

R Couper ↓

Excerpts from a draft autobiographical memoir.

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The pivot of my account is September 1941, when I enrolled as an entering undergraduate at Columbia College in New York City. My earlier education was framed by the New York City public school system: especially by the cadre of devoted and sympathetic teachers who went far beyond their duty in encouraging a precocious youngster whose demands they could not always meet from their own knowledge, and the "elitist" high school system as represented by Stuyvesant High School - open by competitive examination to students with a bent for science and technology. Even more important perhaps was the local Washington Heights branch of the Carnegie-New York public library system.

My earliest recollections aver an unswerving interest in science, as the means by which man could strive for an understanding of his origin, setting and purpose, and for power to forestall his natural fate of hunger, disease and death.

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The library was my university as I went through grade school and junior high school. My most prized Bar-Mitzvah present was a copy of Bodansky's "Introduction of Physiological Chemistry".{ 7 } I had already devoured Bodansky at the local library along with hundreds of other works in the sciences, mathematics, history, philosophy and fiction. Books by Jeans, Eddington and especially Wells, Huxley and Wells' encyclopedic 'The Science of Life' were the most influential sources of my perspective on biology and man's place in the cosmos, seen as evolutionary drama.

Stuyvesant High School offered unusual opportunities for practical work in machine shops and analytical laboratories as well as straight classroom teaching.

Having begged for and been granted access to the Cooper Union Library (near Stuyvesant), I had also read many research papers - but neither these, nor my teachers could really say much of the life of the scientist at work.

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