

A CRITIQUE OF PURE MURDER

2ND
THRILLING
INSTALLMENT
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The Story so far:

Professor Witticus von-Etzdorf never went anywhere without his copy of The Critique of Pure Reason. The Critique was on his desk and the Prof. was missing. With the Logical Positivist Meeting in Vienna only two days away fast talking philosopher-detective Jean Paul Sauvage needed all his wits' about him when Athene von-Etzdorf, the Prof's blonde and beautiful daughter, asked him to trace her father. The trail led to Heidelberg where a gungel with a Smith and Wesson named Gregor learned what it was to cross Sauvage. In Gregor's pocket was a library card. Sauvage decided to check it out. Now read on ...

The librarian was young and pretty. Her hair was the color of a fire burning out of control. I showed her the card and requested a list of the books borrowed on it.

She shook her head and snapped, "No dice, sport. It's against the rules."

I dropped a wad of marks on the counter.

"I make my own rules, sister. Now, spill it."

She shoved the bills in her purse and looked me coolly in the eyes. I couldn't help wondering how a gal with a swell chassis like hers ended up here.

"I'll see what I can do."

She came back a few minutes later with a list of titles. Gregor had taken out 26 books last week. Twenty-two were about Hegel. Four were by von Etzdorf.



"Thanks, red. Maybe I can do you a favor sometime."

She touched my hand lightly and said,

"You just might, at that."

As I was leaving, a thin, sallow-faced man motioned me to sit down across from him. Normally, I don't talk to strangers, but the 9mm Mauser he was pointing at my heart made the offer irresistible. I'd been waiting for him to make his play. He'd been shagging me ever since I left the hotel.

"Any funny business, gumshoe, and I'll drill you so full of holes, you won't cast a shadow."

"Then, at least, I needn't worry about blocking the sun," I countered, leaning back in the chair.

He flaked a cold, even smile.

"Smart guy, huh? I like smart guys. Get one thing straight, buster. I mean business. You got till I count ten to fork over whatever the jane slipped to you. Then I blast you. One ... two ...

three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight ..."

"Doubtless you are under the misapprehension that when you pull that trigger, the bullet will be fired into my heart, thus bumping me off. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. According to Zeno of Elea's Fifth Paradox, before a body in motion, in this case, your bullet, can reach a given point, in this case, my heart, it must first travel half of the distance. But before it can traverse the half of the distance, it must first traverse the quarter of the distance, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Hence, that a body may pass from one point to another, it must traverse an infinite number of divisions. But an infinite distance cannot be traversed in a finite time. Consequently, the goal can never be reached."

"You mean I can't blast you?" he cried, suspiciously eyeing his roscoe.

"Exactly. So long, pal."

I left the library, ducked around the corner, and waited. The gungel came out about the time I finished my third cigarette. After tossing his Mauser in a trash can, he started walking north. Hanging back about 15 feet, I trailed him through the twisting, cobblestoned streets until he reached the Pink Zither, a seedy cocktail lounge near the Jettenbühl. He was about to enter when he spotted me.

"Hey! You're following me."

"You've made yet another fallacious assumption."

I replied, stopping to tie a shoelace. "You are confusing things-as-they-appear-to-be with things-as-they-are. Let us call our mutual point of departure, Point A, and the exact spatio-temporal coordinates of our present respective locations, Point B. The fact that we have both moved from Point A to Point B cannot be said to entail that I was following you, namely having your person as the specific objective of my wanderings. It may well be the case that I am going to veer off in some other direction at the very next instant.

"Secondly, 'following' presupposes that a body is in a state of motion, and since I am unquestionably at a state of rest, it is therefore logically impossible that I should be engaged in that activity of which you are accusing me.

"Thirdly, I should also point out that by turning toward me to accuse me of following you, you are, in fact, patently disproving your claim that I am following you for, by definition, I cannot be following you if I am not behind you and, as you can perceive, that is clearly the case.

"And finally, even if I were behind you, it might well be that it is you who are following me, albeit from a great distance."

"Gosh, I'm sorry, mister, I thought you was following me."

He entered the bar and I grabbed a hack back to the hotel. It was all beginning to fall into place.

A telegram was waiting for me:

1. DOCTOR VON ETZDORF IS BEING HELD PRISONER AT THE STOLICHNAYA VODKA WAREHOUSE.
 2. ALL TELEGRAMS SIGNED "A FRIEND" ARE FALSE
- A FRIEND

It was an odd telegram. I didn't know quite what to make of it.

I waited until nightfall to drive out to the warehouse. As I neared the building, I cut the motor and coasted to a stop in an alley. Even from there I could make out the lighted window in the basement. Moving like a gray cat, I inched my way along the wall toward the window. It took me almost an hour to reach it. I could see the Professor inside. His hands were tied and Gregor stood over him with a shotgun. I was about to jimmy the glass when I felt the cold muzzle of a Luger in my back and a voice growled, "I wouldn't try anything if I were you, Mr Sauvage."

I turned slowly and observed, "But then, of course, you aren't me, are you? And yet, many Oriental philosophers, including such venerable sages as Ch'eng I-ch'uan and Chu Hsi, believe that all men are One, identical with the Absolute or Great Ultimate, unified in --"

"Save your breath, hotshot, or that big trap of yours is gonna buy you a ride in the meat wagon." The speaker was a Russian colonel, flanked by two lugs packing grease-guns. I played my final card.

"Are you aware that you just expressed an *argumentum ad baculum*, that is to say, an argument deriving its strength from appeal to human timidity and fear?"

"Toss him in with Witticus!" the Colonel barked to his henchmen. "If he says anything to you, brain him!"

Minutes later, I was bound hand and foot, the Professor lay across from me.

"What's the scoop, Prof?"

"I've worked out a flawless refutation of Hegel which I planned to reveal tomorrow at my Vienna lecture. As you know, Hegelianism forms much of the foundation of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic. It follows that when I refute Hegel, I will also topple the entire Communist political system. This prompted the Reds to kidnap me and hold me here while they substitute a double for me in Vienna who will deliver a speech refuting Hegel but who will do so in such an inept fashion that he will be hooted by the assemblage and I, subsequently, will be discredited."

"I've got a plan. First, we've got to get rid of the guard. Can you recall any passages from *Critique of Pure Reason*?"

"I know the entire book by heart."

"Start reciting it."

"But --"

"Just do as I say."

"Whatever the process and the means may be which knowledge reaches its objects, there is one that reaches them directly, and forms the ultimate material of all thought..."

Hours passed as the Professor recited page after page of Kant. Gregor and the guards were getting drowsier with each passing second. In fact, it was everything I could do to keep my eyes open. Finally, I whispered, "You can stop now. They're out like a light."

I silently slipped free from my bonds, untied the Professor, and together we stealthily overcame the dozing guards and knocked them senseless. We could hear the Colonel playing chess in the next room. I grabbed the shotgun and got the drop on him.

"I've got you covered, boys. The game is up."

Suddenly the smell of mimosa filled the room and a familiar voice said, "Hoist your mitts, sleuth, or I'll feed you a few right in the belly."

I spun around to face Athene. She was holding a .32 leveled at my guts.

"Meet your 'daughter', Professor," I remarked.

"But this is not my daughter. My daughter is attending school in Switzerland."

"Right, pops. I posed as Athene to lure Sauvage here because he was the only person who might have spotted our fake Doctor von Etdorf for a ringer. But now we got both of you and I'm going to polish you off, here and now. To coin one of your philosopher phrases -- 'I shoot you, therefore you ain't.'"

She aimed the rod at me and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber. Again. And again.

"I'm afraid you put Descartes before the hearse, angel face," I quipped. "I realized from the start that you didn't know Ockham's Razor from a Gillette Blue Blade. And so, when you left my office, I followed you, found out where you lived, returned later, snuck inside, came across your iron and took the liberty of removing all the bullets from it."

"So, you know all the answers, huh, thinkster? But maybe you didn't reckon with this!" She reached into her stocking and came up with a blazing Derringer. Slugs tore all around me, but before they could hit home, I brought up the shotgun and let go.

The shotgun is a swell weapon if you're not fussy.

A few hours later, I was gunning the car toward Vienna and wrapping up in a few loose ends for the Prof.

"When I shadowed the mug to the Pink Zither, a known O.S.S. front, I figured I was in the squeeze position between them and the Reds. The O.S.S. thought they could play me for a sucker by planting the Bolshoi stub and then following my lead. Of course, if I hadn't flattened Gregor, he would probably have taken me right to the warehouse. When this failed, the Colonel sent me the telegram."

We arrived in Vienna just in time. The bogus Doctor von Etdorft, almost identical to the real one, was about to begin his talk, having just asked the audience to "put on their thinking caps." We decided to watch from the wings for a short while, just to see how far the Russians would go. He waited until the crowd quieted and began.

"Let me tell you about this here Hegel. I mean, what did Hegel know? Huh? I'll tell you what Hegel knew - *nothin'*! that's what Hegel knew. When ya get right down to it, Hegel didn't know nothin' at all because Hegel was a bum. Now, my father, there was a philosopher. 'Live and let live,' that was his philosophy. And he didn't need to go to none of them fancy schools like that bum Hegel. The only school my father went to was the School of Hard Knocks. I'll never forget how he used to tell me how 'one hand washes the other.' Now, that's good advice in any man's book. It reminds me of the story about the pessimist and the optimist and the half a bottle of whiskey. Now the pessimist, he looks at the bottle, and he says, 'That bottle is half empty.' But the optimist, he --"

I leapt up to the podium. I had to act fast because the audience was starting to leave. A few, openly hostile, shouted remarks from the floor, such as "Define your terms!" and "What about the *argumentum a contingentia mundi*?"



"Sorry to interrupt, 'Professor,' but permit me to demonstrate a basic Aristotelian concept."

"Well, I'm right in the middle of talkin' about Hegel."

"It will only take a moment. Suppose, if you will, that my fist is the Prime Mover and that your jaw is the First Thing Moved, from which all subsequent motion is derived."

"Yeah?"

I let him have it on the button. His legs buckled and he slumped to the floor. I stepped forward and addressed the crowd.

"This man is an imposter, gentlemen. A lousy, two-bit grifter. Here is the real Doctor von Etdorf."

During the applause, the Professor took me aside.

"Thanks, Jean-Paul. After my lecture, I'm going to buy you the biggest steak in Vienna."

"Afraid I can't stick around, Prof. I've got to talk with a redhead about taking out a library card ... and a librarian."

"One thing still troubles me. How did you know that girl posing as my daughter was a fraud?"

"Easy. That day in my office, she was carrying a copy of *The Story of Philosophy*. I knew you'd never let any daughter of yours read Will Durant."

We shook hands and I left. As I drove past Türkenschanz Park, I noticed some of the leaves had already turned brown. It was going to be an early winter.

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