

## Chapter 23

### Penultimate Wrap-Up

Future biographers, if there are to be any, may well concur that January 17th, 1965 was the busiest day of my entire life. Dad and I left the house at 3 A.M.; I had just time to grab a sandwich on the run. He drove me to the 69th Street Station situated at Philadelphia's city limits just after Upper Darby. From here the elevated trains begin running at 5. By 6 AM I was up in my lab on the 7th floor of the Math-Physics building, working away .

My inventions had all been packed up in boxes and crates over the previous week, preparatory to their being transported down to the basement. All the patents on them belonged to Zelosophic U. , yet until such time as someone else showed an interest in Evolutionary Ethics they were mine for the using. Eventually they would be shipped out to wherever I happened to end up . After 4 hours of labor the lab was cleaned out and ready for its next crop of aliens.

Then my monkeys had to be fed and their cages cleaned, after which the maintenance staff and I worked out the details of having them transported across campus on dollies to the Woolworth theater complex in time for my lecture at 5. Arrangements had already been worked out to divide them up afterwards between Agassiz Hall and the Philadelphia Zoo.

In no time at all it was 12 Noon. Soon afterwards visitors began arriving. The first to pass by with his congratulations was Régard Nombriil. He was very apologetic about not being able to attend my talk.

Together we walked over to the Campus Deli, where he insisted on buying me lunch. He also offered to drive me over to Kresge at 4 before heading off to Madison, Wisconsin to present a paper at a conference.

He was anxious to learn more about my work, and I promised to send him reprints of my up-coming articles in *Biomathematical Transactions*, a journal that had just started up at Union College in Schenectady. Unfortunately the journal never came out with a second issue; I disclaim any responsibility for its demise. There are probably a few copies of my first article still buried in boxes somewhere. Anyone who's really interested can come and help me dig one out.

Then Régard walked me back to Math-Physics. I continued alone up to the 7th floor, while he returned to the Mathematics department on the 6th. <sup>1</sup>

Soon after I re-entered the lab Dr. Alter Buba, all 82 years of him, came tottering through the door. He looked as if he were searching for one good thing to remember about this world before leaving it. Was Aleph Cantor to be that entity? He took my face between his hands and rocked it back and forth:

"Oi , Aleph, Aleph! Vat did I tell zem? Zet peck of *chazers* !  
Ha!! Kesshus Klay - *he* ain't zee greatest - *you* are zee greatest !"

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<sup>1</sup>Drifting around the university system one eventually realizes that the Mathematics Departments are almost always on the upper floors, while things like Physics, Chemistry, Anthropology, etc., fill up the lower ones. The reasons are simple : for most of the time physicists have their feet on the ground while mathematicians have their heads in the clouds.

And he laughed, like the elderly *lamed vov* that I suspected him of secretly being.

An unexpected visit came from Betty. She was on the staff of the library in the Business Administration building. We'd been out on a few dates, from which we were able to gather that there weren't many things of mutual interest between us. I was therefore all the more surprised when she announced that she was "all broken up" by my sudden "success". For about an hour while I was showing the janitors how to move the caged monkeys to the elevators, she moped about the lab trying to work in a proposal of marriage. I think she was sincere in her affection for me, yet her opportunism was just a trifle too blatant. Even had this not been the case the sad truth was that I simply wasn't interested. I'm still not interested. What attractions could marriage have held for someone only a few hours away from freedom? And Betty was hardly the person to exert enough counter-vailing influence to alter my opinions. Her only selling point was her unhappiness, but I was too eager to get on with my life to waste time being embarrassed by it. Paraphrasing Henry David Thoreau, most people live lives of quiet desperation, a few manage to graduate to some form of noisy desperation, but neither class is much fun to be around for long. She finally gave up and left.

At around 2:30 PM Mom showed up with my brother Sam and his fiancée. She'd just come from picking them up at the Greyhound bus terminal at 13th and Market. Sam and I had made life miserable for each another all through childhood, but a decade of separation had softened our hostility. That his job, as dull as his

lifestyle and personality, and as devoid of intellectual activity, left him well provided for, gave me nothing but satisfaction.

Parenthetically this is the only kind of person likely to find any real happiness in this world. In a few minutes Sam and his fiancée went out to get coffee and snacks for everybody.

Free to indulge her vices unwitnessed, Mom beleaguered me for the next half hour with a non-stop stream of gibberish, combining threats, orders, recriminations, regrets, fears, pet peeves, prejudices and superstitions, and a core residue of affectionate concern. When Sam returned we sat around for about 10 minutes, before I had to insist that they leave. We would all be getting together in a few hours at the theater.

Alone at last I strode up to a body-length mirror in the bathroom in the corridor and took stock of my appearance. Like the refined dandy I could never allow myself to be at any other time, I carefully examined and groomed my dress suit and tie before putting them on. Over them I placed a smock put aside for this occasion that had never been used in the lab.

*What a pity!* I thought as I looked at myself in the mirror: taking the time to grow a goatee might have added some luster to my distinction. It would have risked giving Mom a heart attack, yet no more than any other sign of independence.

I might have modeled my appearance after Henri Poincaré. Those old daguerreotypes of him achieve an expressive depth rarely present in modern photography. The eyes, for one thing: the way their power hits the thick lenses of his spectacles like bullets

off shatterproof glass! The straggly beard, the distracted manner, the unkempt air totally offset by the gentlemanly bearing! His was a kindred soul. Any mathematician worthy of the name ought to emulate him.

I continued to study myself in the mirror. For this occasion my appearance would count for a great deal, although part of the effect of that appearance would lie in my ability to convey the impression that appearance was of no importance. I experimented with various effects, pushing my spectacles this way and that on the side of my nose. The eyes needed to appear inscrutable, concealing depths of thought.

Don't use the index finger as a blackboard pointer: it smacks of pedantry. Wave the hands about in suggestive directions, maintain the simulacrum of profundity. Project the image of an intellect not afraid to tussle with the universe and get the shit kicked out of it. Don't kid yourself: science is a blood sport. The audience has to be made to realize that anyone who presumes to tackle the History of Biological Cosmology isn't going to be pushed about by the likes of them!

My natural absent-mindedness was a good beginning. Picture it as something like the dense cloud of smoke generated by a burning trash heap, pierced through with startling insights like random sparks. Avoid showing too much confidence (arrogance) and too little (timidity). Keep to a strict time-table, play it by ear, never let them catch you off guard. Marshal insights, speculations, hypotheses, findings to build slowly, though without tediousness, to a super crescendo of revelation.

**In the ultimate balance only the worth of my ideas would count.**

**Yet beyond the level of a junior high school science fair, science is much more than a barren display of mere factual knowledge! In dealing with subjects of this magnitude - the gradient of Evolution, the algebraic structure of the tree of life, the fate of the species - it will be the larger implications which matter the most.**

