of the gleam of light, the loud noise, the strange odor can be (and are, as he says) *that which* we apprehend, how can it be that as Adler repeatedly says, "A cognitive idea (including here percepts, memories, images, and concepts) cannot, at one and the same time, be both *that which* we directly apprehend and *that by which* we apprehend something else . . . which can be an object of consideration . . . for two or more individuals." (This he calls a public and not a private experience.) To illustrate "public experience" Adler suggests that he and the reader may be sitting at a table looking at the same wine bottle. "Subjective experiences do not enter into our perceptions of something that is one and the same common object for two or more people. They are usually not difficult to account for." He then cites a subjective difference: "I say the wine appears to have the color of burgundy, and you say it appears to have the color of claret." (The light shines differently on two

sides of the bottle.) "In spite of such subjective differences in perception, the object perceived remains the same individual thing for the different perceivers—the same bottle." But have we apprehended *different* percepts, although for each of us the different percept is that by which we apprehend (infer) the presence of "the same" bottle of wine on the table?

In a note addressed "To the Reader" preceding the Prologue, Adler makes the admission, "I have not tried to argue for or prove the truths that I have offered as corrections of the errors I have pointed out. I rely on the reader's common sense to discern that the corrections have the ring of truth." To me, the content of the excerpts presented herewith does not have the ring of truth. Moreover, as a medical school physiologist, I have on various occasions offered evidence for Locke's view by arguing that what we look at is not what we see, what we hear is not what we listen to, and so on for all the external senses. That which I sense is an event in my nervous system (what Locke calls an idea), by which, through a process of projection, we infer the object or event outside the body, from which originated the stimuli which gave rise to the sensations on which our perception is based.

The common sense view, the naive view of Aquinas and Adler, is not a correct view. It has been, and despite some promising modern developments in epistemology, continues to be, a source of very serious problems at all levels of human intercourse.

*Aaron Bechtel*

## PHILADELPHIA NEWS

### As You Like It - Cancelled

One of the greatest of natural laws states, "When things appear to be going well, you have overlooked something." Our 8th Annual Spring Theatre Festival appeared to be shaping up perfectly: a great play; an enthusiastic response; all details painstakingly worked out by Chairman Doris Auspos. But . . . an unforeseen stroke of bad luck has forced the cancellation of our plans: The McCarter Theatre has informed us that their remodelling is running several months behind schedule, forcing them to remain closed through April.

We regret the inconvenience and disappointment caused patrons of this event.

### Leaders Club Booming

Under the chairmanship of Bob Blumenthal, assisted by Charlie Barnes, the Philadelphia Leaders Club is attracting more local leaders than ever. Last December, hostess Olga Wallace welcomed close to half a hundred people to her groaning board. Emil Bix then led a double discussion: first participants discussed Strindberg's intriguing playlet **The Stronger**; then they viewed Vivica Lindfors' filmlet of **The Stronger**, after which they discussed the piece all over again.

The next meeting of the group on February 22 at Liz Eidelson's will feature word play.

### Membership Meeting

All Philadelphia area Great Books members are invited to join the executive board at the annual general membership meeting scheduled for 2:00 pm March 9, at Ludington Library, Bryn Mawr.

### Leadership Training

Leaders Club attendance is due for further burgeoning with the addition of the leader trainees now studying with Sibyl Cohen. Interest in the class was so great that another course will take place on two

successive Sundays in the spring, this time in the western suburbs of the city. For information, call Liz Eidelson, 667-2284.

The present group of trainees is composed chiefly of members of the four new groups started last fall. Several council members undertook to lead these new groups until their own people could be trained to take over. Philadelphia is delighted at the success of this program, which obviated postponement of new groups until leaders were available. Two other new groups are now in that stage of development halfway between a gleam in Liz Eidelson's eye and a flesh-and-blood reality.

### **The Bookworm Turns or The Reader Rampant**

In a work of consummate wizardry, Italo Calvino touches the Gentle Reader with his wand, recreating him as Reader-Hero. Calvino's novel, **If on a Winter's Night a Traveler**, is the scene of this most surprising of transmutations. Kafka's man-to-bug, Andersen's frog-to-prince are no more astonishing than Calvino's bookworm-to-hero. His protagonist is known simply as The Reader. The beautiful, elusive object of his desire is The Other Reader. In his search for the solution to a roller-coaster publishing mystery, our adventuring Reader-Hero explores the entire world of books.

So come, all you fellow-bookworms. Cast off those sticky little feet that glue you to the page, and soar. Become one with the Reader-Hero, that alternately amused, mystified, terrified, captivated center of the action in this totally unpredictable, blindingly original novel by that fabulist, that fantastico—Italo Calvino.

The accompanying reading? A trio of essays that consider the reader's role as well as the writer's, in creating literature: John Gardner on "**Moral Fiction**," from his controversial work of the same title; Vladimir Nabokov on "**Good Readers and Good Writers**," from his **Lectures on Literature**; and Annie Dillard on "**The Egg in the Cage**," from **Living by Fiction**. Readers, come and learn tingling new possibilities for your literacy: discover yourself as Hero in Calvino's novel; take Nabokov's ten-question quiz to determine how good a reader you are; reflect on whether Gardner speaks for you and all readers; judge Dillard's evaluation of the sort of modernist literature written by our man Calvino.

**The Bookworm Turns** is the theme for the 27th Annual Philadelphia Spring Institute on Sunday, May 18, 1986, from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm at beautiful Germantown Academy on Morris Road in Fort Washington, PA. The \$19.00 fee includes books, luncheon, and refreshments. For further information, call Fran Jacobs, IV-2-1367.

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Please enclose check for \$19.00 per person, payable to Philadelphia GB Council.  
Mail to Harold Moll, 7657 Wyndale Ave., Phila., PA 19151.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ reservations.

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## BOSTON NEWS

### Turn, Turn, Turn

Great Books events mark the seasons just as surely as the weather does. Here in Boston there are the fall one-day in September, the winter event in January, and the spring weekend at the beginning of April; then, in August, there's the week-long institute at Colby, which belongs to all of us.

By the time you read this, our winter event will have come and gone. This year it is to be an occasion sponsored by the local Jane Austen Society: a presentation of the film **Pride and Prejudice** at the Dana Hall School in Wellesley. Great Bookers and society members will jointly discuss the movie after the showing. Sounds like fun.

Dana Hall was the locale, too, of the fall one-day institute, which took place the day after Hurricane Gloria whistled its way through Massachusetts. Very few who signed up for the day failed to come, despite downed wires in the roads and doom and gloom warnings from TV weather mavens. There was no power at Dana Hall, but the sun streamed in the windows to warm the discussion rooms; someone brought in a big pot of already-hot coffee to go with morning doughnuts; the kitchen staff produced a passable lunch, though without Dana Hall's good hot soup; and wine and cheese and friendship warmed us before we left at the end of the day.

The books were Evelyn Waugh's **Decline and Fall** and **Hamlet**. John Mogan chose them, he said, to see if anyone could find a connection between them, and of course we did—there can hardly be two better qualified antiheroes than Paul Pennyfeather and the Danish prince. One assumes that John, whimsical man, saw the connection all the time.

Coming up in April is the Boston Spring Weekend. The theme is "**Our Gods, Ourselves.**" The books are Nikos Kazantzakis' **The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises**; Graham Greene's **A Burnt-Out Case**; and C. S. Lewis's **Till We Have Faces**. The last of these is a magical retelling of the Psyche and Eros myth, a story that resonates with the power of the divinity behind the gods.

The weekend will again take place at the Hawthorne Inn in the center of Salem, Massachusetts; the dates are April 4, 5, and 6; the cost is \$165.00 per person double occupancy, with all the usual attributes included. To sign up, send a deposit of \$80.00 per person, made payable to the Spring Institute Committee, to Virginia Thurston, P.O. Box 299, Harvard, MA 01451.

If winter comes, can the spring weekend be far behind?

*Anne Levison*

### Wilmington Spring Seminar

Chairman Mary Schick and Co-Chairman Helen Dawson invite area Great Books people and friends to an exciting Spring Seminar on Saturday, March 22, at Archmere Academy in Wilmington. The subject is **Revolution!** and the readings are **On Revolution** by Hannah Arendt, and **Marat/Sade** by Peter Weiss. Please send check for \$19.00, payable to Great Books Council of Delaware, to Cyra Gross, 101 Delview Drive, Wilmington, DE 19810. Telephone: (302) 475-3914.

## On Slighting Evaluation

Francis Bacon said (in **Advancement of Learning**) "And therefore although the position be good, *oportet discentem credere*<sup>1</sup>, yet it must be coupled with this, *oportet edoctum judecare*<sup>2</sup>; for disciples do owe unto masters only temporary belief and a suspension of their own judgement until they are fully instructed and not an absolute resignation of perpetual captivity; and therefore, to conclude this point, I will say no more, but so let great authors have their due, as time, which is the author of authors, be not deprived of his due, which is, further and further to discover truth."

Would Bacon be happy in a Great Books discussion? Probably not, because the direction of today's Great Books discussions is *oportet discentem credere*. They aim to understand the author, to point out what the author says that is important and to interpret it. Evaluation (or judging for oneself) is becoming extinct. Or if not extinct, merely an entertaining epilogue to what's important.

Feeble lip service is given to evaluation by the Great Books Foundation in the newly printed **Reader's Aid**. This influential document says, "Interpretation is the main purpose of a Great Books discussion," but "Questions of evaluation can introduce a personal dimension to discussion once interpretive issues have been *resolved*." (*my emphasis*) Not much enthusiasm for evaluation in this. But what's worse is dangling the hope of resolving interpretive issues, for the leader's interpretive question "[should be] substantial enough that no single answer can resolve it." But maybe half a dozen can! Having created this delightful paradox it is not hard to see that evaluation doesn't have a chance, notwithstanding the handful of evaluation questions offered in the **Aid**.

It might be objected that Bacon knew the pitfall of premature evaluation, and that one reading of Plato does not mean that we are "fully instructed" thereon. But it is never possible to determine a group's state of instruction because of the different individual backgrounds brought into the group. It would be sad indeed to assume that everyone in a group is not yet fully instructed—and yet such an assumption is needed to explain the decrepit state of evaluation in Great Books today. The fact that the mean age and Great Books tenure of participants is rising suggests that at least some are fully enough instructed. Stifling evaluation not only sells participants short; it also wastes experience.

If the decay of evaluation continues at its present pace, Great Books will soon become indistinguishable from a book report club. Moreover, if we haven't seen it already in certain Foundation issues, we will begin to select readings that do not contain ideas, but only words to interpret.

I believe that the payoff of Great Books is *oportet edoctum judecare*, and that a Great Books discussion that cannot produce the complete Baconian couplet is not worth starting.

1. The learner must believe (what he is told).
2. He who has been taught should judge for himself.

Pres Brown

"Things come and go; or we come and go, and either way things escape our notice."

Don't wait too long to join a Great Books reading and discussion group. Write:

The Great Books Foundation  
A nonprofit corporation  
40 East Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611  
Call: (312) 332-5870



This ad appeared in the January 13 issue of *The New Yorker*, following on the heels of a request for group information from the Chicago GB Foundation. If numbers of new participants stream into your group, this push from the Midwest may be behind them.



## Gordimer on Art and Apartheid

Last month at the International PEN Congress in New York, writers from around the world waited eagerly to hear Nadine Gordimer, the South African novelist. Miss Gordimer, as writer and as public person, has spoken consistently against apartheid. She has criticized the Reagan Administration's policies toward South Africa, and she has supported Bishop Desmond Tutu's call for increased sanctions. Miss Gordimer said at the conference, "It becomes a question of what influence do writers have. My observation is that writers are not taken seriously in America—they're regarded as entertainers. And in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union they're taken so seriously that sometimes they can't be published at all. But I do think South African fiction writers, if we've been of any use at all, have helped rouse and raise the consciousness of the outside world to the long-term effects of life in our country. To put it very simplistically, a newspaper account, however good, tells you what happened. But it's the playwright, the novelist, the poet, the short-story writer who gives you some idea of why."

The PEN Conference on the topic of "How Does the State Imagine" began with an acrimonious dispute over PEN President Norman Mailer's invitation to Secretary of State George P. Shultz to address the opening ceremony. Sixty-six novelists, poets, editors and translators addressed an open letter to Mr. Shultz, charging that, "the Administration you represent has done nothing to further freedom of expression, either at home or abroad."

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