

Chapter 10

My Humanization

Twelve credits in the social sciences were required to complete the undergraduate curriculum at Zelosophic U. In theory this didn't bother me. My normal tendency at the beginning of my college career in 1948 was to regard human beings, (and society in general) , as a waste of time. As that age anything that interfered with my intense intellectual life was viewed as an annoyance, even morally wrong. It may have been the involvement with Felicia Salvador that awakened the realization that mathematics isn't everything. Perhaps a certain curiosity about the interconnections between human nature and society was stimulated by enforced attendance in *History of the English Language* .

It must therefore appear all the more surprising that my investigations into the species should have been initiated by an elective course in Criminology in the second term of my freshman year. To set the record straight, I did in fact enroll in Criminology at that time. However, after the first lecture I never went to another class.

Mind you, my behavior did not imply any criticism of either the subject or its teacher. Simply stated, after I left the classroom that day everything having to do with the course was effaced from my memory. It was with considerable shock at the end of the term when I received my report card, that I noticed the F adjacent to a course listing with the odd name of "Criminology"! Like the novel, *Moby Dick*, which I'd read in high school but of which I cannot to

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this day remember a single word, the recollection of having signed up for Criminology had been blocked from consciousness. Failing meant that Criminology had to be taken again in my sophomore year. This time I was more than eager to attend. Apart from my interest in getting it over and done with, recent experiences had instilled in me a desire to learn something more about outcasts.

Every community has its offenders, its vengeance bureaucracy , its penal institutions. The world of higher education is no exception. There are 3 activities which, although no more than a minor annoyance in the real world, are considered criminal in the academic world :

- (i) Not going through proper channels ;
- (ii) Not paying your dues;
- (iii) Independent thinking.

Criminologists need to do more field work in the institutions that pay them their salaries. Virtually every college professor in America will bellyache about how he is miserably underpaid relative to what he could be getting in private industry. And as a matter of fact, when one considers how much he has to spend just to keep up appearances, one begins to feel as sorry for him as you would for any other small-time operator.

Though he was always doing what he called 'field work' in the prisons, Jerome Fuzz never experienced a single day as a prison inmate . He didn't need to: his entire career was spent in a prison of his own making. That he would never realize this made his punishment in some respects more pitiful than those of Tantalus or Sisyphus. With methodical ignorance Fuzz reliably

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hammered out papers filled with tables exhibiting statistical correlations between tonsillectomy in childhood and kleptomania, vitamin A deficiency and homicidal mania, lead poisoning and embezzling, and so forth. He would have done much better to study himself.

To take a notable example, one that speaks volumes, Jerome Fuzz was a past master of the textbook racket. Way back in 1935 the gang in the Social Sciences Division had cobbled together a Sociology textbook entitled *Deviant Behavior: Cause and Cure*. In due time it became required reading for all introductory courses in the division. Since 12 credits in the social sciences were needed for graduation, sooner or later every undergraduate at Zelosophic U. would have to buy the book.

At the end of each term the half dozen or so bookstores on the periphery of the campus bought up hundreds of used copies. Students are always in need of an extra dollar: getting rid of this book in particular came as something of a relief. It was a good system, allowing incoming freshmen to get their copies at a considerable saving.

To recoup the lost revenue the authors of *Deviant Behavior* came out with a revised edition every 3 or 4 years. It might differ by as little as a few stray paragraphs from the previous edition, yet students were obliged to purchase the new one.

Then in the early 40's, certain faculty members, Jerome Fuzz among them, had the genial inspiration of buying out. during the interim period between editions, the entire stock of used copies

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from all the local booksellers , then selling them directly to their students for a few dollars below list price.

In 1948 I gave \$15 to Jerome Fuzz for a book from which he'd collected \$2 in royalties in 1946, which he'd bought back from Sloan's Books for \$10 at the end of the school year in 1947, who had themselves given \$5 to the student who, in 1945, had paid \$18 for it, of which Sloan's kept \$8 .

Jerome Fuzz made \$7 , \$5 untaxed. Assuming a 50% markup on the wholesale price, Sloan's picked up \$14. I risked losing \$15, except that I wised up soon enough to sell my copy to a Freshman in 1949 for \$16 , who imagined he was saving \$2 .

In 1950 a new edition came out; and of course the price went up.

This meant that a new 'revised edition' had to be purchased for Professor H.M.'s Sociology course in 1951, setting me back \$20. For my third and final recycling of Fuzz's Criminology course in 1956 I had to buy yet another revised edition. Since the differences between this and the edition of 1950 were minuscule, the book was borrowed from other students on the rare occasions when I needed it: Jerome Fuzz was not getting any more rake-offs from me!

My second F in Criminology confirmed my criminality, yet now I no longer knew how I stood as a human being. The object of inquiry in any real science is generally present in Nature in advance; in the human sciences the object is invented co-extensively with the investigation.

Certain simplifying fictions, like normality, predictability, reliability of informants, and the smug conviction of the researcher

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that all other persons are essentially like himself, allow sociologists, anthropologists and others - after dignifying them perhaps with the term, *artifacts* - to examine languages, societies, customs and taboos, pottery shards, etc. However, although paleontologists have been known to learn quite a lot about the dinosaur through the study of its calcinated crotilites, it is always preferable when one can derive the turd from the dinosaur, than to have to infer the dinosaur from the turd.

Jerome Fuzz made me understand that I was intrinsically unsuited as an object of study for the Human Sciences. Though persuaded of my criminality, neither he nor I were able to establish any motives for my crimes . A crime without motive is no more a crime than a mass without acceleration is a force. It isn't the commission of crimes that makes the criminal: one must harbor criminal motives. Remove this Axiom and Criminology as a science collapses. Laws come and go but criminals abide. A government may forbid its citizens from wearing round hats: only criminal natures will do so. ¹

Numerous indictments were registered against me in the dossier compiled by Dr. Fuzz: consistently showing up one-half hour late to his classes; looking out the window while he was lecturing ; never bothering to hide my unreasoning hostility to the

¹ " The Nizhny Novgorad provincial governor identifies as nihilists all women who 'wear round hats, blue glasses, hoods that conceal their short hair and do not wear crinolines' ; he orders the police to arrest them, make them take off all their garments and, if they resist, to exile them from the province" ...
Love and Mathematics: Sofya Kovalevskaya , pg. 33 ; by Pelageya Kochina, Mir Publishers, 1985 ; quotation taken from Nikitenko, A.V. , *Diary of Aleksandr Vasilievitch Nikitenko* ; 1891, pgs. 563-592

instructor; proposing bizarre anti-social theories ; and in the vague phrase from which any conclusion could be drawn : *acting like a psychopath* .

Although his professional reputation was on the line, Fuzz was intelligent enough to recognize that 'criminality' is at most a description, not an explanation. However, the label having been stuck on me, he found himself at a loss to explain what he called my 'gratuitous acts' .²

Why couldn't I mitigate the frequency and intensity of my yawns while he was speaking? What grounds did I have for asserting that a day at Zelosophic was worse than a day in solitary confinement? Had I ever been in solitary confinement? How could one of society's rare and priceless rewards, attendance at a great university, be compared with the means employed by society to punish its offenders?

Why was I so obstinate in maintaining that the notion of a 'psychopath' was ridiculous, when I myself was the prime example of such a being ? Why did I fart right in the middle of Fuzz's lecture on the irresistible impulse? What got into me that afternoon when I turned around and shouted " You gangster!" as I was walking out the door?

I was just as baffled as he was. There appeared to have been no discernible motive for these acts. Why *did* I yawn during his lectures? They weren't boring in the least. They gave me the same

²My extracurricular reading at the time included André Gide's novel '*Lafcadio's Adventures*' (*Les Caves du Vatican*) . It is quite possible that my unconscious was putting some of the ideas from this book into practice.

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sort of enjoyment I get from watching an old Edward G. Robinson movie. I might in fact have been yawning at the recollection of things Phillip Grimbulge had taught us in *History of the English Language*. Reliving memories of boring experiences is another one of my unusual talents.

Why did I state that a day in Zelosophic was worse than a day in solitary confinement, when what I really meant to say was "A day at Zelosophic is worse than a *year* in solitary confinement" ?

The concept of a "psychopath" is ridiculous, but what value is there in trying to convince a pig-headed rogue like Fuzz? Why *did* I fart in class on the above-mentioned day, when I'd just come from taking a crap? Although it made perfect sense to call Jerome Fuzz a gangster, the decision to do so after that particular class makes no sense at all.

The notion of the *gratuitous act* may have some meaning in pseudo-sophisticate French literature, but it is totally unacceptable to a scientist. All things must have a cause; if this ever turns out not to be the case, one will see lots of physics faculty being denied tenure. This was all very upsetting to me until I realized that a *motive* in

Jerome Fuzz's metaphysics had to be defined in terms of some theory fashionable at the moment. I did have motives, naturally, in the sense that my actions were caused by something or other, yet they were not *human* motives as Jerome Fuzz conceptualized the notion of a human being.

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Over the ages our species has been defined and redefined in countless ways: one of them had to be applicable to me. Was I an example of *Man, the measure of all things* ³ Was I *Homo Faber* ? *Homo Sapiens* ? *Featherless biped* ? *A universal entropy reducing system* ? ⁴

All these have merit, yet I remain unconvinced. It's doubtful that they can be applied to anyone and they certainly don't apply to me . The existence of entropy-reducing machines, engines for reducing abstractions, does not inspire much confidence in me. Human beings have been called manufacturers of symbols (*Cassirer, Langer*) , speechifiers, tool-makers, a "piece of work" (*Shakespeare*) ; and so on. Threadbare definitions like these can hardly be said to lay the foundations for the scientific study of humanity. They have no more value than assertions like *Atoms are hard* , or *Substance is the seat of motion* do for the physical sciences.

Fortunately or otherwise, a social scientist doesn't need axioms before getting down to work. He'll be satisfied with some sort of operational heuristic, a subject linked to some sort of predicate. Criminologists can stay in business by defining a

³A notion which, since the advent of Quantum Theory can no longer be applied without reservations!

⁴"..there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to that of the universe at large, and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase. Life finds its home in some of these enclaves."

Norbert Wiener: "The Human Use of Human Beings" 1954 , pg. 12. DaCapo Paperback. On page 40 Wiener takes a somewhat different stance: " In a very real sense we are shipwrecked passengers on a doomed planet."

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human being as : *that entity which, when it commits a crime, has criminal intentions* .

Sociologists can do quite well with: *that discretum which defines itself in the collectivity.* " Anthropologists can argue that: *A human being is that entity, the definition of which is the goal of our science* . Economists see people as: *machines programmed for gain* . No doubt the following suffices for the whole science of psychology: *A human being is a self-investigating feedback mechanism !*

The essential point is this : every one of these heuristics is too narrow to include me. I have to admit I've met all sorts of people to whom they do apply. It was doubts such as these that led me to enroll in my sophomore year in Professor Stannard d.v. H.M.'s Sociology course. It was a disaster in the making.

Surprisingly, relations between Stannard d.v. and myself began on a good footing. We used to run into each other in the cafeteria of the Student Union, where we sat around talking about mathematics. Stannard was middle-aged, with dark hair and an unruly beard, given equally to spontaneously gestures of generosity and sudden fits of temper. His glasses were thick, his gaze more unstable than penetrating. He was probably crossed-eyed; one could never get him to look directly at anything. His manner of walking was more in the nature of a nervous tic. This did not make him unsympathetic, only a little frightening at times.

Comfortably tenured a few years before I met him , one could not say that he was terribly happy. In a private moment Stannard confessed that when he was my age he had also been puzzled about his humanity. In his middle twenties he'd contracted a

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penchant for obsessive futility, which later cost him a year in a mental hospital.

I soon learned of his quasi-religious conviction that all aspects of human behavior could be translated into systems of equations. He's not the only person around afflicted by this peculiar superstition; unhappily he knew nothing about mathematics. Otherwise he could never have come out with so many of his bombastic claims. My dilemma was apposite to his: it had been my hope that insights in my humanhood might counter-balance my too-exclusive preoccupation with mathematics.

In the second month of the Fall semester Stannard asked me if I would be willing to give him some lessons in the applications of the theory of matrices. It was the pet theory of some reputable sociologist that matrices held the key to the human condition. Stannard had only the foggiest idea of what matrices were. *Square arrays*, he called them. How, he wanted to know, did one go about extracting information from square arrays?

Dr. H.M. could become quite carried away by his square arrays. Although he had ideas, some of them fairly good, on many subjects, whenever I was in the vicinity they were the only thing he would talk about. He would be at the front of the class, inserting data into a table drawn on the blackboard when, casting significant glances in my direction, he would say things like: "*Aleph of course knows what I'm talking about.*"

He cornered me in the coffee shops and on the buses, at campus functions and even in the Men's Room, just to talk to me about the wonders of matrices. Finally I agreed to take him on as a

student. Perhaps I could cure him of his obsession. The fee was \$25 an hour (1950's prices!). Dirt cheap considering what I had to put up with.

Stannard d.v. H.M. lived in an oppressive stone-faced house on Spruce Street, not far from Rittenhouse Square. Its long low windows sagged like the eyes of a basset hound. Forbidding entrance by its very aspect, the belligerent black front door promoted, like new-born twins in the hands of an obstetrician, a pair of stickers. The first was a small rectangular box, at the top of which stood a pair of words, blood red with letters shaped like daggers: " I GAVE " Below this, in smaller letters, was the punch-line : " *to the United Way* " .

The other sticker was shaped like a policeman's badge. A red band bordered its upper edge, with blue and white stripes descending vertically. On its field was the message :*This House Is Protected B y Trent Security Services* .

I worked with him from 5 to 7 in the evening two days a week. Upon hearing the buzzer, Stannard would come running to the door and squint at me through the grillwork. Relieved that I was neither a burglar nor some kindly old lady, just that sucker, Aleph McNaughton Cantor, his face lit up and he opened the door. Expansively as an old chum, he clapped an arm about my shoulders and led me into the living-room.

The vast room put me in mind of an antique grand piano, untouched for years, once much played upon, now hopelessly out of tune. A mere mortal dwindled to nothing in the thick fabric of this grey void. Floor-to-ceiling bookcases on the sidewalls, stuffed

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with books, reprints and periodicals, reaffirmed the triumph of knowledge. A clumsy arrangement of floor and table lamps guaranteed that an aura of hopelessness would always hover over the room. Depending on where one stood and the effects of lighting, the ceiling was either too high or the floor too low. Sinister wallpaper like striped pajamas and a heavy Persian carpet did nothing to dispel these feelings of unease. I always suffered from the sensation that one slip would land me on the base of my skull. Stannard earned my gratitude by never inviting me into any other part of the house.

Sessions always began with half an hour of drinks. I had my choice of juices or sodas, while he generally took some sort of aperitif : sherry, brandy or Vermouth. Gossip about acquaintances and campus scandals, and vague talk about life, philosophy and society threatened to use up the available time; once in awhile we managed to get in a bit of work.

Dr. H.M. was a lousy student. His conviction that he was incapable of learning how to do matrix multiplication properly prevented him from doing so . Matrix theory had seduced him: that's the only word for it. Matrices for him were magical , entities of such awesome power that thinking of them as ordinary calculating tools was tantamount to sacrilege. Indeed he became very angry whenever I managed to show him that some mysterious property of matrices derived from a routine application of ordinary arithmetic.

At heart Dr. Stannard d.v. H.M. was credulous. His basic medieval *Weltanschauung* lay buried under an avalanche of

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scientific vocabulary. He would have been much happier in New Guinea worshipping the snake god. Very little was accomplished in our sessions. Either he imagined that he already knew what I was trying to teach him, or that it was unimportant and not worth knowing. Always lurking was the danger that he might burst out into spontaneous panegyrics to the Universal Matrix, cure-all for every social evil, endowed with powers to prevent famines, housing shortages, racial conflict, breakdowns in public services, under-population, over-population and epidemics. From a superficial overhearing of the conversations of his colleagues among the economists, he was convinced that the Soviet mathematician Wassily W. Leontiev had shown that the economy of the world could be projected decades in advance, "*by means of certain mathematical operations on matrices which I hope to learn from you, Aleph !*"

His cheeks burning with asinine enthusiasm, Stannard d.v. recounted how some metropolitan dump had tabulated its crime statistics into a matrix, then, through *Operations Research* - the magic phrase - had computed the optimal policeman's salary ! He went on and on in this vein, his irrational faith in matrices growing in direct proportion to his inability to work with them.

For weeks on end I had to put up with the assault of his impassioned ignorance. Then the whole facade would collapse. I would show up as usual for our rendezvous, only to find Stannard in tears; on more than one occasion I'd the impression he'd been drinking. Work was out of the question. As I sat by him, coddling his ego, he pitifully laid bare his soul.

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Deep down inside he knew he wasn't getting anywhere. Neither was I, but so what? At least I was being paid. Yet had there not been the additional factor of being enrolled in his Sociology course, nothing short of a court order could have prevailed on me to keep up these bi-weekly visits.

H.M. flunked me anyway, which just goes to show what a fool I was for getting roped into the deal in the first place. His initial enthusiasm for me had turned into an all-consuming hatred without any intervening phase of normal dislike. He accused me of being incompetent to teach him matrix theory. He cursed me out, swearing that I didn't know a thing about mathematics. In addition to being demonstrably false, this was beside the point: Piaget couldn't have taught him how to work with matrices.

To set the record straight, the charge that I insulted him on a few occasions did have some basis in fact. Giving comfort has never been my strong point; my mother claims that I kicked her viciously while still trapped in the womb. As a prison even that could not have been worse than being held captive in H.M.'s living-room. He accused me of calling him an imbecile. I may have done so : one should not expect maturity from a 15-year old.

In retaliation he used every public opportunity, in and out of class, to call me an imbecile. If he so much as noticed me walking across campus he would run after me shouting "*Hey, imbecile! Hey, imbecile!*". Sooner or later he would come around to apologize, all but begging me to kick him. Then something new would set him off. His manner was, depending on circumstances,

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threatening, apologetic, whining, priggish, shameless, guilty and vicious.

I'd become the central figure in Dr. Stannard d.v. H.M.'s Oedipus Complex. He had determined that I must suffer because he would never find the Great Matrix to solve his marital problems, his failed investments, his execrable research, his low ratings as a teacher, and the rest of his existential dilemmæ.

He was the worst student I've ever known. Underneath it all, it's not that difficult to hurt my feelings. As if in payment on a long outstanding debt, I finally found the guts to storm out of his living-room when he began accusing me of making time with his wife. The charge was utterly preposterous: I'd made the mistake of commenting favorable on her new hair style. Stannard's wife had taken an instant dislike to me from the day I entered their house. She saw in me a threat to the cornerstone on which rested the stability of their marriage: her husband's emotional immaturity. I was not the first person, nor the last, to size up Stannard d.v. for what he wasn't, and she had good reasons to fear our breed.

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