

(10) BILL HOWARD - STAN AT THE IAS

Subject: Stan, IAS
From: Howard, William A.
To: robtully
Date: Saturday, 20 August 2016, 5:35

Dear Rob,

Here are a few more stories from 1972-1973 at the IAS. Stan was impressed by the following remark by Kaysen in response to a reporter's question as to how he could expect to run an institution when significant faculty members were against him. Kaysen's reply: "They can be replaced."

Stan loved that remark as exemplifying the managerial mind. Not suitable for the IAS or a university, of course. A School of Social Sciences was installed at the IAS; but Kaysen was gone by 1976, and, since then, the directors have been genuine scholars: a historian, one straight physicist, two mathematical physicists, and one straight mathematician. So far, no social scientist. In fact, the social science operation is relatively small: 20 visiting members, as opposed to 50 or 60 in mathematics. As far as I can see (mainly by following the IAS Newsletter), the IAS is still much as I knew it in 1972-1973.

The faculty and visiting members of the IAS lead privileged lives. Stan's daughter, Susan, was much impressed by this. She always referred to the place as The Institsnoot for Advantaged Studies.

Here is an episode that sticks in my mind. One day, Stan said to me, "You have often said that you are curious as to what schizophrenics are like. Well, now you have the opportunity to meet one. There is a topologist, John Nash, who hangs out in Firestone Library; they have given him an office there. A genuine paranoid schizophrenic. Let's go see him."

Me: "No, No."

Stan: "He won't hurt you. He is harmless."

Me: "No, no, no."

I was afraid that I would be contaminated. (The schizophrenic is inhabited by a demon. Watch out!)

When Sylvia Nasar published her brilliant book (A Beautiful Mind) in 1998, I immediately knew who she was talking about.

By 1974 Gödel's health was deteriorating (enlarged prostate, catheterization, in and out of hospitals; see Dawson's biography of

Gödel), but Stan must still have seen him quite a lot. Siobhan Roberts, in her biography of Conway, "Genius at Play", p. 212, mentions that Gödel made a list of the topics he discussed with Stan in 1974: Nixon, McGovern, hippies protesting the middle class, drug addicts, Vietnam, riots and the decay of the U.S., Cohen and Dedekind, Coxeter and modern geometry, Nash and games, Chomsky and the "linguistic aspect of math ed". Very impressive.

Best,

Bil