

Chapter 24

Finale:

Between the Event Horizon and the Big Crunch

The time for further procrastination was past. It was almost 3:30 PM. Even now Régard Nombril might be pacing back and forth, waiting for me in the lobby on the ground floor. With a final run-through at the mirror I was as ready as I would ever be.

Bob Boolean met me on the elevator going down. Once we discovered that Régard was not yet in the lobby he invited me to take a drink with him in his office on the 5th floor.

"What'll it be?"

"Scotch - on the rocks. Make it a double." Boolean chuckled.

"It won't be as bad as all that."

He made up our drinks at a little side-table and placed them in coasters on his desk, incidentally the same one behind which Hans Menglenlehre had suffered a catatonic fit in 1949. Despite a painfully forced "hail-fellow-well-met" manner, Bob obviously had other things in mind. After he returned to sitting in his polished mahogany swivel chair Bob placed his forearms on the green ink blotter. Suddenly he leaned his entire weight forward to glare at me with the full malevolence of a very hungry Bengal tiger!

It was a sad object lesson in what I wanted to avoid, to see what 20 years had done to Bob Boolean. A slow, irrevocable process of erosion had leveled out the distinguishing features on his face, balding head and plump body. No longer was he the star-

struck , naive yet forthright graduate student who'd stood up for me against the rest of the faculty on the occasion of my coming-out party in the graduate lounge in 1948. His eyes, which once had sizzled with the feverish light of intellectual passion, were misted over now by boredom, confusion, the tedium of the daily grind, and the heavy toll of frustrated opportunism.

He'd known for a decade that he'd lost out on his chances of being cited in future encyclopedias of science as "the leading figure in the Zelosophic Circle of 20th century mathematics".¹ Chairman of the mathematics department of a major university at the young age of 38, bringing in, (at 60's purchasing power) , 50 grand a year, these and similar achievements were not sufficient in themselves to satisfy him, mere sops to his vanity and pride. His comportment was that of a man 20 years older than himself, someone for whom the future offered no prospects, no surprise, no promise.

However we still liked each other. I could excuse his goading manner towards me, a mixture of bullying and deference, on the grounds that his really original work in Complex Variables had all been done in the 50's. He still did interesting research. Unfortunately Bob was the recognizable representative of a certain class of scientist who believes that anyone not chosen to become a paradigm should not have wasted the time of the human race with the accident of his birth. The feeling is usually, though not always, shared by the paradigms themselves.

¹Nor was there much chance that he might deserve mention in a footnote stating something like: " Robert Boolean (no relation to the English logician of approximately the same name) " . This may in fact be the only such footnote in existence

Wiping his glasses with a handkerchief, Bob sized me up with distrust:

"Well, Aleph ! Congratulations. You're not going to let us down again, are you?"

I sipped my double Scotch and said nothing.

"I hope not ... for your sake. So!" he cried, changing the subject : " I hear you're off to Colorado. What's after that ?"

I told him about my other prospects.

" I suggest UCLA. There's lots of money in the University of California system, and its prestige has grown enormously since the war. Thank Oppenheimer for that much. Then there's Stanford, Cal Tech - and you can't knock the weather... " Once more he abruptly reversed direction:

" I *know* you're not going to let us down again isn't that so, Aleph?" I wasn't sure how to reply, but he cut me off:

" No, of course you're not. My idea of a joke. Hah! " , there was little humor in his guffaw, "I trust you, Aleph. You must have noticed that I've had enough trust in you not to interfere in your research in any way over the last 6 months. I don't even want to know what it's about."

Once again I started to say something, once again he stopped me:

" Aleph, I've known you on and off for almost 20 years. You've got a good mind. I'm not being condescending. The department awards a dozen Ph.D. 's each year, and most of them aren't worth a damn. Very few of our graduates are going to produce a "moons of

Jupiter" even by the age of 60! I've got no reason to question the value of your work. I know damn well it's going to be good..."

Bob was peering out the window. Suddenly he turned about to face me. He walked over to my chair with a military stride until he stood a few inches away from me. Then he bent down menacingly and whispered in my ear:

"Isn't that right, Aleph?" Fear surged up along my spine as from the touch of a fine razor. I nodded my head and said nothing.

"Well" - Bob looked at his watch with deliberate solemnity - "It's getting to be that time, isn't it? You'd better go down ahead of me. I'll be along soon."

I stood up, relieved, yet also a bit sad, that the interview was over. We shook hands.

"For old time's sake." I said

"Oh yes!" Once again there was something unnatural in his laugh: "For old times sake. Right on Aleph!"

As I walked out of his office and down the corridor to the elevator I'd the impression that his eyes were continuing to hold me in a firm grip, determined to the very end to terrify me of the consequences of bolloxing up the works.

What are you worried about, Bob? I thought to myself as I descended in the elevator: *I really do know what I'm doing!*

Régard Nombril met me in the lobby and drove me to the Woolworth Theater Complex at the other end of the campus. Hastily constructed in 1961 it conjures up the bunkers of the Maginot Line. 4 buildings holding 6 auditoriums sit

uncomfortably on a broad stone dais shaped like an inverted Frisbee, interconnected by concrete ramps which, in less than 5 years had deteriorated through cracks, buckling and other results of quite ordinary natural phenomena.

The auditorium in which my lecture was being held was in the Kresge building. It was called in fact "Kresge auditorium" although there was a smaller more intimate auditorium in the same building, known as the "Actor's Studio", on a lower level. It being opening night for a new production of Gorki's "Lower Depths", an agreement had been reached with the Drama department that we would all be out of the building by 7 at the latest. Had I been more prescient I might have canceled the lecture to attend the play, but that's not the way things happened.

When I got there at 4:15, the Kresge auditorium was rapidly filling up. Functionally designed for the multiple uses of a university, the stage had been ingeniously constructed to serve the twin objectives of theatrical performances and lectures. For this occasion the orchestra pit had been raised so that the speaker would be at the level of the first row of seats. The rows themselves rise steeply in tiers, in the manner of a Greek amphitheater, to fill out a shape somewhat like the hood of an inflamed cobra.

Two large blackboards had been lowered from the ceiling on metal cords, and were stationed to the left and right of the audience, with an empty space between them through one could see the proscenium arch of the curtained stage. Spotlights had been trained directly on their green-slatted faces and on the podium in

the center. There was a gap between the blackboards them through which the curtained stage was visible.

When I entered the building I went immediately to the sub-basement to confer with the maintenance crew and staff guarding the animal cages. Then I walked up through a staircase at the back onto the stage and up to the wine-soaked velvet curtains. There I stationed myself at a place from which I could inspect the audience without being seen. It was important for me to have some idea of the proportions and make-up of the crowd of spectators, Already I could see that it was divided recognizably between the scholarly community, family members and the general public. Anything might happen and I needed to be prepared.

It was almost 5, most of the seats were occupied and yet people continued to arrive. The balcony had to be made available, while about 40 persons remained standing at the back.

After an initial gasp I began to sweat: the dreadful suspicion that Mom had gone completely mad had to be allowed as a hypothesis. The size and makeup of the audience indicated that she'd sent out invitations to everyone on the planet with any conceivable connection to us.

The first 3 rows at the ground level, each of them holding about 18n seats, were occupied almost entirely by relics. A shudder went through me when I recognized Dr. Baumknuppel. He'd been flown in for this special occasion from the *Home for the Aged and Infirm* in Harrisburg, PA . In back of him sat the attendant who had directed his wheelchair down to the front of the auditorium. I

would have to look at Baumknuppel's face, only a few feet away from the podium, for the better part of my talk.

For a decade or more Alzheimer's Disease had established hegemony over his mind. His dried up, bony and desiccated skull gave off a musty smell of rotting intellect, his tongue hanging out loose and head tottering from side to side. At rare moments a wisp of a thought, indecent or otherwise, could be seen emerging from the miasma of darkness, stagnation and confusion that surrounded him. Responding to an inner music, lips and fingers sketched fragments of gestures which, in his prime, would have been certifiably obscene.

Sitting a few seats to his right I recognized Fraulein Zwicky: prim, repressed, sweet as sugar and, as ever, unbelievably unhappy. It surprised me to reflect that she had to be in her early 50's. As a child I'd pictured her as an elderly maiden aunt. Apparently she'd adapted herself to that stereotype early on in life.

Up on the 3rd row I made out the jolly figure of Dr. Alter Buba. He leaned on his cane, playfully shaking his head, a gentle soul.

On the 2nd row were all my English teachers: Phillip Grimbulge, Jessica Grogan, Athanasius Claw, Tobias Stump, Diggory Dribone. All very much alive, banded against me in common hatred, though I'm certain not a one of them could remember why. Grimbulge was reading aloud from the sonnets of Shakespeare. At odd moments Athanasius Claw could be overheard to sigh in sympathetic rapture.

Later I learned that Mom has also invited Cyrus Yaw-Yawn. I suspect that his inability to connect me with someone or something in his past had persuaded him that there was no point in flying from Phoenix to Philadelphia to attend my lecture. However his mother, who had from time immemorial been on Zelosophic's Board of Trustees and kept up with the latest gossip, knew everything there was to know about me. The limousine transporting her from Radnor out on the Main Line had delivered her to Kresge in plenty of time to take up a commanding position on the second row, a few seats above Baumknuppel to my right . Over 90 years her stature as indomitable battle-ax had swollen to epic proportions ; Beowulf himself would have been proud to wield her. Although her eyes were covered with cataracts her rasping voice had defied age. She sat, poised on the narrow vertical of her spine , veritably a queen-mother, her oozing flesh dripping in grey gouts like hocks of moldering ham suspended from hooks in a butcher shop.

Depressing as the circumstance might be, it came as no surprise to me to find Mabuse sitting on the front row, far over to the left in roughly the same spot he normally assumed in the auditorium at Agassiz Hall.

Next to him sat Clorinda Wales, his soul-mate in crime. His legs were jerking back and forth in perpetual clonic motion and he scratched his chin and cheeks with malicious anticipation.

Beyond the third row, the next half dozen were completely filled with relations and friends of the family. Lord gracious, how many relatives I had! Mom must have dug them up from all over

the country, with perhaps a few imported from Russia and Ireland! On my father's side there were Cantors, Simonses, Goldbergs, and Karzinskis. Julius Karzinski was there among them. He was about my age and had been a good friend to me while I was in high school.

About 2 dozen Wadleighs were in attendance, the only other clan of *goyim* to marry into the Cantor line. Sylvia Wadleigh was sitting next to her husband, Dad's cousin, Mordecai Cantor. Surrounding them like so many bees swarmed a score of children, smacking bubble gum, sucking on lollipops and ice-cream cones, bolting down popcorn. From what I know of my Mom, she must have told them they were going to see a movie.

The samplings from my mother's family included Higgineses, Kellys, Clancys, O'Rourkes and other folks from the coal-mining districts of northeastern Pennsylvania. They stood in strange contrast to the rest of the audience. They were coarse and rowdy, of a rough, mottled appearance, and there was no humbug to them. Rather they inserted their own forms of humbug, which I found refreshing. Wouldn't it be nice, I mused, to be able to go up and sit next to them? Alas, it was 30 years to late for that. They also were immersed in a sea of squalling brats, carrying on with great lustiness.

My heart sank. I crossed the stage, exited out the back and walked through the corridors and up via a private stairwell to the control room in a cage directly beneath the balcony. After consultation with the technicians it was decided that the volume in the loudspeakers would be turned up for my speech. It simply

wasn't fair that the launching of my career should weigh in the balance of a hundred screaming kids.

Returning to the stage I continued my inspection of the crowds. By a species of magnetic attraction my eyes were drawn to *The Family Group* : Mom and Dad, Ralph and Aga, Sam with his fiancée and 3 next door neighbors. Like a Doré engraving of the Good Ship Victory ploughing its way through the oceans of the damned they sat together as a single body, smug, erect, proud, all preened and polished like baskets of fruit on display in a gourmet delicatessen.

However they were not, in the conglomerate, solidly homogeneous. Directly to Mom's left sat President Hardball and I noticed there was an unfamiliar male to her right. By his professional attire I knew he had to be Mom's lawyer. For the moment, events appeared to have rendered his presence superfluous. Glowing with pride, tears gushing copiously, Mom clutched my diploma so tightly to her breast that one could have imagined she was going to wipe her ass with it. I tilted my glasses slightly in an effort to read the Latin calligraphy on it. I've never studied Latin but I knew what it said: *Dues Paid* .

The Math Department had reserved all the seats in rows 8 to 10.

At my far left on the 8th row sat Dr. Wissenschlaf, balancing his stomach and burping. The seats from the right of him to the center held over a dozen graduate students. The rest of the faculty was distributed across row 9, with undergraduates filling up the 10th. On an aisle seat to my right on row 9, I made out Bob Boolean,

nervously consulting his watch, even shaking it to make sure it was working. In a few minutes he would be coming down to make the introductory speech.

I was surprised to see Dr. Hans Mengenlehre sitting totally apart from the math contingent down on the second row. He was thinner than I'd remembered him, worn out and bearing the marks of premature aging. Yet somehow he seemed happier than I'd remembered him as being back in the 40's and 50's. Perhaps he'd never really felt comfortable with the life of a full time mathematician, preferring the rude buffeting of politics, however inept he was at coping with it. Hans was engrossed in an earnest discussion with someone to his left, whom I soon identified as Stanislaus Weakbladder, of all people. My impression of Weakbladder was that he'd grown fat with ignorance. They appeared to be comparing notes, probably about me.

Up until the last minute when the doors were closed, there was a continuous trickle of representatives of the greater academic community. One needed little more than the strains of Pomp and Circumstance, mortarboard hats and their colorful bird costumes to be witness to a bonafide graduation ceremony.

Shining from the middle of the auditorium was Harry Malakoff's good-natured and ribbing mug. In widely separated locations I identified Fred Elsasser, Stannard dv H.M. and Jerome Fuzz.

Suddenly, trembling and virtually paralyzed with fear, my eyes made contact with the pig-face of Dr. Jan van Clees. He was seated high up in shadows at the back, all 300 pounds of him

quivering with rage. In my state of panic I briefly considered canceling the lecture and making myself scarce. Instead I walked quickly to the bathroom behind the stage. Opening a spigot at full force I splashed cold water in my face. It was time to face up to my historical destiny. Smoothing the creases in my

smock, tidying up my hair, and with a weary sigh I readied myself for the inevitable.

Braver men than I had quailed at the thought of facing such a rabble - a contradiction in terms - for by facing them was I not braver than they : these hypothetical brave men that is? Then again, what is bravery? Is it an instinct, transmitted through genetic channels from generation to generation? Does it exist throughout the animal kingdom or is it a purely human quality, impossible to formulate without introducing elements of intellect, self-introspection and foresight? There was only one way to find out, and that was to go in there, submit to the ordeal, then generalize afterwards on the basis of the outcome. That final issue disposed of, I stepped boldly into the auditorium.

A deafening mixture of hooting and applause erupted across the room. Booing and clapping in about equal proportions engulfed an already charged atmosphere. Like the fluids in a living body, even the sewage, gas, water, oil and electricity coursing through pipes and wires in the walls, quickened their pace, harried along by the ear-splitting Pandemonium. The noise from the squeals of choruses of children was comparable to that created by the hysteria at a Beatle's concert.

Down in the front rows, the bearded sages stomped their feet and smacked their withers. Jan van Clees had pulled himself to a standing position and was shaking a fist at me and cursing. Behind him I could barely make out 6 attendants holding a strait jacket and chains. Wiegenlied Wissenschlaf was seized with an asthmatic attack. His wife had him carried out and he spent the next week in the hospital.

Transported with joy, Mom was singing. It was her favorite song : "*When the moon comes over the mountain* ". The conclave of families on both sides who, through generations of love and toil had sweated me out of her loins rained down tumultuous Hosannas falling on my head much like the droplets of oil over the matted hair of David the Psalmist.

There were some students and faculty members from Biology and Philosophy grouped respectively at the right and left of the upper the auditorium. I was surprised that so many would choose to attend, if only to jeer. A combination of curiosity, and the desire to hear what I was saying so that they could later repudiate all association with me must have motivated their decision.

Spontaneously and in unison, they unleashed a torrent of invective and ridicule which, in transit to its intended target was obliged to pass over the heads of members of my family. The divergence of reactions depended on which side of the family was involved.

My father's relations endured the intemperate abuse with the stoic fortitude which has ensured the survival of the Jewish people through centuries of persecution. It did not however meet with a

friendly reception in the ears of my mother's tribe, in whose veins there has always coursed more coal than blood. Within moments I was witness to uncles and cousins piling over the backs of their chairs to bloody the noses of the grad students.

A short muscular miner - I think he was a second cousin - yanked a pair of biochemists up by their ears, dragged them up the aisle and dropped them in the outer lobby . A handful of research biologists tried to zap their assailants with electric probes: why they should have brought electric shock machinery to my lecture with them remains a mystery . Perhaps they'd intended to teach me a lesson after it was over. The one Nobel Prize winner in the Biology department had his nose broken by a drunk pug-ugly related to me through a collateral Polish branch. I discerned the shape of a logician smacking the tousled head of a brawny kinsman with Volume 1 of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia* . Mom had fainted dead away . Mabuse was laughing.

Hans Mengelohre stood up suddenly. When he realized that things had gone out of control he snapped his fingers , and an entourage of half a dozen personal bodyguards from the Atlantic City Mafia were dispatched through the aisles to restore order with blackjacks and fists . Spectators were escaping in a wild scramble out the doors of the auditorium, only to be arrested by a squadron of police surging into the building to overpower Dr. Mengelohre and his thugs.

At the peak of the excitement I ducked into one of the actors' dressing rooms behind the stage and covered my head with a blanket. After half an hour the storm died down and Bob

Boolean came back to get me. His arm around my shoulders Bob led me back into the auditorium to a chair to the right of the podium. About two-thirds of the original audience still remained, generating a restrained chorus of applause. Among them were my close family, the senior academics, most of my friends and, alas! too many of my enemies.

Bob Boolean and I shook hands. Then he stepped up to the podium. Following a few timid taps on the microphone he began speaking:

"Welcome, each and everyone of you. Welcome to this auspicious occasion!" The outline of his speech was spread onto the lectern :

"The fame of Aleph Randal McNaughton Cantor can serve as its own introduction, and I have little to add to it. We have observed steady growth: from the dazzling achievements of his teens to the major results which he will be presenting this evening. Growth in perspective; in command; in discipline; in mastery; in confidence; in insight; in ... in.. "- a short embarrassed pause ensued , occasioned by the discovery that he'd run out of adjectives - " in every virtue with which, of necessity, a scientist of the first rank must be endowed.

" Aleph has never hid his light under a bushel , nor should we expect that he will do so now. As we all know, the irresistible advance of the scientific enterprise is being continually jump-started , renovated, revised - er, fueled by the -uh - spontaneous appearance of - er - well -paradigms! "

the discovery of *le mot juste* had galvanized him , " That's it: paradigms. Well - damn it! If Aleph McNaughton Cantor isn't a paradigm, I demand that you show me someone who is! "

Mabuse started to stand up but Clorinda Wales pulled him back into his seat:

" I've had my eye on Aleph since his arrival here in 1948, when his dazzling intellect forced us all into the shade! Why, he was little more than a juvenile, still in knickers and sneakers, his chubby red cheeks aflame with the eager naiveté of youth , with a twisted smart-alecky smile tempered - all too soon - by the school of life.

"As I've said I've watched him every minute of the way. Ladies and gentlemen, it has been an amazing, and I mean truly amazing saga of growth to maturity , a chronicle of triumph over adversity, a bittersweet parable to pass along from generation to generation, to be related in school and at home, a veritable tribute to the human spirit.

" Before I turn the microphone over to him - I know you're all waiting for me to get it over with so you can hear from him - I want to share this little anecdote with you. It tells you a little bit about the remarkable qualities of the person you see in front of you today.

"It must have been around 1954. There was an Assistant Professor in our department who was anxiously awaiting tenure in the following term. Up to then he'd done nothing remarkable, yet in recent months he'd come up with discoveries that could be considered of the first order ... or water ... whatever. The paper

containing the results for which he is best known had already been accepted for publication that summer by the *Annals of Mathematics*.

"Hans Mengenlehre had already told him - you saw him being carted away by the police a few minutes ago - that he'd been nominated for tenure starting the following term; in those days this was a guarantee that he would be getting it.

"One afternoon Aleph came to this individual's office, and asked if he could see a copy of the article he'd submitted to the *Annals*. Aleph took it home with him, promising to return it in a week.

"In fact he was back the next morning. He'd stayed up all night to re-read it three times. While walking along the corridor to this man's office, Aleph had found an error in the last paragraph of the demonstration of the main theorem. A tiny mistake, he said: so inconsequential that he hadn't even wanted to mention it.

"Well, this mathematician reviewed his paper, examined the error and began making calculations. Within the space of an hour he'd witnessed the shattering - into ruins! - of the entire edifice on which his results had been founded.

"The publication in the *Annals* had to be canceled immediately. It took this man *two years* to repair the damage! His tenure was put on hold pending the outcome of his labors- no small matter for someone with a wife and child, and another one on the way.

"I would ask you all to consider this as a tribute to the greatness of Aleph McNaughton Cantor. So deep was his

commitment to truth that he didn't give a damn if he created a life-long enemy by showing off how much he knew!" Bob's voice had risen to a shrill snarl:

"Ladies and gentlemen: *I am that very man!* But let me assure you that I'm still as proud of little Aleph today as I've ever been. *Enough with the introductions !!* Let's listen to the ideas of Aleph Randal McNaughton Cantor in his own words!"

Bob Boolean walked off the stage to ringing applause, the look on his face so grim that I've never forgotten it. A spotlight beamed directly into my eyes as I stepped up to the podium. I adjusted my tie:

"*Ladies and gentlemen.* " The beginning sounded wrong, somehow off-key; I ploughed ahead:

"Members of my beloved family, distinguished professors, learned colleagues and co-workers, all-too-forgiving friends, tolerated sycophants, idle curiosity-seekers and other idlers, hecklers, bystanders, witnesses with grievances, hostile critics and sworn enemies! Why not be frank about it: the whole kit-and-kaboodle! As your devoted servant, I Aleph McNaughton Cantor, am deeply cognizant of the honor of being permitted to address all of you this afternoon. "

I reached under the podium and pressed a button: "This will only take a minute."

A bell rang in the room behind the closed panel of metal doors to my right. They opened from the inside to reveal a sizable storage room holding hydraulic fork-lifts, small trucks and dollies, and specialized vehicles for moving stage furniture and equipment

.The 6 janitors sitting about them had been patiently waiting for 2 hours. All of the freight vehicles were laden with cages holding monkeys of several species. One by one they were wheeled into the auditorium and their cargo deposited at the foot of the podium.

At the sight of these ingratiating furry creatures high-pitched squeals broke from the delighted throats of brats on both sides of the family. Once again Bob Boolean and I were close to panic: was a new crisis about to erupt ? By the time the last cage had been deposited their parents had managed to get the children under control.

30 tiny and sprightly Tarsus monkeys, none more than 6 inches in height, leapt about in their cages. These were lifted on hooks above the blackboards to the right and left by means of ropes descending from the vaulted ceiling.

A 5-foot Urang-Otang was hauled up until it dangled close to the rafters in the empty space between the boards. This brought it at eye-level with Jan van Clees as the back of the auditorium. I observed each of them showing signs of extreme discomfort at the sight of the other.

A few cages holding Gibbon apes were set down on narrow trestles laid down on the floor to my left. Scratching and barking they executed their bizarre and comical gestures for the benefit of the on-lookers. A thoroughly discountenanced Fraulein Zwicky buried her head in her hands and moaned.

Succumbing to a rash impulse I directed that the cage holding the small gorilla be dumped directly in front of the wriggling figure of Dr. Mabuse. It was unavoidable that two beings of such

supreme ugliness would regard one another as mirror images. The fight started when Mabuse tried to frighten the gorilla by making grotesque and lewd faces. In response it drew itself up at full height against the bars of its cage, scratched its frizzled chest and roared with anger. Mabuse lost his cool, as one might expect. He stood up, waddled over to the cage, and began wacking the gorilla with his cane. Weeping in pain the poor creature limped pathetically around his cell as Mabuse, smug and smiling with vindication, turned around to return to his seat. He'd not gone very far before he found himself, to the accompaniment of raucous cries of glee, covered with many small patties of gorilla shit.

"Don't do that!", I scolded the gorilla, "This is a respectable place! This is a great university!"

Affected a great show of disdain, Mabuse slowly wiped the offending substance off his laboratory smock. He wasn't the least upset: it was after all his natural element. After he'd returned to his seat I warned the two of them to cut it out or they would have to leave.

The baboon was strategically placed right in front of Dr. Baumknuppel. My baboon was very intelligent; I knew that because I'd spent 6 months shopping around for it. The baboon interpreted my decision to expose it to the company of Baumknuppel for an hour or so as an insult. It bared its teeth at him, slapped its backside and screamed. The effect woke Dr. Baumknuppel up. At first he observed the baboon closely; then he winked:

"Dot ist fery interesting." he said, " I read about dis case from Krafft-Ebbing". As lowered his head back onto his chest the fingers of both hands kept endlessly repeating the universal "pissamashame" gesture. A dozen bananas were needed to pacify the baboon.

Eight cages holding two chimpanzees each were placed on both sides of the podium and facing the audience. Acting in concert as one monkey, all 16 took one look at the audience, turned away, covered their eyes and squatted. For the rest of the evening they exhibited nothing but their eiderdown asses.

All this activity could not go unremarked. The commotion, broken from time to time by sharp peals of laughter or gasps of astonishment, had risen steadily, and I had to rap a blackboard pointer on the lectern several times to command the public attention.

While waiting for everyone to quiet down I stepped to one side, gauging the effect of my display. Everything had been arranged to my complete satisfaction. My heart swelled with pride. Here one beheld monkeys and humans, distant branches of the same primate tree, eyeing one another perhaps with curiosity, suspicion and fear, awaiting the revelation from me that would alter their mutual relationship for the rest of their term on earth.

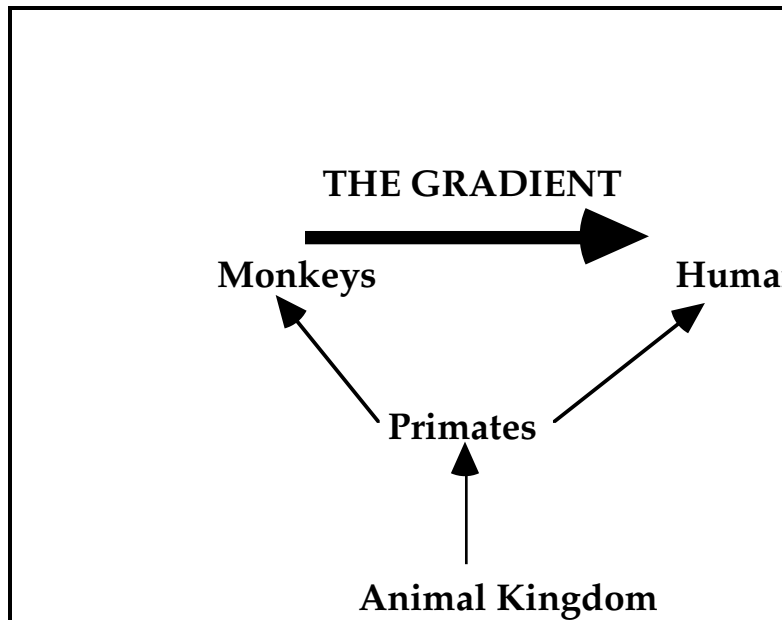
Gamboling about me before representatives of the accumulated wisdom of Western Civilization, I'd placed creatures from all walks of monkey life. They and I were linked together hand in hand, determined to melt the blinders of ignorance, open

the floodgates of light and usher forth the blessed revelation of truth to all who hungered for salvation.

I picked up a piece of chalk and walked over to the blackboard on my right. At the bottom of the slate, near its middle, I wrote the words "Animal Kingdom". Above that, about one-third of the way up, the word "Primates". These categories were connected with a vertical arrow with its head on the upper end.

Then arrows were drawn branching to the left and right. Above the left arrow head I wrote "Monkeys"; above the right, "Humans".

Horizontally from "Monkeys" to "Humans" I drew a thick line with a particularly large wedge-shaped arrow head to the right. Above the arrow I wrote, in capital letters: **THE GRADIENT**.



Unhappily the scritch of my piece of chalk against the slate had triggered an infernal yowling in all the cages. There was

nothing to be done for it apart from mumbling apologies over and over again like an obsequious servant. I hastened to finish up, then walked back to the lectern.

Stepping up to the podium I spoke once more into the microphone.

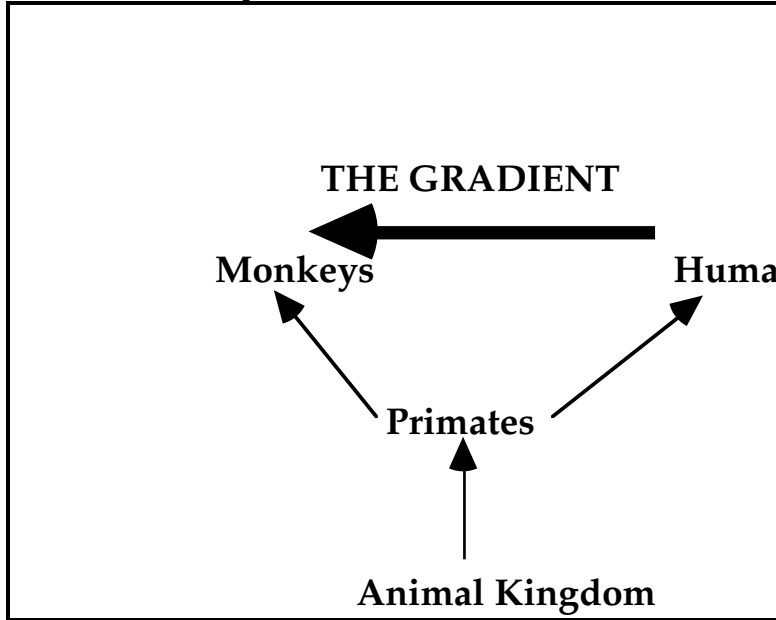
" Distinguished friends! Learned colleagues! "

Once more it developed that it wasn't going to be easy. Just about then the Urang-Otang reached high up in the rafters for a bit of loose wiring, yanked it down and began chomping on it. There was a hiss, a dense cloud of smoke, and the auditorium was plunged in darkness. Luckily the animal itself was unhurt. Another delay of half an hour ensued while janitors and technicians carried in lanterns and lamps. A flashlight was handed over to me so I could continue reading my notes. After thanking everyone in the audience for bearing with me through every conceivable difficulty, I reminded them that a theater company with its crew was expected to arrive within the hour. This obliged me to make a considerable truncation of my intended presentation That was not altogether a bad thing however, given that the gist of what I had to say was briefly told.

Once again I lifted up the sheet of typescript close to my face:

*" Distinguished friends! Learned colleagues! Beloved family !
It has been my good fortune to be the one to first discover that the Biological Sciences have grievously erred, these past hundred years, in obstinately placing the arrowhead of the Gradient of Evolution on the wrong end of the shaft!! "*

I raced back to the blackboard, using the sleeve of my smock to quickly rub out the thick triangular wedge to the right of the gradient then built another one at the left, grazing the top of the word "Monkeys":



An evil shriek ripped through the auditorium : Cyrus Yaw-Yawn's mother was having her last epileptic seizure. Bob Boolean's face was lowered and crushed between his hands; he was crying. Students from every department were throwing things at me, umbrellas, books, shoes. Boos, howls and other forms of execration rained down from all directions.

Dr. Jan van Clees had jumped out of his seat. Rollicking with malicious glee, he went about ordering his crew of attendants to hurry down the aisles and kidnap me. Once again I would have to make a run for my life. By the time they had descended to the center of the auditorium they were grappling with the students and

faculty of Mathematics, united in their determination to keep them from capturing me.

As Mom gazed winsomely at some indistinct place at the top of the proscenium arch above the stage, petrified by the inexorable Will of God, President Hardball leaned over to her and, his face bearing a look of gratification for which he was scarcely to be blamed, gingerly lifted the diploma out of her lifeless hands and tore it in two.

As I ran out the back exit all hell broke loose.

THE END