

George L. Kline, Ph.D.

Educator – Writer

Class of 1938



In the 1938 *Advocate*, which he edited, George L. Kline's senior picture is accompanied by a write-up which foreshadows his future accomplishments. The *Advocate* writer described Kline as "not a Jack-of-all-trades, — but a Genius-of-all-trades!" This description is preceded with a varied list of proficiencies including: skiing, debating, piano playing, Spanish (which he did not take at NHS), shorthand, and sketching. Kline excelled at academics and his love for poetry and foreign languages was nurtured at school. He studied both Latin and German at NHS but they were just the stimulus for studying additional languages later on. Needham High School laid the foundation for a distinguished career as an educator, translator, and author.

Although Kline fervently wanted to be a writer, his father prevailed upon him to be an employed writer, so following high school Kline attended the College of Business Administration at Boston University to become an advertising copywriter. While at B.U. Kline dutifully studied business subjects but he also took Spanish and was fascinated by a course in Theoretical and Applied Logic which initiated him into the study of Philosophy.

In 1941 after leaving B.U. and prior to the United States' involvement in World War II, Kline was employed as a government translator in Washington working on intercepted German and Spanish radio transmissions from South and Central America. After the U.S. entered the war and Russia became an ally, Kline was asked by his employers to learn Russian, which he began with the aid of Russian language records. The self-teaching was shelved, however, when Kline was transferred to the U.S. Army Air Corps.

In the service Kline became a celestial navigator for a heavy bomber group and while he was stationed in Italy he flew 50 combat missions and added Italian to his language portfolio. The Air Corps awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross and transferred him stateside to undergo training to be an instructor in celestial navigation. Kline remained an instructor until he was discharged from the service.

Following discharge, Kline applied to Columbia University but could not begin until January of 1946. While in Boston for a few

months waiting to attend Columbia, Kline and his wife, Virginia, began taking private language lessons from Russian emigres. This experience began the important Russian connection which influenced Kline's education and his writing career.

After completing his liberal arts degree at Columbia in 1947, Kline remained at Columbia to earn both his M.A. and Ph.D in Philosophy. In order to help support his growing family, he tutored high school students. This effort and his experience as an USAAC instructor during the war convinced Kline that an educational career and the accompanying opportunity for translating and writing suited him. Kline began teaching at Columbia in 1950 as an Instructor in Philosophy. He spent a year teaching at the University of Chicago but returned to Columbia, becoming an Assistant Professor on 1954. He was a visiting lecturer (on leave from Columbia) at Bryn Mawr College, 1959-60. The succeeding year Kline made a permanent move to Bryn Mawr where he joined both the departments of Philosophy and Russian. Before his retirement from teaching in 1991, Kline had chaired both departments. In addition to his teaching at Bryn Mawr, Kline has held Cutting, Fulbright, Ford, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim Fellowships and he has lectured at numerous American and foreign universities including John Hopkins, Rutgers, Heidelberg, Oxford, the London School of Economics, Trinity College-Dublin, and Zagreb.

Kline has published numerous books beginning with his Ph.D. dissertation, *Spinoza in Soviet Philosophy*. His subsequent works include more on Spinoza as well as studies on the philosophers, Hegel, Marx, and Sartre among others; works on religion; and also on both Russian philosophy and literature. Kline's *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* and his translation of V. V. Zenkovsky's *History of Russian Philosophy* are considered classics. Kline has also published more than one hundred articles in encyclopedias, symposium volumes and journals.

In addition to his work in philosophy, Kline has directed much of his intellectual attention to Russian literature, particularly 20th-century poetry. He has published several articles on his friend, Joseph Brodsky (Nobel Laureate 1987), and has translated his poetry as well as poems by Marina Tsvetaeva and Boris Pasternak.

Kline remains active by writing, giving lectures, and participating in conferences. He has recently been honored with the publication of *Russian Thought after Communism: Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage*, a volume of essays by international colleagues which is dedicated to Kline celebrating his contributions to the study of Russian philosophy.